



**LIVING GOD
RENEW AND
TRANSFORM US**
26th General Council Leipzig – 29 June to 7 July 2017

PROCEEDINGS OF THE

26th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

LEIPZIG, GERMANY
29 JUNE - 7 JULY 2017



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Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson, General Secretary



WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

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Preface

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. —Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

Guided by this high call of the Apostle Paul the General Council embraced the theme “Living God, renew and transform us” urgently, prayerfully, humbly, joyfully and thoughtfully. It was a significant, powerful and historic moment for our Communion, gathered together in Leipzig, Germany.

The General Council was framed by three contexts. The first was the context of the 500 year commemoration of the Protestant Reformation. Besides the specific task of adding the specific contribution of our diverse Reformed tradition to this moment we were committed to focus our reflections and actions at the Council to bring the Reformation into the “present tense by addressing the tensions of the present situation.” This included embracing the unfinished business of the Reformation as proper for a Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God.

The second context was the context of our own communion. Recognizing that this was the first General Council since our formation in 2010 we sought to embrace our identity and witness as lifted up in our banner—“Called to Communion and Committed to Justice”—so that our meeting would be a powerful moment in communion building and in justice seeking. In other words we sought to both talk the talk and walk the walk in our meeting. Since our Uniting General Council the WCRC has faced serious financial challenges, moved from Geneva, Switzerland, to Hannover, Germany, and changed senior leadership and yet was able to enter the meeting in Leipzig with significant accomplishments and contributions to God’s mission thanks to God’s own grace and gifts.

Thirdly, the context of a deeply troubled and rapidly changing world dominated by massive threats to the wellbeing of all of God creation profoundly marked the worship,

witness, discernment and action of our meeting. We prayed to be given the grace and strength to take all these contexts seriously and respond faithfully to them.

Discerning the will of the Living God moved, energized, challenged, interrogated and inspired us in our Bible studies, keynotes, plenaries, worship services and most especially in our consensus and discernment processes. We strove to transform the way we make decisions so that our discernment helped us strengthen our Communion through honouring the role of all the participants consistent with our theological traditions of conciliarity and the ministry of all believers. It is encouraging that in a Council that saw so many significant and historic moments a highlight for many delegates was this decision-making process.

The theological and biblical presentations were uniformly profound and provocative. It was heartening and hopeful to see the WCRC family growing into a shared vision where God's call to unity, justice and our ecumenical vocation inspire us to boldly embrace our Reformed tradition while weaving a new identity for common witness inclusive of our Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, United and Uniting and First Reformation traditions.

Among the significant examples was the day in Wittenberg, set in the context of the commemoration of 500 years of Reformation. In signing the "association" with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification our Communion vigorously joined the cloud of witnesses confessing our role in the tragic divisions of the past while bringing the Reformation into the present tense, declaring with the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Anglicans that it is possible and necessary to overcome our divisions for the unity of the church and the transformation of the world. In doing so we lifted up a distinct Reformed perspective on justification and justice which our sister communions received with appreciation.

Equally important was the Wittenberg Witness, an action-oriented undertaking by the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation to take concrete steps in greater work together—on all levels. I give thanks to God that the commitment to the unity of the whole church continues to drive and inspire the WCRC. Anything less would be a betrayal both of our Reformed roots and the powerful gift of our United and Uniting churches.

The inseparability of communion and justice was a guiding vision through the Council. The Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination and strong actions on gender justice moved us closer to living out our commitment to being just and inclusive. We reaffirmed in a variety of ways the relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar and Accra confessions. Mission is firmly at the centre of our life as a Communion guided by a biblical vision and a faith stance that holds together economic, ecological and gender justice with a commitment to inclusive community.

There was no doubt that our Communion, which includes over 100 million individuals, is engaged in the struggle to bring the Reformation into the present tense. The unfinished theological agenda of the Reformation calls us to create space to hear and share a greater diversity of voices and theologies from the whole range of contexts that make up our family and not give pride of place to one perspective.

Addressing our responsibilities in the face of the massive threat to life in the global context was an essential dimension to our Council. The Korean Christian Federation from North Korea with our churches from South Korea shared in profound moments of worship together and called on us to continue to seek to de-escalate the current conflict and bring about peaceful reunification. This is but one example of how we are together engaging the world with the love of Christ.

The Council also raised new and renewed ongoing challenges for us as a Communion. We must address in new ways the divisions that threaten to divide us. We must find new ways to sustain our common work financially. We must transform ourselves in our programmes and decision-making so that all our regions fully participate. We must, in short, become a stronger Communion committed to justice.

We give thanks to the God of Life that we emerge not only renewed and encouraged in our vision but also gifted with extraordinary leadership. Najla Kassab, our new president, is well positioned to lead us in our commitments to gender justice, communion building, peace and reconciliation. We are well blessed with officers and Executive Committee members who represent our Communion's diversity in age, gender, region and talents. And we must also say a word of thanks to the officers and Executive Committee members who so ably led our Communion to this Council.

This was an extraordinary General Council held in the confluence of three extraordinary contexts and would not have been possible without extraordinary efforts from the Executive Committee, an exceptional staff team, a wide range of dedicated volunteers and strong support from the German Protestant churches and especially the Reformed Alliance of Germany. The support of the city of Leipzig, the Federal Government of Germany and special support from German ecumenical partners allowed us to fully live into the complexity of the three contexts mentioned above.

Please pray that, with the help of God, we can continue to renew and transform ourselves for the sake of the world.

Thanks be to God.

Chris Ferguson
General Secretary



Actions of the General Council

Organizational Items

ACTION 1

The General Council approved the minutes of the 2010 Uniting General Council.

ACTION 2

The General Council ratified the decisions of the Executive Committee since 2010.

ACTION 3

The General Council admitted the Universal Reformed Church of Christ (formerly The Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST)), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa (Uganda), the *Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche in Niedersachsen*, the Sudanese Reformed Churches (South Sudan), the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) and the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ as full members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ACTION 4

The General Council admitted the China Christian Council to associate membership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ACTION 5

The General Council admitted the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT) and the *Communauté Baptiste des Fideles en Afrique* (CBFA) to affiliate membership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ACTION 6

The General Council adopted the Rules of Procedure (Discernment and Consensus Procedures).

ACTION 7

The General Council unanimously elected the Nominating Committee.

ACTION 8

The General Council accorded those belonging to the categories of participants other than delegates, as listed in the Rules of Procedure, the rights outlined in the Rules of Procedure.

ACTION 9

The General Council adopted the published agenda and authorized the Business Committee to make changes to it.

Reception and Referrals of Addresses, Reports and Papers

ACTION 10

The General Council received the address of the President.

ACTION 11

The General Council referred the address of the President to the Vision and Message Team.

ACTION 12

The General Council received the report of the General Secretary.

ACTION 13

The General Council referred the report of the General Secretary to the Vision and Message Committee.

ACTION 14

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Theology.

ACTION 15

The General Council referred the Concept Paper: Theology to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 16

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Justice and referred it to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 17

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message.

ACTION 18

The General Council referred the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 19

The General Council received the first report of the Drafting Team.

Theology

ACTION 20

Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

- a. to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;
- b. to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;
- c. to the principle contained in both the Belhar and the Accra Confessions that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused;
- d. to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;
- e. to the priesthood of all believers;
- f. to peace, reconciliation, care, and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;
- g. to the *sola scriptura* principle as the basis for Christian communion; and
- h. to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

ACTION 21

Operating Principles

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

- a. the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;
- b. the commitment to contextuality; to the diversity of voices; to the multiplicity of languages; and to, though not limited to, the voices of young people and women;
- c. the commitment to do theology, beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed, and aiming at their liberation;
- d. the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice; and
- e. the commitment to robust engagement with the Word of God.

ACTION 22

Ecumenical Dialogues

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

1. to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids;
2. to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners and be open to new partners; and
3. to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:
 - a. relevance for the WCRC and its member churches' mission of unity and justice;
 - b. global perspective rooted in contextual realities; and
 - c. the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the Communion.

Justice

ACTION 23

The General Council resolves that the primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.

ACTION 24

The General Council resolves that the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be one of the priorities for the WCRC, in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.

ACTION 25

The General Council of the WCRC resolves that the WCRC will, with the guidance of the Accra Confession, concentrate on the specific ways in which empire changes who we are and the contexts in which we live. This will include a recognition that while some of our churches have benefited from empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Existing resources should be catalogued and new resources produced collaboratively with regions and member churches to enable churches and communities to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in their context.

ACTION 26

The General Council resolves that the WCRC will continue its advocacy to international forums and organizations, especially through collaboration with partners and other ecumenical offices in the United Nations, to present concerns that will include, but not be limited to, economic and ecological injustices, human trafficking, militarization, peace and reconciliation, escalating xenophobia and fundamentalisms.

The General Council of the WCRC resolves that a letter be written on behalf of our community, representing 80 million Christians around the world, to the oncoming meeting of the G20, reminding the most powerful countries of the world of their responsibilities to ensure life and justice for every person in the world, including supporting the Paris Climate Agreement.

Gender Justice

ACTION 27

The General Council agrees to amend the text of the Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination.

ACTION 28

The General Council adopts the Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination.

ACTION 29

The General Council received the first report of the Nominating Committee.

ACTION 30

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion and a supporting document containing proposals and referred them to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 31

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee and Secretariat to develop a Gender Justice Policy by 2019 and that they collaborate with the regional

councils to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches. This policy shall delineate issues of gender-based violence within church and society. It shall include an action plan for the implementation of the policy and accountability metrics.

ACTION 32

The Communion's Attention to Gender Justice

The General Council:

- a. confesses that gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms are sin; and
- b. asks that the WCRC join with its ecumenical partners in approaching the UN Commission on the Status of Women, urging a renewed dialogue and response to all forms of gender-based violence.

ACTION 33

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee to open a space of discernment and offer accompaniment, educational materials and guidance to member churches that do not presently ordain women. They shall develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of "A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024.

ACTION 34

The General Council received the report of the Public Witness Committee and referred it to Discernment Groups.

Nominations

ACTION 35

The General Council received the second report of the Nominating Committee.

ACTION 36

The General Council approved all the nominations proposed by the Nominating Committee, with the exception of the nominations of those from Africa.

ACTION 37

The General Council resolved to consider the nominations of those from Africa at a later session.

Justice

ACTION 38

The General Council resolves, having seen a worsening of systems and structures of oppression that threaten life for human beings and the whole creation, to engage in a process of discerning how to address the current challenges attending the rise of authoritarian and populist ideologies and movements in our time.

ACTION 39

To reflect the Communion's commitment to gender equality, the General Council resolves:

- a. that at least 50% of the WCRC Executive Committee members elected at the General Council will be female; and
- b. that, in the hiring process of senior staff, gender equity will be pursued vigorously with a clear goal of at least 50% female.

Strengthening Communion

ACTION 40

The General Council requests the Executive Committee to initiate a process that can lead to a possible constitutional change so that at least one delegate under 30 will be appointed as an officer of the Executive Committee at future General Councils.

ACTION 41

The General Council resolves that the WCRC promotes the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.

ACTION 42

The General Council resolves that the WCRC invites member churches into a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture that is grounded in the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all, and provides resources as necessary.

ACTION 43

The General Council resolves that the WCRC should embark on a process of engaging member churches in a critical analysis of leadership consistent with the communion we seek, modelling inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ including his resistance to domination and control.

ACTION 44

The General Council resolves to:

- a. reaffirm the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches by providing spaces for dialogue and action;
- b. reaffirm the participation of regional representatives in the decision-making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions; and
- c. affirm working styles that strengthen the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.

Organizational Items

ACTION 45

The General Council received the full report of the Public Witness Committee and referred it to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 46

The General Council received the third report of the Nominating Committee.

ACTION 47

The General Council approved the amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws.

Strengthening Communion

ACTION 48

The General Council:

- a. resolves to commit to equal access to ordination for all members; and
- b. asks the Executive Committee to develop a process by which we, as a Communion, wrestle with the question of what it means for all members to fulfil their baptismal vows when they sense the call to ordained service.

ACTION 49

The General Council received the General Treasurer's report.

ACTION 50

The General Council commits to:

- a. set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers,

where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values;

- b. facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition; and
- c. accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations and discussion groups, with Bible Study and reflection, to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.

Public Witness

ACTION 51

The General Council:

1. condemns all acts of human trafficking; asks all member churches to do likewise; recommends member churches engage with the WCRC programme: “Broken for You” (<http://wcrch.ch/justice/broken>); and urges member churches to hold their governments to account in countering human trafficking;
2. recognizing that the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers requires close cooperation and a common response by churches in all parts of the world, encourages the Executive Committee, working in cooperation with its regions, member churches, and other bodies, to find ways:
 - a. to analyse what happens to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the countries they leave, pass through, and settle in;
 - b. to promote networking among regions and local churches to share best practices, in collaboration with the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)
 - c. to consider the theological, spiritual and pastoral challenges confronting member churches;
 - d. to find a common answer to the question of how we deal with one another as human beings and people of faith in this situation; and
 - e. to consider, together, how we may address governments, media and citizens in our countries so that all that is necessary is done and people receive the help they need and deserve as our fellow human beings.
3. urges member churches to hold their governments to account in supporting migrants; and
4. urges all member churches to support affirmative action policies and programmes to create opportunities for migrant workers, refugees and trafficked people.

ACTION 52

The General Council:

1. encourages the Secretariat and member churches to support the multi-level humanitarian efforts of the Mauritian Church on behalf of the Chagossians living in Mauritius; and
2. instructs the Executive Committee to organize, in cooperation with member churches and other ecumenical partners, a pastoral delegation to Mauritius to demonstrate support for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Mauritius, and other churches, in supporting the displaced people.

ACTION 53

The General Council:

1. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, with support from member churches, and the regional bodies and other ecumenical bodies, to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence and the protection of the rights of minorities;
2. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to work with member churches and regional bodies in heightening global awareness of the persecution of Christians— including asking for government and UN action where necessary;
3. urges member churches to offer support to the victims of the on-going activities of insurgents in Nigeria, particularly as it affects women and children in internally displaced peoples' (IDP) camps, and in the rebuilding of devastated communities; and
4. urges member churches to offer support for rebuilding churches in Nigeria when destroyed by government or other groups.

ACTION 54

The General Council:

1. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, convening a North East Asia Ecumenical Peace Convocation, to weave various initiatives of the global, regional and national ecumenical councils, to design an Ecumenical Accompaniment Process for Healing, Reconciliation and Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula from 2017 to 2025 (80th anniversary of the liberation from Japan and the division of the peninsula);
2. agrees that WCRC shall join in the Peace Treaty Campaign Movement as one of the programmes of the above Ecumenical Accompaniment Process; and
3. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to highlight the Korean Peninsula in its programme on Justice and Peace in order to actualize efficient-

ly the above plans, developing a common vision of peace in North East Asia as well as that of the world.

ACTION 55

The General Council:

1. affirms that, with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake;
2. instructs the Secretariat to initiate a programme to:
 - a. collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society, making them available to member churches; and
 - b. undertake study and discernment, using the resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement, regarding theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action;
3. instructs the Executive Committee, with the Secretariat, to respond (before the end of 2017) to the letter of June 21, 2017, from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine indicating what actions can be taken in response to their cry for costly solidarity. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/letters-received/open-letter-from-the-national-coalition-of-christian-organizations-in-palestine/>);
4. encourages member churches to examine their mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law;
5. instructs the Executive Committee to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with the present day Christian community—the “living stones”—of the Holy Land, to witness their situation and express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination; and
6. encourages the Executive Committee to seek to strengthen initiatives for dialogues, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention and transformation.

ACTION 56

The General Council:

1. condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theological views, around the globe;
2. confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence; and

3. continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom and a safe world for all persons to flourish.

ACTION 57

The General Council, working together as equal and mutual partners with Indigenous Peoples to guide and inform its processes and discernment:

1. commits itself to a process of developing right relationships with Indigenous Peoples by initiating a study towards seeking repentance of wrongdoing, an apology, and a process leading to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, including liturgical resources for use in churches;
2. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to organize a theological engagement with the Doctrine of Discovery that can recognize its harmful effects and its justification of genocide on Indigenous Peoples;
3. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to create a special working group, with a majority of Indigenous members, to gather, develop and share the theology of Indigenous Peoples, practice and advocacy resources;
4. encourages member churches:
 - a. to study the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People as a framework for developing relationships with Indigenous Peoples and to advocate with their governments to adopt the Declaration; and
 - b. to help human rights agencies which support Indigenous Peoples as they struggle for their rights;
5. remits to the Executive Committee, in consultation with the regions, to consider:
 - a. including one Indigenous member, or youth, on the WCRC Executive Committee; and
 - b. financial support of an Indigenous delegation to the next WCRC General Council; and
6. requests the Secretariat to write to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in support of the Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples' initiative.

ACTION 58

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee to work with member churches to seek to mobilize the international community, local churches and church agencies to urgently address the challenges of food security and famine.

ACTION 59

The General Council:

1. expresses its conviction that the peoples and governments of the USA and Cuba should continue on the path towards friendship, reconciliation and just

relations, and is concerned about unilateral actions to limit progress towards reconciliation; and

2. calls on the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean to offer support and help to the people of Cuba in order that they can overcome their economic difficulties that come from the economic blockade imposed on Cuba.

ACTION 60

The General Council:

1. encourages the Secretariat, member churches and AIPRAL to support the church in Venezuela in addressing the need to build a culture of peace which makes dialogue and reconciliation possible. This support could be offered through prayer and visits to better understand the reality and contribute to overcoming the communications blockade; and
2. urges the Secretariat and AIPRAL to be involved in advocacy with international organizations, especially the UN and Organization of American States.

ACTION 61

The General Council:

1. urges member churches and AIPRAL to share their experience and expertise in support of the churches' advocacy efforts, dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Northern Triangle of Central America;
2. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, through and with the support of member churches and AIPRAL, to seek ways to accompany the churches in Central America in their efforts to counter violence and promote a culture of peace; and
3. urges the Executive Committee to work with AIPRAL and member churches to make representations to the governments of these countries expressing deep concern about the rampant violence and impunity for those who commit it.

ACTION 62

The General Council:

1. instructs the Secretariat and encourages all member churches to share experiences in peace-building to the promotion of education for peace and reconciliation in Colombia, seeking to strengthen a culture of nonviolence and peaceful resolution of the historic conflict;
2. instructs the Secretariat to work with member churches and ecumenical partners to organize groups and peace witness visits to Colombia to accompany the communities that are trying to build a just peace while living under threat of armed groups seeking to continue the war;

3. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to urge the Colombian government to swiftly and effectively implement the agreements reached with the FARC-EP and continue the dialogues with the ELN, until a negotiated end to the conflict is achieved and peace with social justice becomes a reality; and
4. urges its members to support the churches' programmes of development and education in communities and social sectors that work locally to build peace with an emphasis on human rights, inclusivity, sustainability and care for creation.

ACTION 63

The General Council:

1. expresses its concerns about the developments in Romania regarding the status of restitution of property of churches confiscated during the Communist dictatorship before 1990; and expresses its support for member churches' struggle to reclaim property; and
2. urges member churches to offer support to minority communities—both Christian and ethnic—in exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief.

ACTION 64

The General Council:

1. urges the Executive Committee, Secretariat and member churches to support the Taiwanese appeal to the international community, especially the United Nations, to affirm the legitimate right of the Taiwanese people to participate in international organizations in order to enjoy the guarantees of international standards and norms at all levels of their life;
2. calls on the member churches to pray for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) as it seeks to continue to be the conscience of the nation ensuring transitional justice for the victims of martial law and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan;
3. welcomes the establishment of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum to ensure that the ecumenical movement continues to accompany the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) to face the difficult challenges in the international arena.; and
4. explores the possibility of a conversation for enhancing mutual understanding between PCT and the China Christian Council.

ACTION 65

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee and urges member churches to:

1. pray for the victims and communities affected by police brutality against people of colour in the United States, as well as for those who perpetrate such violence;
2. write letters of support and contact partner churches when instances of racialized violence occur in the United States;
3. contact their country's United Nations Ambassador to demand justice on behalf of victims of racialized violence by the police;
4. urge the United States government to craft regulations that effectively end institutional racialized violence by law enforcement officers against people of colour; and
5. engage with United States member churches to develop educational and liturgical resources that challenge complicity in white supremacy and foster a deepened sense that our salvation is bound up with one another.

ACTION 66

The General Council:

1. encourages the Executive Committee to incorporate into the WCRC programming the particular issues raised by the African churches, including attention to African theology and black theology of liberation; and
2. requests the Secretariat and member churches to continue to accompany the ACRC churches in capacity building and cooperative witness.

ACTION 67

The General Council appeals to all churches and ecumenical bodies to take the important role of intercession, and mobilize individual and corporate prayers prior, during and after the election, and practical support (such as election observers and civic education), for the peaceful election process in Kenya.

ACTION 68

The General Council:

1. urges all to advocate for the care of God's creation in worship, study, and ecumenical and political action;
2. instructs the Secretariat to support, and urges all members and member churches to mark, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, and the Time for Creation (Sept. 1-Oct. 4) in their personal and corporate worship services; and
3. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to ensure the staff and structures of WCRC embody and encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy and urges churches and individuals to model creation care and be a means of visible outreach to concerned people.

ACTION 69

The General Council:

1. requests the Secretariat to partner with other ecumenical bodies who are developing educational and dialogue resources and share these resources with member churches; and
2. requests the Executive Committee to consider how WCRC might engage in interfaith relationships on behalf of and in support of member churches.

ACTION 70

The General Council:

1. remits to the Executive Committee those submitted proposals which were not addressed by the Public Witness Committee; and
2. instructs the Executive Committee to take the concerns of Indonesian delegates on freedom of religion into account and act thereupon.

Vision and Message

ACTION 71

The General Council approved the Vision and Message statement.

ACTION 72

The General Council approved the membership of the Executive Committee as presented.



Narrative of the General Council

THURSDAY, 29 JUNE
THEME OF THE DAY: “WELCOMING THE WORLD”

Worship and Bible Study 1

The General Council convened at 8:35 in the *Leipziger Messe* for worship and Bible study.

President Jerry Pillay welcomed participants and opened the worship.

The Bible study was led by Hyunju Bae on Jeremiah 10:1-10. Opportunity to discuss three questions was given. The worship and Bible study concluded at 10:10.

Plenary Session 1

The General Council moved into plenary session at 10:10.

Quorum

General Secretary Chris Ferguson read from Article VII of the WCRC Constitution: “The General Council is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when representatives of one-half plus one of its member churches are present to establish a quorum.” The General Secretary informed the General Council that 126 out of 233 member churches were registered and present, declared the General Council quorate and invited the President to constitute the Council.

The 26th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches was constituted in prayer by the President.

Seating of delegates

The General Secretary informed the General Council that 313 delegates were present with another 50 expected in the coming days (for a total of 363).

The delegates to the 2017 General Council were seated.

Visas

The General Secretary informed the General Council that 46 delegates had been refused visas to enter Germany. The German government was thanked for granting many necessary visas but, at the same time, disquiet was expressed at the refusal of so many visas, particularly for young delegates from Africa. The General Council was assured that representations were continuing to be made to the German government.

Minutes

The minutes of the Uniting General Council held from 18-28 June 2010 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, were tabled for approval. The General Secretary noted that the minutes had been published, circulated to all members and posted on the WCRC website. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 1

The General Council approved the minutes of the 2010 Uniting General Council.

Ratification of Executive Committee decisions

The General Secretary placed the minutes of the Executive Committee before the General Council and proposed ratification of the decisions contained therein. He noted that the minutes had been published, circulated to all members and posted on the WCRC website. He mentioned the letters informing member churches of major decisions that had been sent over the years and the document *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* as supporting documentation. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 2

The General Council ratified the decisions of the Executive Committee since 2010.

Act of remembrance

The President paid tribute to those who had been involved in the life of the 2010 UGC and who had died. He particularly mentioned Christina Mandang, who was a member of the worship team and was tragically killed in an accident in Grand Rapids, and Salome Twum, who had been a member of the Executive Committee.

The General Council stood in silent reflection and prayed in remembrance, led by the President.

Ratification of new member churches

The General Secretary placed before the General Council the churches proposed for admission to full membership, associate membership and affiliate membership of the WCRC. They were:

Full membership:

1. The Universal Reformed Church of Christ (formerly The Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST))
2. Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa (Uganda)
3. *The Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche in Niedersachsen*
4. The Sudanese Reformed Churches (South Sudan)
5. The Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)
6. The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ

Associate membership:

1. The China Christian Council

Affiliate membership:

1. The Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT)
2. *Communauté Baptiste des Fideles en Afrique* (CBFA)

The proposal was seconded.

By majority vote, the General Council approved the following:

ACTION 3

The General Council admitted the Universal Reformed Church of Christ (formerly The Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST)), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa (Uganda), the *Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche in Niedersachsen*, the Sudanese Reformed Churches (South Sudan), the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) and the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ as full members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ACTION 4

The General Council admitted the China Christian Council to associate membership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ACTION 5

The General Council admitted the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT) and the *Communauté Baptiste des Fideles en Afrique* (CBFA) to affiliate membership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Dissent from the action to admit the ECO into membership was submitted by Anne Weirich and is hereby recorded.

The General Secretary invited those present from new member churches to come to the front of the plenary hall to be welcomed and recognized. The President extended the right hand of fellowship and offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

The Rules of Procedure (Discernment and Consensus Procedures)

The Rules of Procedure (Discernment and Consensus Procedures) were presented and proposed for adoption by the General Secretary. He referred the members of the General Council to the Rules of Procedure published in the General Council Workbook. The proposed discernment and consensus process was outlined by Tara Tautari (see Appendix A). The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 6

The General Council adopted the Rules of Procedure (Discernment and Consensus Procedures).

Appointment of committees and work groups

The General Secretary asked the General Council to note that, in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws, the members of the Executive Committee would serve as the Business Committee of the General Council.

The General Secretary informed the General Council that the President had, in consultation with the Executive Committee and in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws, appointed a Public Witness Committee, a Vision and Message Committee and a Drafting Team. The names of those appointed were projected on screen for the information of the General Council.

In accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws, and on behalf of the Executive Committee, the General Secretary proposed the membership of the Nominating Committee for election. The names of those nominated to serve were shown on screen to the Council. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 7

The General Council unanimously elected the Nominating Committee.

Discernment Groups

Gradye Parsons read out the names of those who had been selected to serve as moderators and scribes of Discernment Groups.

General Council Planning Committee

Lisa Vander Wal, chair of the General Council Planning Committee, addressed the General Council, describing some of the work that had gone into the preparation of the General Council.

Hanns Lessing, General Council coordinator, addressed the General Council, emphasizing the cooperative nature of the preparatory process.

Participants at General Council

The General Secretary proposed that those belonging to the categories of participants other than delegates, as listed in the Rules of Procedure, be accorded the rights outlined in the Rules of Procedure. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 8

The General Council accorded those belonging to the categories of participants other than delegates, as listed in the Rules of Procedure, the rights outlined in the Rules of Procedure.

Business Committee

In laying the agenda before the General Council for adoption, the General Secretary asked the General Council to note that the published agenda was subject to change. He proposed that the Business Committee be authorized to bring changes, in the light of developing business needs. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 9

The General Council adopted the published agenda and authorized the Business Committee to make changes to it.

Stewards

The General Secretary acknowledged the work of the stewards.

Global Institute of Theology

The General Secretary acknowledged the presence of Global Institute of Theology students and faculty among the General Council. He noted that they had been given the status of consultants.

Interpreters and translators

The General Secretary acknowledged the interpreters and translators and thanked them for their work, enjoining the delegates to offer all necessary assistance to them.

Staff

The General Secretary asked that the General Council thank all the staff of the WCRC.

Personal dignity and harassment

The General Secretary emphasized that the rights and dignity of all people had to be respected. Any harassment would not be tolerated and a document, “Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Harassment,” had been provided for all participants (see Appendix 8). He indicated that there was a team of people available to offer pastoral support. Medical services were also available.

The session closed at 11:25. The delegates made their way to the *Leipziger Neues Rathaus* (Leipzig New Town Hall).

Reception

The members of the General Council attended the *Neues Rathaus*, Leipzig, for a reception and light lunch hosted by the mayor of Leipzig, Herr Burkhard Jung. The Mayor extended a warm welcome to the General Council. Vice-President Yueh-Wen Lu replied, thanking the Mayor and the City of Leipzig for its hospitality and welcome. President Jerry Pillay added his thanks and formally launched the Reformation Exhibition, which contained not just an account of the history of the Reformation but also examples of what the Reformation means to the world today. He commended the inclusion in the exhibition of the voices of women and people from parts of the world other than Europe. The Mayor presented a gift to the President and Vice-President.

Following the reception, the members of the General Council returned to the *Leipziger Messe*.

Listening Session 1: Address of the President

The General Council resumed business at 15:15. Vice-President Yvette Noble Bloomfield took the chair.

President Jerry Pillay presented his address (see Appendix 1).

Yvette Noble Bloomfield thanked the President for his address and proposed that it be received by the General Council. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 10

The General Council received the address of the President.

Yvette Noble Bloomfield invited delegates to consider a table reflection question, “From the President’s address, what do you find most appealing, given your contextual reality and the future work of the WCRC?”

Questions were invited. Speakers raised questions about the centrality of Scripture to Reformed theology, about deepening communion, about how smaller member churches can be more involved in the work of the WCRC, about progress dealing with contentious issues such as human sexuality and about institutional renewal in the Indonesian context.

The General Secretary proposed that the General Council refer the address of the President to the Vision and Message Team. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 11

The General Council referred the address of the President to the Vision and Message Team.

The General Council suspended business at 16:30.

Theme Input Session 1: Economic Justice

The General Council resumed business at 17:13.

A keynote address on the theme of economic justice was given by George Zachariah, professor of theology at the United Theological College, Bengaluru, India (see Appendix 10a). Janneke Stegemann, a theologian from the Netherlands, responded and also addressed the General Council on the theme.

Dario Barolin, executive secretary of the *Asociación de Iglesias Presbiterianas y Reformadas en América Latina* (AIPRAL), extended thanks to Dr. Zachariah and Dr. Stegemann for their addresses. The General Secretary presented all three participants with a gift.

Announcements

Alison McDonald, convener of the Nominating Committee, addressed the General Council on the work of the committee and explained how names were to be submitted for membership of the Executive Committee. She asked that delegates give priority to submitting names before the Nominating Committee met on Monday, 3 July. She then explained the timetable and process for agreeing the names of those to be proposed to the General Council on Tuesday, 4 July.

Robina Winbush, convener of the Public Witness Committee, briefly explained the work of that committee and invited delegates to submit proposals for consideration by 19:00 on 1 July; such proposals should have the support of a delegate's member church or regional council and should also have the concurrence of another member church or regional council. Members of the Committee would be available for consultation on Saturday, 1 July.

The General Council suspended business at 18:51.

Evening Sessions

The evening was given to regional, committee and drafting team meetings.

Evening Prayer

Evening prayer was held from 22:00 to 22:15 in the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche zu Leipzig* (Leipzig Reformed Church).

FRIDAY, 30 JUNE THEME OF THE DAY: “LIVING GOD, YOU FORMED US”

Welcoming Worship

Members of the General Council congregated at the *Nikolaikirche* (St. Nicholas Church) for the welcoming worship service, which started at 09:00.

Greetings were given by Martin Henker, senior pastor of the *Nikolaikirche*, by a representative of the city of Leipzig and by Peter Borgdorff, WCRC Executive Committee member and past president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC).

The service was led by members of the General Council Worship Team, and the sermon was preached by President Jerry Pillay, who took as his text Romans 1:1-2. He spoke of hope, dreams, unity and justice, calling delegates to renewal. A highlight of the service was the liturgical use of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Cantata No. 69.

Following the service, the General Council received words of greeting from His Excellency Frank-Walter Steinmeier, *Bundespräsident der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (president of the Federal Republic of Germany), whose welcome and encouragement were warmly received (see Appendix 5).

The General Council heard also from General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and Gottfried Locher, president of

the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), both of whom paid tribute to the WCRC for its commitment to visible unity, justice and peace.

At 10:45, members of the General Council began the journey to the *Messe*.

Listening Session 2: Report of the General Secretary

The General Council convened for business at 12:04. The President called the meeting to order and invited General Secretary Chris Ferguson, to present his report.

The General Secretary presented his report (see Appendix 2).

Opportunity for questions was given. Concerns and questions raised by delegates included: a request to focus on justice for LGBTQ people rather than on issues of communion when considering human sexuality; encouragement to deepen commitment to Indigenous Peoples; the move of the global office from Geneva to Hannover; thankfulness for the generosity of member churches to the WCRC; the refusal of visas for some delegates; the plight of heavily indebted nations; a desire to build communion between Reformed and Orthodox churches and the work of peacebuilding in South Sudan.

Trevor Gribben, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, asked about the decision to enter into association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The General Secretary responded that the decision to associate with the JDDJ had been made by the Executive Committee after a process of consultation.

Dissent from the decision of the Executive Committee that the WCRC should associate with the JDDJ was submitted by Trevor Gribben, on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and by Jonathan Muñoz Vásquez, on behalf of the *Iglesia Presbiteriana de Chile*, and is hereby recorded.

ACTION 12

The General Council received the report of the General Secretary.

The President proposed that the report of the General Secretary be referred to the Vision and Message Committee. This proposal was seconded.

ACTION 13

The General Council referred the report of the General Secretary to the Vision and Message Committee.

The session concluded at 13:30 and the General Council rose for lunch.

As the afternoon session got underway, the General Secretary asked the General Council to note that appreciation of the work of Ryan Smith, the representative of the WCRC at the United Nations office in New York, in collaboration with the PC(USA), had been omitted from the printed version of his report, and apologized for this omission. He specifically asked that this matter be minuted.

Theme Input Session 2: Theology

The General Council resumed business at 15:10.

Reinerio Arce-Valentin, president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Matanzas, (Cuba), took the chair.

Professor Jürgen Moltmann made a presentation (see Appendix 10b). Responses were offered by Isabella Novsima Sinulingga, Marisa Strizzi and Nadia Marais.

The President thanked all the speakers and presented them with gifts. In a special ceremony Professor Moltmann was presented with a certificate of recognition for “a lifetime of contribution to Reformed theology with deepest appreciation by the World Communion of Reformed Churches.”

Listening Session 3: Theology

At 16:50, the General Council moved into a listening session on the theme of theology.

Anna Case-Winters introduced members of the Theology Planning Group for the General Council. She explained that the session would assist delegates as they prepared to discuss the proposals contained within the Concept Paper: Theology (see Appendix 9a).

Panel members briefly addressed a number of key questions:

- How is theology done in your context?
- What does the Reformation mean today for the churches? In particular, what does *sola scriptura* mean today?
- How may we together more fully embrace the WCRC’s understanding of itself as “Called to Communion, Committed to Justice?”

The General Secretary expressed words of thanks to the panel members and proposed the reception of the Concept Paper: Theology. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 14

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Theology.

The General Secretary proposed that the Concept Paper: Theology be sent to Discernment Groups for further study. The proposal was seconded.

The President reminded delegates that Discernment Groups were to consider principally the proposals in bold print in the document. He also encouraged delegates to take part in the discernment process and reminded them of the consensus decision-making process which was to be followed.

ACTION 15

The General Council referred the Concept Paper: Theology to Discernment Groups.

The listening session concluded at 17:41 when the General Council broke into Discernment Groups for Discernment Session 1: Norms and Values; Theology. The discernment session concluded at 18:45.

Evening Sessions

The evening was given to regional, committee and drafting team meetings.

A concert, “Composers – Messengers of the Reformation,” took place in the *Lutherkirche* (Luther Church), Leipzig, sponsored by and featuring members of the Leipzig Reformed Church.

EVENING PRAYER

Evening prayer was held from 22:00 to 22:15 in the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* (Reformed Church).

SATURDAY, 1 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “LIVING GOD, HELP US TO DISCERN YOUR WILL”

Theme Input Session 3

The General Council convened at 08:50 in the *Leipziger Messe*. The session was chaired by Vice-President Helis Barraza Díaz. The General Secretary introduced the two speakers, Isabel Phiri and Philip Peacock.

Isabel Phiri, a theologian and deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), addressed the General Council on the theme of justice (see Appendix 10c).

Philip Peacock, a theologian and ordained minister of the Church of North India, addressed the General Council on the theme of justice (see Appendix 10d).

Helis Barraza Díaz thanked the speakers. The General Secretary presented the speakers with a gift.

Listening Session 4: Justice

At 09:45, the General Council moved into a listening session on the theme of justice. Vice-President Yueh-Wen Lu took the chair.

Omega Bula addressed the General Council. She called on the General Council to be committed to reading the signs of the times and addressing issues of justice in the world. Omega Bula referred to the Concept Paper: Justice and illustrated the points made with a series of citations and a video presentation. The Council was then invited, at tables, to share local challenges and to choose a word of lament and a word of hope.

Yueh-Wen Lu proposed that the General Council refer the Concept Paper: Justice (see Appendix 9b) to Discernment Groups. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 16

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Justice and referred it to Discernment Groups.

The general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, Necta Montes, presented greetings and reflected on several current justice issues. The General Secretary presented her with a gift.

Seong-Won Park of Oikotree presented greetings and reflected on former WARC General Secretary Milan Opechensky's request to declare a *status confessionis* on five justice issues. Seong-Won Park presented the General Secretary with two Oikotree publications and was in turn presented with a gift.

The General Council suspended business at 10:30.

Listening Session 5: Gender Justice

The General Council resumed business at 11:00 with a listening session on gender justice.

Vice-President Yvette Noble Bloomfield took the chair and introduced Dorcas Gordon, Yolanda Dreyer and HyeRan Kim Cragg, members of the Working Group on Gender Justice.

Dorcas Gordon called on the General Council to take on the urgency of addressing violence against women by adopting the proposals contained in the paper presented to the Council, Concept Paper: Gender Justice (see Appendix 9c), and the recommendations formulated by the Women's Pre-Council (see Appendix 3). She introduced the proposals which the Women's Pre-Council were bringing before the General Council, alongside the work of the Gender Justice planning group. She indicated that the intention of the Women's Pre-Council was to refine and expand on the work distributed before the Council met and commended it to the General Council in that spirit.

The General Council then heard a conversation between Carola Tron Urban and Najla Kassab.

Carola Tron Urban formally laid before the General Council the proposals from the Women's Pre-Council on gender justice and ordination of women.

The President proposed receiving the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 17

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message.

The President proposed referring the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message to Discernment Groups. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 18

The General Council referred the Concept Paper: Gender Justice and the proposals contained in the Women's Pre-Council Message to Discernment Groups.

Decision Session 1: Reports and Theology

At 11:45, the General Council moved into a decision session.

Lisa Vander Wal presented the first report of the Drafting Team and proposed a number of amendments to the report to take account of changes suggested by the Discernment Groups. (Deletions are marked by a ~~strike-through~~ and amendments or additions by underlining.)

It was proposed that the General Council receive the first report of the Drafting Team. The proposal was seconded.

ACTION 19

The General Council received the first report of the Drafting Team.

The General Council considered a proposal on taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation.

PROPOSAL

Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

- a. to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;*
- b. to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;*
- c. to the partiality of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor; (supporting the) principle contained in both the Belhar and the Accra Confessions that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused;*
- d. to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;*
- e. to the priesthood of all believers;*
- f. to peace, reconciliation and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;*
- g. to the sola scriptura principle as the basis for Christian communion; and*
- h. to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.*

Amendments were proposed, debated and, by consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 20

Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

- a. to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;**

- b. to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;
- c. to the principle contained in both the Belhar and the Accra Confessions that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused;
- d. to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;
- e. to the priesthood of all believers;
- f. to peace, reconciliation, creation care, and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;
- g. to the sola scriptura principle as the basis for Christian communion; and
- h. to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

The General Council considered a proposal on operating principles for its theological work.

PROPOSAL

Operating Principles

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

- a. *the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;*
- b. *the commitment to contextuality; to the diversity of voices; to the multiplicity of languages; and to the voices of young people and women;*
- c. *the commitment to do theology, beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed, and aiming at their liberation; and*
- d. *the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice.*

It was proposed to add a new operating principle in the following terms: “the commitment to robust engagement with the Word of God.”

By consensus, this was agreed.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 21

Operating Principles

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

- a. **the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;**

- b. **the commitment to contextuality; to the diversity of voices; to the multiplicity of languages; and to, though not limited to, the voices of young people and women;**
- c. **the commitment to do theology, beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed, and aiming at their liberation; and**
- d. **the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice; and**
- e. **the commitment to robust engagement with the Word of God.**

The General Council considered a proposal on confessing Christ against separation and division.

PROPOSAL

Confessing Christ against separation and division

The General Council resolves to consult with churches in all regions to discern whether authoritarian and populist ideologies that violate the rights of people and deny full participation in society because of race, gender, caste, ethnic affiliation or religion shall be renounced in the form of a confession.

After debate, the Moderator determined that this item be referred back to the Drafting Team for consideration at a later session of the General Council.

The General Council considered a proposal on ecumenical dialogues.

PROPOSAL

Ecumenical Dialogues

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

1. *to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids;*
2. *to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners and be open to new partners; and*
3. *to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:*
 - a. *relevance for the WCRC and its member churches' mission of unity and justice;*
 - b. *global perspective rooted in contextual realities; and*
 - c. *the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the communion.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 22

Ecumenical Dialogues

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

1. to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the **Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids**;
2. to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners and be open to new partners; and
3. to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:
 - a. relevance for the WCRC and its member churches' mission of unity and justice;
 - b. global perspective rooted in contextual realities; and
 - c. the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the Communion.

The decision session concluded at 13:21.

Worship

The General Council moved to a short worship session. The General Council rose for lunch at 13:35.

Bible Study 2

At 15:00 the General Council moved to Bible study, on Romans 12:1-2, led by Elsa Tamez. The Council broke for coffee at 16:00.

Discernment Session 2: Justice and Gender Justice

The General Council moved into Discernment Groups at 16:30.

Discernment Groups concluded at 17:30.

Workshop

A Dialogue on Churches and Development took place from 17:37. The session was chaired by General Treasurer Johann Weusmann.

Christopher Selbach, *Kirchen helfen Kirchen* (Churches Helping Churches), made a presentation on the German Churches' aid programme in which 67 projects in 34 countries are supported, working in partnership with the WCRC on some programmes.

Jochen Motte, United Evangelical Mission (UEM), explained their work in Germany, Africa and Asia. They concentrate on defending and promoting human rights; peace and reconciliation; interreligious dialogue; social and economic justice; and climate and environmental justice.

Enno Haaks, Gustav-Adolf-Werk, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD), spoke of their work to support the educational and social projects of diaspora Protestant communities throughout the world.

Agnes Krüzely, *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP), described their work to support the needs of Reformed churches around the world as they themselves articulate those needs.

Christoph Anders, *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland* (EMW), spoke of their work rooted in the ecumenical movement. They work with many international partners and support projects throughout the world.

Leo Kinda, Act Alliance, talked of their work as a global alliance with a vision of full life and dignity for all. It has 25,000 staff and volunteers working in more than 100 countries on development, humanitarian efforts and advocacy.

Thorsten Göbel, *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), described their work in cooperation with local partners to help marginalized people improve their living conditions and to help people in acute need.

The speakers formed a panel for a short discussion on sustainability and international development. The General Council was invited to reflect on the discussion in small groups; some shared their thoughts with the Council.

General Treasurer Johann Weusmann thanked the speakers for their contributions. The session ended at 18:57.

Announcements

Hanns Lessing explained that a theatre performance on justice and peace would now be staged and described its inspiration. Based on the "theatre of the oppressed," the presentation was called "Justice! Peace!" and was directed by Bárbara Santos and Till Baumann. Performers included: Priscilla Parimala Reuben Kantipudi, Katelyn Rita-

Marie Cody, Odalis Margarita Rosario Rodriguez, André Ludik Bartlett, Jessica Bwali, Luciano Kovacs, Yessica Patricia Fridolina, Clariana Lia Teixeira, Lucia Maureliz, Shan Ul Haq Joseph, Simone Vishvabharatha, Mary Deepthy Pilikkal, Tibonge Namwayi Ng'ambi and Constance Kukuua Asare.

The General Council viewed the moving and powerful theatre performance and expressed its appreciation to the performers. It rose at 19:20.

Evening visit

The evening was devoted to a visit to and showcasing of social art projects (including a barbeque supper) at the *Nikolaikirchhof* (St. Nicholas Church Yard). Committee and drafting team meetings were also held.

SUNDAY, 2 JULY THEME OF THE DAY: “WITNESSING TO THE WORLD”

On Sunday, 2 July, the General Council decanted *en masse* to Berlin. A fleet of buses left Leipzig between 05:30 and 06:00.

Upon arrival at the *Berliner Dom* (Berlin Cathedral), the General Council was welcomed by the pastor, Petra Zimmermann. During this welcoming period, the Brass Ensemble of the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* and the *Gospelkollektiv* (a women's choir) held their final warm-up sessions. The delegates enjoyed their own musical warm-up being led in the hymns, songs and responses by Helga Hoogland and Stephan Zebe. Pastor Zimmermann called the Council to gather their hearts in some moments of silence. Liturgists for the service were EKD Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, President Jerry Pillay and Pastor Petra Zimmermann. Preachers for the service were General Secretary Chris Ferguson, Vice-President Yvette Noble Bloomfield, Aiko Sumichan and Alexandra Nikolara (see Appendix 11a). During the service, the readings, preaching, songs and prayers were offered in a variety of languages with the entire service booklet available in all six General Council languages. The service was broadcast live on German television and live-streamed to a number of other countries via the Internet.

Following the service, the General Council was greeted and welcomed by Bishop Marcus Dröge. Additional greetings were brought by President Volker Jung, from the Union of Protestant Churches in Germany, and by Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, member of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and president of

Brot für die Welt. The General Council then walked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a reception and lunch hosted by the German Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Barbara Hendricks, and Walter J. Lindner, state secretary at the German Foreign Office. Dr. Hendricks and Herr Lindner addressed words of welcome and support to the General Council, paying tribute to the contribution of faith groups to world peace and social justice. President Jerry Pillay responded.

The afternoon was devoted to visiting mission projects and sites of historical interest before a return to Leipzig by coach.

The Nominating Committee and Public Witness Committee met in the course of the day in the *Messe*.

MONDAY, 3 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “LIVING GOD, RENEW US”

Worship and Bible Study 3

The General Council convened at 08:35 for worship and Bible study led by Mitri Raheb, president of Dar al-Kalima University College (Bethlehem) and senior pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, on Luke 4:16-21.

Business was suspended for coffee at 10:00.

Plenary Session 3

The General Council resumed business at 10:38 to receive greetings from Jong Chung Park, president of the World Methodist Council and from Andre Karamaga, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches

Listening Session 6: Communion in Mission

At 10:45, the General Council moved into a listening session on communion in mission. The session was presented by Peter Crutchley-Jones, mission secretary, Council

for World Mission, introducing the theme of living out faith in the face of idolatries of power and privilege (see Appendix 9d).

Theme Input Session 4: Communion in Mission

At 11:35, the General Council moved to hear further contributions on the topic of communion in mission. Farid Esack, professor at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa (see Appendix 10e), and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus, Reformed Church in America (see Appendix 10f), introduced the topic.

President Jerry Pillay expressed the thanks of the General Council to both speakers and presented them with gifts.

The General Council was informed that the Business Committee wanted to extend the conversation on mission in communion and asked that Discernment Groups should consider mission in general rather than focusing on the concept paper in the Workbook. Comments were to be passed to the Vision and Message Committee.

Business was suspended for lunch at 12:32. Korean delegates and visitors enjoyed a presentation in a special lunch-time “Agape” meeting which included participation of attendees from both the Republic of Korea (South) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North) and a celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Discernment Session 3

The General Council resumed business at 14:00 with a discernment session on Mission in Communion.

Decision Session 2

The General Council resumed in plenary at 15:13. The second report of the Drafting Team, dealing with the proposals made by Discernment Groups on justice and gender justice, was presented by Lisa Vander Wal.

She reported that the Drafting Team had received reports from thirteen of the seventeen groups. Most groups had been able to address themselves to most of the proposals. She informed the General Council that, at both its meetings, the Drafting Team had received many comments that indicated delegates did not have a clear understanding of the material before them. The Drafting Team had therefore recommended

to the Business Committee that it should permit the taking of questions for clarification in listening sessions before proposals went to Discernment Groups.

The General Secretary led the General Council in prayer for full and complete discernment of the living God's will.

Justice

The General Council considered a proposal on the primary areas of the justice work of the WCRC.

PROPOSAL

The primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.

Amendments were proposed and debated and, by consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 23

The General Council resolves that the primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.

The General Council considered a proposal on the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative.

PROPOSAL

The New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be a central priority for the WCRC, in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.

It was proposed to delete "a central priority" and replace it with "one of the priorities." By consensus, this was agreed.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 24

The General Council resolves that the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be one of the priorities for the WCRC, in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.

The General Council considered a proposal on the contexts and impacts of empire.

PROPOSAL

The General Council of the WCRC resolves that the WCRC will, with the guidance of the Accra Confession, concentrate on the specific ways in which empire changes who we are and the contexts in which we live. This will include a recognition that while some of our churches have benefited from empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Existing resources should be catalogued and new resources produced collaboratively with regions and member churches to enable churches and communities to live faithfully as disciples in their context.

Amendments were proposed and debated and, by consensus, the General Council agreed to add “of Christ” after “disciples.”

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 25

The General Council of the WCRC resolves that the WCRC will, with the guidance of the Accra Confession, concentrate on the specific ways in which empire changes who we are and the contexts in which we live. This will include a recognition that while some of our churches have benefited from empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Existing resources should be catalogued and new resources produced collaboratively with regions and member churches to enable churches and communities to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in their context.

The General Council considered a proposal on advocacy to international forums and organizations.

PROPOSAL

The WCRC will continue its advocacy to international forums and organizations, especially through collaboration with the PC(USA) existing partners and other ecumenical offices in the United Nations, to present concerns that will include, but not be limited to, economic and ecological injustices, militarization, peace and reconciliation, escalating xenophobia and fundamentalisms.

An immediate opportunity comes to write a letter. The General Council of the WCRC resolves that a letter be written on behalf of our community, representing 80 million Christians around the world, to the oncoming meeting of the G20, reminding the most powerful countries of the world of their responsibilities to ensure life and justice for every person in the world.

Amendments were proposed and debated. It was proposed to add “human trafficking” after “ecological injustices.” By consensus, this was agreed.

It was proposed to remove “existing” before “partners.” On the advice of the Convener, and by consensus, this was agreed.

It was proposed to add at the end of paragraph 2, “; including supporting the Paris Climate Change Agreement.” By consensus, this was agreed.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 26

The General Council resolves that the WCRC will continue its advocacy to international forums and organizations, especially through collaboration with partners and other ecumenical offices in the United Nations, to present concerns that will include, but not be limited to, economic and ecological injustices, human trafficking, militarization, peace and reconciliation, escalating xenophobia and fundamentalisms.

The General Council of the WCRC resolves that a letter be written on behalf of our community, representing 80 million Christians around the world, to the oncoming meeting of the G20, reminding the most powerful countries of the world of their responsibilities to ensure life and justice for every person in the world, including supporting the Paris Climate Agreement.

Gender Justice

The General Council considered a proposal on adopting the “Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.”

PROPOSAL

The General Council adopt the Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination

The proposal was debated. Concern was expressed about the possibility that member churches that do not agree with the Declaration could be excluded from the WCRC in the future. A delegate from the *Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* declared that his church found no biblical support for the ordination of women and that they therefore could not support this Declaration. He believed that the adoption of the Declaration would lead to the separation of their church from other churches in that area of the world. An officer from AIPRAL assured the General Council that the region had always sought to include the Mexican church and that the previous speaker’s fears were groundless.

It was noted that the printed text of the Declaration reflected what had been proposed in relation to the ordination of women at the 2010 Uniting General Council, rather than what had been agreed. Reference was made to the UGC Minutes, page 44, where it was recorded that the original recommendation read: “WCRC will promote ordina-

tion of women and work toward a time when the ordination of women will be binding on communion.”

After debate, this had been changed and the following was approved: “WCRC promote the ordination of women amongst its member churches.”

The General Council noted that the printed text of the relevant section read:

The Uniting General Council then affirmed women’s ordination as central to the understanding of communion, stating: “True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized.” Among the recommendations approved by the WCRC General Council was a commitment to “...promote the ordination of women and work toward a time when the ordination of women will be binding on communion.” To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

It was proposed that the text of the Declaration be corrected prior to its adoption to read:

The Uniting General Council then affirmed women’s ordination as central to the understanding of communion, stating: “True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized.” Among the recommendations approved by the WCRC General Council was a commitment to “...promote the ordination of women **amongst its member churches.**” To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

By consensus, it was agreed to make this change to the text of the Declaration.

ACTION 27

The General Council agrees to amend the text of the Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.

By majority, the General Council agreed to adopt the Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.

ACTION 28

The General Council adopts the Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.

Dissent from the decision to adopt the Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination was submitted by Danny Ramirez Celis, Sahara N. Peralta Salazar, Abigail E. Aguilar

Rocha, David Monroy Adame and Porfirio Camarillo Vazquez, on behalf of the *Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México*, and by Norohanta Andrianalizah and Guy Maillard, on behalf of the *Union Nationale des Eglises Protestantes Réformées Evangéliques de France* (UNEPREF), and is hereby recorded.

The Presbyterian Church of Chile asked that its abstention from this decision be noted in the minutes.

Consideration of the remaining sections of the report of the Drafting Team was suspended.

Greetings

Bishop Annette Kurschus of the *Evangelisch Kirche von Westfalen* and the EKD brought greetings to the Council. President Jerry Pillay thanked Bishop Kurschus and presented her with a gift.

The session was adjourned at 16:28 and delegates were encouraged to move as swiftly as possible to the *Nikolaikirche* for Peace Prayers at 17:00.

The late afternoon and evening were devoted to Peace Prayers at the *Nikolaikirche* (St. Nicholas Church) and a reception hosted by the Leipzig Mission, followed by an organ concert at the *Thomaskirche* (St. Thomas Church), as well as committee and drafting team meetings.

TUESDAY, 4 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “LIVING GOD, REFORM US”

Worship and Bible Study 4

The General Council met at 8:30 for Worship and Bible study at the *Leipziger Messe*. Elsa Tamez led the study on Matthew 15:21-28. Following the study, Elsa Tamez was presented with a gift by Vice-President Yvette Noble Bloomfield.

Greetings

Martin Junge, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, brought greetings to the General Council.

Milton Mejia, general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, brought greetings to the General Council.

Plenary Session 4

The business of the General Council resumed at 10:36 for the first report of the Nominating Committee.

The President led the General Council in prayer.

Alison McDonald, convener of the Nominating Committee, reported. She outlined the process that the Nominating Committee had followed in creating the slate of nominees and the process that would be followed by the General Council in considering it.

She noted that the Nominating Committee had achieved a 50/50 gender balance in the list of names; that there was good youth involvement with four names; that there were nine lay and thirteen ordained; that a fair geographical spread and that a good range of gifts, skills and experience was offered. Five of those being proposed had already served on the Executive Committee, offering a measure of continuity.

She offered the General Council the slate, starting by listing those nominated to serve as officers, followed by those nominated to serve in the other Executive Committee positions.

The Convener indicated that the whole Nominating Committee would be available in the Nominating Committee room for questions of clarification from 13:30-14:30 on Tuesday, 4 July, and the President invited those with specific questions which did not need to be brought to the plenary to avail themselves of this opportunity.

The President asked, by a show of hands, whether the General Council received the report.

ACTION 29

The General Council received the first report of the Nominating Committee.

Questions were invited. Delegates asked about the balance of lay and ordained people, about advisers, about language balance, about whether a young person should be appointed to serve as an officer and about the participation of all members of the Nominating Committee in its work.

The President thanked the Convener and her committee for their work.

Theme Input Session 5: Strengthening Communion

At 11:00, the General Council moved into a theme input session on strengthening communion.

Moderator Yvette Noble Bloomfield introduced Roderick Hewitt who outlined the process for this session.

Collin Cowan, general secretary of the Council for World Mission, brought greetings from the Council and gave a presentation on Strengthening Communion (see Appendix 10g).

Dr. Hewitt invited ten minutes of table talk.

President Jerry Pillay expressed words of thanks to Dr. Cowan for his presentation and for CWM's continuing staunch support over some years for the work of the WCRC; he presented him with a gift.

Listening Session 7: Strengthening Communion

The General Council moved into a listening session at 11:57 on strengthening communion, chaired by Dr. Hewitt. A short film was shown. Dr. Hewitt explained that Dr. Cowan's paper addressed the ways in which the Communion and its commitment to justice could be strengthened, emphasizing that communion and justice are so tied that one cannot have one without the other.

Dr. Hewitt then invited presentations from a panel comprising Yoshi Fujimori, Dario Barolin, Jessica Vasquez Torres, Clayton Leal da Silva and, for the Youth Pre-Council, Raissa Brasil and Andrew MacPherson.

Dr. Hewitt proposed that the Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion and an accompanying proposal document (see Appendix 9e) be received and referred to Discernment Groups.

By consensus, this was agreed.

ACTION 30

The General Council received the Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion and a supporting document containing proposals and referred them to Discernment Groups.

The General Secretary thanked Aruna Gnanadason for her leadership of the Global Institute of Theology and for her service as consultant for theology, mission and communion.

Business was suspended at 12:56 for lunch. A special lunch for delegates from United and Uniting Churches was held.

Discernment Session 4

The General Council resumed business at 14:00 in Discernment Groups considering strengthening communion.

Decision Session 3

The General Council returned to plenary at 15:13. Lisa Vander Wal, for the Drafting Team, presented their third report, which covered the work left over from Monday, 3 July.

The General Council considered a proposal on adopting a gender justice policy.

PROPOSAL

That the WCRC's Executive Committee and Secretariat develop a Gender Justice Policy by 2019 and that they collaborate with the regional councils to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches. This policy shall delineate issues of gender-based violence within church and society. It shall include an action plan for the implementation of the policy and accountability metrics.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 31

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee and Secretariat to develop a Gender Justice Policy by 2019 and that they collaborate with the regional councils to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches. This policy shall delineate issues of gender-based violence within church and society. It shall include an action plan for the implementation of the policy and accountability metrics.

The General Council considered a proposal on gender equity in staffing.

PROPOSAL

The WCRC Executive Committee and senior staff should represent the Communion's commitment to gender equity and shall be at least 50% female by the next General Council.

Following considerable debate, the Moderator resolved to send the proposal back to the Drafting Team for further consideration.

The General Council considered an amended proposal, arising from the report of the Women's Pre-Council.

PROPOSAL

The Communion's Attention to Gender Justice

- a. that this General Council confess that gender-based violence in all its forms is sin; and*
- b. that the WCRC join with its ecumenical partners in approaching the UN Commission on the Status of Women, urging a renewed dialogue and response to all forms of gender-based violence.*

It was proposed to add "and discrimination" after "gender based violence" in section a.

By consensus, this was agreed.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 32

The Communion's Attention to Gender Justice

The General Council:

- a. confesses that gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms are sin; and**
- b. asks that the WCRC join with its ecumenical partners in approaching the UN Commission on the Status of Women, urging a renewed dialogue and response to all forms of gender-based violence.**

The General Council considered a proposal on the Communion's efforts to work with member churches regarding the ordination of women.

PROPOSAL

That the WCRC Executive Committee open a space of discernment and offer accompaniment, educational materials and guidance to with member churches that do not presently ordain women. They shall develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of "A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 33

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee to open a space of discernment and offer accompaniment, educational materials and guidance to member churches that do not presently ordain women. They shall develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of “A Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination” will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024.

Dissent from this action was submitted by Trevor Gribben on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and by Jonathan Muñoz Vásquez on behalf of the *Iglesia Presbiteriana de Chile*, and is hereby recorded.

Business was suspended at 16:11.

Listening Session 8: Korean Peninsula

The General Council resumed business at 16:16 with a presentation about the Korean peninsula.

Vice-President Yueh-Wen Lu moderated the session. She was joined by panellists Ri Jongro, Paul Oppenheim, Lutz Drescher, Lee Jaechun and Hong Jung Lee. Topics covered included sanctions against North Korea, denuclearization, the peace process, reunification and the role of the churches.

Listening Session 9

At 17:00, the General Council moved to a listening session, turning its attention to matters of public witness. It was presented by the convener of the Public Witness Committee, Robina Winbush, and by Ian Alexander from the Public Witness Committee. A paper had been circulated (see Appendix 12). The Convener thanked the committee, staff members and stewards for their work.

The General Council received the paper and resolved to send it to Discernment Groups for discussion.

ACTION 34

The General Council received the report of the Public Witness Committee and referred it to Discernment Groups.

Business was suspended at 17:31 for supper and to allow delegates to travel into central Leipzig.

In the evening delegates had the opportunity to attend a Psalm concert in the *Nikolai-kirche* (St. Nicholas Church).

Committee and drafting team members remained at the *Messe* for meetings.

WEDNESDAY, 5 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “AFFIRMING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH”

Delegates gathered at 07:30 for a coach journey to Wittenberg and were seated in the *Stadtkirche* (City Church) in good time for a special service of Witness to the Unity of the Church at 10:00. In a joyful celebration of unity, the Council prayed, praised God in music and listened to the Word preached by Najla Kassab (see Appendix 11b) in the welcome presence of representatives from the Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Methodist Council, the Mennonite Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

The focus of the service was the formal association of the WCRC with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (see Appendix 6), originally signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999 and with which the World Methodist Council had associated itself in 2006. During the service, the Lutheran World Federation and the WCRC also signed the Wittenberg Witness, a pledge to strengthen cooperation and joint action (see Appendix 7).

After the service, greetings and messages were brought to the General Council by the pastor of the local congregation; Bishop Brian Farrell, who read a message from His Holiness Pope Francis; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson on behalf of the Global Christian Forum; Cesar Garcia on behalf of the World Mennonite Conference; the Lutheran Bishop of Wittenberg; the Roman Catholic Bishop of Magdeburg; and a representative of the local Old Catholic congregation.

Lunch was served to delegates in the grounds of the *Stadtkirche* after which tours of the World Reformation Exhibition were offered. Coaches left Wittenberg beginning at 15:30 for a return to the *Leipziger Messe*.

Evening Session

Committee and Drafting Team members met in the evening.

Evening Prayer

Evening prayer was held from 22:00 to 22:15 in the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* (Reformed Church).

THURSDAY, 6 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “LIVING GOD, TRANSFORM US”

Worship and Bible Study 5

The General Council convened at the *Leipziger Messe* at 08:40 for worship focused on a commemoration of Jan Hus. An agape meal was shared.

Mitri Raheb led the General Council in a Bible study of Acts 2:1-21 and 37-39.

Table discussion was held for 15 minutes. Questions were then shared.

Following the study, Mitri Raheb was thanked by Vice-President Yvette Noble Bloomfield, who presented him with a gift.

Plenary Session 5

The General Council moved into a plenary session at 10:05. The President laid a revised timetable before the General Council for the rest of the day. The Council approved the revised timetable by a show of hands.

The Convener of the Nominating Committee presented the second report of the committee.

She presented nominations for president, officers and members of the Executive Committee to the General Council, drawing attention to the changes that had been made since the first report had been presented. She thanked all who had made comments. She assured the General Council that the Nominating Committee had listened to all the feedback, particularly the plea to strengthen youth in leadership, on linguistic and regional balance and on the range of skills within the proposed Executive Committee, while maintaining the balance between women and men.

She reiterated that the Nominating Committee had taken great care to ensure balance but also to create a team. She appealed to the General Council to consider the *whole* slate. The Convener asked the General Council to note that, at the last moment, the original nominee from the Pacific had withdrawn. A new nominee had been appointed.

In conclusion, she reminded the General Council that 66 nominations for 22 places had been received. She asked the General Council to be mindful that every one of those people was someone willing to serve the Communion, for whom the whole General Council should be thankful.

Noting that the regional distribution remained the same, the Convener asked the General Council to note that the revised slate now contained 10 men and 12 women. Eight were lay, fourteen ordained and five were young people.

She proceeded to provide brief biographies of those proposed to serve as president and officers.

Nominated to serve as president:

Najla Kassab, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

Nominated to serve as vice-presidents:

Samuel Ayete-Nyampang, Presbyterian Church of Ghana

Lisa Vander Wal, Reformed Church in America

Sylvana Maria Apituley, Protestant Church in West Indonesia

Raissa Brasil, United Presbyterian Church in Brazil

Nominated to serve as general treasurer:

Johann Weusmann, Reformed Alliance (Germany)

Nominated to serve as members of the Executive Committee:

Coutinho Maravilhoso Moma, Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola

Yolanda Dreyer, Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa

Tibonge Ng'ambi, Presbyterian Church in Zambia

Veronica Muchiri, Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Hilary Hagar, Presbyterian Church of Canada

Annabelle Lalla-Ramkelawan, Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago
J. Herbert Nelson, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Hong Jung Lee, Presbyterian Church in Korea
Khid-arn Prawate, Church of Christ in Thailand
Susan Thomas, Church of South India
Hanna North, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand
Milciades Pua, Presbyterian Church of Colombia
Clayton Da Silva, Independent Presbyterian Church in Brazil
Hefin Jones, Union of Welsh Independents
Claudio Pasquet, Waldensian Church
Diána Erdélyi, Hungarian Reformed Church

The President asked if the General Council wished to receive the report.

ACTION 35

The General Council received the second report of the Nominating Committee.

The President asked for further consideration of the names proposed.

It was proposed that Yolanda Dreyer be replaced by Mary Ekinde Salle, from Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, on the basis that she was from the Central Africa Region.

By majority vote, the General Council approved this substitution.

A significant number of changes were suggested by delegates from churches in Africa. The President proposed that only the Africa section of the slate be delayed for further consideration.

The Convener made a plea that, if substitutions were to be proposed, biographical information, covering experience, gifts and skills should be provided, in order that the Committee could make informed nominations. She reiterated that experience, gifts and skills were more important than regional balance.

Concern was expressed that no male youth delegate had been nominated to serve. Concern was expressed that no nominee from India had been proposed. The delegate who spoke asked for this concern to be minuted for the benefit of the next General Council. A question was asked about how advisers could be added to Executive Committee and by whom. A delegate said that photographs and biographies of the nominees would have been of assistance in informing the General Council.

The General Secretary reminded the General Council that all nominees had to be supported fully by their member churches, and that that support normally included

financial support. Exceptions were possible but had to be agreed before a nomination could be accepted.

A plea was made for churches to think less of themselves and more of skills, gifts and experience required for the effective functioning of the Executive Committee and leadership of the WCRC. An appeal was made that there be no change to the number of female and youth nominations.

ACTION 36

The General Council approved all the nominations proposed by the Nominating Committee, with the exception of the nominations of those from Africa.

ACTION 37

The General Council resolved to consider the nominations of those from Africa at a later session.

Decision Session 4

The General Council moved into a decision session. Lisa Vander Wal, for the Drafting Team, presented its fourth report, which dealt with proposals remaindered from previous sessions made by the Discernment Groups on theology, the Women's Pre-Council, the Youth Pre-Council and the Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion.

Theology

The Drafting Team referred to a proposal on confessing Christ against separation and division.

PROPOSAL

We have seen a worsening of systems and structures of oppression that threaten life for human beings and the whole creation. Therefore the General Council resolves to engage in a process of discerning how to address the current challenges attending the rise of authoritarian and populist ideologies and movements in our time.

It was proposed to add the words "ideologies and" before "movements." By consensus, this was agreed.

(N.B. The text of the action has been rearranged to comply with the standard format adopted for all actions agreed by the General Council.)

ACTION 38

The General Council resolves, having seen a worsening of systems and structures of oppression that threaten life for human beings and the whole creation, to

engage in a process of discerning how to address the current challenges attending the rise of authoritarian and populist ideologies and movements in our time.

From the Women's Pre-Council

The General Council considered a proposal on gender equity in the Executive Committee and senior staff.

PROPOSAL

To reflect the Communion's commitment to gender equity, the General Council resolves

- a. that at least 50% of the WCRC Executive Committee members elected at the General Council will be female*
- b. that in the hiring process of senior staff, gender equity will be pursued vigorously.*

It was proposed to add, as a final clause to b. the words “with a clear goal of at least 50% female.” By consensus, this was agreed.

The General Council approved the amended proposal as follows:

ACTION 39

To reflect the Communion's commitment to gender equality, the General Council resolves:

- a. that at least 50% of the WCRC Executive Committee members elected at the General Council will be female; and**
- b. that, in the hiring process of senior staff, gender equity will be pursued vigorously with a clear goal of at least 50% female.**

From the Youth Pre-Council

The General Council considered a proposal arising from the report of the Youth Pre-Council on youth representation among the officers.

PROPOSAL

The General Council requests the Executive Committee to initiate a process that can lead to a possible constitutional change so that at least one delegate under 30 will be appointed as an officer of the Executive Committee at the next General Council.

It was proposed to delete “the next” and insert “future.” By consensus this was agreed.

ACTION 40

The General Council requests the Executive Committee to initiate a process that can lead to a possible constitutional change so that at least one delegate under

30 will be appointed as an officer of the Executive Committee at future General Councils.

The General Council considered a proposal on equal access to ordination.

PROPOSAL

The General Council resolves to commit to equal access to ordination for all members.

It was proposed to add, as a final clause, the words “for everyone who is considered by his or her church to be gifted, trained and called to the ministry.”

It was proposed to delete word “all” from the proposed addition above.

It was proposed to substitute the words “according to the constitution of their member church” for “for everyone who is considered by his or her church to be gifted, trained and called to the ministry.”

The President ruled that the proposal and suggested amendments be referred back to the Youth Pre-Council for further consideration.

Strengthening Communion

The General Council considered a proposal on the issue of strengthening communion.

PROPOSAL

The WCRC promote the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 41

The General Council resolves that the WCRC promotes the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.

The General Council considered a proposal on a conversation on interpretation of Scripture.

PROPOSAL

The WCRC invites member churches into a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture that is grounded in the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all, and provides resources as necessary.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 42

The General Council resolves that the WCRC invites member churches into a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture that is grounded in the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all, and provides resources as necessary.

The General Council considered a proposal on communion and sexuality.

PROPOSAL

That the World Communion of Reformed Churches commits to:

- a. *set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and sexual diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values;*
- b. *facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition; and*
- c. *accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.*

It was proposed to delete the words “sexual diversity” or alternatively just to delete the word “sexual” leaving in “diversity.” Much debate ensued. It was not possible to achieve consensus on amending or receiving the above proposal. It was referred back to the Drafting Team for further consideration.

The General Council considered a proposal on leadership.

PROPOSAL

The General Council resolved that the WCRC should embark on a process of engaging member churches in a critical analysis of leadership consistent with the communion we seek, modelling inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ including his resistance to domination and control.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 43

The General Council resolves that the WCRC should embark on a process of engaging member churches in a critical analysis of leadership consistent with the communion we seek, modelling inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ including his resistance to domination and control.

The General Council considered a proposal on the work of regional councils.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- a. reaffirms the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches; and providing spaces for dialogue and action;*
- b. reaffirms the participation of regional representatives in decision making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions; and*
- c. affirms working styles that strengthen the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 44

The General Council resolves to:

- a. reaffirm the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches by providing spaces for dialogue and action;**
- b. reaffirm the participation of regional representatives in the decision-making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions; and**
- c. affirm working styles that strengthen the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.**

The session ended at 12:58.

Announcement and Photograph

Hanns Lessing highlighted the opportunity for member churches to obtain copies of the Global Players Reformation exhibition for display in their localities.

A group photograph was taken after which delegates proceeded to lunch and various group meetings.

Listening Session 10

The General Council resumed business at 14:15 for a second listening session on public witness, with Vice-President Bas Plaisier moderating. Robina Winbush, convener of the Public Witness Committee and Ian Alexander, for the Committee, read the proposals (see Appendix 12).

A delegate from Indonesia expressed concern that the issues facing Indonesia, including the effects of a recent volcanic eruption, had not been reflected in the proposals. Other delegates raised similar concerns. The Convener drew the attention of the General Council to the difficulty the Committee had in addressing all the issues that were brought to its attention; this was due to the absence of supporting information, the lack of clarity on expected outcomes or the lateness of the suggestion and asked delegates to note that the Committee proposed to remit all such issues to the Executive Committee for later scrutiny.

The General Council agreed to receive the report of the Public Witness Committee and to refer it to Discernment Groups.

ACTION 45

The General Council received the full report of the Public Witness Committee and referred it to Discernment Groups.

The session moved to consideration of the draft text of the Vision and Message Committee, which was read to the General Council by the Convener, Rathnakara Sadananda, and members of the committee. The draft message was received by the General Council and was passed to Discernment Groups for further consideration (see Appendix D).

The session concluded at 15:43.

Discernment Session 6

The General Council moved into Discernment Groups at 15:45 to consider the proposals of the Public Witness and Vision and Message Committees.

Plenary Session 5

Setri Nyomi led the General Council in prayer.

Nominations

At 17:53, the General Council convened and heard a report from the Nominating Committee. The Convener, Alison McDonald, presented the slate of names of those nominated to serve from Africa.

Coutinho Maravilhoso Moma, Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola
Mary Ekinde Salle, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
Tibonge Ng'ambi, Presbyterian Church in Zambia
Veronica Muchiri, Presbyterian Church of East Africa

The General Council agreed to receive the report.

ACTION 46

The General Council received the third report of the Nominating Committee.

Constitution and By-laws

Cheryl Meban, of the Executive Committee's Constitution and Membership Committee, presented proposed changes to the Constitution and By-laws (see Appendix B). She explained that the Executive Committee had felt that no major changes were required but was bringing some minor changes for clarity and ease.

She gave a reminder of the process: the General Council could accept or reject any of the changes but could not propose new amendments for consideration at this Council. The General Secretary confirmed that due notice had been given of the changes being proposed to this Council by the Executive Committee. The General Secretary also confirmed that changes to the Constitution required a two-thirds majority of those Council members present at the time of the vote.

Cheryl Meban gave background information to some of the changes that were being proposed.

It was proposed from the floor that the proposed constitutional amendments be agreed.

A delegate expressed concern that there was not a quorum, in terms of Article VII, present at this session of the General Council. He was content that the matter should nonetheless proceed but asked that his concern be recorded. The Moderator determined that a quorum was present and business could proceed.

ACTION 47

The General Council approved the amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws.

Presentation of Lombard Prizes

Aruna Gnanadason announced that the winner of the first prize was Jordan Redding, from the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. The second prize went to Nadia Marais, of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. The President expressed his congratulations and thanks.

Decision Session 5

The General Council resumed consideration of a proposal on equal access to ordination left over from the fourth decision session earlier that day.

PROPOSAL

The General Council resolve to commit to equal access to ordination for all members.

It was reported to the General Council that the Youth Pre-Council had made it clear, in the interim, that it wished the Council to decide on the disposal of this proposal in the light of the Council's earlier adoption of the Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination.

A delegate pointed out that the proposal in fact opened up the issue of access to ordination for groups other than women and he felt this was an important discussion for the WCRC to hold.

The suggestion that the proposal be withdrawn was put before the Council; some concern was displayed. A further member of the Youth Pre-Council suggested that the matter should instead be referred to the Drafting Team for further consideration.

A proposal was made to add a new section to the proposal: "that the Executive Committee be asked to develop a process by which we, as a Communion, wrestle with the question of what it means for all members to fulfil their baptismal vows when they sense the call to ordained service."

A delegate sought a clear assurance that all earlier proposed amendments would be considered by the Executive Committee in its further deliberations. The President assured the Council that this would be the case.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 48

The General Council:

- a. resolves to commit to equal access to ordination for all members; and**
- b. asks the Executive Committee to develop a process by which we, as a Communion, wrestle with the question of what it means for all members to fulfil their baptismal vows when they sense the call to ordained service.**

The General Council considered a proposal on strengthening communion.

Lisa Vander Wal explained that the Drafting Team had consulted the Strengthening Communion Task Group and that it had expressed a desire that the Team present again to the Council the original amended wording of this proposal.

PROPOSAL

That the General Council commits to:

- a. *set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and sexual diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values.*
- b. *facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition.*
- c. *accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.*

It was suggested that the word “sexual” be removed from section a. of the proposal. A suggestion was made that the proposal instead be referred to the Executive Committee.

The proposal in its original amended form was put to the Council. Discussion continued.

A proposal was made that the question be decided by majority voting. The Council did not agree and the proposal fell, the discussion then continuing. A delegate pointed out that his country had legal prohibitions for some sorts of sexual expression and that therefore actions taken by this body would have a greater and different impact in some countries than in countries of the Global North.

The President ruled that the matter be postponed for further discussion on Friday, 7 July.

Business was suspended at 19:07.

Evening Session

The evening was devoted to committee and drafting team meetings.

Evening Prayer

Evening prayer was held from 22:00 to 22:15 in the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* (Reformed Church).

FRIDAY, 7 JULY

THEME OF THE DAY: “CLOSE AS A COMMUNION”

Morning Devotion

The General Council gathered at the *Leipziger Messe* at 08:40 for a short morning devotion led by the Worship Team.

The General Council moved into a business session at 08:58. President Jerry Pillay presided.

Treasurer’s Report

General Treasurer Johann Weusmann presented a general report for information, setting out the main challenges facing the WCRC. He reminded the Council that these matters were for the Executive Committee. He listed the five financial goals of the WCRC:

1. a stable financial basis for sustainable work
2. financing the core budget through membership fees (the Executive Committee would be asking for higher membership dues, particularly from Asian member churches)
3. financing project work through fundraising
4. maintaining reserves for future stability (reserves are now healthier than they were before the move to Hannover)
5. investing ethically

Income

Income from membership dues had fallen and this needed addressing.

Expenditure

Expenditure had fallen because of the lower salary budget in Hannover and other lower costs. However, while expenses had been trimmed as much as possible, costs continued to rise and this would become increasingly problematic.

Challenges

The General Treasurer listed the following challenges:

1. financial continuity through contributions
2. improved fundraising

He stated that it was necessary to achieve a balanced budget.

ACTION 49

The General Council received the General Treasurer’s report.

The President expressed the Council’s thanks to Johann Weusmann.

Decision Session 6

The General Council moved into a decision session at 09:07. Lisa Vander Wal, for the Drafting Team, presented the sixth report of the team.

The General Council considered a revised proposal on communion and diversity.

PROPOSAL

That the World Communion of Reformed Churches commits to:

- a. set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values;*
- b. facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition; and*
- c. accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.*

After debate, the mood of the Council was tested. Delegates were reminded that dissent could be recorded.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 50

The General Council commits to:

- a. set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values;**
- b. facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition; and**

- c. **accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.**

Dissent from this action was submitted by Enobong Bohaji Anani, Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, and Fonki Samuel Forba, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, and is hereby recorded.

The General Council moved to deal with matters arising from the discussion within Discernment Groups on the theme of public witness.

Public Witness

Ian Alexander presented the proposals of the Public Witness Committee (underlined text indicates additions made during the discernment process).

The General Council considered a proposal on migration, human trafficking and refugees.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *condemns all acts of human trafficking; asks all member churches to do likewise; recommends member churches engage with the WCRC programme: “Broken for You” (<http://wcrch.ch/justice/broken>); and urges member churches to hold their governments to account in countering human trafficking;*
2. *recognizing that the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers requires close cooperation and a common response by churches in all parts of the world, encourages the Executive Committee, working in cooperation with its regions, member churches, and other bodies, to find ways:*
 - a. *to analyse what happens to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the countries they leave, pass through, and settle in;*
 - b. *to promote networking among regions and local churches to share best practices, in collaboration with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)*
 - c. *to consider the theological, spiritual and pastoral challenges confronting member churches;*
 - d. *to find a common answer to the question of how we deal with one another as human beings and people of faith in this situation; and*
 - e. *to consider, together, how we may address governments, media and citizens in our countries so that all that is necessary is done and people receive the help they need and deserve as our fellow human beings;*

3. *urges member churches to hold their government to account in supporting migrants; and*
4. *urges all member churches to support affirmative action policies and programmes to create opportunities for migrant workers, refugees and trafficked people.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 51

The General Council:

1. **condemns all acts of human trafficking; asks all member churches to do likewise; recommends member churches engage with the WCRC programme: “Broken for You” (<http://wrc.ch/justice/broken>); and urges member churches to hold their government to account in countering human trafficking;**
2. **recognizing that the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers requires close cooperation and a common response by churches in all parts of the world, encourages the Executive Committee, working in cooperation with its regions, member churches, and other bodies, to find ways:**
 - a. **to analyse what happens to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the countries they leave, pass through, and settle in;**
 - b. **to promote networking among regions and local churches to share best practices, in collaboration with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)**
 - c. **to consider the theological, spiritual and pastoral challenges confronting member churches;**
 - d. **to find a common answer to the question of how we deal with one another as human beings and people of faith in this situation; and**
 - e. **to consider, together, how we may address governments, media and citizens in our countries so that all that is necessary is done and people receive the help they need and deserve as our fellow human beings;**
3. **urges member churches to hold their government to account in supporting migrants; and**
4. **urges all member churches to support affirmative action policies and programmes to create opportunities for migrant workers, refugees and trafficked people.**

The General Council considered a proposal on uprooted and displaced people in Mauritius.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *encourages the Secretariat and member churches to support the multi-level humanitarian efforts of the Mauritian Church on behalf of the Chagossians living in Mauritius; and*
2. *instructs the Executive Committee to organize, in cooperation with member churches and other ecumenical partners, a pastoral delegation to Mauritius to demonstrate support for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Mauritius, and other churches, in supporting the displaced people.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 52

The General Council:

1. **encourages the Secretariat and member churches to support the multi-level humanitarian efforts of the Mauritian Church on behalf of the Chagossians living in Mauritius; and**
2. **instructs the Executive Committee to organize, in cooperation with member churches and other ecumenical partners, a pastoral delegation to Mauritius to demonstrate support for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Mauritius, and other churches, in supporting the displaced people.**

The General Council considered a proposal on the treatment of Christians globally.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, with support from member churches, and the regional bodies and other ecumenical bodies, to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence and the protection of the rights of minorities;*
2. *instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, to work with member churches and regional bodies, in heightening global awareness of the persecution of Christians—including asking for government and UN action where necessary;*
3. *urges member churches to offer support to the victims of the on-going activities of insurgents in Nigeria, particularly as it affects women and children in internally displaced peoples' (IDP) camps, and in the rebuilding of devastated communities; and*
4. *urges member churches to offer support for rebuilding churches in Nigeria when destroyed by governments or other groups.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 53

The General Council:

- 1. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, with support from member churches, and the regional bodies and other ecumenical bodies, to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence and the protection of the rights of minorities;**
- 2. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, to work with member churches and regional bodies, in heightening global awareness of the persecution of Christians— including asking for government and UN action where necessary;**
- 3. urges member churches to offer support to the victims of the on-going activities of insurgents in Nigeria, particularly as it affects women and children in internally displaced peoples' (IDP) camps, and in the rebuilding of devastated communities; and**
- 4. urges member churches to offer support for rebuilding churches in Nigeria when destroyed by governments or other groups.**

The General Council considered a proposal on Korea.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- 1. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, convening a North East Asia Ecumenical Peace Convocation, to weave various initiatives of the global, regional and national ecumenical councils, to design an Ecumenical Accompaniment Process for Healing, Reconciliation and Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula from 2017 to 2025 (80th anniversary of the liberation from Japan and the division of the peninsula);*
- 2. agrees that WCRC shall join in the Peace Treaty Campaign Movement as one of the programmes of the above Ecumenical Accompaniment Process; and*
- 3. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to highlight the Korean Peninsula in its programme on Justice and Peace in order to actualize efficiently the above plans, developing a common vision of peace in North East Asia as well as that of the world.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 54

The General Council:

- 1. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, convening a North East Asia Ecumenical Peace Convocation, to weave various initiatives of**

- the global, regional and national ecumenical councils, to design an Ecumenical Accompaniment Process for Healing, Reconciliation and Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula from 2017 to 2025 (80th anniversary of the liberation from Japan and the division of the peninsula);
2. agrees that WCRC shall join in the Peace Treaty Campaign Movement as one of the programmes of the above Ecumenical Accompaniment Process; and
 3. instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to highlight the Korean Peninsula in its programme on Justice and Peace in order to actualize efficiently the above plans, developing a common vision of peace in North East Asia as well as that of the world.

The General Council considered a proposal on Palestine.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *affirms that, with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake;*
2. *instructs the Secretariat to initiate a programme to:*
 - a. *collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society, making them available to member churches; and*
 - b. *undertake study and discernment, using the resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement, regarding theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action;*
3. *instructs the Executive Committee, with the Secretariat, to respond (before the end of 2017) to the letter of June 21, 2017, from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine indicating what actions can be taken in response to their cry for costly solidarity. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/letters-received/open-letter-from-the-national-coalition-of-christian-organizations-in-palestine>);*
4. *encourages member churches to examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law;*
5. *instructs the Executive Committee to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with the present day*

- Christian community—the “living stones”—of the Holy Land, to witness their situation and express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination; and*
6. *encourages the Executive Committee to seek to strengthen initiatives for dialogues, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention and transformation.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 55

The General Council:

1. affirms that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake;
2. instructs the Secretariat to initiate a programme to:
 - a. collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society, making them available to member churches; and
 - b. undertake study and discernment, using the resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement, regarding theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action;
3. instructs the Executive Committee, with the Secretariat, to respond (before the end of 2017) to the letter of June 21, 2017, from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine indicating what actions can be taken in response to their cry for costly solidarity.
(<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/letters-received/open-letter-from-the-national-coalition-of-christian-organizations-in-palestine/>);
4. encourages member churches to examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law;
5. instructs the Executive Committee to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with the present day Christian community—the “living stones”—of the Holy Land, to witness their situation and express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination; and

6. **encourages the Executive Committee to seek to strengthen initiatives for dialogues, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention and transformation.**

The General Council considered a proposal on violence against individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theological views, around the globe;*
2. *confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence; and*
3. *(Deleted)*
4. *continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom and a safe world for all persons to flourish.*

Debate ensued on whether or not to delete section 3 as proposed, which had read: *commits to speaking about “human sexualities” rather than using the term “human sexuality,” recognizing the diversity, and continuum, of sexual expression.* By majority, it was deleted.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 56

The General Council:

1. **condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theological views, around the globe;**
2. **confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence; and**
3. **continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom and a safe world for all persons to flourish.**

Dissent from the decision to delete the third section of the above proposal was submitted by Sean M. Weston, United Church of Christ in the United States; Bethany Joy Winn, United Church of Christ in the United States; and Jessica Vazquez Torres, Presbyterian Church (USA), and is hereby recorded.

The General Council considered a proposal on Indigenous Peoples.

PROPOSAL

The General Council, working together as equal and mutual partners with Indigenous Peoples to guide and inform its processes and discernment:

1. *commits itself to a process of developing right relationships with Indigenous Peoples by initiating a study towards seeking repentance of wrongdoing, an apology, and a process leading to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, including liturgical resources for use in churches;*
2. *instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to organize a theological engagement with the Doctrine of Discovery that can recognize its harmful effects and its justification of genocide on Indigenous Peoples;*
3. *instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to create a special working group, with a majority of Indigenous members, to gather, develop and share the theology of Indigenous Peoples, practice and advocacy resources;*
4. *encourages member churches:*
 - a. *to study the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for developing relationships with Indigenous Peoples and to advocate with their governments to adopt the Declaration; and*
 - b. *to help human rights agencies which support Indigenous Peoples as they struggle for their rights;*
5. *remits to the Executive Committee, in consultation with the regions, to consider:*
 - a. *including one Indigenous member, or youth, on the WCRC Executive Committee; and*
 - b. *financial support of an Indigenous delegation to the next WCRC General Council; and*
6. *requests the Secretariat to write to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in support of the Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples' initiative.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 57

The General Council, working together as equal and mutual partners with Indigenous Peoples to guide and inform its processes and discernment:

1. **commits itself to a process of developing right relationships with Indigenous Peoples by initiating a study towards seeking repentance of wrongdoing, an apology, and a process leading to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, including liturgical resources for use in churches;**
2. **instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to organize a theological engagement with the Doctrine of Discovery that can recognize its harmful effects and its justification of genocide on Indigenous Peoples;**

3. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to create a special working group, with a majority of Indigenous members, to gather, develop and share the theology of Indigenous Peoples, practice and advocacy resources;
4. encourages member churches:
 - a. to study the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People as a framework for developing relationships with Indigenous Peoples and to advocate with their governments to adopt the Declaration; and
 - b. to help human rights agencies which support Indigenous Peoples as they struggle for their rights;
5. remits to the Executive Committee, in consultation with the regions, to consider:
 - a. including one Indigenous member, or youth, on the WCRC Executive Committee; and
 - b. financial support of an Indigenous delegation to the next WCRC General Council; and
6. requests the Secretariat to write to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in support of the Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples' initiative.

The General Council considered a proposal on drought and hunger in the Horn of Africa.

PROPOSAL

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee to work with member churches to seek to mobilize the international community, local churches and church agencies to urgently address the challenges of food security and famine.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 58

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee to work with member churches to seek to mobilize the international community, local churches and church agencies to urgently address the challenges of food security and famine.

The General Council considered a proposal on Cuba.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *expresses its conviction that the peoples and governments of the USA and Cuba should continue on the path towards friendship, reconciliation and just relations, and is concerned about unilateral actions to limit progress towards reconciliation.*

It was proposed to add a new section 2, to read:

calls on the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean to offer support and help to the people of Cuba in order that they can overcome their economic difficulties that come from the economic blockade imposed on Cuba.

By consensus, the General Council agreed to add this new section 2 to the proposal.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 59

The General Council:

- 1. expresses its conviction that the peoples and governments of the USA and Cuba should continue on the path towards friendship, reconciliation and just relations, and is concerned about unilateral actions to limit progress towards reconciliation; and**
- 2. calls on the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean to offer support and help to the people of Cuba in order that they can overcome their economic difficulties that come from the economic blockade imposed on Cuba.**

The General Council considered a proposal on Venezuela.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- 1. encourages the Secretariat, member churches and AIPRAL to support the church in Venezuela in addressing the need to build a culture of peace which makes dialogue and reconciliation possible. This support could be offered through prayer and visits to better understand the reality and contribute to overcoming the communications blockade; and*
- 2. urges the Secretaria, and AIPRAL to be involved in advocacy with international organizations, especially the UN and Organization of American States.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 60

The General Council:

- 1. encourages the Secretariat, member churches and AIPRAL to support the church in Venezuela in addressing the need to build a culture of peace which makes dialogue and reconciliation possible. This support could**

be offered through prayer and visits to better understand the reality and contribute to overcoming the communications blockade; and

- 2. urges the Secretariat and AIPRAL to be involved in advocacy with international organizations, especially the UN and Organization of American States.**

The General Council considered a proposal on violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- 1. urges member churches, and AIPRAL, to share their experience and expertise in support of the churches' advocacy efforts, dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation in the Northern Triangle of Central America;*
- 2. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, through and with the support of member churches and AIPRAL, to seek ways to accompany the churches in Central America in their efforts to counter violence and promote a culture of peace; and*
- 3. urges the Executive Committee to work with AIPRAL and member churches to make representations to the governments of these countries expressing deep concern about the rampant violence and impunity for those who commit it.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 61

The General Council:

- 1. urges member churches and AIPRAL to share their experience and expertise in support of the churches' advocacy efforts, dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Northern Triangle of Central America;**
- 2. instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, through and with the support of member churches and AIPRAL, to seek ways to accompany the churches in Central America in their efforts to counter violence and promote a culture of peace; and**
- 3. urges the Executive Committee to work with AIPRAL and member churches to make representations to the governments of these countries expressing deep concern about the rampant violence and impunity for those who commit it.**

The General Council considered a proposal on support and accompaniment for the accomplishment of peace in Colombia.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *instructs the Secretariat and encourages all member churches to share experiences in peace-building to the promotion of education for peace and reconciliation in Colombia, seeking to strengthen a culture of nonviolence and peaceful resolution of the historic conflict;*
2. *instructs the Secretariat to work with member churches and ecumenical partners to organize groups and peace witness visits to Colombia to accompany the communities that are trying to build a just peace while living under threat of armed groups seeking to continue the war;*
3. *instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to urge the Colombian government to swiftly and effectively implement the agreements reached with the FARC-EP and continue the dialogues with the ELN, until a negotiated end to the conflict is achieved and peace with social justice becomes a reality; and*
4. *urges its members to support the churches' programmes of development and education in communities and social sectors that work locally to build peace with an emphasis on human rights, inclusivity, sustainability and care for creation.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 62

The General Council:

1. **instructs the Secretariat and encourages all member churches to share experiences in peace-building to the promotion of education for peace and reconciliation in Colombia, seeking to strengthen a culture of nonviolence and peaceful resolution of the historic conflict;**
2. **instructs the Secretariat to work with member churches and ecumenical partners to organize groups and peace witness visits to Colombia to accompany the communities that are trying to build a just peace while living under threat of armed groups seeking to continue the war;**
3. **instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to urge the Colombian government to swiftly and effectively implement the agreements reached with the FARC-EP and continue the dialogues with the ELN, until a negotiated end to the conflict is achieved and peace with social justice becomes a reality; and**
4. **urges its members to support the churches' programmes of development and education in communities and social sectors that work locally to build peace with an emphasis on human rights, inclusivity, sustainability and care for creation.**

The General Council considered a proposal on confiscated property of religious minorities in Romania.

The report of the Public Witness Committee contained the following statement:

After the confiscation of Church property during Communist rule, the restitution of the properties since 1990 has been difficult for the Reformed Church in Romania and other religious minorities. Since 2014, a court decision stopped the restitution of property, and sentenced those involved in the process to suspended imprisonment. The General Convention of the Hungarian Reformed Church issued a statement in June 2016 to reclaim the Church property. The President of the WCRC also made a solidarity visit in 2017.

The General Council accepted a proposal to change the preamble to this proposal from “Since 2014, a court decision stopped the restitution of property...” to read, “Since 2014, a court decision has hindered the restitution of property...”

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *expresses its concerns about the developments in Romania regarding the status of restitution of property of churches confiscated during the Communist dictatorship before 1990; and expresses its support for member church’s struggle to reclaim property; and*
2. *urges member churches to offer support to minority communities—both Christian and ethnic—in exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 63

The General Council:

1. **expresses its concerns about the developments in Romania regarding the status of restitution of property of churches confiscated during the Communist dictatorship before 1990; and expresses its support for member church’s struggle to reclaim property; and**
2. **urges member churches to offer support to minority communities—both Christian and ethnic—in exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief.**

The General Council considered a proposal on Taiwan.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- 1. urges the Executive Committee, Secretariat and member churches to support the Taiwanese appeal to the international community, especially the United Nations, to affirm the legitimate right of the Taiwanese people to participate in international organizations in order to enjoy the guarantees of international standards and norms at all levels of their life;*
- 2. calls on the member churches to pray for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) as it seeks to continue to be the conscience of the nation ensuring transitional justice for the victims of martial law and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan;*
- 3. welcomes the establishment of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum to ensure that the ecumenical movement continues to accompany the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) to face the difficult challenges in the international arena; and*
- 4. commits to explore the possibility of a conversation for enhancing mutual understanding between PCT and the China Christian Council.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 64

The General Council:

- 1. urges the Executive Committee, Secretariat and member churches to support the Taiwanese appeal to the international community, especially the United Nations, to affirm the legitimate right of the Taiwanese people to participate in international organizations in order to enjoy the guarantees of international standards and norms at all levels of their life;**
- 2. calls on the member churches to pray for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) as it seeks to continue to be the conscience of the nation ensuring transitional justice for the victims of martial law and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan;**
- 3. welcomes the establishment of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum to ensure that the ecumenical movement continues to accompany the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) to face the difficult challenges in the international arena; and**
- 4. commits to explore the possibility of a conversation for enhancing mutual understanding between PCT and the China Christian Council.**

The General Council considered a proposal on combatting racialized violence against people of colour by police forces in the United States of America.

PROPOSAL

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee and urges member churches to:

- 1. pray for the victims and communities affected by police brutality against people of colour in the United States, as well as for those who perpetrate such violence;*
- 2. write letters of support and contact partner churches when instances of racialized violence occur in the United States;*
- 3. contact their country's United Nations Ambassador to demand justice on behalf of victims of racialized violence by the police;*
- 4. urge the United States government to craft regulations that effectively end institutional racialized violence by law enforcement officers against people of colour; and*
- 5. engage with United States member churches to develop educational and liturgical resources that challenge complicity in white supremacy and foster deepened sense that our salvation is bound up with one another.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 65

The General Council instructs the Executive Committee and urges member churches to:

- 1. pray for the victims and communities affected by police brutality against people of colour in the United States, as well as for those who perpetrate such violence;**
- 2. write letters of support and contact partner churches when instances of racialized violence occur in the United States;**
- 3. contact their country's United Nations Ambassador to demand justice on behalf of victims of racialized violence by the police;**
- 4. urge the United States government to craft regulations that effectively end institutional racialized violence by law enforcement officers against people of colour; and**
- 5. engage with United States member churches to develop educational and liturgical resources that challenge complicity in white supremacy and foster deepened sense that our salvation is bound up with one another.**

The General Council considered a proposal on accompaniment of African churches in mission.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *encourages the Executive Committee to incorporate into the WCRC programming the particular issues raised by the African churches, including attention to African theology and black theology of liberation, and*
2. *requests the Secretariat and member churches to continue to accompany the ACRC churches in capacity building and cooperative witness.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 66

The General Council:

1. **encourages the Executive Committee to incorporate into the WCRC programming the particular issues raised by the African churches, including attention to African theology and black theology of liberation; and**
2. **requests the Secretariat and member churches to continue to accompany the ACRC churches in capacity building and cooperative witness.**

The General Council considered a proposal on the 2017 general election in Kenya.

The General Council accepted a proposal from the floor to change the preamble to the proposal so that it read:

Kenya is preparing to hold a General Election in August 2017. During the 2007 General Election, there was pre and post-election violence in which 1,133 died and nearly 600,000 were displaced from their homes. A lot has been done and is being done by the churches, civil society and the government to ensure there is a credible election free from violence.

The General Council did not accept another proposal to include reference to the impending election in Congo in this proposal.

PROPOSAL

The General Council appeals to all churches and ecumenical bodies to take the important role of intercession, and mobilize individual and corporate prayers, and practical support, (such as election observers and civic education), for the peaceful election process in Kenya.

A proposal was made to add the words “*prior, during and after the election,*” after the words “*corporate prayers.*” By consensus, the General Council agreed to make this addition.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 67

The General Council appeals to all churches and ecumenical bodies to take the important role of intercession, and mobilize individual and corporate prayers prior, during and after the election, and practical support (such as election observers and civic education), for the peaceful election process in Kenya.

The General Council considered a proposal on creation and unity.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

1. *urges all to advocate for the care of God's creation in worship, study, and ecumenical and political action;*
2. *instructs the Secretariat to support, and urges all members and member churches to mark, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, and the Time for Creation (September 1-October 4) in their personal and corporate worship services; and*
3. *instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to ensure the staff and structures of WCRC embody and encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy and urges churches and individuals to model creation care and be a means of visible outreach to concerned people.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 68

The General Council:

1. **urges all to advocate for the care of God's creation in worship, study, and ecumenical and political action;**
2. **instructs the Secretariat to support, and urges all members and member churches to mark, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, and the Time for Creation (Sept. 1-Oct. 4) in their personal and corporate worship services; and**
3. **instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to ensure the staff and structures of WCRC embody and encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy and urges churches and individuals to model creation care and be a means of visible outreach to concerned people.**

The General Council considered a proposal on interfaith relations.

The General Council accepted proposals to change the preamble to the proposal from "religiously pluralistic contexts" to "religiously diverse contexts;" to include the

words “Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Morocco” after “contexts” and to add the words “extremism and” before “fundamentalism.”

The amended preamble therefore reads:

Many member churches live in religiously diverse contexts such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Morocco. The rise of religious extremism and fundamentalism, paired with political struggle, has created serious challenges between peoples of differing faith. Some churches speak of their difficulties in finding effective ways to witness to the Christian faith and disciple new Christians. Some churches are looking for assistance in finding ways to live in meaningful and constructive relationships with people of different faiths.

PROPOSAL

The General Council:

- 1. requests the Secretariat to partner with other ecumenical bodies who are developing educational and dialogue resources and share these resources with member churches; and*
- 2. requests the Executive Committee to consider how WCRC might engage in interfaith relationships on behalf of and in support of member churches.*

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 69

The General Council:

- 1. requests the Secretariat to partner with other ecumenical bodies who are developing educational and dialogue resources and share these resources with member churches; and**
- 2. requests the Executive Committee to consider how WCRC might engage in interfaith relationships on behalf of and in support of member churches.**

The General Council considered a proposal on issues it had been unable to address.

The General Council:

- 1. remits to the Executive Committee those submitted proposals which were not addressed by the Public Witness Committee.*

A concern was raised by delegates from Indonesia that their issues had not been fully reflected in the report. A proposal was made that the General Council should add a new section 2 to instruct the Executive Committee to take the concerns of Indonesian

delegates on freedom of religion into account and act thereupon, bearing in mind that the issue of religious freedom affects many other countries in South East Asia, too.

By consensus, the General Council approved the addition of a new section 2 in the following terms:

instructs the Executive Committee to take the concerns of Indonesian delegates on freedom of religion into account and act thereupon.

By consensus, the General Council agreed the following:

ACTION 70

The General Council:

- 1. remits to the Executive Committee those submitted proposals which were not addressed by the Public Witness Committee; and**
- 2. instructs the Executive Committee to take the concerns of Indonesian delegates on freedom of religion into account and act thereupon.**

A delegate expressed concern in writing that this debate, and subsequent decision-making, was conducted on a written report that was only fully available in English and not in any of the five other supported languages.

Vision and Message

The convener of the Vision and Message Committee thanked the Discernment Groups for their responses and presented a slightly amended version of the Vision and Message Statement, outlining the changes. The President invited comments.

Suggestions for further minor changes were made.

A delegate formally proposed, under paragraph 14 of the Rules of Procedure, that the debate be closed. The President put this proposal to the floor and it was agreed by consensus.

ACTION 71

The General Council approved the Vision and Message statement.

The President offered the thanks of the General Council to convener, scribe and committee members of the Vision and Message Committee.

Nominating Committee

The General Council moved to a further report from the Nominating Committee, presented by Alison McDonald. The Convener placed the final list of nominees for

officers and members of the Executive Committee before the General Council. The President invited discussion.

Nominated to serve as president:

Najla Kassab, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

Nominated to serve as vice-presidents:

Samuel Ayete-Nyampang, Presbyterian Church of Ghana

Lisa Vander Wal, Reformed Church in America

Sylvana Maria Apituley, Gereja Protestant Indonesia Bagian Barat

Raissa Brasil, United Presbyterian Church in Brazil

Nominated to serve as general treasurer:

Johann Weusmann, Reformed Alliance (Germany)

Nominated to serve as members of the Executive Committee:

Coutinho Maravilhoso Moma, Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola

Mary Ekinde Salle, Presbyterian Church, Cameroon

Tibonge Ng'ambi, Presbyterian Church in Zambia

Veronica Muchiri, Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Hilary Hagar, Presbyterian Church of Canada

Annabelle Lallaram-kelawan, Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago

J. Herbert Nelson, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Hong Jung Lee, Presbyterian Church in Korea

Khid-arn Prawate, Church of Christ in Thailand

Susan Thomas, Church of South India

Hanna North, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

Milciades Pua, Presbyterian Church of Colombia

Clayton Da Silva, Independent Presbyterian Church in Brazil

Hefin Jones, Union of Welsh Independents

Claudio Pasquet, Waldensian Church

Diána Erdélyi, Hungarian Reformed Church

A delegate commented that no member of the new Executive Committee came from the membership of the former Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). He suggested inviting advisers from former REC churches. It was also noted that there were five young people, a significant step forward. The General Council was encouraged to celebrate this within its member churches to encourage young people.

A delegate commented, for future reference, that there should be a policy of no member church being represented on the Executive Committee for more than two consecutive terms.

A delegate asked that the new Executive Committee should consult with the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches to ensure that the next General Council is accessible for all.

ACTION 72

The General Council approved the membership of the Executive Committee as presented.

Najla Kassab, the new president, was invited to address the General Council. She thanked the General Council for its trust and for making the WCRC more credible and just. She reminded delegates that there was much work to be done. She thanked Jerry Pillay for his wise leadership, commitment to WCRC and contribution to justice.

Jerry Pillay spoke of his joy at her leadership and wished her God's blessing for wisdom, joy and health. He led the Council in prayer for Najla and for the retiring and new members of the Executive Committee.

The General Secretary introduced Anna Case-Winters, chair of the Executive Secretary Search Committee, who presented the two new executive secretaries, stressing that they came with the full support of the Executive Committee:

- Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness: Philip Peacock.
- Executive Secretary for Communion and Theology: Hanns Lessing.

The President commented that the Executive Committee had thought at length about the message sent by an all-male senior staff but had felt strongly that they had to appoint the strongest candidates. He welcomed and thanked them both. The General Council welcomed both.

General feedback

Comments were invited.

A speaker asked if there would be a platform for feedback, good and bad, on the General Council. She thanked everyone for their hard work. The President confirmed that this would be the case and that an evaluation form would be sent out.

A speaker welcomed the spirit of respect and fellowship in the Communion.

Announcements and thanks

The President paid gracious tribute to the work of the many people involved in the General Council.

The General Secretary thanked Jerry Pillay and presented him with a memory album.

Closing Communion

The business of the General Council was concluded at 11:55, whereupon the General Council celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion. The new officers and members of the Executive Committee were installed during the worship service which was led by members of the Worship Committee along with the newly elected Executive Committee.



Appendices: Documents Adopted by the Council

APPENDIX A RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL (GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNMENT PROCEDURES)

Background

In preparation for the General Council in Leipzig the Executive Committee of the WCRC resolved at its meeting in Havana, Cuba, to propose the following Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business guided by discernment principles. In so doing, they have learned from the experience in using discernment and consensus procedures at WARC’s 24th General Council and at the Uniting General Council at Grand Rapids and will put in place measures and training to ensure that these Rules of Procedure are used to best advantage.

I. DISCERNMENT AND THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

1. Theological Basis

At the heart of discernment procedures is a commitment to worship, work, listen and pray together as a community of faith, seeking to discern God’s will for the way forward on issues under consideration.

As the Body of Christ, the church is always searching for the mind of Christ, seeking to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). Our common commitment to seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our deliberations is confirmed by the

experience of the fruit of the Spirit amongst us as we work: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is intentionally a communion built around a common table for both worship and decision making. The table symbolizes the centrality of Christ and our mutual dependence on the Holy Spirit for our life together. We sit equally before God as sisters and brothers.

The WCRC describes itself as a communion that is committed to justice. It is therefore imperative that in its shared life together it operates in a way that fosters communion among its members and which allows them to live justly in relation to one another. All conversations should be edifying and all efforts build *koinonia*.

Our developing *koinonia*, our intentional spiritual fellowship, is dedicated to the prophetic calling to bring God’s justice like a mighty river and righteousness like an ever flowing stream to a world thirsty for hope and the grace of the Gospel.

Discernment means a prayerful process that builds community and by which a common mind of the General Council is sought concerning the wisest way forward on a particular issue at that time.

There are no winners and losers—we are all seekers and discerners together, affirming through our common loyalty to Jesus Christ that:

- the General Council is a community of faith earnestly seeking to understand God’s will;
- each participant in the General Council has been given unique gifts and insights by God;
- every participant’s contribution is worthy of respect;
- our aim is to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches through the General Council;
- our commitment is to find faithful ways forward on which all can agree.

Adopting Rules of Procedure, business processes and techniques ensures that the General Council of the WCRC will:

- foster deep **listening** and respect
- make space for the influence of the Holy Spirit and different perspectives through **dialogue** and **discernment**;
- take the time to **build consensus** in decision making.

2. Building Community

The General Council draws together people from different countries, cultures and traditions. It takes time to build the trust and relationships that form a community of faith. That is why 20 percent of our life together during the General Council is dedicated to worship, Bible study and community building.

As we acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and listen for the Word of God in worship together each morning and evening the bonds of community are strengthened. Our diversity and unity in Jesus Christ is also celebrated informally as we live, work and pray together.

All General Council participants are invited to contribute insights and wisdom to any issue being discussed. Bible study groups (home groups) meet each morning.

The link between Bible study and discernment is also expressed by the composition of the Discernment Groups, which will discern the major issues and prepare them for decision making.

II. RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

1. Definitions

Bible study group means a group with constant membership meeting on a daily basis after the Bible study presentation, providing opportunities for mutual sharing and support. Bible study groups will be composed of eight people speaking one language, providing familiarity with other participants. Three Bible study groups from different language groups form one Discernment Group.

Chairperson means a person appointed by the General Council to chair committees.

Committee means a group appointed by the General Council to bring reports and proposals on particular business. There shall be the following committees:

- Business Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Public Witness Committee
- Vision and Message Committee

Discernment Group means a cluster of three Bible study groups that discern the main issues of the General Council. Discernment Groups are composed according to the values of empowerment and diversity: Each member shall be given the chance to fully contribute to the discussion in dialogue with voices expressing themselves from different perspectives (see part 10 of these rules).

Discernment Procedures Team means persons assisting with the use of discernment procedures (see part 6 of these rules).

Drafting Team means the committee of the Scribes of the Discernment Groups that amend the proposals coming from the Discernment Groups in the light of the discussions in the groups (see part 10 of these rules).

Facilitator means a person appointed by the General Council to be the facilitator of a Discernment Group. The main task of the facilitator is to ensure that all delegates can fully participate in the discussion (see part 10 of these rules).

Participants

- Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of *voting delegates*. Voting delegates are defined as the ones who have been entrusted with discernment indicator cards or allowed to vote when called upon.
- An *associate delegate* is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- An *affiliate delegate* is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- An *ecumenical delegate* is one who represents a recognized ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Guests* are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Observers* are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Observers also include the Global Institute of Theology students and the stewards. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council, have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Consultants* may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.
- *Visitors* are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions or vote.
- *Officers* are the following elected officials of the WCRC: president, vice president, general secretary and general treasurer. The general secretary, by virtue of his office, has the right to speak but may not vote.

The Pastoral Care Team is comprised of chaplains and provides support for people who have been harassed or emotionally harmed.

Scribe means a person appointed by the General Council to be the secretary of a Discernment Group and to convey its findings to the Drafting Team. At the end of each

session the Discernment Group determines which points should be brought to the Drafting Team (see part 10 of these rules).

2. Business Committee

The Executive Committee constitutes the Business Committee. Others may be invited as its agenda requires.

The role of the Business Committee is:

- to initiate proposals on any matter relating to the efficient working of the General Council;
- to consider how matters may best be grouped for consideration, so none is disadvantaged;
- to ensure that the General Council is resourced with information from a range of perspectives about each matter, so that an informed way forward may be discerned;
- to review the agenda regularly, prioritizing items needing deeper deliberation and more time;
- to alter the agenda as needed;
- to authorize the translation, copying and circulation of printed material;
- to appoint scrutineers to count election ballot returns and plenary session votes if necessary.

3. Matters of Consideration

Matters for consideration shall be lodged with the Business Committee for inclusion on the agenda unless already on the agenda. These may arise from reports of the officers, the outgoing Executive Committee, appointed committees and matters raised by a member church. WCRC staff may act as resources in the work needed for discernment on these matters and may be invited to clarify.

The Business Committee receives the reports of the Drafting Team.

4. Interpretation and Documentation

The WCRC Constitution requires translation of documents will be available in English, French, German and Spanish. A speaker may use another language only if interpretation is available into one of these. Interpretation facilities are available in plenary sessions, Discernment Groups and committees. The supported languages of the General Council are English, French, German, Spanish, Korean and Indonesian.

Participants are expected to read all material before it is presented to the General Council.

5. Moderator

The officers of the WCRC (president or one of the vice-presidents) shall be Moderator of the plenary sessions of the General Council.

The role of the Moderator is to preside in a manner which assists the General Council in seeking to understand the will of God as far as possible and which meets the needs and purposes of the General Council and its participants.

In so doing, the Moderator:

- ensures that the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business are observed;
- watches with the participants for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the wisdom of Scripture throughout all contributions;
- is prepared to pause for prayer or silent reflection as appropriate;
- may invite participants to turn to others nearby for small group discussion or prayer;
- encourages trust and integrity in contributions;
- ensures care and support for those whose honesty may leave them vulnerable;
- invites delegates to indicate their response to speeches and reflects that mood back to the General Council as it becomes apparent;
- looks for creative modifications of a proposal, incorporating insights expressed by speakers;
- summarizes discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the direction;
- does not participate in discussion (if a Moderator wishes to speak to an issue someone else will act as Moderator during consideration of that particular issue until it is resolved);
- acknowledges those who wish to speak to the General Council. Unless directed otherwise, participants who are authorized to speak may stand at the microphone until acknowledged by the Moderator. They begin by stating their name, the church they represent and their category of participation. They address the General Council through the Moderator.
- ensures that different voices are included during plenary sessions.

Participants will respect requests or directions from the Moderator. Out of respect for the office of Moderator, when she or he speaks, all remain silent so the Moderator is heard without interruption.

6. Discernment Procedures Team

Members of the Discernment Procedures Team appointed by the Executive Committees are present to assist with resourcing the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business.

The responsibilities of the Discernment Procedures Team are:

- to be resources for the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business and the discernment principles on which they are based;
- to clarify any uncertainties about procedures in plenary sessions if called upon by the Moderator or the General Secretary;
- to be available to support the Moderator and General Secretary in chairing each session;
- to be available to assist the Moderator in ensuring that all insights are considered as the General Council seeks to discern a way forward for any issue;
- to attend Business Committee meetings to advise on procedures as necessary;
- to advise participants about procedures as necessary.

7. Use of Discernment Procedures

The General Council will use the discernment process to make all decisions except for: approval or changes in procedures, elections and constitutional and bylaws changes. If a resubmitted matter does not receive approval through the discernment process, and the General Council takes the view that a decision must be made on this item of business at this meeting of the General Council then a vote will be taken.

8. Building Blocks of the Discernment Process

The basic building blocks of the discernment process are:

- Introduce and clarify the issue (listening sessions)
- Explore the issue and look for ideas (Discernment Groups)
- Look for emerging proposals (decision sessions)
- Discuss, clarify and offer proposals (decision sessions)
- Test for agreement (decision sessions)
- Implement the decision (Executive Committee)

9. Listening Sessions to Introduce and Clarify the Issue

The General Council must be fully resourced with information about an issue, proposal or report. Seeking to discern God's will for a faithful response presumes participants hold a clear understanding of the rationale and theological basis for possible ways forward.

Listening sessions shall be prepared in conjunction with the Business Committee.

During the listening sessions the reports and matters are received. A number of speakers may be invited to present varying aspects of a particular issue before clarification questions and discussion.

Reception of a report means agreement to consider the substance of a report. This is approved in the listening sessions after the report is presented and any clarifying

questions are answered. Reception means that the proposals in the report are now before the General Council for consideration. A report as a whole must be adopted if its substance is to become policy, or specific proposals arising from a report must be considered before agreement to act can be assumed.

At the end of each listening session draft proposals to be discussed by the Discernment Groups shall be introduced.

10. Discernment Groups to Look for Emerging Consensus

Composition of Discernment Groups

The Discernment Groups will formally be appointed by the president and approved by the General Council. Their specific composition will be driven by language. Since participation from all is a foundation for a successful discernment process, delegates need to feel comfortable communicating within the Discernment Groups. Language, however, is not the only factor used for creating the groups. Factors that need to be included (and sometimes weighed against each other):

1. **Diversity:** Groups should not be geographically driven. The discernment process is designed to unite the Council and its decision-making process from the grassroots. It is thus important not to have a group composed solely from a single country or region.
2. **Communication:** All members of a group must be able to communicate effectively with one another. This does not necessarily mean that groups are composed based on primary language, however. Options include grouping those fluent in the same language or providing interpreters.
3. **Balances:** Besides geographic diversity, each group should be balanced between gender, age, ordained/non-ordained and abilities.

Discernment Groups should be constructed using *language fluency* (rather than primary language) as a criteria. Discernment Groups will be limited to one or two languages to reduce demands on interpreters (and hence the budget). If this is not possible, then a limited number of multi-lingual Discernment Groups would be created.

Another critical aspect of each group's composition is the *leadership*. Each group needs at least two pre-selected (and trained) leaders: one to *facilitate* the group and another one to act as *Scribe*, not only recording the decisions of the group but also taking those decisions to the Drafting Team. The *Facilitator* will need to be able to facilitate a process that respects all members' voices while striving at reaching consensus on the issues within the time allotted.

Process in Discernment Groups

The introductory session of the Discernment Group will introduce the discernment process to the group and set the “norms” (rules, guidelines, etc.) of how the group will operate. Setting the norms also gives the members a first experience of the discernment process and can be used by the leadership to accommodate differing cultural needs, fix any glitches in the system (especially translation), etc. While structured to produce constructive results that will move the process to the Drafting Team, the discernment process is geared to hear all voices and invite the movement of the Holy Spirit into all groups.

The Discernment Groups are guided by materials they receive from the Business Committee; they discuss and amend the proposals that were introduced during the listening session. Decisions within each group should be made through consensus. If consensus cannot be reached the group defines the point of disagreement and requests the Scribe to take the different opinions to the Drafting Team.

The discernment process during the General Council is value driven and should respect each individual and her/his voice even as the process unites the delegates through discussion and consensus. No delegate should be marginalized based on any factor, especially, in this process, language: “The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another” (WCRC Constitution, Article IV, Section B).

At the end of each Discernment Group session, the Scribes will gather to distill the variety of material produced into a report with specific recommendations. The processes used in the Drafting Team to create the report will also be by consensus and use norms as determined by the group.

11. Decision Sessions to Discuss, Clarify and Test for Agreement

The final reports of the Drafting Team will be brought to the plenary. The reports should be presented by at least two Scribes, selected by the Drafting Team. Delegates will hear the voice of their Discernment Group in the report and its recommendations, changing the tenor of the discussion positively. The plenary will then discuss and come to consensus on the reports and recommendations.

Procedures in Decision Sessions

Orange and blue indicator cards are provided for voting delegates (not for other participants). At the end of each speech, voting delegates may choose to indicate their

response to the content of the speech, by showing their orange or blue card. The cards provide a quick and visible indication of the mood of the General Council.¹

- Showing an orange card indicates warmth and appreciation towards a point of view.
- Showing a blue card indicates coolness and hesitation towards a point of view, or that more discussion is needed.

Cards may also be used to indicate to the Moderator that it is time to move on; a speaker may be getting repetitious, or the points may have been well made already. In this case, a delegate can hold the two indicator cards crossed in front of her/his chest, as a silent indication that pursuing debate is not likely to be helpful.

The Moderator alerts the General Council to the strength of feeling expressed through the indicator cards as appropriate. The delegates may express their thoughts and offer proposals.

Possible outcomes of discernment process:

- All in agreement (unanimous);
- Most are in agreement (minority give consent to move forward);
- Consideration on matter postponed;
- Agree no decision can be reached;
- Refer an issue to another body, either to bring advice to the General Council on how to proceed or to determine the referred issue on behalf of the General Council;
- Issue brought to a vote, if this is agreed by a two-thirds majority of voting delegates present (see below).

The Moderator may determine that a proposal be referred to a small group of participants nominated by the Moderator, with a view to the small group bringing an amended proposal likely to receive greater support. The matter is resubmitted to the General Council for decision when the Business Committee determines.

In the event that:

- the resubmitted matter does not receive support, and
- if the Business Committee takes the view that a decision must be made on this item of business at this meeting of the General Council,
- then the General Council may determine that a two thirds majority of delegates present and voting is sufficient to determine this item of business.

¹ Orange and blue are used because they can be clearly distinguished even by people who are colour-blind.

12. When Voting is Required

Only voting delegates may vote. The Moderator declares the method of voting (show of hands, standing, written ballot, etc).

A majority of delegates present and voting is required for approval of the proposal.

After the vote, the Moderator declares the proposal approved or not approved.

All participants are encouraged to return to their churches advocating the resolutions of the General Council, even if they would have preferred different outcomes. It is the responsibility of those privileged to participate to explain to those who were not present why particular decisions were taken.

13. Recording Dissension

The basis of discernment procedures is that the community of faith listens, prays, discusses and works together towards discerning God's will for a faithful response. Resolutions are made in that light.

Voting Delegates may record their dissent or abstention on any particular resolution by lodging it in writing with the recording secretaries before the next session commences.

A member church may choose to record dissent by lodging it in writing with the recording secretaries before the next session commences.

14. Procedural Proposals

Procedural proposals may be raised by delegates (not by other participants) and relate to how or when the General Council deals with a particular agenda item. When making a procedural proposal a delegate may not interrupt a speaker but seeks recognition from the Moderator to speak. Procedural proposals must be seconded, may be debated, and are determined by discernment procedures or a simple majority vote (50 percent plus one).

Procedural proposals include:

- *Fixed order*: proposes that the General Council deals with business previously set for that time. It may be linked to a procedural proposal for the adjournment of the current discussion.
- *Adjournment*: may be proposed by a delegate who has not spoken in the current discussion. If approved, any person whose speech was interrupted may speak first when discussion resumes.
- *Closed Session*: all who are not delegates leave the session while the General Council considers an issue in private. If approved, it requires a subsequent

procedural proposal (“that the General Council cease sitting in closed session”) to return to an open plenary session.

- *Closure of the debate*: may be proposed (“that the vote be now taken”) by a delegate who has not spoken in the current discussion. The Moderator may also propose closure.

15. Points of Concern

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23).

The General Council will engage in its business and corporate life in a way that ensures that the fruits of the Spirit are supported and expressed:

- prayerful listening respect for all participants;
- compassion with one another;
- trust;
- encouraging shared goals;
- exhibiting an openness/vulnerability to one another.

A delegate may raise a concern at any time by gaining the attention of the Moderator and stating, “I have a point of concern.” The Moderator asks the delegate to state the concern.

Concerns that may be raised are:

- A speaker is thought to be digressing from the matter under discussion.
- A delegate may claim the right to make personal explanation if a subsequent speaker grossly misrepresents her/his remarks.
- A delegate may raise objection if remarks are thought to be offensive or derogatory.

The Moderator may without debate:

- rule on it immediately;
- ask advice from selected participants and then rule on the point;
- ask the General Council to decide the matter by discussion and discernment.

If the Moderator’s ruling on a point of concern is challenged, the challenging delegate may speak, and the Moderator may reply before putting it to a vote to sustain or disallow the ruling, without further discussion. The decision is resolved by simple majority.

16. Nominating Committee

(procedures may be replaced by Executive Committee)

The General Council, on recommendation of the Executive Committees, elects a Nominating Committee of not more than 10 people, taking into consideration

geographic distribution, cultural and denominational diversity and gender. Nominating Committee members are not eligible for election.

The role of the Nominating Committee is to process nominations for officers and members of the Executive Committee, to prepare and present a slate of candidates to the General Council and to facilitate elections.

In so doing, the Nominating Committee:

- considers delegates proposed by member churches, regional meetings and delegates, and their own knowledge of their regions;
- ensures that the list of nominations includes the necessary expertise and achieves a balance of gender, age, denominational diversity and regional representation;
- presents a draft list of nominations for comments from the General Council prior to elections;
- considers feedback on the draft list in preparing a final list of nominations;
- presents a final list of nominations 24 hours prior to elections.

17. Public Witness Committee

A Public Witness Committee is appointed by the General Council from among the delegates upon nomination by the Executive Committees.

The role of the Public Witness Committee is to prepare statements and proposals on issues of public concern that warrant discussion and adoption by the General Council.

In so doing, the Public Witness Committee:

- considers concerns raised by member churches;
- holds an open hearing to gather input from participants;
- works in small groups if necessary to consider possible statements and proposals.

18. Vision and Message Committee

A Vision and Message Committee is appointed by the General Council from among the delegates upon nomination by the Executive Committees.

The role of the Vision and Message Committee is to:

- receive the reports of the President and General Secretary, along with any proposals;
- listen to the Holy Spirit during all sessions of the General Council;
- engage with Discernment Group leadership;
- prepare over-arching visions to guide the work of the WCRC in the next seven years;

- prepare for member churches a message expressing the heart of the General Council;
- prepare other messages of recognition and thanks as needed.

The over-arching visions, message for member churches and other messages of recognition and thanks will be brought to the General Council for approval.

19. Special Rule of Procedure for Committees

The combined report and proposals of each committee should be reasonable in length. A proposal to receive the report is brought. Questions for clarification and discussion may follow, but the plenary session is not in a position to change the report.

When the report has been received, proposals arising from it are presented for consideration, possible modification and resolution as actions of the General Council.

20. Adoption of the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business

The General Council in its first business session determines by simple majority vote whether to adopt or modify these Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business. During the course of the meeting, suspension or amendment of all or part of the procedures may be agreed by discernment procedures or a two-thirds majority of delegates present and voting.

APPENDIX B CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Appendix B1

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

WCRC Constitution and Bylaws with proposed amendments

Changes and new text underlined

Deletions are denoted with strike-through

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

[Adopted 2010, Amended 2016]

Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover,
Germany

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

THE CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

Jesus Christ is the foundation and head of the Christian church.

It is in Jesus Christ that the Word became flesh and the gospel is embodied.

It is to God in Christ that the Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bear witness.

It is through Christ that God gives abundant life and spiritual vitality to the members of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The churches in the World Communion of Reformed Churches are called together in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Under the sovereign God, with Christ's followers across the globe, sharing one baptism, the members of the communion belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

ARTICLE I – NAME AND SUCCESSION

The name of this organization shall be the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The following constitute the name of the organization in French, German and Spanish:

Communion Mondiale des Églises Réformées (CMER)

Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGRK)

Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization, registered as a corporation under public law in Germany and as a 501(c)3 corporate entity in the State of Michigan in the United States of America. The membership of the registered entities is the same.

As of the 2010 Uniting General Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches succeeds the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its antecedents, as a united ecumenical body for Reformed churches.

ARTICLE II – BASIS

The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to this triune God that the church bears witness. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, and as continued in the life and witness of the broader family of Reformed, United and Uniting churches.

ARTICLE III – VALUES

A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to demonstrate and live the oneness in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that enable all member churches to share their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God's saving purposes for the good of all and for the transformation of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches serves its members with love and care, encouraging their mutual support and nurture of one another.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches embraces God's covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation through Jesus Christ. In doing so, it affirms the biblical calling of the members to recognize the gift of baptism in one another, and the call to be unified in ministry, and together to bear witness to God's justice and peace and to the integrity of creation.

ARTICLE IV – IDENTITY, MISSION AND PURPOSES

A. Drawing on the heritage of the Reformed confessions, as a gift for the renewal of the whole church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches which shall foster communion among its member churches by:

1. affirming the gifts of unity in Christ and promoting unity in and among churches through the mutual recognition of baptism and membership, pulpit and table fellowship, ministry and witness;
2. interpreting Reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness;
3. encouraging the renewal of Christian worship and spiritual life within the Reformed tradition;
4. renewing a commitment to partnership in God's mission through worship, witness, diaconal service and work for justice, so as to foster mission in unity, mission renewal, and mission empowerment;
5. encouraging leadership development and nurture of the covenant community;
6. engaging with other ecumenical organizations and churches of other traditions in the ecumenical movement through dialogue and cooperation in ministry;
7. expressing unity and solidarity with those minorities living in the context of marginalization and violence.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall assist its member churches by

1. widening and deepening understanding and community among the member churches and helping them to fulfil their own responsibilities in the service of Christ;
2. facilitating the transformation of the member churches into interdependent missional communities that support, empower and challenge each other as partners in the one mission of God;
3. promoting the full and just participation of all members, of all ages, in all aspects of the church's life and its public witness;
4. promoting the full and just partnership of women and men in church and society;
5. encouraging and promoting diaconal service in the church and society;
6. expressing unity and solidarity with those of its members who are persecuted or marginalized.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall also contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world by:

1. promoting economic and ecological justice, global peace, and reconciliation in the world;
2. promoting and defending religious, civil, and all other human rights wherever threatened throughout the world;
3. encouraging and promoting relief and sustainable development in the world and focusing on the eradication of poverty;
4. providing Reformed perspectives on church unity.

ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP

A. Any church of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, other First Reformation, United, and Uniting traditions is eligible to apply for membership, if such a church affirms this constitution.

B. Member churches are expected to join in achieving the Mission and Purposes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches by, among other things, participating in meetings, financially supporting its existence, taking seriously its actions and decisions, and engaging in its collective work.

C. Fellowships and associations of churches that affirm a Reformed identity and include in their membership World Communion of Reformed Churches' members are eligible for associate membership. Such associate members shall share in the fellowship and programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, participate on a reciprocal basis without a vote in governance, and thereby strengthen the broader Reformed family's participation in the church ecumenical.

D. An institution established by one or more member churches or whose faith basis and operation are in agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions are eligible for affiliate membership, without voting privileges.

E. Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches does not limit the autonomy of any member church or restrict its relationships with other churches or with other ecumenical organizations.

F. Members in the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall support the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through an annual financial contribution reflecting the resources and membership of that church. The General Council or the Executive Committee shall set a minimum contribution requirement for all member churches, associate and affiliate members.

G. Application for membership shall be made to the office of the General Secretary not later than six months before a General Council meeting. Admission to membership shall be by decision of the Executive Committee following consultation with other member churches in the region. The General Council shall ratify new members by a two-thirds majority of ballots cast. A new member shall not vote on the ratification of its own membership.

H. A member church may terminate its membership by giving notice in writing to the office of the General Secretary. It will be encouraged to give reasons for this action.

ARTICLE VI – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of Article II - Basis, Article III - Values, or Article IV - Identity, Mission and Purposes of this Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the conditions stated in the Bylaws.

ARTICLE VII – GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The General Council is the main governing body of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Council is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when representatives of one-half plus one of its member churches are present when the General Council convenes to establish a quorum.

B. The General Council shall;

1. provide leadership for the World Communion of Reformed Churches in achieving the aims and purposes of the organization;
2. may adopt and may amend the Constitution and the Bylaws;
3. make and adopt policies and programmes for the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
4. elect officers and members of the Executive Committee;
5. consider matters brought before it by member churches;
6. receives decisions of the Executive Committee for ratification.

C. Decisions of the General Council concerning its organization and institutional activities shall be binding.

D. Decisions of the General Council involving the life and witness of the member churches are advisory in character.

ARTICLE VIII – MEETINGS OF GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The General Council shall ordinarily meet once in every seven years.

B. At the request of at least one-fifth of the member churches, the Executive Committee shall convene the General Council into special session.

C. The time, place, and programme of a General Council meeting shall be determined by the Executive Committee.

D. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall adopt rules of procedure for the conduct of its business.

ARTICLE IX – COMPOSITION OF GENERAL COUNCIL

A. Participants at the General Council are voting delegates, associate and affiliate delegates, ecumenical delegates, consultants, observers, guests, and visitors.

B. Member churches shall be entitled to appoint voting delegates on the basis of their membership. The World Communion of Reformed Churches will accept the information each member church submits based on its normal counting procedure. The same numbers will be used for attendance at the General Council meeting and for the basis used to determine membership contributions.

Member churches with up to 300,000 members are entitled to appoint up to four voting delegates.

Member churches with between 300,001 and 1,000,000 members are entitled to appoint up to six voting delegates.

Member churches with 1,000,001 members or more are entitled to appoint up to eight voting delegates.

Each delegation shall be gender balanced and no more than half shall be clergy. At least one voting delegate shall be thirty years of age or younger on the date the General Council is convened.

C. Each of the officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be an ex-officio delegate (with vote) to any General Council that meets during the officer's term of office.

D. Only delegates from member churches and Officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall have the right to vote and to move or second motions in all sessions of the General Council.

ARTICLE X – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. The Executive Committee shall have twenty-two (22) members elected by the General Council (including six (6) officers). ~~The Moderator, President or Convener of each Regional Council shall be members.~~ The General Secretary shall be a member ex-officio (without vote). The Executive Committee is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when a majority of its members is present to establish a quorum. ~~The officers and members of the Executive Committee shall hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.~~

~~B. Either the moderator, president, convener or secretary of each Regional Council shall be a full member of the Executive Committee.~~

C. The Executive Committee may invite Executive Secretaries to participate in its meetings in an advisory capacity.

D. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Committee, an alternate may be appointed under the provisions in the Bylaws.

E. The Executive Committee shall meet annually.

F. When the President and the General Secretary deem it necessary to secure a decision of the Executive Committee between its meetings, a vote by mail, email, telephone conference, or other electronic means may be taken. In such cases the required majority (one-half plus one) is based on all the members of the Executive Committee.

G. The Executive Committee shall:

- ~~exercis~~es general oversight of the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council including, but not limited to, the formation of departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- ~~authoriz~~es the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council. The Executive Committee may, by way of exception and if needed, appoint one or more additional persons to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- ~~perform~~s all duties specified elsewhere in this Constitution and in the Bylaws or committed to it by the General Council.
- ~~has authority to~~ approve the annual financial reports and adopt the annual budget.
- ~~fills~~ vacancies among the officers and in its own membership, as specified in the Bylaws, which may occur between meetings of the General Council.
- ~~elect~~s a General Secretary and appoints Executive Secretaries.

7. decides on admission to and suspension of membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches in consultation with local member churches subject to ratification by the next General Council.

ARTICLE XI – OFFICERS OF THE WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

A. The General Council shall elect the following officers from among those present at the General Council to hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.

1. one president
2. four (4) vice-presidents

B. The General Treasurer is elected by the Executive Committee and serves as a member of the officers, and serves until a successor is elected

C. The officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be formed into an officers' committee with power to act to perform their responsibilities as stated in the Bylaws.

1. Approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings.
2. Ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
3. Provide advice and direction to the General Secretary.
4. Report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken.
5. Oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

D. Any two of the following: the President (or one of the Vice-Presidents if substituting for the President), the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer, are authorized to sign jointly for all legally required registrations, opening of bank accounts, and other legal transactions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ARTICLE XII – GENERAL SECRETARY

A. The General Secretary shall be the chief executive officer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and shall be responsible to the General Council and to the Executive Committee to direct and coordinate the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Secretary is responsible for advising the Executive Committee and the officers of risks and potential liabilities that may pertain.

B. The General Secretary shall serve a term of seven years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another seven-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each seven-year term and prior to the decision to appoint

the General Secretary to a second seven-year term. The performance review shall be conducted by persons appointed by the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE XIII – EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES

A. Executive Secretaries shall be appointed for the operations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

B. The number of Executive Secretaries serving at any one time, and the scope of their responsibilities, is determined by the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the General Secretary.

C. Executive Secretaries shall serve a term of five years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another five-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each five-year term and prior to the decision to appoint an Executive Secretary to a second five-year term. The performance review is conducted by the General Secretary.

ARTICLE XIV – FINANCE

A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be financed by contributions from member churches, associate and affiliate members, and gifts from individuals, congregations, organizations, and other sources.

B. The General Treasurer and the General Secretary shall be responsible for the preparation of the annual budget, which shall be presented to the Executive Committee for approval.

C. The financial accounts of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be audited annually by auditors approved by the Executive Committee. The audited accounts shall be presented annually to the Executive Committee for adoption.

ARTICLE XV – DEPARTMENTS, COMMITTEES, OFFICES, AND COMMISSIONS

A. The General Council or the Executive Committee may form departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

B. All committees or commissions shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee.

C. Departments and offices shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee, through the General Secretary. They shall function in a manner that promotes the coherence of the programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. To this end they are not independent entities but function interdependently.

ARTICLE XVI – ORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

To promote the closest possible community and cooperation among member churches in a particular area of the world, and the effectiveness of the total work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the General Council may authorize the organization of a Regional Council composed of the member churches in that defined geographical area. Such a Regional Council shall be accountable to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through its appointed administrative structures.

- A. The number, boundaries, and names of the Regional Councils shall be determined by the General Council or by the Executive Committee in consultation with the member churches of the region.
- B. The organization of a Regional Council shall be effected by the member churches within the area, in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Each Regional Council shall adopt its own Bylaws subject to ratification by the Executive Committee.
- C. Each Regional Council shall meet from time to time within the geographic area, provide for an Administrative Committee, and elect officers, including a Moderator (or President or Convener), a Secretary and a Treasurer, pursuant to its Bylaws, subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.
- D. Each Regional Council shall elect a President, a Moderator or a Convener.
- E. Each Regional Council shall elect a Secretary and a Treasurer to serve the Regional Council subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.
- D. A Vice-President, or another member of the Executive Committee, shall be appointed by the Executive Committee to be a corresponding member of each Regional Council.

ARTICLE XVII – DISSOLUTION

In the event that the World Communion of Reformed Churches ceases to exist as a corporate entity, any remaining assets or liabilities shall be distributed pro-rata to the member churches.

ARTICLE XVIII – AMENDMENTS

A. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegates in attendance at any meeting of the General Council, provided the proposed amendment has been transmitted to each member church, to members of the Executive Committee, and to the Regional Councils at least six months before it is submitted for approval.

B. The Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the delegates in attendance at a meeting of the General Council, provided notice of at least 24 hours has been given to the delegates attending that meeting.

C. Between meetings of the General Council, the Bylaws may be amended by a two thirds majority of the Executive Committee. Such changes shall be submitted to the next General Council for ratification.

ARTICLE XIX – OFFICIAL LANGUAGE VERSION

The English version of this document is the definitive document for interpretation purposes.

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

THE BYLAWS

I. GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The Executive Committee shall serve as the Business Committee of the General Council.

B. The President, with the advice of the Executive Committee, shall appoint from among the delegates such Standing Committees and Task Groups as may be necessary for the efficient operation of the General Council when in session.

C. The status and classification of participants at a General Council meeting shall be as follows:

1. Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of voting delegates.
2. An associate delegate is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
3. An affiliate delegate is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
4. An ecumenical delegate is one who represents a recognized ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
5. Guests are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
6. Observers are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed churches. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council but do not have the right to vote.

7. Consultants may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.
8. Visitors are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions, or vote.

II. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. Elections

1. The General Council shall elect officers from among the voting delegates, appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.
2. The General Council shall elect an Executive Committee from among the voting delegates appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, experience, and the advice of regional councils.
3. The Executive Committee members shall hold office from their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
4. Officers and members of the Executive Committee shall be eligible to serve for not more than two consecutive terms.
5. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall elect a Nominating Committee of not more than ten persons, two of whom must be under 30 years of age, one of them female and one male. The nomination procedure shall take into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, and gender.
6. Members of the Nominating Committee are not eligible for election as officers or as members of the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee shall receive and consider proposed nominations from delegates and from Regional Councils and shall make its own proposals.
7. The Nominating Committee shall present to the General Council a slate of nominations for officers and for members of the Executive Committee. When the proposal of the Nominating Committee has been presented, nominations from the floor may be proposed as an alternative to any of the nominees recommended by the Nominating Committee.
8. The election of General Council Officers and Executive Committee members shall take place no sooner than twenty-four hours after the presentation of all candidates.

9. Each member of the Executive Committee shall be required to disclose potential and real conflict of interest issues. A signed form for such disclosure shall be retained in the office of the General Secretary.
10. Delegates elected to the Executive Committee are ordinarily expected to represent the interests of the General Council.

B. Alternates and advisers

1. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Executive Committee, the President and the General Secretary, after due consultation, may appoint an alternate from the same region, to serve for that particular meeting as a member of the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee may invite churches or organizations to appoint a representative to attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Such an invited representative shall be able to participate in the meeting without the right to vote.

C. Removal from office

1. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee is deemed by another officer or member to have failed to perform his or her duties, a hearing or hearings shall be conducted.
2. The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person to the Executive Committee.
3. Having heard the accusations, having considered the appropriate evidence and having heard the response the accused person chooses to make, the Executive Committee may reprimand, suspend, or remove the accused person, or declare that the person's service will continue. The seriousness of the offence will determine the action to be taken—not necessarily the number of occasions of transgression.
4. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee has been found guilty of an offence by the ecclesiastical procedures of his or her church, the Executive Committee may declare the office or membership vacant after having taken note of the official statement of the charges (formal accusation), decision, and censure (judgment, sentence). The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person (at her or his own expense) to the Executive Committee.
4. Whether or not there is a response, the Executive Committee may remove or suspend the person, or take no action.

D. Vacant positions

When the position of a member of the Executive Committee becomes vacant through death, resignation in writing to the General Secretary, removal from office by action of the Executive Committee, or non-attendance over an extended period, the Executive Committee may fill such vacancy in the following manner:

1. If the office of President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office of President by election from among the Vice-Presidents or the elected members of the Executive Committee.
2. If the office of a Vice-President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office by election from among the members of the Executive Committee.
3. If the office of General Treasurer becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall select a person to fill the position.
4. If a general position on the Executive Committee becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee may fill the vacancy by election from among those who were delegates to the previous General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.

E. Meetings

1. The Executive Committee shall meet once a year, the specific time and place to be set by the Executive Committee or by the President and General Secretary at its previous meeting or by way of circular decision as provided for in article X.E of the Constitution. Failing this, the President and the General Secretary decide as to the time and place of the Executive Committee's meeting. If they cannot come to an agreement, the President decides.
2. The President and the General Secretary may call special meetings of the Executive Committee, and shall do so at the request of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee.
3. A quorum shall be a majority of the total voting membership of the Executive Committee in attendance.

III – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of the Basis, Values, Mission and Purposes of the Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the following conditions. The following procedure shall be followed:

1. Such action may be proposed to the Executive Committee by one or more member churches, after such church or churches have previously presented their concerns to the church in question. A proposal to suspend a member church shall be presented to the Executive Committee at least six months prior to its meeting.
2. The Executive Committee that has received a proposal for suspension shall conduct an investigation. The officers shall develop an investigative process for the specific charges. The process shall be approved by the Executive Committee.

3. The Executive Committee shall take final action only after the church in question has been given sufficient opportunity to defend itself.

4. After such an investigation has been completed, the Executive Committee may decide by a two-thirds vote of members present to suspend the membership of the member church in question or refer the case to the next General Council. When an Executive Committee decides suspension, it may be lifted at any subsequent Executive Committee meeting.

5. When a member church is suspended at a General Council meeting, that suspension may be lifted at any subsequent General Council meeting upon recommendation of the then current Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall, therefore, maintain communication with that member church about the matters related to the cause for suspension.

6. A suspended member church may send observers to plenary sessions of the General Council but shall not have the right to vote or address plenary sessions of the General Council except by extraordinary permission of the President. A suspended member church shall not have any financial obligations to the World Communion of Reformed Churches during the suspension, nor shall a suspended member church be entitled to financial support.

7. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason to the secretariat for three consecutive years shall have the privileges of membership withdrawn by the Executive Committee until the requirements of membership are fulfilled. A member church whose membership privileges are withdrawn shall be considered an inactive member. An inactive member church may attend a General Council meeting as an observer but will not have the right to speak or vote. Inactive members do not qualify for financial support from the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

8. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason with the secretariat for three consecutive years may not participate in the Executive Committee. Such a member church may be reinstated by the Executive Committee upon resumption of contact and fulfilment of its obligations.

IV - OFFICERS' COMMITTEE

The elected officers, the General Secretary and the General Treasurer shall form themselves into an officers' committee (chaired by the President) to perform the following functions:

1. approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings;

2. ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;

3. provide advice and direction to the General Secretary

- 4. report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken;
- 5. oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
- 6. along with the General Secretary, conduct risk assessments as needed and report conclusions reached to the Executive Committee.

V – GENERAL SECRETARY

A. The General Secretary shall make all necessary arrangements for the convening, reporting, and proper conduct of the General Council.

B. The General Secretary shall supervise the personnel of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and be responsible for the proper functioning of the secretariat.

C. ~~All~~ WCRC publications (excluding those from Regional Councils) shall be under the supervision of the General Secretary. The General Secretary shall be the official spokesperson for the policies and statements of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

VI – FINANCES

A. The Executive Committee may propose to the member churches proportional financial contributions to the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

B. Any proposals for the disbursement of any funds relating to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, other than disbursements included in the annual budget, shall be approved by the Executive Committee.

C. In exceptional cases, the General Secretary shall be permitted to initiate an action with financial consequences, within the parameters of the purposes and aims of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, after consultation with and the approval of the President and the General Treasurer.

D. If necessary for timely consideration, the Executive Committee may vote on the adoption of the budget by mail ballot, teleconference, or other electronic means upon the recommendation of the officers.

E. The General Treasurer and the finance coordinator shall report regularly to the Executive Committee.

F. The expenses of the President, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, and other members of the staff will be met from the funds of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when they attend meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee.

G. The expenses of delegates to the General Council and of members of the Executive Committee attending the General Council shall be paid by the churches of which they are members unless a prior agreement for support has been negotiated.

H. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall pay for the expenses of the Executive Committee in accordance with established administrative guidelines.

I. Each Regional Council shall submit to the General Secretary a copy of its annual audited financial statements.

Appendix B2

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

[Adopted 2010, Amended 2017]

Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover,
Germany

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

THE CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

Jesus Christ is the foundation and head of the Christian church.

It is in Jesus Christ that the Word became flesh and the gospel is embodied.

It is to God in Christ that the Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bear witness.

It is through Christ that God gives abundant life and spiritual vitality to the members of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The churches in the World Communion of Reformed Churches are called together in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Under the sovereign God, with Christ's followers across the globe, sharing one baptism, the members of the communion belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

ARTICLE I – NAME AND SUCCESSION

The name of this organization shall be the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The following constitute the name of the organization in French, German and Spanish:

Communion Mondiale des Églises Réformées (CMER)

Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGRK)

Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization, registered as a corporation under public law in Germany and as a 501(c)3 corporate entity in the State of Michigan in the United States of America. The membership of the registered entities is the same.

As of the 2010 Uniting General Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches succeeds the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its antecedents, as a united ecumenical body for Reformed churches.

ARTICLE II – BASIS

The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to this triune God that the church bears witness. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, and as continued in the life and witness of the broader family of Reformed, United and Uniting churches.

ARTICLE III – VALUES

A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to demonstrate and live the oneness in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that enable all member churches to share their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God's saving purposes for the good of all and for the transformation of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches serves its members with love and care, encouraging their mutual support and nurture of one another.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches embraces God's covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation through Jesus Christ. In doing so, it affirms the biblical calling of the members to recognize the gift of baptism in one another, and the call to be unified in ministry, and together to bear witness to God's justice and peace and to the integrity of creation.

ARTICLE IV – IDENTITY, MISSION AND PURPOSES

A. Drawing on the heritage of the Reformed confessions, as a gift for the renewal of the whole church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches which shall foster communion among its member churches by:

1. affirming the gifts of unity in Christ and promoting unity in and among churches through the mutual recognition of baptism and membership, pulpit and table fellowship, ministry and witness;
2. interpreting Reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness;
3. encouraging the renewal of Christian worship and spiritual life within the Reformed tradition;
4. renewing a commitment to partnership in God's mission through worship, witness, diaconal service and work for justice, so as to foster mission in unity, mission renewal, and mission empowerment;
5. encouraging leadership development and nurture of the covenant community;
6. engaging with other ecumenical organizations and churches of other traditions in the ecumenical movement through dialogue and cooperation in ministry;
7. expressing unity and solidarity with those minorities living in the context of marginalization and violence.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall assist its member churches by:

1. widening and deepening understanding and community among the member churches and helping them to fulfil their own responsibilities in the service of Christ;
2. facilitating the transformation of the member churches into interdependent missional communities that support, empower and challenge each other as partners in the one mission of God;
3. promoting the full and just participation of all members, of all ages, in all aspects of the church's life and its public witness;
4. promoting the full and just partnership of women and men in church and society;
5. encouraging and promoting diaconal service in the church and society;
6. expressing unity and solidarity with those of its members who are persecuted or marginalized.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall also contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world by:

1. promoting economic and ecological justice, global peace, and reconciliation in the world;
2. promoting and defending religious, civil, and all other human rights wherever threatened throughout the world;
3. encouraging and promoting relief and sustainable development in the world and focusing on the eradication of poverty;
4. providing Reformed perspectives on church unity.

ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP

A. Any church of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, other First Reformation, United, and Uniting traditions is eligible to apply for membership, if such a church affirms this constitution.

B. Member churches are expected to join in achieving the Mission and Purposes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches by, among other things, participating in meetings, financially supporting its existence, taking seriously its actions and decisions, and engaging in its collective work.

C. Fellowships and associations of churches that affirm a Reformed identity and include in their membership World Communion of Reformed Churches' members are eligible for associate membership. Such associate members shall share in the fellowship and programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, participate on a reciprocal basis without a vote in governance, and thereby strengthen the broader Reformed family's participation in the church ecumenical.

D. An institution established by one or more member churches or whose faith basis and operation are in agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions are eligible for affiliate membership, without voting privileges.

E. Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches does not limit the autonomy of any member church or restrict its relationships with other churches or with other ecumenical organizations.

F. Members in the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall support the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through an annual financial contribution reflecting the resources and membership of that church. The General Council or the Executive Committee shall set a minimum contribution requirement for all member churches, associate and affiliate members.

G. Application for membership shall be made to the office of the General Secretary not later than six months before a General Council meeting. Admission to membership shall be by decision of the Executive Committee following consultation with other member churches in the region. The General Council shall ratify new members by a two-thirds majority of ballots cast. A new member shall not vote on the ratification of its own membership.

H. A member church may terminate its membership by giving notice in writing to the office of the General Secretary. It will be encouraged to give reasons for this action.

ARTICLE VI – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of Article II - Basis, Article III - Values, or Article IV - Identity, Mission and Purposes of this Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the conditions stated in the Bylaws.

ARTICLE VII – GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The General Council is the main governing body of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Council is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when representatives of one-half plus one of its member churches are present when the General Council convenes to establish a quorum.

B. The General Council:

1. provides leadership for the World Communion of Reformed Churches in achieving the aims and purposes of the organization;
2. may adopt and may amend the Constitution and the Bylaws;
3. makes and adopts policies and programmes for the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
4. elects officers and members of the Executive Committee;
5. considers matters brought before it by member churches;
6. receives decisions of the Executive Committee for ratification.

C. Decisions of the General Council concerning its organization and institutional activities shall be binding.

D. Decisions of the General Council involving the life and witness of the member churches are advisory in character.

ARTICLE VIII – MEETINGS OF GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The General Council shall ordinarily meet once in every seven years.

B. At the request of at least one-fifth of the member churches, the Executive Committee shall convene the General Council into special session.

C. The time, place, and programme of a General Council meeting shall be determined by the Executive Committee.

D. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall adopt rules of procedure for the conduct of its business.

ARTICLE IX – COMPOSITION OF GENERAL COUNCIL

A. Participants at the General Council are voting delegates, associate and affiliate delegates, ecumenical delegates, consultants, observers, guests, and visitors.

B. Member churches shall be entitled to appoint voting delegates on the basis of their membership. The World Communion of Reformed Churches will accept the information each member church submits based on its normal counting procedure. The same numbers will be used for attendance at the General Council meeting and for the basis used to determine membership contributions.

Member churches with up to 300,000 members are entitled to appoint up to four voting delegates.

Member churches with between 300,001 and 1,000,000 members are entitled to appoint up to six voting delegates.

Member churches with 1,000,001 members or more are entitled to appoint up to eight voting delegates.

Each delegation shall be gender balanced and no more than half shall be clergy. At least one voting delegate shall be thirty years of age or younger on the date the General Council is convened.

C. Each of the officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be an ex-officio delegate (with vote) to any General Council that meets during the officer's term of office.

D. Only delegates from member churches and Officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall have the right to vote and to move or second motions in all sessions of the General Council.

ARTICLE X – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. The Executive Committee shall have twenty-two (22) members elected by the General Council (including six (6) officers). The General Secretary shall be a member ex-officio (without vote). The Executive Committee is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when a majority of its members is present to establish a quorum. The officers and members of the Executive Committee shall hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.

B. Either the moderator, president, convener or secretary of each Regional Council shall be a full member of the Executive Committee.

C. The Executive Committee may invite Executive Secretaries to participate in its meetings in an advisory capacity.

D. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Committee, an alternate may be appointed under the provisions in the Bylaws.

E. The Executive Committee shall meet annually.

F. When the President and the General Secretary deem it necessary to secure a decision of the Executive Committee between its meetings, a vote by mail, email, telephone conference, or other electronic means may be taken. In such cases the required majority (one-half plus one) is based on all the members of the Executive Committee.

G. The Executive Committee:

1. exercises general oversight of the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council including, but not limited to, the formation of departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
2. authorizes the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council. The Executive Committee may, by way of exception and if needed, appoint one or more additional persons to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
3. performs all duties specified elsewhere in this Constitution and in the Bylaws or committed to it by the General Council.
4. has authority to approve the annual financial reports and adopt the annual budget.
5. fills vacancies among the officers and in its own membership, as specified in the Bylaws, which may occur between meetings of the General Council.
6. elects a General Secretary and appoints Executive Secretaries.

7. decides on admission to and suspension of membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches subject to ratification by the next General Council.

ARTICLE XI – OFFICERS OF THE WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

A. The General Council shall elect the following officers from among those present at the General Council to hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.

1. one president
2. four (4) vice-presidents

B. The General Treasurer is elected by the Executive Committee and serves as a member of the officers, and serves until a successor is elected.

C. The officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be formed into an officers' committee with power to act to perform their responsibilities as stated in the Bylaws.

D. Any two of the following: the President (or one of the Vice-Presidents if substituting for the President), the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer, are authorized to sign jointly for all legally required registrations, opening of bank accounts, and other legal transactions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

ARTICLE XII – GENERAL SECRETARY

A. The General Secretary shall be the chief executive officer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and shall be responsible to the General Council and to the Executive Committee to direct and coordinate the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Secretary is responsible for advising the Executive Committee and the officers of risks and potential liabilities that may pertain.

B. The General Secretary shall serve a term of seven years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another seven-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each seven-year term and prior to the decision to appoint the General Secretary to a second seven-year term. The performance review shall be conducted by persons appointed by the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE XIII – EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES

A. Executive Secretaries shall be appointed for the operations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

B. The number of Executive Secretaries serving at any one time, and the scope of their responsibilities, is determined by the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the General Secretary.

C. Executive Secretaries shall serve a term of five years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another five-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each five-year term and prior to the decision to appoint an Executive Secretary to a second five-year term. The performance review is conducted by the General Secretary.

ARTICLE XIV – FINANCE

A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be financed by contributions from member churches, associate and affiliate members, and gifts from individuals, congregations, organizations, and other sources.

B. The General Treasurer and the General Secretary shall be responsible for the preparation of the annual budget, which shall be presented to the Executive Committee for approval.

C. The financial accounts of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be audited annually by auditors approved by the Executive Committee. The audited accounts shall be presented annually to the Executive Committee for adoption.

ARTICLE XV – DEPARTMENTS, COMMITTEES, OFFICES, AND COMMISSIONS

A. The General Council or the Executive Committee may form departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

B. All committees or commissions shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee.

C. Departments and offices shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee, through the General Secretary. They shall function in a manner that promotes the coherence of the programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. To this end they are not independent entities but function interdependently.

ARTICLE XVI – ORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

To promote the closest possible community and cooperation among member churches in a particular area of the world, and the effectiveness of the total work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the General Council may authorize the organization of a Regional Council composed of the member churches in that defined geographical area. Such a Regional Council shall be accountable to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through its appointed administrative structures.

A. The number, boundaries, and names of the Regional Councils shall be determined by the General Council or by the Executive Committee in consultation with the member churches of the region.

B. The organization of a Regional Council shall be effected by the member churches within the area, in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Each Regional Council shall adopt its own Bylaws subject to ratification by the Executive Committee.

C. Each Regional Council shall meet from time to time within the geographic area, provide for an Administrative Committee, and elect officers, including a Moderator (or President or Convener), a Secretary and a Treasurer, pursuant to its Bylaws, subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.

D. A Vice-President, or another member of the Executive Committee, shall be appointed by the Executive Committee to be a corresponding member of each Regional Council.

ARTICLE XVII – DISSOLUTION

In the event that the World Communion of Reformed Churches ceases to exist as a corporate entity, any remaining assets or liabilities shall be distributed pro-rata to the member churches.

ARTICLE XVIII – AMENDMENTS

A. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegates in attendance at any meeting of the General Council, provided the proposed amendment has been transmitted to each member church, to members of the Executive Committee, and to the Regional Councils at least six months before it is submitted for approval.

B. The Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the delegates in attendance at a meeting of the General Council, provided notice of at least 24 hours has been given to the delegates attending that meeting.

C. Between meetings of the General Council, the Bylaws may be amended by a two thirds majority of the Executive Committee. Such changes shall be submitted to the next General Council for ratification.

ARTICLE XIX – OFFICIAL LANGUAGE VERSION

The English version of this document is the definitive document for interpretation purposes.

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

THE BYLAWS

I. GENERAL COUNCIL

A. The Executive Committee shall serve as the Business Committee of the General Council.

B. The President, with the advice of the Executive Committee, shall appoint from among the delegates such Standing Committees and Task Groups as may be necessary for the efficient operation of the General Council when in session.

C. The status and classification of participants at a General Council meeting shall be as follows:

1. Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of voting delegates.
2. An associate delegate is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
3. An affiliate delegate is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
4. An ecumenical delegate is one who represents a recognized ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
5. Guests are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
6. Observers are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed churches. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council but do not have the right to vote.
7. Consultants may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.
8. Visitors are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions, or vote.

II. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. Elections

1. The General Council shall elect officers from among the voting delegates appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.

2. The General Council shall elect an Executive Committee from among the voting delegates appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, experience, and the advice of regional councils.
3. The Executive Committee members shall hold office from their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
4. Officers and members of the Executive Committee shall be eligible to serve for not more than two consecutive terms.
5. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall elect a Nominating Committee of not more than ten persons, two of whom must be under 30 years of age, one of them female and one male. The nomination procedure shall take into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, and gender.
6. Members of the Nominating Committee are not eligible for election as officers or as members of the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee shall receive and consider proposed nominations from delegates and from Regional Councils and shall make its own proposals.
7. The Nominating Committee shall present to the General Council a slate of nominations for officers and for members of the Executive Committee. When the proposal of the Nominating Committee has been presented, nominations from the floor may be proposed as an alternative to any of the nominees recommended by the Nominating Committee.
8. The election of General Council Officers and Executive Committee members shall take place no sooner than twenty-four hours after the presentation of all candidates.
9. Each member of the Executive Committee shall be required to disclose potential and real conflict of interest issues. A signed form for such disclosure shall be retained in the office of the General Secretary.
10. Delegates elected to the Executive Committee are ordinarily expected to represent the interests of the General Council.

B. Alternates and advisers

1. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Executive Committee, the President and the General Secretary, after due consultation, may appoint an alternate from the same region, to serve for that particular meeting as a member of the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee may invite churches or organizations to appoint a representative to attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Such an invited representative shall be able to participate in the meeting without the right to vote.

C. Removal from office

1. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee is deemed by another officer or member to have failed to perform his or her duties, a hearing or hearings shall be conducted.
2. The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person to the Executive Committee.
3. Having heard the accusations, having considered the appropriate evidence and having heard the response the accused person chooses to make, the Executive Committee may reprimand, suspend, or remove the accused person, or declare that the person's service will continue. The seriousness of the offence will determine the action to be taken—not necessarily the number of occasions of transgression.
4. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee has been found guilty of an offence by the ecclesiastical procedures of his or her church, the Executive Committee may declare the office or membership vacant after having taken note of the official statement of the charges (formal accusation), decision, and censure (judgment, sentence). The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person (at her or his own expense) to the Executive Committee. Whether or not there is a response, the Executive Committee may remove or suspend the person, or take no action.

D. Vacant positions

When the position of a member of the Executive Committee becomes vacant through death, resignation in writing to the General Secretary, removal from office by action of the Executive Committee, or non-attendance over an extended period, the Executive Committee may fill such vacancy in the following manner:

1. If the office of President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office of President by election from among the Vice-Presidents or the elected members of the Executive Committee.
2. If the office of a Vice-President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office by election from among the members of the Executive Committee.
3. If the office of General Treasurer becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall select a person to fill the position.
4. If a general position on the Executive Committee becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee may fill the vacancy by election from among those who were delegates to the previous General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.

E. Meetings

1. The Executive Committee shall meet once a year, the specific time and place to be set by the Executive Committee or by the President and General Secretary.
2. The President and the General Secretary may call special meetings of the Executive Committee, and shall do so at the request of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee.
3. A quorum shall be a majority of the total voting membership of the Executive Committee in attendance.

III – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of the Basis, Values, Mission and Purposes of the Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization. The following procedure shall be followed:

1. Such action may be proposed to the Executive Committee by one or more member churches, after such church or churches have previously presented their concerns to the church in question. A proposal to suspend a member church shall be presented to the Executive Committee at least six months prior to its meeting.
2. The Executive Committee that has received a proposal for suspension shall conduct an investigation. The officers shall develop an investigative process for the specific charges. The process shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
3. The Executive Committee shall take final action only after the church in question has been given sufficient opportunity to defend itself.
4. After such an investigation has been completed, the Executive Committee may decide by a two-thirds vote of members present to suspend the membership of the member church in question or refer the case to the next General Council. When an Executive Committee decides suspension, it may be lifted at any subsequent Executive Committee meeting.
5. When a member church is suspended at a General Council meeting, that suspension may be lifted at any subsequent General Council meeting upon recommendation of the then current Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall, therefore, maintain communication with that member church about the matters related to the cause for suspension.
6. A suspended member church may send observers to plenary sessions of the General Council but shall not have the right to vote or address plenary sessions of the General Council except by extraordinary permission of the President. A suspended member church shall not have any financial obligations to the World Communion of Reformed Churches during the suspension, nor shall a suspended member church be entitled to financial support.

7. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason to the secretariat for three consecutive years shall have the privileges of membership withdrawn by the Executive Committee until the requirements of membership are fulfilled. A member church whose membership privileges are withdrawn shall be considered an inactive member. An inactive member church may attend a General Council meeting as an observer but will not have the right to speak or vote. Inactive members do not qualify for financial support from the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

8. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason with the secretariat for three consecutive years may not participate in the Executive Committee. Such a member church may be reinstated by the Executive Committee upon resumption of contact and fulfilment of its obligations.

IV-OFFICERS' COMMITTEE

The elected officers, the General Secretary and the General Treasurer shall form themselves into an officers' committee (chaired by the President) to perform the following functions:

1. approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings;
2. ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
3. provide advice and direction to the General Secretary;
4. report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken;
5. oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
6. along with the General Secretary, conduct risk assessments as needed and report conclusions reached to the Executive Committee.

V – GENERAL SECRETARY

A. The General Secretary shall make all necessary arrangements for the convening, reporting, and proper conduct of the General Council.

B. The General Secretary shall supervise the personnel of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and be responsible for the proper functioning of the secretariat.

C. WCRC publications (excluding those from Regional Councils) shall be under the supervision of the General Secretary. The General Secretary shall be the official spokesperson for the policies and statements of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

VI – FINANCES

- A. The Executive Committee may propose to the member churches proportional financial contributions to the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. Any proposals for the disbursement of any funds relating to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, other than disbursements included in the annual budget, shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
- C. In exceptional cases, the General Secretary shall be permitted to initiate an action with financial consequences, within the parameters of the purposes and aims of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, after consultation with and the approval of the President and the General Treasurer.
- D. If necessary for timely consideration, the Executive Committee may vote on the adoption of the budget by mail ballot, teleconference, or other electronic means upon the recommendation of the officers.
- E. The General Treasurer and the finance coordinator shall report regularly to the Executive Committee.
- F. The expenses of the President, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, and other members of the staff will be met from the funds of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when they attend meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee.
- G. The expenses of delegates to the General Council and of members of the Executive Committee attending the General Council shall be paid by the churches of which they are members unless a prior agreement for support has been negotiated.
- H. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall pay for the expenses of the Executive Committee in accordance with established administrative guidelines.
- I. Each Regional Council shall submit to the General Secretary a copy of its annual audited financial statements.

APPENDIX C

A DECLARATION OF FAITH ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION

A Declaration of Faith: God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.

This declaration testifies to our belief that women and men were created equally in the image of God and that they therefore should be treated with equal respect and dignity. It testifies to the profound unity of all who have been baptized. It testifies to our experience over centuries that God has been calling both women and men to ministries of spiritual leadership and granting them the gifts and graces to carry out those roles. In some of the cultural contexts in which our churches live today, this declaration goes against the prevailing ethos. Thus faithful Christians are often called to be countercultural. Theological integrity and justice require that the churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in solidarity courageously declare their commitment to assure that both women and men have equal standing to reflect their common incorporation into the body of Christ in baptism and service.

The churches of the WCRC now pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation will be determined on the same basis as for men.

The Context

Why do we make this declaration now?

The women's pre-assembly at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA (2010), through its commitment to full partnership between women and men, affirmed both the need to work towards a binding commitment of the Communion to the ordination of women, and also the need to achieve equal representation of women and men on the Executive Committee.

The Uniting General Council then affirmed women's ordination as central to the understanding of communion, stating: "True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized."¹ Among the recommendations approved by the WCRC General Council was a commitment to "...promote the ordination of women **amongst its**

¹ Record of Proceedings, United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, USA, p.160

member churches.²² To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

The brutality of the treatment of women across the world today reflects a long-standing view in some cultures that women are by nature inferior to men, born to serve and obey men, that the girl is less valuable than the boy, that women deserve neither respect nor dignity. We see that the girl and the mother are often the last in the family to be fed and are the least educated, so that their life possibilities are limited. We see mass rape of girls and women used as a weapon of war with appalling consequences. We see women forbidden to leave their homes and take part in the wider life of society. Even in highly developed nations, women are paid less for the same work than men, sometimes have restricted access to healthcare and are rarely fully represented in national governing structures.

Churches rightly protest assaults on the human rights of women, but their moral authority is compromised when they demonstrate by their institutional life that they, too, believe in the inferiority of women and their incapacity to serve as ordained church leaders. The churches' refusal to ordain women is experienced by them as painful oppression, robbing them of their proper dignity. Even when the women have been ordained, they often face discrimination and marginalization.

The churches of the Reformed family today, spanning the globe and rooted in diverse cultures, have the opportunity and the obligation to witness before the world that women and men alike are created in the image of God, deserve equal respect and dignity, and can find in the institutional life of the church an affirmation of those beliefs. The ordination of women is a powerful witness to the equality of women and men in the eyes of God. It is also an expression of gratitude for women's rich gifts of leadership that invigorate the life of the churches.

The Biblical Foundation: Creation and New Creation

The Bible, foundation of Reformed belief and practice, has been used to support both the approval and disapproval of women's ordination. The Bible in fact both reflects and challenges the patriarchal world in which it was written, prompting us to define a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the Bible. Reformed Christians generally read the Bible in the light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, aided by critical biblical scholarship and rigorous reflection and discernment in the community of faith, upheld by prayer. This approach to discerning God's will avoids simply studying

² Idem

and citing isolated texts. God's grace for the whole of creation leads us to approach the Bible embracing mercy, justice and liberation in the face of the fallen world and structures of oppression. Galatians 5:1: "For freedom, Christ has set us free." There has been a fundamental shift in critical scholarship that has supported a renewed understanding of the equality proclaimed in the Gospel. This has guided us in our firm conviction that the ordination of women is a fully biblical imperative. We will sketch the basis of that belief, focusing on two texts: Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28.

Creation: Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'"(NRSV).

Fundamental to our understanding of the proper role of women is this verse, announcing at the very beginning of the biblical narrative that women and men together are created in God's image. This is a statement of equality and solidarity. Neither here nor in the following verse's charge to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth is there any suggestion of division of labor by sex or of women's subordination.

Opponents of women's ordination often point to Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (NRSV). The term "helper" has been seen as a sign of subordination. In the Hebrew, however, the word carries the opposite connotation. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures the same word often describes God creating and saving Israel, a source of strong support. The recognition by the man in Genesis 2:23 that the woman is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is again a declaration of mutuality and solidarity.

We reject theologies that teach that women are by their biological nature inferior to men, or that women reflect the image of God less fully than men, or that women's proper role is limited to procreation and the domestic realm, excluding them from taking public responsibility within creation.

God's intention at creation is equality and solidarity between women and men in harmony with all creation. After the fall both the woman and the man experience distortion of those relationships. In Genesis 3:16, the woman hears that she should be subject to her husband as punishment for sin, and the man is punished by the cursing of the land and his labor. The biblical narrative continues then to portray a patriarchal society. Jewish women in the Hebrew Scriptures rarely appear in official leadership. We do read of Queen Esther and of Deborah the judge, and of prophets like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah. A rich succession of able women nonetheless pervades

the biblical text, such as the clever Hebrew midwives in Egypt, and the beloved Ruth with her own book.

New Creation: Galatians 3:27-28: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV).

The ministry of Jesus portrays many challenges to the oppressive practices of society, where public contact between women and men was strictly regulated. For example, he intervened against stoning of the woman taken in adultery. He allowed the hemorrhaging woman to touch his garment, and he healed her. He was surrounded by both women and men as disciples and empowered them in life and ministry. He taught about the reign of God that was already beginning among them and that would upend the current way of life. His intimate friendships with Mary and Martha permitted them to engage in theological conversation. He accepted the Syro-Phoenician woman’s challenge to his understanding of his mission, and yielded to her plea to heal her daughter. He crossed the conventional boundary by engaging in a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, talking with her at length, and enabling her to return to her community and minister by sharing the good news. His interaction with Mary Magdalene transformed her into a faithful disciple who witnessed the resurrection. After his resurrection, he appeared to women disciples and sent them to tell the others that he lived. These examples demonstrate the countercultural nature of Jesus’s ministry and indicate the value and significance Jesus gave to women in ministry.

In the band of disciples that gathered in Jerusalem to pray after Jesus’ resurrection were “certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14, NRSV). All were present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Peter, addressing the people of Jerusalem to explain how the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah, took his text from the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18, NRSV; cf. Joel 2:28-9). In this new era of the reign of God where the Spirit has been poured out, women will have a far more egalitarian role than before. So it should not surprise us to read in the book of Acts about women prophets like the daughters of Philip, about Priscilla with her husband teaching the preacher Apollos and accompanying Paul on his journey, risking their necks for him, he says, and about the women hosting house churches. Paul speaks warmly and gratefully about his women colleagues in ministry: among them Junia the apostle; Phoebe, the minister (or deacon) of the church of Cenchreae; Priscilla and Mary. Some had been jailed with him (Romans 16:1-16). The widows who cared for the poor (I Timothy 5)

were understood by John Calvin to be part of the office of deacon. There are many records in the early centuries of the ordained women deacons.

It is in the context of the new creation, where the Holy Spirit calls those least expected to give leadership, that we read Galatians 3:27-28 as part of an ancient baptismal rite. All who are called into faith and baptized into Christ's body have become one family where human barriers accepted by society must fall. We know from the book of Acts how difficult a struggle it was for those early Christians to accept that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, previously sanctioned by religion, had been broken by the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet a clear decision was made that Gentiles given the gift of faith must be accepted into the community without circumcision. Some of our churches were still struggling in the late nineteenth century with the implications of that phrase "no longer slave or free," but the teaching of the Bible eventually led them to decide that slavery was morally wrong and that Christians could not be slaveholders. It took another century for some of our churches to understand that the racial barrier has also been broken by the Holy Spirit, and there can be no racially segregated churches. Our Reformed family at the WARC General Council in Ottawa in 1982 declared that apartheid (which had extended to church structures) is sin, and justifying it morally and theologically is "a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy."

We now are at a moment in history when our churches must declare that among the baptized there is no longer male and female. This means that men can no longer be exclusively privileged with church leadership.

Experience in the Life of the Church

Women lost their equality with men in the Church in the early centuries as the house churches moved out into public spaces, and the Church became institutionalized. Theologians living in the dualistic thought of the Hellenistic world lost the Hebraic belief in the goodness of creation. They adopted from Greek philosophy and Roman law unbiblical views of the subordination and inferiority of women. Thomas Aquinas, for example, adopted Aristotle's view of women as defective males, damaged in the process of gestation. Apart from some women deacons in the East who marched with the clergy in the early middle ages, the only official role available to medieval women in the church was that of a nun; but some nuns did exercise remarkable influence. Christine de Pisan, a lay woman, set off around 1400 a centuries-long literary debate about the nature of women in which she challenged the theologians' assumptions. Marie Dentiere in the early years of the Reformation in Geneva took up this debate, insisting that the liberating Gospel called on women to speak and write, and she did. She asked, "Are there two gospels, one for men, another for women?" Women writing in this tradition

pointed out the varied roles of women in the New Testament, reading the Bible very differently than either Catholic or Protestant male theologians. Attempts were made to silence these women.

Luther's Reformation, honored in 2017 at its 500th anniversary, gave to all of Protestantism the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the right of all the baptized to stand before God to pray for one another and to teach one another divine things, declaring God's gracious love and forgiveness to one another. This priesthood is distinct, however, from public ministry on behalf of a congregation. Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians repudiated the Aristotelian view of women, gave greater dignity to marriage, and even encouraged women to join congregational singing in public worship. Nonetheless they did not understand the priesthood of all believers to undermine the tradition of exclusively male clergy carrying out public ministry. After five hundred years, it is time for us to declare that a full understanding of the priesthood of all believers calls for equality of women and men in public ministry as well.

The ordination of women already has a long-standing tradition in the Reformed family. The Congregationalists have been ordaining women ministers since 1853, when Antoinette Brown became the first woman Congregational minister. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley in 1889, but no other Presbyterians followed for many years. There have been women deacons since at least the late 19th century, and women elders since at least the 1930's. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, increasing numbers of Reformed churches around the world have been regularly ordaining women as ministers, elders and deacons, and today most do so. Therefore, we have abundant evidence that women in diverse cultures on every continent can become fine theologians and have fruitful ministries. Our churches have confirmed through their experience with faithful women leaders that God is indeed calling women to ordained ministries and through them strengthening the churches.

Through history and in the present there is a disturbing recurrent experience in churches that do not ordain women. It is the disjunction of ordination from the practice of functions ordinarily related to ordained ministry. In all our churches women carry out tasks that churches with Presbyterian governance typically assign to elders and deacons; yet where ordination of women is refused, women carry out those tasks without the authority of office, without the ability to participate in the decision-making of governing bodies, and without the collegial support of ordained colleagues. In unusual situations of flux and transition, where pastors are scarce, where men are at war, on the mission field and in remote locations, able women are also called to exercise pastoral functions. They organize churches, lead public worship, preach, lead and teach in theological schools, and provide pastoral care. Yet even if they are theologically educated, they, too, lack the authority of office, participation in governing bodies,

and collegial support, and they cannot offer the sacraments. They are also paid much less than pastors. The Reformed tradition has closely tied ordination to the functions of ministry. If women are trusted to carry out the functions of ministry, they should be ordained. This is a matter of faith and of justice.

When surveyed, most of our member churches that do not ordain women do not cite theology as the reason but culture. Some live in contexts where secular society does not accept women's leadership. Some are minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic or Orthodox countries and feel ecumenical pressure to refrain from actions their neighbors find offensive. These cultural pressures are significant and sometimes life threatening. The Church throughout its history has faced such challenge in its struggle to make a faithful witness in the world. The WCRC needs to accompany these churches in solidarity. In Christ we are called to be a new creation, transcending the oppressive aspects of culture.

Since the Seoul General Council of WARC in 1989, general councils have been calling on the churches to re-examine their practice if they do not ordain women and developing ways to assist them in this process. Those churches that do ordain women have been asked to study whether women ministers have equal access to placement opportunities and equal pay for equal work. The survey made by the office of partnership between women and men in 2009 (WARC) presented not very precise information since all churches did not respond properly. It showed that at least 42 churches do not ordain women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Those churches are distributed as follow: Europe 7, Africa 18, Middle East 3, Latin America 5, Asia 9. From 2010 until now we have not been able to elicit a clear response from the member churches, though the regional councils that allow us to update these figures point out that those numbers are still valid.

We now seek to live out our commitment to communion and justice as we make this common Declaration of Faith, praying: Living God, renew and transform us!

APPENDIX D

VISION AND MESSAGE COMMITTEE

A Dream for Our Communion

Our vision statement comes in four movements: celebration, lament, commitment, and dreaming.

We Celebrate

During the General Council, meeting in Leipzig, 29 June to 7 July 2017, the World Communion of Reformed Churches discovered and rediscovered how much we have to celebrate together.

We celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with its renewing and transforming power. It reflects the “shining face of God” and disarms death-dealing idols. Ours is a religion of joy!

We celebrate the gifts of worship, music, drama and dance that have lifted us beyond ourselves, joining us with the Holy Spirit, disclosed in daily Bible study and prayer, and giving us inspiration for our journey together. As we share the Lord’s Supper we become the body of Christ for the world.

We celebrate a commitment to unity that rejoices living in reconciled diversity and shows we are truly living into what it means to be a Communion. After only seven years, we speak of communion with joy and enthusiasm for our future together.

We celebrate a deepening inclusion of women and a clearer path forward to full equality for women and men throughout our structures and in the ministries of our churches.

We celebrate the presence and participation of youth. They bring enthusiasm and awareness of new challenges to our Communion, strengthening our accountability to the future and insisting on new forms of reformation.

We celebrate the way we have seen our Council discern and deliberate through brilliant yet demanding presentations, helping us seek the mind of Christ in the face of interlocking world crises. We have listened to one another in groups and come to consensus in plenaries in ways that value voices from the margins and seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We celebrate the global nature of our Communion. We made pilgrimage to the well-springs of our 500-year-old Reformation in Leipzig, Berlin and Wittenberg, and saw the Reformed and transforming engagement of the German churches with their state, culture and history.

We celebrate the warm welcome and generous support of our member churches in Germany as we settled into our new home in Hannover.

We celebrate the joining of our Communion with the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation and World Methodist Council in a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, adding Reformed insights about God's justice to a renewed understanding of God's sovereign grace. And then in a Wittenberg Witness with our Lutheran siblings, we confirmed the hopes of common witness already seen in our united and uniting member churches.

We Lament

We lament the acts of evil carried out by people across the world. Addictions to money and power create a system where a select few live in comfort and use the resources of our planet to aid themselves, while ignoring the destruction and grinding poverty they leave in their wake. Our destructive changes to the environment leave us in a teetering world where both drought and flood result in human climate refugees and extinctions of species.

We mourn every human rights violation, especially gender based violence where women and children are exploited for their bodies or punished for seeking freedom, violence directed towards the LGBTQ+ community and the racial violence that joins so easily with authoritarian politics.

We grieve for all victims of terrorism across the globe, recognizing the wars, desperation and fundamentalist ideologies that create this nihilism and encourage further militarism. We cry out for all refugees and displaced people. We pray for all religious minorities under continuous pressure, and remember particularly our Christian sisters and brothers who are persecuted.

We are disturbed at the shrinking space for religious faith in many societies and institutions, as we watch empty secularism unable to resist the commodification of life and the idolatries of nationalism. How often does the church come unprepared to stand up for the Word of Life?

We gathered together to pray: “Living God, renew and transform us.” This prayer is both a petition and a lament. We confess to God that both in the world and within our Communion there are still multiple injustices that need transformation.

We Commit

Like the Reformers who preceded us, men and women, we stand on the solid foundation of God’s love and justice shown in the teaching, life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We stand for the dignity and equality of all people. We commit ourselves to the protection and defense of those who are abandoned or abused. We stand for the freedom of conscience and the freedom of religion. We commit ourselves to defend these freedoms in the face of radical secularization, fanaticism and fundamentalist violence.

We are liberated to liberate. Standing together, we will not conform to this world, but reform and transform this world through inclusive love and justice. We stand for the call of religion to make and keep peace, remembering the prayerful demonstrations in Leipzig that led in liberating Eastern Europe in 1989. We commit ourselves to interreligious dialogue and peacemaking, strengthened by life-shaping spiritual practices and loving community in our congregations.

We commit ourselves to the robust engagement with the Word of God which renews and transforms us across the boundaries of cultures and nationalities. This enables us to dismantle all forms of empire, as recorded in the “mission statement” of Jesus (Luke 4:16-18), and commits us to build life-affirming communities for the dignity of all.

We stand for the integrity of creation, beginning with our message to the G20, urging them to remain firm on the Paris Climate Agreement. We commit ourselves to help rescue the planet that God has entrusted to our care for present and future generations.

For our Communion, this understanding of our participation in God’s mission means that, sharing the Gospel to the ends of the Earth (Matthew 28:18-20), we continue to be the kind of churches that speak prophetically in statements such as the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra. We accompany and hold one another mutually accountable with shared leadership, strengthening our regional bodies and international networks—with “faithbooks” that aid our prayer and acts of solidarity. We commit to empower our members in giving and sharing their spiritual and financial gifts for the blessing of the Communion and of the world.

Under the sovereignty of God, we seek to understand the economic, technological and political structures that enforce domination, in order to help dismantle them. Crucial to that task, we work on alternatives that embody truth and reconciliation and build up the common good. Through consultation and theological exploration, we address challenging issues that threaten our unity, seeking to love all those whom God loves as gracious communities of faith.

We Dream

We long to be a Communion that burns with love and joy as did the disciples' hearts at the Emmaus meal (Luke 24:32). May that redemptive power of Christ drive us to new opportunities of every kind, our ways illuminated by the Spirit, so that we can be a light for the world.

We dream of a church known for its practical love; a body whose heart is filled with compassion as its hands are turned to reaching, caring for and empowering those on the margins and in greatest need.

At the same time, we dream of a church reformed and reforming at God's speed, so that a dynamic and racing world may know a yet swifter and more dynamic church, a church that drives technology to create incubators that deliver solutions of freedom, abundance and joy.

We pray for a church that has a clear tomorrow; a vision so compelling that it invites individuals and communities into this morrow with an irresistible yet humble confidence and determination, whatever the obstacles. May we be that Communion that will never be shocked or distracted from our calling, that will never give up on unity, and never stop breaking down even self-erected barriers in our service to a God beyond all borders.

In a world with more and more migrants and refugees may those who flee from the effects of empire be our most privileged members and be pilgrims with us toward God's new heaven and new earth.

We yearn for a church that pushes back the gods of death with the power of the God of Life.



Supplementary Material

APPENDIX 1 ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT JERRY PILLAY

Introduction

1. Psalm 8 speaks about the majesty of God and acknowledges that God is creator of the heavens and the earth: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” It testifies to the fact that God is in control even though at times it may not seem that way.
2. The world today is in crisis! There is abundance of pain, suffering, turmoil and conflict. We are surrounded by violence, fear, terrorism, political unrest, natural disasters, unemployment, poverty, gender discrimination, famine, dreaded diseases, religious tensions, religious fundamentalism, wars, factions, forced migration, political dictatorship, abuse of women and children, and the list goes on.
3. In the midst of all these we may fail to understand what’s going on. We are even tempted to question the presence of God. Psalm 8 reminds us that God is present and that God has everything in God’s hands. The Apostle Paul captures this truth for us in Romans 8:22-25. He establishes: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” The Apostle then grounds this in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Further, the Holy Spirit helps us through our struggles and

“intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (v.26). The realities in the world and church calls for renewal and transformation.

4. Five hundred years ago Reformers were concerned about the state of the church. The concept of renewal is not strange to Reformed churches. In fact, at the heart of the Reformation was the intent to reform, revive and renew the church. Basic for the understanding of ecumenism is that the Reformers did not intend to found a new church but sought reform the whole church. In their minds the church was not standing up to the realities of its time in confronting financial corruption, sexual immorality and political power.
5. Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others called for the “reawakening” of the church to address these issues. In so doing they did not hesitate to point out the inadequacies and corruption of the church which impacted on its life, work, witness and theology. These, for example, are reflected in Luther’s 95 *Thesis* and Calvin’s *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543). This renewal was to impact the structure, polity, theology, mission, worship and witness of the church. The attempt to renew and reform the church also seriously impacted the transformation of society as well.
6. And now 500 years later we sense an even greater need for renewal and transformation of both church and society. This evidently is what we have tried to capture in the theme we have chosen for this General Council: “*Living God, renew and transform us.*”
7. The theme reflects a prayer to the “living God” which speaks of God’s presence and power in the world. The resurrection power tells us that there is nothing in this world that God cannot overcome. The Gospel writer Mark tells us that God in Christ overcomes danger, demons, diseases, death (chapter 5). The cross speaks of the measure that God will go through to restore and save the world. It is all because of love! This theme is reflected as a prayer to God who lives and reigns in the world. It is a prayer that God will make the church and Christians to be what God wants and wills for us to be, and that God will use us to change the world so that it may reflect God’s reign and presence bringing justice, peace, love and abundance of life to all. But what does it mean to be renewed and transformed?
8. The word “renew” implies that we have lost something, and that we should go back to what we should be, to begin or take up again, to restore to a former state, to replenish, revive or re-establish, to make new. It is the first step to real transformation. In many senses the church has lost, neglected, forgotten and forsaken its calling. We are called to proclaim the good news of salvation and life in Jesus Christ but we have become side-tracked from our main purpose as church.
9. The word “transform” means to change completely from inside out. It has the same meaning as transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) or metamorphosis which

means to change into another form. The picture here is of a caterpillar which changes into something quite different when it becomes a butterfly. So how do we seek renewal and transformation? I will return to this later.

10. The “us” in the theme is a reference to both the church and the world. We recognize that the church is in much need of renewal and transformation in as much as the world with all its injustices, corruption, deceit and unrighteousness. We thus need to speak to ourselves first before we can tell the world what to do or not to do. In some senses the church is a microcosm of the world rather than being a bridgehead to an alternative world filled with justice, peace and fullness of life for all (John 10:10).
11. In this address I shall mainly focus on four areas: 1) the 500th Martin Luther Reformation Anniversary, 2) the life and witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) from Grand Rapids (2010) to Leipzig, 3) some visionary thoughts about the future of the WCRC, and 4) express thanks to all those who have contributed to the life and work of the WCRC in the past seven years.

The 2017 Reformation

12. 2017 is no doubt a big year for Protestant and Reformed churches as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther and his formulation of his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg. No doubt, Luther’s courage to challenge the church in his time paved the way for immense changes to the life, work and witness of the church. It was not Luther’s intention to break away from the Roman Catholic Church but to bring about renewal and transformation in the church. This attempt inevitably led to wide-scale impact on social, political and economic structures that challenged and transformed society as well.
13. There are numerous activities and events taking place all over the world to celebrate this event. Churches, universities, seminaries, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) the Lutheran World Federation and many others have organized various events to celebrate this Reformation anniversary. The WCRC is also participating in these celebrations. One of the questions we are asked is, why is the WCRC celebrating the 2017 Luther Reformation since this ordinarily should be an event for the Lutherans?
14. In fact, this is a question that has confused some people, both Reformed Christians and others. I shall now venture to offer some insights into this question as to why the WCRC has chosen to participate in the 2017 Luther Reformation anniversary and what we hope to bring to this significant celebration.

15. Firstly, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) joined in an historic celebration in 2010 to form what is now known as the WCRC. This new body consists of 230 member churches in 109 countries in the world with a membership of nearly 80 million Christians who are part of the Reformed, Congregational, Presbyterian, Waldensian and United and Uniting Churches. In this regard, on the ground, throughout the world, there are strong ties between Lutheran and Reformed Christians. This is most evident in United and Uniting churches. Thus, such deep rooting and connections makes the Reformation celebration an observed reality for many Christians in the world and a shared experience on the ground, especially in the life of united congregations.
16. Secondly, the Reformation is not centred on one person or event but on a number of contributions by various individuals such as Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Knox and others. The Lutheran Reformation was initially an academic movement initiated by Martin Luther, concerned with reforming the teaching of theology at the University of Wittenberg, particularly as Luther was concerned with the doctrine of justification. However, with time, Luther's program for academic reform changed into a program for reform of church and society. His ideas influenced religious, social and political reforming movements which opened the way to new religious and social thinking in Europe.
17. The origins of the Reformed church lie with developments within the Swiss Confederation. Whereas the Lutheran Reformation had its origins primarily in an academic context in Germany, the Reformed church owed its origins more to a series of attempts to reform the morals and worship of the church according to a more biblical pattern. The term "Calvinism" (John Calvin) is often used to refer to the religious ideas of the Reformed church. It is now generally discouraged that we should use this term because Reformed theology draws from a variety of sources other than Calvin himself (McGrath 2012:8). In fact, it is generally agreed that Calvin's ideas were modified subtly by his successors, and it has evolved into something new. Both Luther's and Calvin's ideas ultimately extended beyond their local domain and reached out to places in England, Netherlands, Scotland, France and, today, it is also beyond these countries, impacting on Latin America, the Global South and other parts of the world. For example, John Witte Jr. recently noted how Calvin's teachings on authority and liberty, duties and rights, and church and state had influenced many Protestant lands. He states that as a result of its adaptability, this "rendered early modern Calvinism one of the driving engines of Western constitutionalism." According to Witte, "a number of our bedrock Western understandings of civil and political rights, social and confessional pluralism,

federalism and social contract, and more owe a great deal to Calvinist theological and political reforms” (Witte:2007:2).

18. Thus the Reformation, as we understand it today, is very diverse, complex and broad, encompassing a vast volume of encounters and experiences. In this sense the Reformation includes several churches, countries and movements, and all of these experiences, including the Martin Luther Reformation, are part and parcel to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the Reformation. It is primarily for this reason that the WCRC joins in the 2017 Reformation celebrations.
19. Thirdly, in recent years a welcome degree of convergence has been worked out by the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans and the Methodists. In 1999, after many years of serious dialogue, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed by the Roman Catholics and Lutherans and ratified by the Methodists in 2006. By this, it is clearly indicated that what was once the flashpoint of the Reformation has settled into relative concord. The mutual anathemas of the 16th century, while still accepted as salutary warnings, have been laid aside as not applying to the present. This has been strongly discovered and expressed in the Reformed-Lutheran Dialogue. Several years of dialogue with the Lutherans has shown us that we have more in common theologically than we have otherwise believed.
20. In this light, the WCRC has also welcomed the invitation to join the ecumenical concord of the JDDJ. In making its own contribution to the JDDJ, the WCRC outlined its points of agreements with the Catholics and Lutherans and, most significantly, expressed its concern that the Joint Declaration remains silent about the relationship between justification and justice. This input has been welcomed by the Lutherans and Catholics. The WCRC has decided that their association with the JDDJ should take place at a special event during its General Council in June 2017. The idea is to make it a huge ecumenical event that includes not just the Lutherans, Catholics and Methodists but other denominations as well. We want to use this ecumenical service and gathering as a strong statement for Christian unity and witness.
21. John Calvin considered unity to be part of the nature of the church. His fourth book of the *Institutes* is a vivid expression of this conviction: “*On the True Church with whom we are to cultivate Unity because She is the Mother of all faithful*” (*Inst.4.1*). He made repeated efforts to avoid the final rupture with the Church of Rome. In particular, he worked untiringly for the unity of the various Reformation churches. In this respect, his assumption was that as long as agreement on the essentials of faith was assured, diversity among the local churches was admissible. The one church consists of several Christian communions that are one in the essentials of the faith and recognize one another on this basis. Reformed theologians persisted in hoping that one day the

divided churches would gather in a universal council and confess together the fundamental truths of the gospel.

22. In the course of the centuries, Reformed churches were at the origin of many initiatives toward unity—both internal and intra-confessional. The hardening of the Reformed tradition into Reformed orthodoxy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and resulting splits provoked counter-movements. Both in Pietism and the revival movements, the quest for unity was alive. In spite of numerous challenges Reformed theologians played an outstanding role in the beginning and shaping of the modern ecumenical movement (e.g. F.F. Ellinwood, William Paton, Wilfred Monod and Adolf Keller). The thought of some Reformed theologians had a decisive influence on the nascent ecumenical movement (e.g., Karl Barth, John Mackay, Lesslie Newbigin, Hendrikus Berkhof). It is often said that to be Reformed is to be ecumenical. This has, no doubt, been clearly visible in the history of Reformed churches worldwide. The WCRC takes very seriously the call to Christian unity and ecumenical partnerships.
23. In some senses we hope to use the 2017 Reformation celebrations to get closer to the vision of Christian unity. The WCRC stated clearly at its constitution in Grand Rapids, in 2010, that it is *called to communion and committed to justice*. We see the call to communion as not only strengthening the relationships within the Reformed family but also actively working for Christian unity and witness in the world.
24. In addition to our association with the JDDJ, during the WCRC General Council we will sign a “Wittenberg Witness” with the Lutheran World Federation in Wittenberg. The latter document, drawn from the Reformed and Lutheran dialogue, is intended to give *visible* expression of Christian unity and witness in the world. It’s taking the next step of the dialogues into a higher level. Perhaps this will serve as a symbolic commitment to the process to unity, especially in the presence of other denominations.
25. Wittenberg, we believe, is an important venue for this event because it symbolically represents the breakup of the unity of the Christian church in the 16th century. In the 500th anniversary of the Luther Reformation, it would be most powerful to turn the tide around and communicate a new message. Wittenberg can now be the symbol of renewal of the church and the hope that the division of the church can be healed. In keeping with its strong calling to communion, the WCRC aims to celebrate the 2017 Reformation by working towards Christian unity and deeper ecumenical engagement and partnerships. This is what the WCRC brings to the celebration.
26. Fourthly, the WCRC sees the 2017 Reformation anniversary as the ideal time for renewal and transformation. In a rapidly changing world it is important to ask fresh questions about the relevance and contributions of the Reformed

tradition and faith. The WCRC seeks to engage this as it seeks renewal in its mission, justice, theology and spirituality. I shall return to this discussion in the third section of this address where I will focus on the vision and future of the WCRC. For now, I trust that we are able to see and appreciate some reasons as to why the WCRC is also participating in the Martin Luther 500th Reformation Anniversary.

27. The 16th century Reformation is known as a turning point in history. It was aimed at getting the teachings of the church and the life of the people in line with the Word of God. It was an era of great change as it transformed both church and society. Its huge impact and contributions continue to live with us today. The WCRC celebrates the Reformation, including the Luther Reformation, with the hope and prayer for Christian unity, a renewed commitment to mission, justice, and ecumenical engagement. In light of the contextual realities in the world today and the shift of Christianity to the Global South, the WCRC is praying and working for renewal in Reformed theology and spirituality. We join the 2017 celebrations with the hope and joyful anticipation of God's Spirit continuing to transform both the church and the world.

From Grand Rapids to Leipzig: Organizational Matters

28. Indeed the journey from Grand Rapids to Leipzig has not been an easy one, yet filled with joys and anticipation of the emergence of something new and refreshing in the work, witness and life of the WCRC.
29. By 2011 we discovered that the WCRC was not a financially healthy organization. Whilst we were managing to sustain our programmes, the funding for our core budget (salaries and administration) was just not adequate to keep the WCRC afloat. It was only a matter of time before we were destined to hit the financial crunch. We had to think creatively and decisively as to how we were going to manage the financial crisis. We knew that cutting down on an already small office staff was not going to be the way out if we were to continue to maintain relevance and effectiveness in what we do as an organization.
30. After much deliberation, consultation and debate the Executive Committee of the WCRC decided to move from Geneva to Hannover, Germany. This move was necessary because we came to believe that it was far too expensive to remain in Geneva, and the exchange rate from US\$ and Euros to Swiss francs was not doing us any good. In fact, to say the truth, had we still been in Geneva the WCRC would have gone bankrupt. Thank God that the move to Hannover has put us in a safe and stable position, even though we still have challenges.
31. It was, of course, not an easy decision to leave Geneva. We had tried our level best to stay by conversing with other ecumenical partners, our member

churches and the Swiss Canton but, in as much as they were all willing to assist us; it simply was not going to be possible to remain in Geneva, from a financial point of view. We are grateful to our Member Churches there who really tried their best in this regard.

32. We realized that there was much to lose in making such a move. In my 2013 report to the Executive Committee I spelt out this loss: “It is true that we have much to lose when we move out of Geneva. Geneva is the heart of Reformation history and experience as we consider the work and contributions of Reformers such as John Calvin, etc. Another great sense of loss is the presence and contacts we have with other ecumenical partners in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. This is probably unmatched in any other part of the world since contacts with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Lutheran Federation (LWF) and the many others put us in touch and in tune with world issues, ecumenical engagement together, helps us to back up our meetings with the WCC at times to save travel costs, and gives us access to numerous ecumenical experts and experiences which we ordinarily would not be able to encounter elsewhere. However, the decision to move to Hannover is now made and as we make this move, to be completed by the end of 2013, we need to ask significant questions about our future ecumenical life, partnerships, priorities and strategies. What ecumenical contours or focus will the move to Hannover bring to the WCRC?” I cite this to express the pain and dilemma of having to make that decision to move. It was not easy!
33. The Executive Committee, through the officers, set out a process which involved sending professional evaluators to at least 4 different parts of the world to assess the issue of location, and called for Member Churches to invite and dream-up the possibilities of the WCRC moving to their country or location. The response was not very good in the latter. Some Member Churches responded but most among them were not able to provide any financial assistance or support to the WCRC. The option presented by the Reformed Alliance, in Hannover, was then pursued and the rest is history. I make this point to illustrate the time, effort and care that was taken in attempting to locate a new venue for the WCRC office.
34. We are very grateful to the Reformed Alliance and the Uniting and United Churches in Germany who received us very warmly and went out of their way to make our move there a very smooth transition. We are also thankful for the added resources that they had brought into sustaining the work of the WCRC. I know that there have been some concerns about the possibility of a “German take over” of the WCRC. However, I can unreservedly assure you that this is not the case. Whilst we are expected to fit into the German context and abide by their rules and regulations in the running of an organization, we have by all means managed to secure our right of practice as an International organiza-

tion. I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to our General Treasurer, Dr. Johann Weusmann, for his hard and diligent work in sorting out all the legalities and even managing to get us something of a diplomatic status in Hannover.

35. We are now well settled in Hannover and even though there is a sense of ecumenical isolation from what we had before, we have managed to give greater value and effort in developing our ecumenical partnerships and work. In fact we have developed even stronger ties in most places. We are grateful for the contact and support we get from the EKD (the Evangelical Church in Germany) and other organizations based in Germany.

Finance

36. We thank God that our financial situation is now fairly stable. We express our sincere thanks and appreciation to our General Treasurer, and others, for the incredible work done to raise funds and sustain the budget. We are incredibly blessed with well-structured mechanisms in place to manage our finances, draw up budgets, ensure updated financial reports and undertake proper financial audits. We are grateful to the EKD High Audit Office for their good work and the Finance Committee for their regular meetings and involvement.
37. I must admit, however, that there are concerns about the future prospects of financial growth. We definitely need more financing of our core budget. Whilst we are thankful for the support that we have received from our Member Churches and others in Germany, we must accept that it is not viable to be so reliant on the latter source. We were fortunate to raise a substantial amount of funding from Germany to hold this General Council but I sincerely wonder whether it is something we will be able to do again in the future. I have great concerns about this, our financial ability to hold future General Councils. What we receive from our member churches is not adequate to sustain the work of the WCRC.
38. For a long time we have been blessed that, though our funds for our core budget were diminishing, the budgets for our programmes were well sustained. We are absolutely grateful to our ecumenical partners who have wonderfully supported our work, mainly our Theology and Justice Work. However, some of these organizations are also going through financially challenging times. We are thankful that they have not altogether stopped their financial contributions but have, in some cases, reduced their support. We are pleased to report at this point that many of our ecumenical partners are seeking to be more connected with our programmes rather than run their own. They are showing

high appreciation for what we are doing and increasingly desiring to be a part of the work we are engaging.

39. I wish to express our sincere thanks to the Council for World Mission (CWM) who gave us a million pounds to set aside as an endowment to help ensure the financial sustainability of the WCRC. Their generous contribution and support for the WCRC speak volumes about their commitment and endeavour to see us succeed. Thank you so much!
40. We have been working on a strategic fundraising plan. The Executive Committee requested the officers to appoint a team of professional people to assist us with a development fund and financial sustainability plan. This is still in progress as gathering such a group is challenging in our global context.
41. It is absolutely essential and critical that the WCRC gives time, energy and effort to embark on plans for financial sustainability if we are to secure our future. It is clearly evident that we need additional sources of income, other than that of our member churches, if we are to successfully go about our calling and work. It is imperative that this be followed up by the next Executive Committee as well.

Strategic Plan

42. In 2010, immediately after the Uniting General Council, a group of people met at my request to draw up a strategic plan for the WCRC. Although the General Council gave a very clear mandate of being *called to communion and committed to justice*, it was necessary to set a clear direction and programme plan for the organization.
43. The Strategic Planning Team drew up a really fantastic plan to guide the work of the then newly formed WCRC. They drafted a new Vision and Mission Statement together with values that should undergird the work, life and witness of the organization. Additionally, in line with the Vision and Mission Statement they proposed five key directions for the WCRC: *mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement*. Since I have spoken about these quite extensively in my reports to the Executive Committee over the past years I would not elaborate on these any further. They can be accessed on the WCRC website. In any case the booklet *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* covers this quite adequately and so will the general secretary's report.
44. I am pleased to report that the Executive Committee had fully endorsed the Vision and Mission Statement and the five key directions in 2011, which then became the guiding post for our continued work. Our programme activities and work agenda were driven by these directives.

45. Unfortunately, from 2011 to 2013 we were quite occupied with internal issues related to finance, relocation, the move to Hannover and the appointment of new staff, including a new general secretary. Whilst we may have succeeded in continuing our work in those trying times, it can be said that our work of delivery on our vision, mission and strategic direction took a little bit of a distraction and dive.
46. However, this was soon rectified in our revised strategic plan in which we consciously engaged specific actions in each of the key directions (the general secretary will report on these). I am pleased to report that we have managed to successfully implement those and it has created a new energy and set the WCRC on a new wave of acceptance, recognition and call for assistance by our member churches and partner organizations. We are most thankful to God for this wonderful turn-around and the high appreciation, impact and value the WCRC seems to be having, especially as we address global issues. We come to this General Council knowing that the WCRC is in a very sound, stable and productive place as it continues to engage God's mission in the world.

Staff Matters

47. We are really grateful to the staff in the WCRC global office for their work in their respective fields and portfolios. Most of the staff from Geneva did not go with us to Hannover, and understandably so, since it had personal implications. We are thankful for the work done by the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, in his role then as general secretary, in overseeing the move to Hannover and setting up the office in the new location. We are most grateful to the staff in our Geneva office who decided not to relocate to Germany. Their years of valuable and faithful work would always be appreciated and valued. A special thanks to Kristine Greenway who served as Executive Secretary for Communications.
48. I wish to express a sincere word of gratitude to Dr. Nyomi for his 14 years of service to WARC and the WCRC. Indeed, his years of faithful service has stood us in good stead and helped us to make huge achievements. We wish him, his dear wife and family God's continued blessings and strength in their ministry in Ghana.
49. We are thankful for the coming on board of the new general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson. His energy, ecumenical vision, contacts and ability to drive the strategic vision of the WCRC have tremendously enabled us to sustain and lift the profile of the WCRC. This is evident in the many requests we get for collaboration and solidarity accompaniment with member churches and partner organizations.

50. I wish to recognize with thanks and appreciation the work of the Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser, as Executive Secretary of Theology, Communion and Mission, over many years. Douwe moved with the WCRC to Hannover. Unfortunately, due to major knee surgery that would effectively see him out of work for at least nine months, Douwe opted for early retirement at the end of July 2017, and this has allowed the position to become vacant. We have engaged the services of others to assist us with his responsibilities, especially as we were preparing for the 2017 General Council.
51. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin for her work as Executive Secretary of Justice and Partnership. Dora came in at a difficult time in the thick of our financial crisis and relocation to Hannover. In spite of our challenges she has done her level best to continue the work within her given position. We appreciate her presence, personality and work done over the years. Dora's term in this position comes to an end in December 2017. We wish her well in her future ministry.
52. Phil Tanis, Executive Secretary for Communications, has done much to improve the communications portfolio. We are now managing to translate much of our material into at least eight different languages. We have tremendously improved in the use of our website and social media. We express our thanks to Phil for his continued work in this area and look forward to further new developments to improve in our communication abilities and potential.
53. The move to Hannover has resulted, as expected, with virtually a new complement of staff. We are thankful for their service in their respective responsibilities and trust that they would continue to enjoy their work with the WCRC. We did experience some challenges in the time of transition but these have been attended to with care and satisfaction.
54. The vacant positions of Executive Secretary for Theology and Executive Secretary for Justice have created with Douwe's retirement and Dora's term coming to an end, a gap in the office. The officers, in consultation with the Executive Committee, decided to proceed with attempting to fill the said positions in order to allow for effective continuation of the WCRC work. The positions have been reworked and structures in the office have been redesigned to meet our needs. At the time of the writing of this address the process of appointing the new executive secretaries is almost completed. Hopefully, we may be able to report on this to the General Council.

President's Work

55. It was a joy and pleasure to visit member churches, general assemblies and special events and give addresses and academic papers in different places

throughout the past years. It was good to visit with the WCRC regions and get acquainted with their struggles and joys, and to be able to chart the way forward in a number of troubled areas. It was encouraging to know that many people still look to the WCRC for leadership, support and guidance on a number of issues. We have been called upon to help in a number of areas, especially with significant matters that are bringing huge challenges to our member churches, e.g. human sexuality, leadership struggles, church conflicts, peace initiatives, etc. We are, indeed, glad that we are able to assist and journey with our fellow members in some ways and, hopefully, helping to make a difference.

56. The challenges in relocation, financial constraints, dealing with staff matters, and all other issues within the WCRC within the past seven years has required much of my time and energy. It has certainly been taxing, especially the last few years, but it has been a tremendous joy to be involved in the work of the WCRC. It is now an even greater joy to know that in spite of all our challenges we have a very strong and ready WCRC to move into the next phase of our work.
57. Much of my work in the past years, together with the General Secretaries, has also related to journeying with churches in conflict situations. I am glad that most of these have turned out really well and member churches have been able to move forward in unity and strength.
58. The past two years was also occupied with the preparations for the 2017 General Council. It has been an absolute joy to work with the most incredibly gifted, creative and hardworking people. They have given so much of their time and devotion in working with every detail to make this a successful meeting. Many people have assisted us with a variety of important things. I express my thanks to all of them and especially to the General Council Planning Committee, General Secretary Chris Ferguson and General Council Coordinator Hanns Lessing for their hard and diligent work.

Member Churches

59. Member churches are crucial to the life and work of the WCRC. The organization counts on the support and involvement of member churches. We are here to serve you and to assist you in tackling issues that you are not able to engage because of various limitations. In the same breath our task is to help mobilize awareness and involvement of member churches on global issues. This calls for solidarity, advocacy and unity as we address vital issues in the world.
60. Member churches have to assume their role and responsibilities within the WCRC family. We need to understand that membership is not just a theoretic-

cal exercise to say that we belong to the organization. Whilst this is necessary in the first instance, what is needed is an active participation and involvement in the work of the WCRC. It is effectively the members who are the people who carry the name, ethos, beliefs and practices of the organization. In essence the WCRC lives through its members who give it life, form and movement in the 109 countries in the world where it is found. You keep the organization alive in the interim period of the seven years when the General Council meets.

61. Member churches have to equally bear responsibility to ensure the financial sustainability of the WCRC. We do this most responsibly when we pay our membership fees as a first and obvious sign of commitment and fellowship. It is thus concerning that there are many member churches that have simply ignored the numerous attempts to engage them in fulfilling this responsibility. A decision was taken by the Executive Committee to withdraw the privileges of membership to member churches who have not paid their membership fees since the inception of the WCRC. However, this was always exercised with grace and caution.
62. We are aware that there are member churches that find it extremely challenging to pay the basic amounts requested in membership fees. We, of course, need to be mindful of this as we relate to justice issues and the genuine inability of some of them to pay. We also need to realize that if we perceive contributions to the life and work of the WCRC only in economic and material terms then we have succumbed to a very narrow perspective of what the Communion is all about. We are enriched by the very presence of others different from us and varied in what they have to offer in and through their very own life experiences, culture, gifts and presence. We learn from their experiences and encounter in life what it means to be part of the same body of Jesus Christ. Ecumenism is not just about economics as we address the concerns about the poor but it is also about *all* the gifts found in the house of God to help make a difference in the world as we together proclaim the fullness of life in the Risen Lord.
63. I cannot stress enough that member churches should participate most actively in the life and work of the WCRC at regional level, in programmatic activities, financial contributions and personal involvement. A successful building of this would ensure the relevance and continuity of the WCRC into the future. I therefore call on members churches that tend to retreat into the woods after the General Council to continue their commitment and involvement with the WCRC family at all levels but especially at the regions.

WCRC Vision and Future

64. Over the past seven years, together with the officers and the Executive Committee, I have attempted to provide a visionary leadership and outlook for the WCRC. As my term draws to a close, I consider it appropriate to share with you some of those thoughts, simply because they are still relevant and applicable. It is an indication of what we have been striving to do and, perhaps, it might be helpful to the future leadership of the WCRC and a wider audience at the General Council. Hence what I propose to do in this section is to draw together, and largely repeat, some of the things I have been saying over the past years.
65. Five hundred years ago the Reformation was a call for the renewal and reform of the church which certainly impacted on society. Now, five hundred years later, the call for renewal and transformation has become even greater as we deal with the complex challenges of a suffering world and a struggling and divided Church.
66. It is in this context that we pray: “Living God, renew and transform us”. So where does the WCRC need renewal and transformation? I shall now proceed to share some thoughts about this as I point out our continued direction into the future. I will offer a summary at the end of each point to capture what has been said and, more significantly, offer it as themes to be considered for our future programme activities.

Renewal of our Commitment to Unity and Justice

67. The focus of the WCRC is on building communion and justice. This is, indeed, a necessary combination because we cannot build communion without justice and we cannot have justice without working for unity at the same time. Although the WCRC has been saying this all along yet it seems to place these in different camps of emphasis and responsibility. There are some who care more for unity and others more for justice. However, we need to accept both dimensions with equal care and responsibility. This is why I have intentionally placed them together in this section rather than talk about them as separate entities.
68. It is heartening to note that in a special WCRC consultation on Communion participants expressed the depth and connectedness of communion and its link with justice. The following statement out of that consultation expresses this well: “Participants shared the conviction that communion is a gift from God. It is the gift of *koinonia* that the life of Jesus exemplified. Through this *koinonia* or *communio* we participate in the body of Christ especially through

baptism and the Lord's Supper. This participatory aspect is very essential. We are invited to participate into something that is there already as a gift. It is not us building up something that we then open for ourselves and for others. Communion is first of all experienced in the congregation where we worship. It is also experienced in a wider context when churches of the same confession or crossing the confessional borders come together sharing the full participation into the body of Christ. In that sense, WCRC seeks to be the body in which the gift of communion is lived out in a manner that provides a forum for the member churches to participate in the body of Christ in full communion. This is expressed by the conviction that WCRC is "called to communion."

69. The participants at the consultation were also convinced that the gift of communion leads to a deep commitment to justice. The commitment to justice is the way to live out the communion: "The call for justice requires our churches to listen deeply to those who suffer and to act in solidarity with them, even when it is costly to us. In responding to this call, we experience God's gift of communion to us."
70. It is interesting that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are recognized as the expression of our "gift" of unity in the consultation statement. However, these sacraments have become the source of our disunity rather than what visibly signifies our unity as Christians in the body of Christ. The WCC General Secretary Dr. Olav Tveit, describes the challenges around the Eucharist as "one of the theological and pastoral battlefields of the Reformation" (2015: 92)). They are what Faith and Order identifies as "the most difficult issues facing the churches in overcoming any remaining obstacles to their living out the Lord's gift of communion: our understanding of the nature of the Church itself" (Ibid; 94).
71. The above paragraph refers mainly to the different confessions or church traditions. However, worse still is the fact that within the Reformed family we have also allowed theological, cultural and contextual issues to divide us at the Lord's Table. For example, I have seen people refuse to take Holy Communion when administered by a woman priest. The unity that Christ calls us into requires that we deal with all dividing lines and barriers so that we reflect the glory of God in unity and justice.
72. Getting back to the separation of communion and justice, I am pleased to report that we have rectified this in our organizational and management structures of the WCRC as well by linking communion and justice, careful thought and changes have been made in the job descriptions of the Executive Secretaries and structure of the Global Office to address this matter.
73. The Belhar Confession, as well, clearly affirms the call to be one church and to stand firmly against any injustice that denies the call to be one human family. It makes three key affirmations about unity. First, it states that unity is "both

a gift and an obligation.” It is God’s gift and intention of uniting all humanity and the earth. However, it is also an obligation because God expects us to work towards the same. Second, unity must become visible. This is a clear call and expression of Belhar. Third, unity must be active. Christians must be actively working for unity among themselves which should also lead to serve the cause of unity in the world.

74. Belhar also linked unity with reconciliation and restorative justice. It indicated clearly and emphatically that God is “the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people.” It went further to state that “God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” In this breath it called on the church to stand with the poor and to work against injustice. It established in a solid way that the church is called to be both, a unity-seeking church and a justice-seeking church, as it seeks to transform the world in the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.
75. The WCRC is called to stand with the poor. This is an essential basis for our renewal and transformation, as also taught by the reformers. Their work in *justice* extended into formulating new social policies to address the care and concern of the poor, resulting in major economic and social change. For example, Luther made provision in Wittenberg for the city council to provide low-interest loans for workers, subsidies for education and training for the children of the poor, taxes to support the poor – all designed to prevent as well as alleviate poverty (Pillay 2002). Holding to the two “kingdoms” theory, one *spiritual* and the other *civil*, Luther believed that the task of social change was essentially for the secular ruler. However, he maintained that Christians cannot live exclusively in either the spiritual or civil kingdom.
76. Calvin, emphasizing the sovereignty of God, took the believer’s responsibility in the world more seriously than Luther. W. F. Graham observes that: “For Calvin the world was to be taken seriously, and for him the real world involved shoemakers, printers, and clockmakers, as well as farmers, scholars, Knights, and clergymen. Calvin’s world-affirming theology is quite apparent” (Graham 1971:91). Thus Calvin as a theologian and pastor became involved in everyday matters as diverse as the high cost of dying, hospitals, sumptuary laws and the regulation of business and industry and the question of wages in Geneva. He considered no area as too secular to be of legitimate Christian concern.
77. The Reformers generally advocated an involvement with the world and attempted to transform society as they took up the challenges and concerns of the poor. Today we live in a world in which the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. We are experiencing continued oppression, poverty, human trafficking, racism, caste and ethnic divisions, xenophobia, migration of people, refugee challenges, religious violence and climate change. There is a

need to commit to justice. The WCRC sees the 2017 Reformation as a renewed commitment to justice and peace in the world. In 2004 the then-WARC formulated the Accra Confession in which it called for economic justice, gender justice and ecological justice. It was also further affirmed by the Uniting General Council in 2010. The WCRC brings this afresh to the 2017 Reformation celebration with a renewed call and commitment to justice in the world.

78. The WCRC has done well with its vision for Christian unity as can be seen in our dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation, Pentecostals, etc. Heeding to the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar Confession we are seeking visible unity of Christian witness in the world. A suffering and struggling world is in dire need for Christians to stand together to bring about renewal and transformation. We are better and stronger together in Jesus Christ!
79. Our efforts, as mentioned earlier, of the Wittenberg Witness and the JDDJ are fruitful endeavours to continue the struggle for unity and justice. We need to continue to cooperate, collaborate and work with other Christian communions, ecumenical organizations and churches. We cannot rest content, if we are to take the prayer of Jesus seriously in John 17: “Father that they may be *one*.” The call for Christian unity is both a gift from God and the prayer of Jesus. We need to always keep this in mind as the goal for ecumenism and the creating of community. And we must keep at it faithfully bearing in mind Calvin’s words: “I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it.”
80. However, as we seek unity and justice with other churches and of the world in building human community, we also need to be mindful that it begins at home. There are numerous challenges that we face within the WCRC family that warrants introspection, renewal and transformation.
81. Embracing diversity and gifts within our Communion requires that we build our fellowship mindful of inequalities, exclusions and economic power. Our relationship must be centred in Christ who taught us the way of humility, love and care. This is what Paul calls for in the sharing of resources as part of creating *koinonia*: “*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*” (Philippians 2:4). He then goes on to plead: “*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*”
82. Our challenge is to build our fellowship as we address inequalities, embrace diversity and share resources. Our giving to another is not to be a burden but a gift: the gift of blessing, caring and joyfully offering the gifts of God given to us to others.

83. We need to consider seriously how to encourage this within the WCRC family. We should ensure that all our programmes, workshops and activities consciously embrace the variety of gifts, contexts, diversity and differences we have within the Communion. We need to provide space for people to share, learn and discover new things from one another. These are important initiatives for our own transformation and renewal.
84. Our unity is at risk because of the current climate of issues that tend to separate us. Internal division remains a characteristic of the Reformed family. While in some countries reunion of divided Reformed churches was successfully achieved (e.g. United States, Holland), the movement of dividing continues in other countries (e.g. Korea and parts of Africa). Reformed churches easily succumb to divisions. The history of the Reformed churches since the Reformation is a history of multiple divisions, and unfortunately the trend continues. Reformed churches have a tendency to split. In almost all countries in the world there is more than one Reformed church. Whilst this may be in some places the result of church planting by different missionary efforts, these are usually brought about by divergences over doctrinal or ethical issues or over aspects of church government or political options. In recent times the issues of the ordination of women and human sexuality has led to further divisions and strife. In such a context we need to hear afresh the need for Reformed churches to be driven by the agenda of unity and justice. Whilst diversity may be one of the strengths which keep the Reformed family together, it is becoming increasingly apparent that it may also be its weakness.
85. Theological diversity and ethical issues continue to divide us as Reformed Christians. It is sad to see these things destabilizing, fragmenting and disintegrating churches today. We are witnessing splits in denominations, severance of long-standing denominational partnerships, and a “zero-tolerance” approach justifying separation and disunity. These have already found their way into the WCRC and our tendency is to shy away from these realities without choosing to get too involved in specific matters and situations. This, of course, is the ‘safe’ option but one wonders for how long it would be possible to maintain this stance.
86. In my view the WCRC should be a platform and a facility to help embrace diversity and differences. However, it would be required in time to do more than this – or rather to do it with more effort, energy and care. In my opinion the WCRC would need to play a role in the following ways: 1) *guiding* scriptural and theological interpretations, 2) creating a *safe space* for honest engagement, 3) helping to *sustain* church or denominational partnerships and relationships, and 4) *shaping* a new direction in addressing diversity and differences.

87. I am pleased to report that we have already started to work on the subject of human sexuality which has become one of the most divisive issues. A consultation with representatives from different perspectives would take place sometime after the General Council to engage dialogue on the issues of human sexuality and the challenges it poses to the church. The intention is not to take a position on the matter but to strongly assert that unity and justice should take prominence in such debates. How can we preserve the unity and witness of the church in the midst of differences and divergent expressions of views?
88. I am also pleased to report that this General Council would be taking seriously the challenges we face within the WCRC about the recognition and acceptance of women in the leadership of the church. In fact, this was already said by decision of the 2010 Uniting General Council which called for the recognition of women in ministry to be “binding” on the WCRC. The task group commissioned to work on this by our executive secretary for justice and partnership found it necessary to call for a “Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women” as a serious measure in moving forward on this matter. This declaration will be presented to the General Council. I know that this may not go down well with some of our member churches that still do not ordain women in ministry. However, it is a road we must travel if we are to remain true to what we believe as a Communion.
89. *To summarize this section, the WCRC focus on communion and justice warrants new conversations as we reflect on what separates, threatens and challenges the unity of churches today. As we address the issue of unity, it should also be coupled with the commitment to justice. This necessary combination is a valuable basis and source for our continued renewal and transformation.*

Renewal of Reformed Theology and Spirituality

90. Central to the 16th century Protestant Reformation is allegiance to the authority of the Bible as God’s word; continuing recognition of that authority is basic to our identity in Christ as guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In Reformed theology, we affirm our focus on the sovereignty of God, covenantal theology, the priesthood of all believers, *solus Christus*, *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gloria*, *sola gratia*, etc. Today we are realizing that these “principles” of the Reformation have to be subject to scrutiny and possible reinterpretation. However, this should not be strange to Reformed teachings which stress *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*—the Reformed church is always reforming. We need to submit our own traditions and ambitions to constant

reformation by the Spirit as we live as followers of Jesus Christ in ever changing cultures.

91. Let me illustrate what I am saying by referring to the principle of *sola Scriptura*. At the heart of the Reformation was the quest to return to the Bible. The Reformation saw a new importance being attached to Scripture—or, perhaps, an ancient view of the importance of Scripture being recovered. The idea of *sola Scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” became one of the great slogans of the Reformers as they sought to bring the practices and beliefs of the church back into line with those of the golden age of Christianity. According to McGrath (2012: 91), if the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the material principle of the Reformation, the principle of *sola Scriptura* was its formal principle.
92. Mainstream Reformers had no difficulty with the notion of a “traditional interpretation” of the Bible. In fact they advocated that they were not attempting to start a new church but were seeking to reform and renew Christianity, which implied affirming continuity with the great historic tradition of Christian faith, stretching back through the patristic era to the apostles themselves. For example, Calvin asserted that the institutions and regulations of both church and state were required to be grounded in Scripture. Zwingli stated that “the foundation of our religion is the written word, the Scriptures of God.” Heinrich Bullinger stated that the authority of Scripture was absolute and autonomous: “Because it is the Word of God, the holy biblical Scripture has adequate standing and credibility in itself and of itself” (McGrath 2012:97). Such views indicate the consistently high view of Scripture adopted by the Reformers. It represents a major point of continuity with medieval theology.
93. The difference between the Reformers and medieval theology at this point concerns how Scripture is *defined* and *interpreted*, rather than the *status* that it is given. It is this interpretation of Scripture in a changing world that becomes a crucial element for renewal and transformation. It is a stark reminder that the Reformation can not only be discussed in terms of its ecclesial meaning but also in its relation to culture as a whole. The issue of context and biblical interpretation becomes a serious matter of importance.
94. The Bible is a central document of western civilization, not only as the source of Christian ideas but also as an influence upon education and culture. Today this is being seriously challenged as we question the “hermeneutical lens” we tend to use in interpreting Scripture. Further, the critical question is “Who is interpreting Scripture and for whom?” Gerald West (2009), speaking into the South African context, makes the point that the Bible has always been at the centre of the liberation struggle even though it has been categorized as a tool of oppression. For example, it was used as the tool to build an apartheid South

Africa, but equally it was used as the key text of the struggling masses in South Africa for liberation and justice.

95. The above point establishes the need for Reformed theology to seek renewal and transformation in the area of further understanding *sola Scriptura*; the focus is not only on *what* the interpretation is but, more significantly, on *“who”* is interpreting. The Reformed faith has the obligation of protecting the text from being co-opted by the powerful and the elite and, thereby, giving vent and expression to the “voice” of the poor, marginalized and oppressed masses. How do the latter groups inform biblical interpretation? How can this become a source for renewal and transformation? In the context of the Global South critical biblical interpretation and application of Scripture has become the norm. Whilst Reformed theology and tradition has taught us to do this, contextual realities aligned to the quest for justice and peace has taken it even further.
96. Whilst Reformed theology and tradition may have the same substance of faith and belief, as expressed above, it does not mean that it has the exact same impact in different contexts. Hence what is needed as a sign of renewal and transformation is a contextual reading and adaption of Reformed teaching and beliefs. For example, in Africa we need to ask what value and significance the Reformed faith can have in the context of poverty, religious violence, civil factions, political instability and dictatorship. In the western world it may be necessary to dialogue the Reformed faith in the context of capitalism, empire, refugees, Brexit, etc.
97. For example, the Kairos Document has helped us to see how (Reformed) theology can be used and misused in the South African context. It identified three types of theology: state theology (which justified apartheid), church theology (the liberal voice that remained essentially silent) and prophetic theology (which denounced apartheid calling it a heresy). In light of the experiences in the world today the WCRC is called upon to exercise a prophetic voice which it did in opposing apartheid in South Africa.
98. As expressed above, the WCRC senses the need for *theological renewal* and transformation. Thus we see the 2017 Reformation anniversary as the space for what some have described as the “Second Reformation,” especially acknowledging that the centre of Christianity has shifted to the Global South. Huibert van Beek points out that the shift is not only geographical, but also confessional with the rapid growth of modern Pentecostalism (2009: vii).
99. John W. de Gruchy in his book, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, states that Reformed Theology “is best understood as a liberating theology that is catholic in its substance, evangelical in principle, and socially engaged and prophetic in its witness” (1991: Xii). He points out that while Reformed tradition may be liberating in intent, it has

also been guilty of legitimating oppression in practice. He thus establishes that one way of doing Reformed theology is to enter into dialogue with the various forms of liberation theology at work in the contemporary church. Whilst this has been now done to some extent, in my opinion, we need to do more.

100. It is commendable that the WCRC is periodically bringing young Reformed theologians together in the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) where they are grappling with our current realities and new expressions of theological engagement. These critical and relevant reflections must be encouraged if we are to encourage renewal and transformation in theological thinking. Young theologians need to reflect on new contextual and global theologies and what these have to say to our understanding of Reformed theology today.
101. Essential to the Reformation is the doctrine of justification by faith alone: *sola fide*. The theme of “redemption through Christ” is central throughout the New Testament, Christian worship and Christian theology. The term “soteriology” is used in Christian theology to communicate the images which describe the redemption achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ. McGrath (2012) points out that there are five broad components to this network of ideas: images of victory, images of a changed legal status, images of changed personal relationships, images of liberation and images of restoration to wholeness. All of these images, no doubt, describe renewal and transformation.
102. It is not my intention here to get stuck in the theological debates of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is interesting to note that though there are differences in Luther’s and Calvin’s thought about this our joint Lutheran-Reformed dialogue have found that they are not significantly different; in essence they attempt to say the same thing.
103. My point of entry into this discussion for here is to mention that this doctrine provides for us a solid theological undergirding for renewal and transformation. The redemption of Christ through the cross and resurrection provides the basis for renewal and transformation. It is through this act that God in Christ makes all things new. Luther’s focus on the theology of the cross makes this point abundantly clear. How can the cross and the resurrection and faith in Jesus Christ become the basis for renewal and transformation?
104. The new theological emphasis on individual faith contributed to the growing influence of the new individualistic philosophy. The basic tenet of Protestantism was the doctrine that human beings were justified by faith rather than by works. Each person had to search his or her own heart to discover if acts stemmed from a pure heart and faith in God.
105. Unfortunately, the new theological focus on individual faith was to strongly influence the economic views of the new middle-class artisans and small

- merchants. Such people felt quite genuinely and strongly that their economic practices, though they might conflict with the traditional law of the old church, were not offensive to God. On the contrary: they glorified God.
106. The new doctrines stressed the necessity of doing well at one's earthly calling as the best way to please God, and emphasized diligence and hard work. These doctrines subsequently led to the spiritualizing of economic processes and the belief that "God instituted the market and exchange" (Pillay 2002). This emphasis, however, sadly took the Christian focus away from the general concern for the community and the obligation to the poor. It gave acceptance to the liberal paradigm: poverty as backwardness, stressing that the poor should be enabled to reach their full potential.
 107. Although this view on poverty has been seriously debated and challenged over the years, we still need to assess how the Reformation relates to imperial capitalism and to the male means-end rationality in science, technology and individualistic calculating mentality (Duchrow 2015). How does this view of *sola fide* stand in need of renewal and reformation is a question we must continue to engage.
 108. John Calvin's theology took the believer's responsibility in the world more seriously than Luther. His view on the *sovereignty of God* gave rise to the idea of mission as "extending the reign of Christ" both by inward spiritual renewal of individuals and by transforming the face of the earth through filling it with "the knowledge of the Lord." This particular view led Calvin into bringing about social transformation in Geneva.
 109. It stressed the point of *covenantal theology* and laboured the fact that God covenants with all human beings and they are part of the human chain. Calvin employed the traditional organic metaphor for society (as found in Acts 2: 42ff), in which, as he wrote, no member has "power for itself nor applies it to its own private use, but each pours it out to the fellow members;" what chiefly matters is "the common advantage of the whole body" (Inst., 111, vii, 5). Occasionally he identified this community with the whole human race. "All people," he could maintain, "are bound together as a sacred chain ... [which] ...should be embraced in one feeling of love" (Commentary Acts 13:36; Inst., 11, viii, 55).
 110. Consequently, it is not surprising that Calvin showed a particular concern for the poor which resulted in his attempt to transform his society, especially in Geneva. He concerned himself with the issues of commerce and economic justice. His theology was not disembodied, divorced from the realities of life where labourers and employers are often at odds over economic matters. Calvin realized that because of the nature of humanity and the sinfulness of all of our institutions, our endeavours are to some extent motivated by self-interest, pride, and greed. Yet his is a "world-affirming theology" in the sense that he sought to apply the gospel to all of life. For

him, that meant seeking the guidance of scripture for the problems besetting humanity, particularly those besetting the citizens of Geneva.

111. Given the dynamics of a world in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and the numbers of people living in poverty and hunger continues to increase, it is important for Reformed theology to make a clear commitment of standing with the poor and oppressed in the world. We need to shift from a “window-dressing” theological approach to an in-depth involvement with the plight of the poor. We need to ask whether our theological positions are life-enhancing and life-affirming; do they follow the Bible in socio-historic precision, in essence, do they contribute to liberation and justice?
112. In addition, we need to reflect on the Reformation and its historical impact in view of the global threat to humanity and the Earth—both positively and negatively. We are living in difficult times as we experience climate change and witness the devastation of the earth. Reformed theology must awaken to a renewed sense of responding to our given realities and focus on the need of “caring for the earth.” The WCRC needs to engage more meaningful work in this area of environmental issues.
113. The Accra Confession (2004) is a significant attempt in focusing theology on “covenanting and caring for the earth.” It has outlined and prophetically engaged the issues of economic justice, gender justice and ecological justice. It has rightfully pointed us to these matters and prompted us to respond to the unjust realities of life. Now in this second decade of the Accra Confession we need to ask how this document can be a basis for renewal and transformation for ourselves as the WCRC and for the world at large. The refusal to do this is to not take seriously one of the significant tenets of Reformed theology: the Reformed church is continually reforming.
114. This also impacts on our understanding of *Reformed spirituality*. Spirituality is the pattern by which we shape our lives in response to our experiences of God as a very real presence in and around us (Rice 1991). To be spiritual is to take seriously our consciousness of God’s presence and to live in such a way that the presence of God is central in all that we do. Such spirituality turns to the world not away from it. It gives attention to the threats of life and embraces the need for justice.
115. Reformed spirituality is geared towards equipping life-giving transformative engagement in the world. It is a spirituality that is built in community and builds community. Thus, any piety that appears to be content with a personal relationship with Jesus, and which shuns or belittles the horizontal dimension of discipleship, is suspect. Any spirituality that advocates a withdrawal from what is going on in the world is contrary to Christ’s spirit.
116. This concept of spirituality aligns well with the African concept of *Ubuntu* which says that “I am because of you. I belong therefore I am.” This concept of

community is needed to help shape and define our Communion. What does it mean to be a family together as we address diversity and differences? How can member churches hold up the quest for unity in the midst of differing views and theological interpretations? Our quest for renewal and transformation would certainly have to address such relevant questions.

117. At the centre of Reformed theology is the message of *sola gratia*. It reminds us that grace alone is the source and sustenance of our salvation. God's provision of saving, sustaining and glorifying grace is the golden thread uniting all Christian scripture and enabling all Christian faithfulness. This means all works honouring God—including our personal sanctification, our love for neighbours and enemies, our zeal for world mission, our free offer of the Gospel, our warnings of judgement, our promises of eternity, our mercy toward the poor and oppressed, our stewardship of God's world, our battles against Satan, our prayer for God's blessing, and our work toward Christ's coming—all find proper motivation and enablement in love for Christ. Of course, this can be misused to use grace to excuse sin, but the principles of grace revealed in all Scripture are the fuel of personal holiness and spiritual revival for those led by the Spirit.
118. Thus, presenting the doctrines of grace in a warm and embracing way is not to obscure holy boldness but to encourage compassion and humility in the face of God's sovereign mercy to all he loves from every tribe, language, people and nation. As the kindness of God has led to repentance and renewal among us, we must be committed to a manner and ministry that reflects God's grace to others (cf. Romans 2:4; 1 Peter 3:15). We must be on guard that the grace message that God has brought to us (or our particular expression of it) does not become a jewel that we admire and adore for the joy it brings us rather than for the hope it offers the world.
119. The critical question is: How do we understand this concept of grace in the light of the new, emerging world experiences impinging on the role of women in society, issues of human sexuality, interreligious encounters and tensions, racism, xenophobia, tribalism, the refugee situation, etc. How do we express grace and hospitality to differing views, theological beliefs and human experiences? All of these impress upon us the need for renewal and transformation as we seek to build inclusive communities and foster better relationships with people of other faiths. These are realities that the WCRC would have to deal with, and it is these that would hopefully bring theological renewal and transformation.
120. *To summarize this quest for theological renewal and transformation, we need to note that for far too long we have engaged theological formation from western perspectives, with the shift of Christianity to the Global South we need to ask how we can embrace learning and discovering from new centres. How can the perspectives of the*

poor, marginalized, oppressed, etc., inform, shape and direct Reformed theological thinking today? We should ask: What role does confessional, contextual, ecumenical and community thinking have on theological understanding? How do the matters of justice and liberation shape theological formation? Is our theology life-affirming and biblically relevant given the contextual and global realities? Is our theology inclusive and embracing whilst remaining true to what we believe is the Gospel message of love? This calls for radical reformation! The WCRC needs to allow these kinds of questions to direct and shape its continued theological engagement for Reformed theological renewal, transformation and relevance.

Renewal of Church Life, Witness and Structure

121. D.J. Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission* suggests that mission remains an indispensable dimension of the Christian faith and that, at its most profound level, its purpose is to transform reality around it (Bosch 1999: xv). Mission, in this perspective, is that dimension of our faith that refuses to accept reality as it is and aims at changing it. “Transforming” is, therefore, an adjective that depicts an essential feature of what Christian mission is all about.
122. The church as a community does not exist for itself. It has received a commission; it is sent into the world to proclaim and praise God. It is sent to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of the realization of God’s purpose in Christ for the whole humanity and creation. The mission of the church is founded on the sending out of disciples by Christ at the conclusion of his ministry and the empowerment of the Christian community for mission at Pentecost by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
123. The church proclaims in the name of the crucified and risen Lord God’s saving grace and love for the whole world. In the midst of sin, brokenness, pain and suffering it proclaims to the world in word and deed that God’s salvation, hope, and reconciliation have come into our midst in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It does so in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Mission must mean something more than merely “saving souls”—it must also transform the environment in which people live.
124. The church thus becomes an agent of hope in a suffering and dark world. This is precisely how the Reformers saw the church. Both Luther and Calvin worked for the transformation of society. Our church structures are usually guided by Reformed doctrine, polity and ecclesiology which preserve our identity and tradition. This is a good thing! However, we should still ask key questions related to practice and relevance. Are we meeting the needs of our members and are our churches “free” enough to create space for others? There are at least two new tendencies today that should be taken into

consideration. The first is the fact that many denominations and churches today are becoming more *missional* focused. The idea is to relevantly engage God's mission in the world bringing about justice and peace. In fact they are now moving to what is referred to as mission-ecclesiology. There is no doubt that such a focus is going to revive and transform Reformed churches, leading to relevance and growth. Church leaders should consider thinking missionally—a basis for renewal and transformation. The WCRC should help our churches to do this.

125. The second trend today is to consider more intently the presence, power and movement of God's Holy Spirit both in the church and the world. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who brings us renewal and transformation. We need to rely more on the Spirit to change us, bring us to repentance and the discovery of the new life in Jesus Christ. Left on our own, we struggle to change ourselves, but God through the abiding and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit does this in us and through us. It is widely accepted that Pentecostalism is growing in many parts of the world (Huibert van Beek 2009: viii). The WCRC is in dialogue with Pentecostals; what can we learn from them in this regard? We should not be afraid to ask such a question. The WCRC should guide our churches in this regard from lessons that can be learnt from others in the interest of Kingdom building.
126. Some of our churches are inhibited by paternalistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, caste and language barriers. Whilst most of our churches are open to the acceptance of women in leadership, there are others who seriously resist this. The WCRC needs to continue to provide biblical and theological engagement on this matter. The 2010 General Council took a massive step in stating that the 2017 General Council should consist of an equal number of men and women. Of course, one of the best ways to address this is to increase the participation of women in the highest leadership level of member churches. This is really hard to do from where we sit as the WCRC because member churches have their own views, life and structures and, in short, we cannot tell them what to do. However, I note with gratitude the significant increase in women delegates to this General Council. Well done!
127. Further, as already mentioned, at this General Council we will consider a Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination. Our approval of this Declaration is another step towards openness, inclusivity and hospitality towards all God's people. It is also recognition that women are equally called to serve God both in the church and the world. However, we have a responsibility to journey with member churches who think differently on this subject.
128. The WCRC needs to put more energy and resources into the development and acceptance of Youth in the structures of the organization and within its member churches. The children and youth are very much part of the church today

and not relegated to the future alone. They are the ones who will help guide us to the future but it starts with involving them in the present. Church leaders should not feel threatened by the youth; instead they should receive young people as God's gift to bless and enrich the church. Many Reformed churches do not seem to attract and keep young people, often leading to declining membership and irrelevance. We need to find more creative ways of enabling and empowering young people in the local church and even within the structures of the WCRC. We are working on this but we need to do more. A vision to integrate and empower the youth is needed. This leads me to my next point.

129. We may need renewal and transformation in our worship. It is evident that most young people are looking for something more in the experience of worship. How does our liturgy meet their needs? For a large number of people the use of technology, art, drama, visuals and lively singing seem to be quite appealing. How do we cater for these in our worship services so that our members, particularly the youth, do not go church shopping? The WCRC can help member churches to be open to a variety of diverse experiences whilst remaining true to our Reformed identity and liturgy.
130. The "prosperity gospel" seems to become more attractive today, especially in Africa, and thousands of people seem to flock these churches. It is unfortunate that what most of these churches teach is biblically questionable. The WCRC needs to help our churches, especially in Africa, to understand and address these realities from a sound biblical point of view. We may need to engage or connect with researchers on this topic and help Christians to understand what is really being taught. How do we enable our churches to grow without gimmicks and sometimes biblically untenable practices such as calling congregants to eat grass, spray doom and drink petrol, as seen in some parts of Africa?
131. *In this section I have tried to outline some of the areas in which we should seek renewal and transformation in denominations and local churches. The WCRC should help and direct churches in the areas of mission, ecclesiology, women, youth and worship. All of these are essential if we are to experience renewal and transformation as Reformed churches in the world today.*

Institutional Renewal and Transformation

132. The WCRC is privileged to have a wide membership throughout the world. This is great and it works well in many places, especially where the regions are functioning well. However, we also have situations in which member churches do not participate adequately in the regions and only connect with the global structures, sometimes only when it gets closer to the next General Council.

We need to bring renewal and transformation into our structures so that we foster and encourage deep relationship-building at all levels, starting with the regional structures. This is the most obvious way to build true *koinonia*.

133. The regions also face challenges surrounded by theological, doctrinal, ethical, cultural, racial, economic and political divides. We can only be able to transcend these differences by working and spending time together as we seek to understand and apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our contextual realities, and through the power of the Holy Spirit be able to find each other in significant relational ways that enables us to see the face of God in the other. As we learn to respect and love one another as fellow human beings we are able to bring this from one region into the whole WCRC family.
134. We also need to facilitate and encourage regional connections. Regions can provide added encouragement and a sense of learning and sharing of best practices on various matters from one region to another. We need a strategic plan that enables regions to share expertise, resources, struggles, stories and successes with one another. This is vital and essential if we are intentional about building the WCRC family. Such a strategy should empower regions, cross regional boundaries, build bridges of solidarity and care within the WCRC family and beyond.
135. In February 2017 a Regional Empowerment Consultation was held in which each region was well represented. The focus was on understanding the status of regions, leadership of regional councils, role of the vice presidents, formation of regions and power relations, membership of regions in relation to membership of the WCRC, resources and challenges within the regions. This was a really good meeting and I sincerely hope that the decisions at this consultation would be implemented in due course.
136. As part of our institutional renewal and transformation, careful consideration must be given to decentralizing some of our programmes and projects. In this way we can allow for greater regional and member church participation on the ground. It is sensible to note that some of our programmes can be better placed and more effective in certain contexts rather than from the global office. For example, climate change and environmental issues can be in the Pacific, religious violence can be in the Middle East, etc. The task of the global office staff would be to oversee the programme/project and to broaden and extend it to the whole WCRC family. We cannot continue to expect our small staff in Hannover to do all this work; we need to develop a culture of shared responsibility and a participatory work ethos within the Communion.
137. As part of our institutional renewal and transformation, the General Council Planning Committee has proposed that we use the consensus/discernment model in making decisions in its full form and depth. This is not new to us. It has been partially used at the General Council in Accra in 2004 and at the 2010

Uniting General Council. The consensus/discernment model usually takes time but it is a process that allows virtually all the participants/delegates to contribute to the decision-making process. People who do not prefer to speak in public are empowered to speak in the small groups. The moderators/facilitators of these groups are trained to encourage free and “safe-space” participation of all members of the group and not just the vocal few. In this sense people go away feeling that they have been heard. This is what we would wish to achieve at the General Council. The model also enables us to create and build community catering for different experiences and views, whilst appreciating and respecting others and applying the fruits of the Spirit. Attempts would be made to accommodate language and embrace diversity.

138. Detailed presentations about the model would be made at the General Council. Let me capture this in a brief description. There are three main stages to this model: 1) *Listening*, 2) *Dialogue* and 3) *Decision*. In the first stage we merely listen to the presentation of the report and may have questions for clarity. The reports are then taken to a number of small groups meeting concurrently for dialogue and discussion on the proposals. The small group is allowed to amend the proposals or to even add new ones as long as they relate to the subject under discussion. These proposals are then passed on to a drafting committee that is tasked to take the various comments from the small groups into consideration and come up with a “consolidated” proposal/s. These are then brought to the Decision Session where further dialogue takes place and a decision is reached by consensus with the use of orange (yes) and blue (no) cards.
139. *Summary: our lives together in the Communion is a shared life in the Triune God. Just as God works in community so we should also learn to work towards building and strengthening the WCRC family. As proposed above, we can do this by relooking at how we work together in the regions, the global WCRC family and how we make decisions together at all levels. It is hoped that these would help to foster communion and justice, bringing renewal and transformation.*

Ecumenical Renewal and Commitment

140. In moving the WCRC Office to Hannover, we were concerned about our loss of ecumenical contact and connectedness. However, I am most grateful that Chris and the staff have worked hard at strengthening our ecumenical ties. This is something that we must continue to do with great effort.
141. We are quite aware that ecumenical organizations are constantly under pressure and are often faced with huge financial challenges. It is thus imperative that we find ways of working together, pooling our resources and

engaging effectively on key global issues. This is quite observable in the joint programmes of WCRC, WCC, CWM and LWF on the New Economic and International Financial Architecture (NEIFA) and the Oikotree projects. We need more of this kind of cooperation and collaboration.

142. As a sign of renewal and transformation, it seems that ecumenism is morphing into something new. The tendency is not to function as an institutionally set up organization but as a *network* of Christians working together for the transformation of society. The focus is not on organic unity but on creating a forum for Christians to come together to act on global issues. It is not a communion or *koinonia* but more of an alliance to demonstrate Christian unity and prophetic witness on particular issues. Invariably, there is no discussion on doctrinal issues; the focus is on common witness and service. For example, this can be seen in the work of the Global Christian Forum.
143. The WCRC is a communion (and confessional body), and rightly so, but we need to continue to network and work with other ecumenical organizations and NGOs in the endeavour to engage God's mission in the world. We need to take seriously our partnerships in the common interest of the "preferential option of the poor."
144. As we continue to embrace our future, and in the struggle for Christian unity, we need to have before us this picture of an emerging ecumenism which calls us to engage the ecumenical discourse with the following understanding:
 - a. We need to be less *institutional* and more *relational* as we network, develop partnerships and work with others in God's mission in the world. We need to give greater value to such partnerships as we seek to be where God is, among the poor, needy and oppressed.
 - b. We need to realize that the new ecumenical space is not just with ecumenical organizations and church leaders but with ordinary Christians who are daily seeking to understand their faith in a world of conflict, struggle and suffering. Thus it deems it necessary for us to equip and empower the ecumenical "agents" in the pews and "market place." We have to follow the work of the Spirit to identify new areas where Christians are finding one another, often by working together to meet the needs of the wider community. What would this mean for future ecumenical vision and work?
 - c. In many places, local ecumenical initiatives have contributed to a renewal of local congregational life and the unity of the church becomes a concrete reality. New impulses are also given to regional, national, and international ecumenism by such local efforts. Here the focus is not on ecclesiology but on *mission*. The truth is that national ecumenical movements are being overtaken by reality and they cannot find the drive to keep in flow with the Spirit. This calls for radical re-thinking on how we

do ecumenism today in the world. How can we in the WCRC use this to build our member churches, local churches and regions? It seems to me that we need stronger regional structures if we are to truly impact our member churches. But equally member churches need to fully participate in these structures if we are to make it work.

- d. We can no longer work as independent organizations and churches in ecumenical work; instead we must continue to foster interdependence, cooperation and collaboration. We have done well in our dialogues with the Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, but how do we take this further in the quest for unity in Christian witness, a testimony that the world needs to see. How do we strengthen our ties with the WCC, CWM, EKD, etc.?
 - e. We will need fresh expressions in thinking ecumenical theology as we consider the need for Christian unity and witness in the world. How do we address challenges which breed divisions, separation and distinctive identities? What do we say about confessions and creeds and its use in the quest for unity and mission? We will need to give considerations to these questions as we embrace a new vision for ecumenism and address the fragmentation of churches.
 - f. How do we address the deepest fault lines in ecumenical relationships as we address issues of ideologies especially in terms of race, ethnicity, subculture, class, gender and sexual orientation? These are issues that are dividing churches and creating disunity. Ecumenical organizations will have to address inclusion and exclusion. It will have to assess and reassess its endeavour of serving as an ecumenical platform and of providing a safe space for churches and Christians to share their differences on issues but are still able to remain a part of the Christian family.
 - g. As we consider issues of injustices, the need for security and peace in so many countries, religious factions and fundamentalism, civil wars, etc., we will need to give greater consideration to these in ecumenical dialogues and deliberations. The WCRC needs to put greater effort in interfaith dialogues and work with interfaith movements in the quest of “fullness of life” for all people and life on Earth. This is, unfortunately, an area in which we have been rather weak. I hope that our programmatic strategy for the ensuing years would give due consideration to this area.
145. *In summary, the WCRC needs to continue to strengthen its ecumenical vision and work. We need to give greater consideration to the changing dynamics of ecumenism today realizing the value and significant movements in ecumenism emerging in congregations and among ordinary Christians in the pews and marketplace, which seems to be overtaking denominational and ecumenical leaders. What can we learn*

from this bottom up approach and how can it stimulate and enhance our ecumenical work? These are some of the questions that should guide our ecumenical endeavours.

146. I hope what I have offered in this section would be helpful to continue to guide the future vision and programmatic work of the WCRC. We have travelled a long road but the destiny is not (perhaps never) reached.

Thanks and Appreciation

147. There are many people who keep the WCRC wheels turning at the different levels of the organizational structure from the officers, Executive Committee, global office, regions, member churches and committees. I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone concerned for all their work and effort in keeping the WCRC alive and at work in many places around the world.
148. I wish to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Chris Ferguson (general secretary), the executive secretaries: Douwe Visser, Dora Arce-Valentin, Phil Tanis; specialized assistance from Aruna Gnanadason in theology, Hanns Lessing as General Council coordinator and Gerhard Plenter, our volunteer finance coordinator; all the supporting staff: Claudia Duval, Emelda Ndipewah, and Viktoria Koczian (all of whom have now left us), Katrina Mertz, Anna Krüger, Werner Joecker, Paul Oppenheim and Amritha Perumalla; and our interns who have served in Hannover: Joanna Hipp, Fundiswa Kobo, Wan-Jou Lin, Miguel Rosa and Grenna Kaiya. May God continue to bless and sustain them as they serve the WCRC in their respective and various capacities.
149. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratefulness to the officers for their constant journey, wisdom, support and encouragement. We have had some challenging moments, but they have hung in there strong and well. I appreciate the time and effort they made to connect mainly via Skype and the fruitful and thoughtful contributions they made to our conversations. May God bless and keep each of you in joy, peace and good health.
150. We are truly blessed to have the kind of members who served on the Executive Committee. Thank you for your deep interest in the well-being and work of the WCRC. All that you have done through the past seven years is dearly appreciated and valued. We are where we are as the WCRC because of your interest, involvement and commitment to the organization.
151. I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all our volunteers, people who work in the different regions, serve on various committees, attend and contribute to our programmes and conversations and bless us in a variety of ways. It is they who sustain the life and work of the WCRC on the ground, where it matters most! Thank you!

152. I would like to recognize with joyful thanksgiving the many organizations and churches that generously and graciously support our work and programmes with financial and other resources, not forgetting particularly the Council for World Mission (CWM), the German churches and UEM. Again a special thanks to all those who contributed so graciously to the fundraising initiatives for the 2017 General Council.
153. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) for their support and understanding in the earlier years of my time as president of the WCRC. Even though I was general secretary of the UPCSA, they availed me the time to do this important work.
154. In September 2014 I joined the Theology Faculty at the University of Pretoria. I became the Head of Department for Church History and Church Polity in January 2015 and in spite of this huge responsibility the dean, as my line manager, never once refused me the opportunity to go about doing the work of the WCRC. I am most grateful to Professor Buitendag and my colleagues at the university for their support and encouragement.
155. Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my family for their patience, support and love. My wife, Sandra, and children: Jessie, Janice and Aaron have been extremely understanding and supportive given my different roles in the WCRC, the University of Pretoria and the UPCSA. I remain eternally grateful to them for the support and sacrifices they have made during the past seven years. Indeed, I am truly blessed! Hopefully, I would now be able to spend more time with them.

Conclusion

156. The past seven years was a really fantastic and wonderful time in spite of the challenges we faced financially leading to the need to relocate. These are all part and parcel to running an organization that is dependent on member churches and donors for its on-going work. I am deeply grateful to all who have contributed to bringing the WCRC to where it is now in a reasonably strong and good place. My prayer and hope is that the next Executive Committee would continue to build on the foundation that has been established, to the Glory of God and the good of the WCRC. We wish them God's blessings, wisdom and strength, as we continue to pray: "*Living God, renew and transform us.*"

Thank You!

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APPENDIX 2
GENERAL SECRETARY’S REPORT
CHRIS FERGUSON

1. Giving thanks to the Living God I begin my report by affirming that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on its many levels is embracing the call for renewal embodied in our General Council theme, “Living God, renew and transform us.” Thanks to the faithfulness, prayer, hard work and dedication of the officers, Executive Committee, staff, regional councils and member churches we are, despite considerable past and ongoing challenges, moving forward with renewed vigour on many fronts. The call to renewal and transformation has inspired us not to conform but to turn around and renew ourselves for our mission.
2. As a World Communion we are all aware that our entire world—people and planet—are in a crisis that engulfs our life together in all its dimensions; politically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously, ecologically, militarily and gender equality with massive threats to life, sustainability and wellbeing. In this we continue to see that the inequity, systemic racism, war, poverty and violence are deeply rooted in and driven by inherently unjust and ecologically destructive economic and financial systems that work against the “life abundant for all” that is at the core of the mission of Jesus Christ and therefore our own (John 10:10, Luke 4:16ff).
3. We begin with our turning to the Living God, and in that prayer and confession we reject all systems, ideologies, regimes and idols that impose domination, division, destruction, despair, suffering and death over God’s creation (Jeremiah 10:10, the Belhar and Accra confessions).
4. We lift up the vitality and joy shared as the churches of the WCRC witness to the life-giving and liberating Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of world-shaking challenges, crises and contexts.
5. These last few years have seen a deepening and worsening of this all-embracing global crisis beyond the long list of terrible and terrifying events and crises that impact specific places, sectors, classes, genders and contexts. We see the writing on the wall and are just now grasping the true global dimension of the crisis—and from that deep place we cry out to God to renew us for the transformation of the world. I will return to this later.
6. The report *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* outlines the realities, challenges and accomplishments of the last seven years, as does the president’s report. I will not repeat all the details here in my report, but commend both for your study and reception. I will offer the highlights of the journey in the last seven years,

but I will briefly focus on the last two and a half years and will emphasize the challenges and vision for the future.

7. Before going any further, I must give thanks to God for the gifts of this WCRC family and specifically for the vision, leadership, faithfulness and dedication and commitment of all those who have worked, prayed and gone the second mile to bring us to where we are today.
8. Specifically, I must express the deepest appreciation for the ministry, leadership and service of Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi. Thanks to his graciousness and diligence the handover of leadership was smooth. And every day we see the fruits of his fourteen years of leadership. There is fulsome testimony in the pages of *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* of his guiding influence in the consolidation of the journey of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) to together become “called to communion and committed to justice.” Deepest thanks, Setri!
9. A special word of gratitude and appreciation is due to the WCRC’s first president, Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay. His exceptional gifts of theologically rooted, visionary leadership have upheld and oriented the WCRC and its Executive in moving forward in the face of significant challenges in the last seven years. I add also my personal word of appreciation to President Pillay who has made a very special effort to guide and support me.
10. The officers deserve the grateful thanks of the whole Communion as this journey presented them with unexpected twists and turns. They, with the whole Executive, have displayed faithful leadership and creativity in confronting the very difficult financial situation which led them to make the courageous decision to move the global offices of the WCRC from Geneva to Hannover. Early in the process there was a change in general treasurers: with Rev. Dr. Gottfried Löcher not able to continue, Dr. Johann Weusmann was elected. His financial and visionary leadership and fundraising ability are superlative, and the WCRC simply would not be in our current stable situation without his timeless efforts.
11. The Executive acted resolutely and decisively to ensure that the WCRC could survive financially and face the tough reality that we could no longer sustain offices and staff salaries in one of the most expensive cities in the world. To leave the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva with its rich and important, historical and ecumenical significance was wrenching. Bold leadership was needed to ensure that financial stability would be ensured and ecumenical relationships were maintained.
12. The move to Hannover was made possible by the extraordinary generosity and vision of the Reformed Alliance in Germany and the support of German member churches—and most graciously due to the special efforts and financial gifts of the United Evangelical Churches (UEK), who in fact are not

members of the WCRC, but who faithfully and consistently make significant contributions of people, money and encouragement. The support of churches like the United Churches of Westphalia and the Rhineland are especially worthy of mention. Without the vision and determination of the leadership of the Reformed Alliance, the successful move to Germany would have been impossible. The Reformed Alliance's vision and commitment have been at the base of the successful transition to Hanover.

13. In the midst of the financial crisis, extra efforts were made by mission councils and churches to ensure that funding was secured to allow for the support of the justice and partnership office. The financial report in *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* notes these very important contributions without which the WCRC simply would not have been able to support our own justice work. This was not only for special programmes, but also the core budget support for staff, that the membership contributions were not sufficient to cover.
14. In those years of financial crisis and the move to Hannover, there was great pressure on and disruption to the staff team. The move and financial instability took a tremendous toll on staff. For various reasons some executive staff decided not to make the move. I will say more in appreciation of the contributions of staff below. But here I want to register that one side effect of the move was the disruption to the staff team and to the systems, procedures, and administration of the global office. Thanks to the exceptional dedication of many staff, we have now overcome most of these challenges.
15. Special mention and great appreciation must be made for the grace-filled generosity and unprecedented support to the WCRC by the Council for World Mission (CWM) and in particular its general secretary, Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan. After in-depth consultation, the WCRC and CWM articulated a common commitment to mission values and vision. With almost all CWM churches also being members of the WCRC, beyond that obvious link, the CWM discerned the leadership and contribution of the WCRC in justice and theology so significant for their own work, that they expressed that support for partnership through a capital donation of 1 million British pounds.
16. The CWM capital donation and the special UEK contribution, along with others, have meant that the WCRC has gone from a nearly bankrupt organization with almost no reserves to a relatively stable, ecumenical organization with a growing base of reserves. These contributions represent a clear affirmation of the importance and relevance of the WCRC as a global family "called to communion and committed to justice."
17. Given the WCRC's global network of churches and firm commitment to justice and unity, the *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP), the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church (USA), *ICCO Cooperation*, *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland* (EMW,) *Otto per Mille of the*

Tavola Valdese, Brot für die Welt and others have all partnered with the WCRC in significant ways to support programmes and activities, including those for justice, mission, theological dialogues, peace and reconciliation and communications, as well as the Reformed Partnership Fund.

18. The *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* report highlights the important work done in the period from 2010 to 2017. And yet it must be noted that the lofty objectives of the strategic plan and the key directions set out in it were often overtaken by the need to attend to the financial crisis. The scarcity of resources that required the move to Hannover inevitably caused the turbulence and disruption any such move brings to staff, administration, and relationships. In addition, and at the same time, the second term of the general secretary drew to a close, and the Executive found themselves in a prolonged search for new leadership. This was a turbulent period from 2011-2014, and meant that many of the goals of the strategic plan went unfulfilled.
19. With the move to Hannover complete, the financial reserves stabilized, some new sources of programme funds on hand and new leadership in place, attention could be given to re-establishing the administrative and financial systems disrupted by the move, as well as re-building the staff team. Intensive efforts were made to reconnect to member churches that felt some distance during the transition period. Special efforts were made to reconnect creatively to the ecumenical family, some of whom felt the move from the Ecumenical Centre had meant a cooling of ecumenical commitments on the part of the WCRC. More will be said of this below.
20. In 2016 at the Executive Committee meeting in Havana, Cuba, the WCRC was in a position to evaluate its strategic plan. The assessment, given the challenges outlined above, was: “We are moving forward and are better placed than in recent years to focus on the high vision of the plan.” But at the same time: “We all see we are not where we need to be with one year left before the 2017 General Council and must discern well what we can accomplish together well in the remaining time.”
21. Significant efforts were made to overcome the distractions and challenges and “to put the WCRC back on the map” with many of our member churches, regions and within the ecumenical community—through extensive visits and contributions to key events and occasions by the president, general secretary and staff; through well-received consultations and networking; and through renewed participation in ecumenical processes. We are slowly re-establishing our relationships and impact with some who felt us far from them in the last number of years. Through participation in situations of conflict and discord, and accompanying churches as mediators and facilitators, we have advanced in building up the true meaning of communion in key places and spaces. In the last two years, we have been making a qualitative shift and are receiving clear

and growing feedback that our leadership and renewed communication is being felt and appreciated.

22. Also at its Havana meeting the Executive adopted revisions to the strategic plan to focus on key goals for the remaining time leading to the General Council. The plan identified key outcomes in each of the five key directions outlined in the strategic plan so that the WCRC could move forward with its stated goals while contributing to and assuring a successful General Council. The Executive affirmed that the General Council is not an end in itself but will, if successful, contribute to carrying out the core vision and mission of the WCRC in both consolidating communion and advancing the justice God calls for. In addition to ongoing programmes the specific strategic foci for the five key directions during final pre-Council period were:
23. Mission: To move forward towards the second “Mission in the Frontlines” event. This is to accompany member churches in the context of religion, violence and peacebuilding, along with an inter-religious cooperation dimension, with special attention to Middle Eastern and African churches. This will be done with all WCRC desks involved. The planning meeting was held in 2016 and the event will be held in Lebanon in 2018.
24. Communion: Urgent need to follow up on the 2014 Communion Consultation with two foci: 1) A consultation with the regional leaders and the officers was held in February 2017. It was very successful in helping focus on imperative improvements in the relationships with regions and regional councils. The WCRC through the new Executive Committee must implement the recommendations for changes in working styles, communication and resources while resolving issues about the number of regional councils and the relationship of the regions to member churches and the whole of the WCRC. A report on the consultation is available on the WCRC website.
25. 2) The issue of human sexuality has been long identified as both a church-dividing and a communion-dividing issue. It is proposed to convene a “Consultation on Communion and Human Sexuality” to provide a safe space and opportunity in mutual respect in the spirit of communion to explore how the WCRC can ensure that we maintain and deepen our unity in the face of our differences while drawing on the gifts and theological and biblical perspectives from our Reformed traditions. The goal is not to come to a common position on an issue but to find ways to ensure our differences do not divide us and that justice is pursued. The consultation is planned for late November and will be hosted by the Church of South India.
26. Justice: The key goal was the re-launching of the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative. A series of meetings were held to plan the WCRC’s contribution and to reinvigorate the ecumenical partnerships. These were successful, and NIFEA is now refocused and its relaunch

secured. The justice goals included a reviving of the Justice Network to help prepare a vision for justice work beyond 2017. You will see the fruits of that work at this Council. The gender justice work focused on the full participation of women in the ministry and leadership of the church. A task group has prepared a presentation for this Council with a proposed declaration endorsed by the Executive Committee. The other key focus was to ensure that this General Council achieved the required equity and gender balances for delegations. This process has gone fairly well despite internal contradictions within the constitutional stipulations as explained in another part of my report.

27. **Theology:** A key priority for 2016 was the preparation of the Global Institute of Theology held just before and then along with the Council. Participants in the GIT are attending and will be contributing to the discussions and activities here. For 2016 we identified follow-up and continuity in our ecumenical dialogues. Another theology priority was the consultation process on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) discussed in several parts of this report. This has been a significant reactivation of our ecumenical involvement. On the same note is the follow-up to the Lutheran–Reformed dialogue bearing fruit in the Wittenberg Witness. This, too, is a sign of solid reconnection and forward movement with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Both the general secretariat and the theology desk have been involved in this work. Progress has been very positive especially considering significant staff challenges.
28. **Ecumenical Engagement:** my leadership in the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) and more emphasis on WCRC participation in the PJP was a priority, as well as more focus on ecumenical collaboration on key public witness, advocacy and accompaniment foci, specifically:
 - a. Peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, working with the Presbyterian Church of Korea, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, National Council of Churches in Korea, World Council of Churches and Korean Christian Federation (KCF). This resulted in a WCRC delegation to North Korea in 2016. KCF delegates are present at this meeting, and the WCRC is hosting a meeting of the Ecumenical Forum on Korea directly after the Council.
 - b. Supporting member churches in the Colombian peace process, including my direct involvement in ecumenical diplomacy, visits and advocacy including a visit with Colombia’s president.
 - c. Supporting member churches in the Middle East through pastoral visits and interfaith meetings. Partners include the Middle Council of Churches and Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches.
 - d. South Sudan and Nigeria: With the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches and member churches we are organizing a pastoral visit to

South Sudan later this year. A visit to member churches in Nigeria coincided with a meeting with the WCC PJP.

- e. Strengthening direct relations with other communions especially in light of the 500 year Reformation(s) commemorations. I attended the Anglican Consultative Council in April 2017. In June 2016 a WCRC delegation had an audience with Pope Francis and met the Pontifical Councils on Christian Unity and on Justice and Peace. In November 2017 we will have a meeting to begin conversations with the Mennonites. We are in conversations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate about resuming ecumenical dialogues with them.
29. There has also been steady progress in addressing the organizational and administrative challenges of transferring and setting up the appropriate systems and structure for the effective operation of the WCRC's office in Hannover. It has taken time to put the financial systems in place and address serious inherited weaknesses and problems. The last two extremely positive audit reports testify to this progress—with great thanks to the finance staff team and the extraordinary efforts of the general treasurer.
30. With the convening of this General Council, we are just at the last phase—although not yet perfect—of overcoming significant challenges with the database and records management. Despite several glitches, the record number of registered delegates to this meeting bears testimony to the fact that we are in much better shape than in the last number of years.
31. The many challenges listed above have put a great deal of pressure on the staff team. Appended to this report is a list of those who have served the WCRC in the last seven years. A special note must be made of the changes in the executive staff team since Grand Rapids.
32. Executive Secretary for Communications Kristine Greenaway decided not to make the move to Hannover. We are extremely grateful to Kristine for her long service and significant contribution and also give special thanks to the United Church of Canada who supported her in her position at the WCRC. Philip Tanis of the Reformed Church in America was appointed as executive secretary of communications in 2014. Phil has not only made significant and highly appreciated contributions in communications and publications but has drawn on his experience to support and consolidate the administrative and management systems for the staff team.
33. The Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser, the executive secretary for theology, mission and communion faced serious health problems, resulting in extended medical leave and requested early retirement, which will take effect as of August 1. We are pleased to report that Douwe's surgeries were successful, and he is doing well. We wish to express our gratitude to Douwe, who was not only a long-serving theology secretary for WARC and the WCRC, but as a former

president of the REC, co-presided over the agreements for the WARC and REC together, giving birth to the WCRC. We give thanks to God for his vision and his leadership. Dr. Aruna Gnanadason of the Church of South India has generously taken on the challenges serving as the consultant to theology, mission and communion during Douwe's absence, working from her home in Chennai, India. Her major focus has been the organizing of the Global Institute of Theology. She has also been the steady hand guiding the ongoing ecumenical dialogues. We are so grateful and appreciative for her coming to our aid on short notice and doing such excellent work, adding so much to the staff team.

34. In addition to the regular three executive secretaries elected by the Executive Committee, the WCRC has been blessed by the dedicated and highly effective service of the Rev. Dr. Hanns Lessing as our General Council coordinator. By now, Hanns will be well known to you all. It is important to note that on top of the formidable task of coordinating the planning and running of the Council (with a very small staff, which was also short one full time executive) Hanns has along with Aruna played an important role helping the WCRC move forward with two crucial ecumenical consultations during the medical leave of Douwe Visser: the association with the JDDJ and the Wittenberg Witness (a follow up to the Reformed–Lutheran Dialogue, *On Being the Church*). Hanns has gone far beyond the second mile in the planning of this Council and has been an important and fully contributing member of our executive staff team. Special thanks are due to him and the United Church of Westphalia which generously and without reserve seconded Hanns for this role and provided this salary as one of their highly significant contributions to the success of the Council.
35. Since relocating to Germany, the WCRC has changed the structure of its finance office in response to financial constraints. Presently, the office is comprised of Gerhard Plenter, who is the volunteer financial coordinator, seconded as a consultant to oversee the professional functioning of the finance team, working with Anna Krüger, the finance administrative assistant. Again, a very special word of thanks to Gerhard and his church, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, for the unfailing support and service to the WCRC. The EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) also provides consultancy services in the area of human resources and legal advice in the absence of WCRC staff capacity. Again these exceptional efforts by the German churches have made the move from Geneva possible.
36. Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth served as Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership until 2011. Patricia left a strong legacy of work and witness for justice and partnership for which the WCRC gives thanks to God. Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin took over from Pat in 2012. Dora has served the WCRC

faithfully with remarkable perseverance in a five-year period during which she moved twice, worked out of three different countries and had to face a scarcity of resources to carry out enormously challenging tasks. Dora's dedication and steadfastness as a colleague and team-worker are greatly appreciated. The Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women to be presented to this Council stands in strong testimony to Dora's much appreciated witness to gender justice and the relationship between justice and communion. Dora will complete her five-year term as executive secretary for justice and partnership in December 2017 and will return to serve the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, leaving a strong legacy of service and commitment to justice.

37. The staff team that served the WCRC until 2014 and who did not make the move to Hannover deserve our most profound thanks. The staff colleagues who formed the initial team in the transition to Hannover merit special mention for the difficult task of transition.
38. We give thanks to God that after much change and challenge the WCRC is now blessed with a staff team which is working well with incredible dedication and purpose even in the face of staff shortages due to illness and transitions, not to mention the monumental task of bringing the financial, database and administrative systems up to speed; planning and supporting an impressive array of programmes, consultations and meetings and not least of all the effective support for the planning and success of this Council. They do indeed deserve the heartfelt thanks of the WCRC for their extraordinary dedication and service!
39. In response to the two vacancies created by Douwe Visser's early retirement and the conclusion of Dora Arce-Valentin's term, the Executive Committee appointed a search committee made up of the officers plus Ms. Omega Bula and Chair Dr. Anna Case-Winters to nominate persons to fill the two vacant executive secretary positions. That committee has done its work, and the Executive Committee will receive that report. There is the expectation that excellent and highly qualified people will be in place by 1 January 2018.
40. While lifting up the special leadership of the president, the general treasurer, the former general secretary and your staff team, I allow myself the opportunity to draw your attention to the work of the Executive Committee and as well as the leadership of the officers. As my report shows—and *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* illustrates—the last seven years have been filled with obstacles, challenges and crises. But it should also be breathtakingly clear that God blessed the WCRC with an Executive Committee willing and able with the help of Holy Spirit to meet the challenges, overcome the obstacles, find solutions and against all odds allow the WCRC to be of significant value to its member churches, as well as make an important contribution ecumenically in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and faithfully to the God of Life! I have only come on board after the hard decisions had been made, so I believe I am

in a good position to say how well the WCRC has been served by the Executive and its officers. An obvious example is the effective planning and carrying out of this Council in the midst of turbulence and transition. While far from perfect and short of all that was hoped, the forward movement has been significant. A special mention must be made of the General Council Planning Committee and the vision and leadership of its chair, Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal. Thanks be to God!

41. The unfinished agenda, the ongoing challenges and new ones arising from the crises facing the rapidly changing global reality are enormous. I would point to three frames within which we can see our present situation as the WCRC: 1) the context of the 500 year Reformation(s) commemorating the immediate reality of the WCRC as “called to communion, committed to justice;” 2) the frame of our particular challenges as WCRC with only seven years of life together as a communion and 3) the context of a rapidly changing, if not deteriorating, global situation in a world fallen among thieves. The overall theological and biblical lens for our reflection on these interlocking and entangled contexts can be our General Council theme, “Living God, renew and transform us,” which is at one and the same time a prayer, a confession and expression of public witness.
42. The following brief reflections are no more than possible markers for the corporate reflection of the whole WCRC Communion.
43. The 500 year commemoration of the Protestant Reformation(s) coincides within the reality that the current global crisis is revealing a change of “epoch,” a change of the dominant and prevailing so-called “civilizational paradigm.” For the WCRC we have the task of reflecting on the traditions and plural heritages and multiple identities of the various Reformation movements that make up the complex reality that is often simply called the Protestant Reformation. The year 2017 and October 31st has become the common focus for Protestants and the ecumenical community to commemorate the whole complex historical and theological heritage. For the WCRC family we have felt a special obligation over the years to lift up the specific contribution of Calvin, Knox, Zwingli and others, including the celebration of the “Calvin Year” in 2009. In addition we celebrate and lift up the first Reformation movement traditions of Jan Huss and Pierre Waldo and the many others. Along with the obviously key contributions of Luther and the German Reformers we need to lift up the contributions from other countries and insist on the foregrounding of the role of women Reformers such as Katharina von Bora, Marie Dentière, Marguerite de Navarre, Argula von Grumbach.
44. In taking our Reformation and Protestantism seriously we must reflect critically as a WCRC family on the Reformed principle of a “Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God.” We are in fact rooted in

Reformed tradition but actively reforming and transforming the meaning of that living tradition.

45. The World Communion of Reformed Churches includes Reformed and Presbyterian churches, but also congregational churches, Czech Brethren, Moravian, Waldensian and United and Uniting churches. The Reformed tradition is not simply a description of what was inherited from the 16th century and before, but a living, emerging tradition as we are bringing ecumenical richness and the call to specific and sometimes narrowly Reformed identities into new expressions through the influence of the many branches in our family tree, and particularly the complex and multiple identities of the many United and Uniting churches who are integral to our life and witness as the WCRC. For many of our churches, their identities include a firm rooting in the living Reformed tradition, but also with ecumenical bodies like the WCC and other communions, such as the Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and so on! Most importantly, the majority of churches in our living tradition live, move and have their being in the Global South!
46. For the WCRC, as for WARC and REC before it, fundamental to our self-understanding is that to live in the Reformed tradition is to be ecumenical. To situate ourselves within the Protestant family is to fully embrace the ecumenical imperative. We commemorate rather than simply celebrate the 500 years because the memories include the Reformed tradition's contribution to division, disunity, conflict and even persecution not only of other Christians, but of people of other faiths. We uphold the key distinctive of the Reformed contributions with the pillars of Protestant theology and practice while confessing the sin of divisive violence and excessive denominationalism. The year 2017 is a significant moment for us to re-invigorate our response to the imperative of Christian unity and loving solidarity with all of humanity and the whole of creation (John 3:16, John 10:10, John 17:21)
47. Holding our General Council in Germany in 2017 is a special opportunity to bring the Reformation tradition into the present tense. We are called to acknowledge the sins and shortcomings of the past and lift up the distinctive gifts of our tradition in order to faithfully witness to the Living God as part of the church of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray and work for the transformation of a world "groaning in travail" as all of creation is faced with massive threats to life.
48. In the call to bring our distinctive witness as the WCRC and the living Reformed tradition to both the cause of Christian unity and witnessing to a broken and unjust world without peace, we have focused in the last three years on two specific opportunities for ecumenical witness in this special Reformation focus year.

49. We followed the mandate of the 2010 Uniting General Council “to have a consultation within the WCRC to consider the possibility of associating with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” After a process of consultation, the Executive Committee decided in May 2016 to joyfully accept the invitation to associate with the JDDJ and to emphasize the connection between justification and justice as a Reformed contribution to the ecumenical understanding of justification. This means adding a Reformed voice and commitment to the document signed by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation in 1999. The Methodists have also associated, and the Anglican Communion has affirmed and welcomed the JDDJ. We will celebrate our association together in the context of this Council during our day in Wittenberg on July 5. This is an important signal of our commitment to Christian unity and our determination to recognize our differences—but to ensure that we do not let reconcilable differences divide us.
50. As a Reformation tradition which has played a role in division and growing denominationalism, we now exercise our vocation for bringing Reformation into the present tense as a force for unity and common witness so that the next 500 years may be shaped by the visible unity of the church acting, praying and witnessing together for the transformation of the world.
51. The long process since 1999 as WARC and since 2010 as the WCRC has also taught us much about respecting difference and the meaning of communion within our family. The process of consultation demonstrated sufficient enthusiasm, agreement and encouragement for the Executive Committee to agree to associate with the JDDJ, but at the same time at least two members clearly expressed their dissent, and others expressed some unease. In the spirit of communion those churches did not want to block the decision, but did need to be assured that their dissent was heard, understood and made visible. This we will find a suitable way to do. The experience has sharpened for us the complexities of life in a global Communion where what is right and even imperative at a global level can cause tensions and unease in specific contexts. The JDDJ revealed both this tension and the grace given and displayed by not allowing differences to divide us, but at the same time showing the need for differences to be acknowledged and respected.
52. The other wing on the bird of our ecumenical vocation at this Council is the signing with the LWF of the “Wittenberg Witness”—fruit of the Reformed–Lutheran Dialogue. In this report and in *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig*, this expression of deepening the unity of the two Reformation churches by taking more concrete steps towards unity is another offering in the year 2017. As President Pillay says in his report, this is an act “to turn the tide around” and communicate Wittenberg as the symbol of the renewal and transformation we all seek.

53. The president's address has helpfully lifted up the Protestant distinctiveness that we need to embrace and enrich with our own diverse yet particular theological perspective as a WCRC family bringing the living and transforming Reformed tradition to the present tense. Here I want to reflect on the shift from the preoccupation with "confessionalism" to embracing our vocation as a "confessing" communion. Bringing the resources of the Reformed theological and confessing tradition in to the present tense means listening to the suffering and cries of humanity and all of creation. It means listening and responding to the situations of our churches who live and witness in situations of injustice and oppression. It means all together listening and responding to the suffering, violence and oppression at the global level of the life of *oikumene* and creation itself. The whole of creation is the theatre of God's grace. This tenet of Calvin must lead us to follow both the imperatives and the approach of confessing moments as represented by Barmen, Belhar and Accra. We confess that the "Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." We are bold to say "Jesus is Lord." Now we must act as if we mean it.
54. The WCRC is in the position to intensify the prophetic traditions of public witness as a confessing communion in a world fallen among thieves. More confessional churches are adding Belhar to their books of confession. And many churches in our family see in Belhar new clarity to guide their prophetic witness in response to the deepening racism, authoritarianism and exclusion in global and national contexts.
55. The Barmen Declaration, born like Belhar in a specific historic context, is now gaining renewed currency as a gospel-centred way of being church in contexts where the liberating Lordship of Jesus Christ and the God of Life are pushed aside by idols of nationalism, war, security, profit, class, race, caste, patriarchy and the many more that crowd the pantheon of sin and death.
56. We continue to hear of the continuing and even growing relevance of the Accra Confession. Some seminaries and church and mission programmes have based their curriculums and strategic plans and mission vision on the reading of the signs of the times and faith stance for the economy and the Earth. The ecumenical New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) programme and the São Paulo Statement are rooted in the Accra understanding of justice and resistance to Empire. Recent Vatican documents echo the affirmations, analysis and imperatives of Accra (e.g. *Laudato Si*).
57. At the same time many within our own family of churches do not know Accra. Our vocation as a family of churches "called to communion, committed to justice" requires us to take firm steps to make our Reformed witness known to our own family on the global level; to put mission at the centre of our Communion's life, living out fully our identity as a confessing, ecumenical

communion in the spirit of Barmen, Belhar and Accra—while following their example with a renewed and consistent reading of the signs of times.

58. To bring the Reformation into the “present tense” is to renew and transform the church for the renewal and transformation of the world. This requires us to engage the “tense present” or said another way, take on the “tensions of the present age.” We must as a Communion intentionally put ourselves in the eye of the storm, to go to the belly of the beast, to go to where God’s creation is most under threat, to be with those whose life, freedom and wellbeing is most at risk to the powers of injustice, sin and death (Matthew 25). The context of Reformation calls us to embrace and translate the key pillars of the multiple identities of the Reformed traditions into the present tense—specifically, the confessional, theological tradition of transformative, prophetic, public witness in the spirit of Barmen, Belhar and Accra, and always rooted and guided by Scripture and rigorous theological reflection.
59. The second frame or context for our reflection on the WCRC is that of our identity, mission and vocation since 2010 as a family of churches “called to communion, committed to justice;” in short, our life as a communion of churches.
60. As a communion, *KOINONIA* or fellowship in intimate relationship bonded by love and interdependence, we are obviously very much a work in progress. The strategic plan of 2011 laid out lofty goals for our life together as a Communion. The Consultation on Communion in 2014 shows that we have still a long way to go. We are a family of nearly 80 million believers, many of whom have no idea that we exist or that they are part of us. Not all member churches thought that calling ourselves the World COMMUNION of Reformed Churches actually meant that we had a new way of relating to each other different than we had when we were a “Council” or an “Alliance.” Those members who do place value on “communion” relationship don’t all share the same understanding of what communion means or what it might be expected of us. There is a broad appreciation and value placed in belonging to a family of churches with shared history, tradition and understanding of the faith, but we have a very long way to go.
61. For some of our members and especially smaller churches in the Global South, the WCRC is their only significant organizational relationship or wider fellowship. In times of crisis, conflict and need belonging to the WCRC has been extremely significant and uplifting. On the other hand, many churches (especially but not only United and Uniting churches) struggle with valuing the WCRC connection while at the same time belonging to other (and sometimes many) families, communions and ecumenical organizations nationally, regionally and globally.

62. This diversity in the midst of rapidly changing situations of our churches creates many opportunities but also many challenges for the WCRC.
63. The challenge of sustainability, including ensuring sufficient financial resources to maintain and nurture our Communion has been a major issue for the last seven years and continues to be a major challenge despite considerable progress. All member churches must assume this task and responsibility if the WCRC is to fulfil its mission and survive and thrive. We must have all regions and our members vigorously supporting the WCRC.
64. In light of common pressures on the whole ecumenical movement concerning the sustainability of the current architecture of the world ecumenical movement, I believe it is important for the WCRC to enter into multicultural conversations with other ecumenical bodies seeking common or mutually supportive models of ecumenical sustainability. We must seek new strategies together. We should consider joint assemblies and other specific ideas and do so urgently.
65. Since 2010, the WCRC has stressed the importance for our unity and mission of communion through the full involvement of member churches and regions in the work of the WCRC in terms of vision, programme, witness and decision-making. The life and witness of the WCRC must reach the national and regional levels but also the congregational level. All of these levels and realities must shape the priorities, programmes and witness of the WCRC as a world communion. This is both a theological and practical imperative.
66. Regional empowerment and participation was a key dimension of the 2011 strategic plan. The 2014 Consultation on Communion stressed the importance of regions in the life of the Communion. A Regional Empowerment Consultation in 2017 reaffirmed the centrality of the role of regions in the synergy of the WCRC and confessed and lamented that we were far from where we need to be and that many issues regarding regional empowerment including consultation, communication, representation, the number of regular councils, etc. have yet to be adequately addressed. Attending to these issues effectively and as a new approach to membership contributions have shown some positive results. Overall, the members report shrinking resources and in the Global North dwindling numbers and increased competition for scarce resources.
67. Traditional approaches to fundraising in the last seven years show new context-sensitive approaches are needed. Sustainability issues were eased but not totally resolved by the move to Hannover. Partnerships with CWM, EMW, *Otto per Mille*, and *Brot für die Welt* have been extremely helpful and revitalized our programmes and witness, but more stable and membership driven solutions must be found, especially for our core budget. It must be stressed that the mobilization of funds for this General Council represents a unique

historical moment because of the Reformation 2017 commemorations. The significant German church and government funding tied to the Reformation year will not be available again. No one should leave this meeting with the impression that the WCRC is a wealthy organization. If we do not find new ways to sustain and expand our work and witness we not meet our calling as a communion. These issues are equally issues of communion and of justice.

68. Our communion has—as have all other Christian world communions—had its unity and common purpose challenged and threatened by significant differences between and among members concerning human sexuality. The differences include but are by no means limited to differences concerning same sex marriage, the ordination of LGBTQ¹ clergy, biblical understandings of homosexuality and theological and biblical understanding of the church as an inclusive community.
69. It is important to note that the WCRC has not taken a position on the issues of human sexuality.
70. There are currently member churches who have severed mission and communion relationships and partnerships with other churches who are also WCRC members because of the differences cited above. Our commitment to unity and communion—to *koinonia*—is weakened if we imagine that it is possible to be fully in communion at the global level but not in communion with other specific churches within the Communion.
71. Our common commitment to Christ’s call to communion leads us to not accept that issues of human sexuality and differences in faithful and biblical interpretation are church-dividing and communion-dividing issues. Our living Reformed tradition, along with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, offers significant biblical and theological resources for members of the Communion to dialogue and discern together how to maintain our unity, do justice and respect difference.
72. As mentioned above the Executive Committee in 2016 as part of the final phase of the revised strategic plan has proposed a consultative process and resources to create the possibility for dialogue and engagement in processes to explore together the meaning of communion and to strive to maintain our unity while facing our difference and healing the imperatives of justice.
73. The first consultation on the global level will be for a group of 25 member churches hosted by the Church of South India. The purpose is not to come to a common position on human sexuality but to strengthen our understanding of communion and the Reformed approach to respectful dialogue—taking away

¹ LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

the power of our differences to divide us while honouring the imperative of justice.

74. It is clear that God has given us many gifts and resources to help us nurture the gift of unity, and the Reformed tradition particularly values vigorous theological and biblical reflection in community as an instrument for mission and unity. It is time to create the spaces and resources to dialogue and maintain respectful relationships and not allow the differences we have as we face the wider and complex issues of human sexuality and especially issues of faithful interpretations of the Scriptures to threaten God's gift of unity.
75. A challenge for the Christian church and therefore for our Communion is the full participation of women in the ordained ministries, governance and decision-making structures of the churches.
76. This Council has come close to the goal of a gender balanced meeting, and it must be noted that member churches responded very positively to the encouragement to fulfil the constitutionally stipulated balances. One obstacle to achieve a full balance is that the way the current constitution sets the entitlement for churches to appoint delegations based on the number of baptized members. Article IX of the constitution allows for three delegates for churches up to 200,000 members, five delegates for churches with 300,001 to 500,000, seven delegates for churches with 750,001 to 1,000,000 and nine delegates for members with 1,500,001 to 2,000,000. This formula creates four situations where delegations could be odd numbered, making it numerically challenging to fulfil the constitutional requirement that delegations be gender balanced.
77. The proposed constitutional amendments to be decided upon by this Council would change the formula in order to ensure that all delegations over one delegate will be even numbered, allowing for the constitutional provision to be implemented. This is very important if we are to ensure the full and equal participation of men and women and ordained ministers and lay people.
78. The constitution also stipulates youth delegates in delegations of over four delegates. The formula ensures only a very modest participation of youth. This points to a much deeper issue for our Communion. Many, if not most, of our members face challenges in promoting the full and equal participation of people under the age of 30 in the life and ministry of our churches.
79. The 2011 strategic plan placed an emphasis on youth leadership development and promoting the formation of young theologians through programmes such as the Global Institute of Theology (GIT). While we are encouraged by the excellent contribution of stewards, GIT participation and the input of the Youth Pre-Council, the participation of youth in the life of the Communion falls far, far short of what is required for us to be an inclusive and vibrant Communion. This is an issue that must receive priority attention in the next seven years.

80. Another communion challenge that WCRC has failed to adequately address is our commitment for the solidarity with and participation of indigenous peoples. The underlying commitments made at the Uniting General Council need to be more fully attended to.
81. Similarly there is a long-standing call for the WCRC family to intentionally address the call by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) and differently abled people in our churches for their full inclusion in our programmes and structures.
82. Another challenge for our Communion is the reality of global migration. Globally there is a humanitarian and socio-political crisis of forced displacement and refugees of historically unprecedented dimensions; over 70 million people. This massive forced displacement is a symptom and consequence of militarized, systemic, and structural economic, social, ecological and political inequality, injustice and oppression, which are the bitter fruits of Empire.
83. The imperatives of justice, peace, solidarity and compassion call for a wide response by our Communion to see this reality in its complexity and respond at both the level of compassion and diakonia and also at the level of global justice, transforming the economic and political systems that provoke forced displacement.
84. At the same time I raise the issue as a communion issue because migration is changing the nature of our cultures and societies and also is changing our self-understanding of church, evangelism and mission within societies, including the Global North where the relationship with other churches in the global family is now taking on a new dimension and the processes of secularization are being impacted by migration.
85. In reading the signs of the times and understanding the full impact that immigration—and particularly forced migration—represents as crisis, challenge and blessing and opportunity, the WCRC needs to create spaces and resources for our churches in all parts of the Communion to dialogue, pray and act together in both prophetic and humanitarian actions. Migration itself is a human reality and not a problem but a blessing. Forced displacement is an injustice and a sin. Our congregations, nations and regions are living in a profoundly cross-cultural and trans-cultural reality that we must understand and address.
86. There is also an important challenge for the WCRC in terms of the imperatives for inter-faith dialogue and inter-religious solidarity and cooperation for justice, peace and reconciliation. Here justice is, of course, in the spirit of the Accra Confession, a biblically-based understanding inclusive of economic, ecological, gender and social justice.
87. Many of our churches live in contexts where they are the religious minorities numerically and sometimes culturally. The WCRC has begun to develop

processes and consultations along with other ecumenical and Christian forums to address the mission and evangelism challenges in such contexts. This includes joining the theological discernment around situations of religious persecution and discrimination. We need to urgently increase our common theological reflection from the Reformed tradition, deepening and broadening our accompaniment of member churches in facing the complexities and life-and-death dangers in situations of spiralling religious polarization.

88. At the same time we must add our voice to the global reading of the signs of the times and seek to discern the political, social, cultural, economic and military interests in play. We must be more intentional as a Communion in vigorous theological and biblical reflection from the Reformed tradition rooted contextually in the situations of our member churches while challenging polarizing calls for “civilizational wars of religions” pitting Christianity against other faiths by living out God’s vision for all to live in peace and be unafraid (Micah 4:4).
89. Jesus calls us “to know the things that make for peace.” Inter-religious cooperation aided by inter-faith dialogue, nurtured by vigorous theological reflection and biblical discernment on a Communion-wide basis, regionally and locally, should be a priority for WCRC in the next seven years. This of course includes that the WCRC, from our communion and justice perspective, requires broad consultations on the relationship between religion and violence at all levels of the life of the Communion and provides spaces and resources for discernment, engagement and witness.
90. The third frame of the entangled and enmeshed context in which we embody our theme—“Living God, renew and transform us”—is the context of a rapidly changing global context beset with multiple and interdependent life threatening crises. To put it metaphorically, we are called out to confess the God of Life in a world fallen among thieves. In John 10, Jesus contrasts himself as the good Shepherd who comes so that “all may have life” with the thieves and robbers that come only to steal, kill and destroy.
91. In 2004, the Accra Confession said we lived in a scandalous world. In 2010, the Uniting General Council echoed and affirmed Accra’s witness. Now in 2017, the world situation has only gotten worse and is rapidly deteriorating. Inequality is in such an ethically intolerable place that Oxfam reports “just eight men own the same wealth as one half of the entire world.” We have cried out against ecological destruction and extreme poverty, wars, violence, erosion of human solidarity, spiralling religiously justified violence, slavery, human trafficking, systemic racism, casteism, gender based sexual violence and skyrocketing cultures of fear, hate, xenophobia and exclusion.
92. We are in a world fallen among thieves; a world created and loved by God but in social, political, cultural, economic and religious terms dominated by

systems and structures and even spiritualities that obey other masters. Who can doubt that Mammon reigns in much of the world order, that the idols of market, nationalism, individualism, death, war and violence hold sway (Jeremiah 10:10)?

93. The Accra Confession named and renounced both economic ideologies and systems that stand in the way of the fullness of life through Jesus Christ. Accra also named the convergence of systems, structures, cultures and spiritualities of domination as Empire from the biblical, prophetic understanding of Empire/Babylon. And Accra called us to stand with Jesus' resistance to Roman domination in the prophetic and jubilee traditions.
94. The theological horizon of Accra is profoundly biblical, drawing on the jubilee–prophetic trajectory which runs through the whole of the biblical witness. The biblical concept of God and faith in God being inseparable from justice was firmly embraced by Calvin and theologians of the Reformed tradition and is strong in First Reformation traditions. The integrity of God's saving action being an indivisible reality of justification and justice is central to our theological tradition and finds robust expression in the Accra Confession. (The theological link is developed in the Reformed statement attached to our association with the JDDJ, as well.)
95. The conceptual framework of the Accra Confession (drawing as it does from Barmen and Belhar) advanced a lens for reading the signs of the times and faithful Christian witness that since 2004 have gained wide ecumenical and social agreement. This includes the linking of economic and ecological justice (“The Cry of the Poor – The Cry of the Earth,” Luke 4:16-21)—and the linking and entwining of both the above with gender justice. As mentioned above the Vatican, the WCC and other world communions have advanced positions and reflections in very strong resonance with the Accra Confession, such as *Laudato Si* and *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.
96. The much discussed Empire analysis generated both controversy and constructive ecumenical debate and now forms the basis of some ecumenical and mission organizations' core statements of mission and vision such as the World Student Christian Federation and the Council for World Mission. Some institutions of theological education have in fact revised and restructured their curriculum based on the “mission in the times of empire” contribution of Accra and the WARC-led “Manila Declaration” notable is the case of the United Theological Seminary in the Philippines.
97. The biblical–theological–missiological lens of Empire based on a reading of the signs of the times has in the period since Accra inspired a massive amount of theological writing and a now well-established approach to New Testament studies. The biblical-theological action reflection project called “Radicalizing

the Reformation – Provoked by the Bible and Today’s Crises,” draws heavily on the insights of Accra, Grand Rapids, and the WCRC vision.

98. We have, at the same time, come a long way since Accra, both in our debates and in the profound way the world and our churches are changing. There are key realities that have not changed and continue to be part of our reading the signs of the times. The realities of economic injustice and growing inequality have gotten worse. The scale of human caused climate change and its destructive effects are clearer now than then—even as there are some steps forward, in response there have been backwards steps as well. The plague of gender based sexual violence is spiralling. The oppression of women, girls and children in all its dimensions screams at us as a persistent structural sin including in our churches. New realities demand to be named and understood, as already mentioned above.
99. Here I want to stress that the contribution of Accra in the use of “Empire” is not and was not about advancing an ideological position, but taking serious the reality described when Accra says “we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination...” Since its creation, debate and study of the Accra Confession has allowed us to enrich that definition further. Empire/Babylon names realities of sin and death which have a global and systemic nature. Empire/Babylon is not mostly a place, but a complexly entangled reality with local, national, regional and global divisions. Today more than one power nation is competing for dominance and hegemony.
100. The enormity of this massive threat to life demands that we not only debate how to name this reality, but that, led by the Spirit of life, we resist it and seek to transform it. This requires our own transformation as persons and as churches. Again, recall the Accra Confession, article 28: “We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness” (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.” All this means living out God’s mission in the power of the Holy Spirit in our time and place, freeing real captives, healing real bodies broken by oppression and reviving creation itself.
101. In addressing our global context, we understand that as a people of faith, we must include and collaborate others, and not only other faith groups, but also NGOs, social movements, civil society organized or undefined, many of which of which are calling us to join them in the search for global transformation and to defend the life of the people and the planet.

102. The call “to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” comes not only from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (12:2) as a Gospel imperative, but from those whose bodies, lives, lands and hopes have been broken, destroyed and held captive along with creation itself by the current, complex world (dis)order.
103. Many biblical scholars would agree that when the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 speaks of the “world,” he is speaking specifically about the world order of Roman rule. This resonates with the social movements and civil society voices, indigenous peoples, faith groups, women and victims of oppression, who cry out against our current world order, which is rigged against the poor and vulnerable, and cry out that another world is possible. In reading the signs of the times, witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and confessing the God of Life, in this world so desperately in need of transformation, we must be open to making common cause with transforming the world and caring for the Earth.
104. Canadian author and activist Naomi Klein, in her new book *No Is Not Enough*, put forward a clear analysis that seeks to explain why, faced with so many threats to life, justice and dignity, people do not seem to act in their own interests and in fact allow policies, laws and practices that violate their own declared values.
105. Klein argues that tactics, policies, interests and politics that are so destructive to life can be resisted. This is a statement most people of faith would agree with. She begins with the idea that we allow these destructive systems because others use times of shock and crisis to impose unjust and oppressive policies that people are too disoriented by the shock or crisis to resist. She says, “we need a firm grasp of how shock politics work and whose interests they serve... this is how we get out of shock and start fighting back.”
106. “Secondly, we have to tell a different story from the one the shock doctors are peddling, a vision of the world compelling enough to go head to head with theirs.” She goes on: “This values-based vision must offer a different path, away from serial shocks—based on coming together across racial, ethnic, religious, and gender divides, rather than being wrenched further apart, and one based on healing the planet rather than unleashing further destabilizing wars and pollution. Most of all, that vision needs to offer those who are hurting—for lack of jobs, lack of health care, lack of peace, lack of hope—a tangibly better life.”
107. No one would think that Klein is reading directly from the prophets and Gospels, but her sources are the life experience and leadership examples of people brutalized by the system and in fact point exactly to where the Bible points.
108. She points to groups in the US collaborating together and says, “it is possible to see the outlines of a progressive majority, one grounded in a bold plan for the safe and caring world we all want and need.” At this point, unknowingly,

Klein is echoing the concept of leadership in mission coming from the margins, from the poor and oppressed as expressed in the WCC mission statement *Together Towards Life*.

109. Using a sports metaphor, but one that would not be lost on the prophets or on Jesus of Galilee, Klein asserts, “we need to fight offence and defence simultaneously—to resist the attacks of the present day and still find space to build the future we need.”
110. So close to the theological method of affirming and rejecting, confessing and denouncing, Klein reverses the order and says, “In other words, the firmness of No’s has to be accompanied by a bold forward looking yes.” She adds, “Yes, is the beacon in the coming storms that will prevent us from losing our way.” Klein is calling all to overcome division for the sake of transformation.
111. And for us? Yes, to the God of Life so all can have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10) and Yes, we do know what the Lord requires of us (Micah 6:8).
112. So as a vital, diverse Communion with common roots and common vision but significant differences, we gather here in Leipzig to assess the past seven years, take stock of the “present times” and, preceded by the God of Life, we stare the future (both threatening and hopeful) in the face.
113. As argued in this report we can understand our call and challenges as responding to the three shaping contexts:
 - a. The history of our Reformation and ecumenical context covering at least 500 years
 - b. Our context as a church family newly focused on our life as a communion, a *koinonia*; “Committed to Communion – Called to Justice”
 - c. The context of our world—history and creation. Groaning in travail, fallen among thieves, but gripped with the power of the resurrection, gifted by the God of Life.
114. At the collision of these three urgent contexts, we give thanks to God for all that we received as a family of churches and now bend into our confession and prayer. For all our brokenness and incompleteness, we have the gift of communion. We confess our faith in the God of Life and seek renewal and transformation.
115. How will WCRC on all its levels answer Klein’s and the wider world’s yearning for a Yes that will get us all (creation included) through “the storms?” What is our Yes in a world fallen among thieves where No is not enough? Is there a distinctive missional contribution from the Reformed family of churches?
116. Our “no” to structures of sin and death is resoundingly clear! Barmen, Belhar, Accra and the faithful and prophetic witness against injustice call out undeniably. And yet for many, even with all the strong affirmations we make, our Yes is not clear—or not yet clear enough.

117. Emerging from our confession of the Living God through the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to embrace a bold Yes to life, to live out and give voice to a compelling, values-based vision that creates a real plan that lifts up those crushed by Empire. Here, we will not be able to rest on religious slogans, pious hopes or righteous proclamations. Klein—and the suffering human and earth community—demand “the offering of a different path” against “the great unmaking;” a path based on coming together as peoples and healing the planet to offer those who are hurting a “tangible better life.”
118. We seek humbly the renewal and transformation needed to respond through the grace of God, the leading of the spirit and in discipleship to Jesus Christ as a Communion.
119. Challenged to “make plain the vision” (Habakkuk 2:2) we know in the Scriptures that the prophetic Micah is clear and plain spoken on the big picture: “Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.” Psalm 85 is clear that we should turn to God and when we do “God speaks peace...peace and justice embrace.” Isaiah 58 is clear that if we stand with the hungry, poor and afflicted we will be called “repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in.” That does sound more tangible!
120. Jesus is clear that his Yes is God’s mission in the power of the Spirit lifted up in Luke 4: Bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, liberation to the oppressed, to proclaim the year of jubilee so the people and earth may live. Jesus is even plainer in Matthew 25 that our Yes must be a path that is centred on the least favoured: the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the refugee, the prisoner, the stranger.
121. But at this historical turning point what does this path to renewal and transformation really look like? For our Communion what are the markers of a bold way forward where the Yes is as clear as the No? How do we in our next seven years humbly but boldly and fully take on a Yes that, in the power of God’s Spirit, will lead to the healing of the Earth and tangibly better life for those who are brutalized by injustice.
122. For her part Klein is honest and humble in saying she doesn’t exactly know what the Yes looks like. She implies none of us know yet. We are all trying to figure it out, but perceptively she suggests how we will figure it out, and with who and where. In effect she says: “I don’t have a plan, but I do know it will emerge collaboratively. I know who the architects and artisans of the plan are and where the path will be discerned.” Without any direct reference or allusion Klein is in strong resonance with the jubilee-prophetic-Jesus tradition of the Bible. In fact she is moving entirely in the same direction as the WCC recent mission statement, *Together Towards Life (TTL)*. *TTL* is clear how God works and who God is using to construct what Klein has called the “bold plan for the safe and caring world we all want and need.” The who in *TTL* and in the

Bible is clear. In repairing the breach in a broken world God uses the poor, oppressed, marginalized, excluded, including the excluded Earth itself. God uses those people whose lives are destroyed, broken and threatened. The Lord of the resurrection transforms the world through the crucified Lord and lifts up the crucified people and the crucified Earth. This is the Gospel paradox that Klein, the secular activist, mirrors back to us. Not only does the church evangelize the world, the least favoured evangelize the church. With God's leading we make the Yes path together, towards life.

123. The “how” of the Yes is to work together with all those effected—collaboratively, mutually and in loving solidarity. The question of who are architects and artisans of the Yes has a biblical answer: the architects and artisans that God is using to renew and transform are the very ones lifted up in Luke 4 and Matthew 25.
124. Our bold Yes must directly be constructed working with those God uses as co-transformers of the current economic system. Together on the local, national and global levels the alternatives must be created by those who are brutalized by the current realities. New social relations and politics must come from below. New ways of stopping environmental destruction must come from the communities whose ancient wisdom and present realities can lead the way. The WCRC is called to add our distinctive witness as a family committed to communion and called to justice—but not alone. The new path toward *Buen Vivir*, the embracing of *Ubuntu*, the opening to God's ushering in God's reign must be done standing with the poor, powerless, marginalized, excluded and hopeless. We must be a Communion that seeks to be part of a *koinonia* of all—from below. So like Klein we know we still have to figure out, to discern, the specifics of our Yes. But we must do it collaboratively, and how we do it must be faithful to how Jesus lived God's ministry with the crucified people and the Earth in the power of the resurrection in our history.
125. The where of our Yes follows from the who. Our Yes must include being where life is most at risk and most threatened, both within our own family and in the world at large. Those are places and spaces in all continents and counties. There is no east-west, north-south divide in the threat to life. Our *koinonia* means when there is pain and threat in the family the members must know they are not alone. When there is massive threat in the ecumenical family—the same. Within the wider religious community—the same. Within the whole Earth community—the same!
126. In order to fulfil our call to be a faithful, reforming and confessing *koinonia*, witnessing to the Living God in the present tense and taking our three contextual frames seriously, I would lift up the following directions for the next seven years for our engagement and discernment together:

127. This would require the WCRC to bring our diverse but distinctive Reformation(s)–Reformed traditions into the present tense by engaging the current world contexts and local contexts as a confessing ecumenical family, addressing the interlocking crises that affect the global community and creation itself. This would include strategies and resources drawing on our Protestant–Reformed identities and families from all corners of the communion.
128. This transformation and renewal would require us to ensure that the full diversity of our Reformed, United and Uniting church traditions from the north and south, east and west, young and old, men and women are heard and contributing to our theological witness.
129. This would require building up our relationships in the bonds of unity so that global, regional and local dimensions of our *koinonia* are interdependent as they influence and support each other in God’s mission and express the right relations we proclaim.
130. This renewal and transformation would require the WCRC engaging actively in the wider ecumenical family in new and creative ways, offering our distinctive voice and witness and learning from other Christians so as to strengthen unity and justice. An example would be to intensify the WCRC participation in the WCC PJP at all levels and in new ways as a major emphasis over the next four years.
131. This renewal and transformation would absolutely require specific emphasis on full and active participation of children and young people at all levels of our Communion. This also would require strategies, programmes and resources to ensure that we embrace fully the ministry of all believers.
132. This would require renewal and transformation to overcome the theological, cultural, practical, political and ideological obstacles to the full and equal participation of women and men in vigorous embracing of the ministry of all believers. This would require addressing decision-making structures where we as churches “conformed to the world” and replicated unequal power structures in the life of the church, giving precedents in status and decisions to men over women, age over youth, clergy over lay, and so on. This would include continuing to address how the ordination of women would be “binding” for the Communion.
133. This renewal and transformation would require urgently and intentionally foregrounding the participation, voices, struggles and rights of indigenous peoples, Dalits, the poor and the marginalized, excluded and oppressed, in our churches, regions and Communion. Our *koinonia* would be transformed to embrace “mission from the margins” and become a “borderless and confessing” Communion.
134. This would require acknowledging our failure to adequately affirm the ministry, voice and place of the differently abled in our midst both as an issue of

their rights but also as an imperative for communion and adopting strategies and plans for full participation.

135. This renewal and transformation would require the WCRC to address the hardest challenges of inter-faith relations and embrace interreligious cooperation for peace, justice and reconciliation, drawing on the already inspiring examples within our family and responding as a family in those situations that are far from resolved. This would include resources and strategies for biblical and theological reflection and concerted action at all levels of our Communion. This would include accompanying churches, as well as the Communion reflecting on the missiological imperatives through initiatives like Mission in the Frontline. This requires actively defending the rights of all and allowing no religion to be singled out for derision or attack.
136. This would require the WCRC intentionally working with all who are seeking the renewal and transformation to address the massive threats to life and build life-affirming communities of hope and a world order based on justice and peace according to God's call to all peoples and all creation. This includes dialogue and participation with social movements, civil society, women's movements, Dalit movements, environmental movements and all activists who embrace non-violent change for peace. The WCRC would thus provide on all levels of our Communion resources for such alliances for life. Acknowledging theologically and missiologically that God's Spirit moves throughout creation bringing life, that the church can and should also be led in its prophetic actions by those whose life is most threatened.
137. Our renewal and transformation would require continuing rigorous theological study and reading the signs of the times in a confessing spirit, drawing on the Belhar and Accra confessions, deepening our theological understanding of the intersections between justice, peace, reconciliation and gender justice.
138. This would include embracing the *kairos* and confessing identity of the WCRC, providing resources, programmes and strategies so that the contributions of our tradition(s) are known to all and can support and inspire the WCRC to address the challenges of today, bringing Reformation into the present tense, resist growing militarism, authoritarianism and radicalized injustice, among other threats, along with our ongoing commitments to gender, economic and ecological justice.
139. This renewal and transformation would include deepening our common thinking and acting about the realities of human migration and especially the root causes of forced migration as an urgent priority.
140. This renewal and transformation would require priority attention to strengthening and insuring the mutual relationships between the regions and the global WCRC and with regions and member churches. This would include

consultations, strategies, resources and new ways of working in programmes, communication and decision-making.

141. This would require immediate attention to insuring the sustainability of the WCRC and all aspects of life and work as mentioned above, not the least of which is financial sustainability based on each member church contributing actively through a variety of means to supporting the common life and work of our Communion. The Executive Committee must play a key role along with the general secretary, but new strategies and creative working styles must be found that are context sensitive but ensure that all actively play a role. Joint assemblies with other Christian world communions and the WCC would be explored.
142. This would require the WCRC to continue, if to not expand, its role in accompanying member churches in situations of crisis and emergency, giving special attention to local contexts where the crisis has global consequences, to situations where there is a distinctive role for the WCRC to play because of our Reformed heritage or because our member church(es) are playing a key role, and in situations where if not for our involvement our churches would have no significant international support or solidarity in the face of life-threatening situations. This would include growing our capacities to work with others in the ecumenical movement as global witnesses to peace, justice and reconciliation and strengthening our relationship so that the whole Communion can be mobilized, called by God as co-agents of transformation where our voice or identity can make a difference. Some current examples of areas in which the WCRC could engage are the Korean peninsula, Colombia, the Middle East (Syria, Israel–Palestine), South Sudan and Nigeria.
143. Our renewal and transformation would require consolidating and deepening our common identity as a Communion, embracing God’s gift of unity. This Spirit-centred unity in the name of Jesus both allows us and requires us to draw on the distinctive resources of our Protestant–Reformed tradition to acknowledge and address our differences so that we both witness to the truth of the Gospel and not allow our differences to divide us. This would include the WCRC accompanying churches facing the threat of division by providing steady resources, mediation and prayer. Most significantly it will require focusing on structures, programmes, and biblical/theological resources to consolidate our common understanding and identity as a communion (*koinonia*)—and the implications for our life together. This would include providing strategies, programmes, consultations and spaces to safely, respectfully, and constructively address our differences on issues or different approaches to interpreting Scripture, drawing on the distinctive resources and traditions of the Reformed faith rooted in Scripture open to the guiding of the Spirit.

144. This would require the WCRC humbly learning from the past 500 years so that we enter the next 500 renewed and transformed by God's grace having repented of our sins of division and exclusion and bringing the gifts of the Reformation(s) forward into the present tense as a family "called to communion, committed to justice."
145. The WCRC at this Council faces a historic *kairos*, gathered in our diversity with our distinctive voices, proclaiming a new moment of ecumenical reconciliation, without ignoring significant problems and significant differences within and among the Christian churches, building up our *koinonia*, studying the Bible, praying, witnessing and confessing to the Living God in a world desperate for the fullness of life.
146. In joy, in hope, humbly repentant, with great expectations, sobered by the stark realities we have to face, my report ends affirming that the WCRC has moved forward as a communion and is positioned, in spite of many challenges, to embrace the call of the Living God. So, emboldened by grace, chastened by our shortcomings and with thanks to God, we pray "Living God, renew and transform us."
147. To God be the glory. Amen.

ADDENDUM: WCRC STAFF OVERVIEW: 2010-2017

The following is a list of the former WCRC staff:

- Penelope Blachut (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until July 2012
- Yueh Cho (Switzerland), Finance Coordinator, served until December 2013
- Jet den Hollander (The Netherlands), Executive Secretary for Mission Projects, served until February 2011
- Smaranda Dochia (Romania), Administrative Assistant, served until December 2010
- Claudia Duval (Germany), Administrative Assistant to the General Secretariat, served from January 2014 until January 2016
- Brigitte Facchin (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until May 2010
- Ayari Felix (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until January 2010
- Heather Fouquet (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until September 2010
- Ruthan Gill (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant of Communications, September 2010

- Kristine Greenaway (Canada), Executive Secretary for Communications, served until March 2013
- Victoria Koczian (Hungary), Administrative Assistant to TMC, served from January 2014 until May 2015
- Joy Lee (US), REC Assistant, served until July 2010
- Hartmut Lucke (Switzerland), Translator/ Interpreter, served until 2013 (volunteer)
- Daphne Martin-Gnanadason (India), Administrative Assistant, served until 2013
- Ida Milli (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until December 2013
- Emelda Ndiwewah (Cameroon), Administrative Assistant to TMC and Justice and Partnership, served October 2015 through December 2016
- Setri Nyomi (Ghana), General Secretary, served until 2014
- Maureen O'Brien (Great Britain), Executive Secretary for Finance and Fund-raising, served until November 2010
- Paraic Reamon (Ireland), Deputy Director of the Partnership Fund, served 2012-2015
- Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth (Guyana), Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, served until June 2011
- Franziska Surber (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant of Communications, served until November 2010
- Richard van Houten (US), REC GS, served until September 2010
- Antoinette Visser (The Netherlands), Partnership Fund Assistant, served until 2011 (volunteer)

The following is a list of the current WCRC staff:

- Christopher Ferguson (Canada), General Secretary, since April 2014
- Aruna Gnanadason (India), Consultant to TMC, serves from May 2016 until August 2017
- Werner Joecker, since April 2014
- Mun-Kee Kim (South Korea, Seconded), Project Coordinator for Peace and Development, since October 2016
- Anna Krüger (Germany), Administrative Assistant for Finance and Communications, since November 2013
- Hanns Lessing, General Council Coordinator, since July 2015
- Katrina Mertz (US), Administrative Assistant to the General Secretariat, since January 2016
- Paul Oppenheim (Germany), Project Assistant / Translator, since 2014 (partially volunteer)
- Amritha Perumalla-Bosi, Administrative Assistant to TMC and Justice and Partnership, since June 2015

- Gerhard Plenter (Germany), Finance Coordinator, since 2014 (volunteer)
- Sylke Saggio (Germany), Cleaning Staff, since August 2016
- Philip Tanis, Executive Secretary for Communications, since February 2014
- Dora Arce-Valentin (Cuba), Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, served until December 2017
- Douwe Visser (The Netherlands), Executive Secretary for Theology, Mission and Communion, serves until August 2017

APPENDIX 3

MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN'S PRE-COUNCIL

Living God—in a World of Violence—Renew and Transform Us

We, women of the Reformed churches, from every region of the world, met together in the Women's Pre-Council, prior to the General Council, from June 26-28, 2017, in Leipzig, Germany. To the General Council theme, "Living God renew and transform us" we have added "in a world of violence." The gravity of the many injustices (eg. economic/social/ecological/gender) that are present in the church and the world impact women's lives in every context.

In the stories we heard of countless women, in our own stories, in our songs, and in our prayers our witness of women's experiences of exclusion and violence in church and society evoked pain and anguish. We call out the scourge of violence which now impacts over 70% (UNODC 2014 report on Human Trafficking) of women and girls globally. Infanticide - Female Genital Mutilation - Child Brides - Honour Killings - Intimate Partner Violence - Human Trafficking - Sexual Exploitation - Rape - Workplace Sexual Violence - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women - HIV Sexual Violence to women and girls - are examples of the many types of violence against women and girls.

In our conversations we remembered that the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra in 2004 confessed: "We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations—gender, race, class, disability, or caste." Yet the stories and statistics we shared in this Pre-Council continue to speak of lives and relationships destroyed by multiple forms of gender-based violence. These are often intensified by intersections of race, class, disability, age, caste and sexual orientation.

By failing to acknowledge this violence in our midst, our churches sin and have contributed to women's pain. Present in our church structures, our interpretation of Scripture, and our theologies are the patterns of domination and submission which have normalized a culture of violence in our societies. We come away from this Women's Pre-Council filled with a deep sense of urgency. We are clear that the voices of our sisters who die daily from suppression of life and meaning must be heard.

As we name injustice to women and girls across the globe, we come face-to-face with injustice to women within our own reformed churches. In 2010 the Uniting General Council agreed to "promote the ordination of women and work toward a time when the ordination of women will be binding on the Communion." We celebrate that some churches have responded to this call but more is needed.

This is a *kairos* moment. On the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, the time has come to adopt “A Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.” This declaration pledges the churches of the WCRC to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call to ministry as a fulfillment of their baptismal vows. (Workbook, General Council 2017).

Conclusion

We Reformed women of faith anointed by the Spirit commit ourselves to work to end all violence against women and girls. We exhort all in the Communion to join with us in our commitment.

We bring the following recommendations in alignment with the foregoing:

THE COMMUNION’S ATTENTION TO GENDER JUSTICE

- That this General Council confess that violence against women in all its forms is sin.
- That the WCRC’s Executive Committee and General Secretary develop a Gender Justice Policy that delineates issues of gender-based violence within church and society by 2019. It shall include an action plan for the implementation of the policy and accountability metrics, working closely with the regional councils of the WCRC.
- That the WCRC join with its ecumenical partners in approaching the UN Commission on the Status of Women, urging a renewed dialogue and response to all forms of gender-based violence.

THE COMMUNION’S ATTENTION TO EQUAL PARTNERSHIP: ORDINATION OF WOMEN

- That the WCRC adopt “A Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.”
- That the WCRC Executive Committee open a space of discernment with member churches that do not presently ordain women. They shall develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of “A Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination” will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024.

APPENDIX 4

MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH PRE-COUNCIL

The youth delegates of the WCRC, while in celebration of this time of fellowship, feel challenged because of the problems of our time. These problems from which the people of God, the society and the planet suffer, compel us to raise our voice to denounce these conditions brought about by humanity and promote justice—Amos 5:24: “But let the justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-falling stream!”

We believe that as a body of Christ, even though we have different problems, which may concern a region, a country, an island or even one particular church, these points concern all of us as a community and we give this as our confession of thoughts.

Corruption in any political system that generates and increases poverty is an affront to our God. It should be a mission of the church to take a position and act against corruption.

New ways of economic development which respect a good life, human beings and all of creation must be created and supported.

When Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” it was a clear message. Love must extend beyond ourselves, our homes, our countries, our continents; far beyond. As Christians, from all walks of life, united by our faith, we strongly believe the church must take an active role in fighting racial discrimination as we continue to practice love and respect for all our diversity. A Loving God shows love to all people and creation.

Our churches must act on gender inequalities and make decisions that give equal access to the ministry to both men and women in accordance to the biblical view of unity. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Youth in our churches must be valued and recognized as an equal part of the church. We appreciate the WCRC gives a platform to practice and develop talents for God’s ministry, and the steps given for inclusion; but continue to push for more. It is our request that, to highlight the importance of youth, one of the vice-presidential positions be given to a delegate who is under 30. The young and the old generations should come together and share understanding to bridge the generational gap.

With a rapid growth of population and overexploitation of resources to cater for human needs, the church is called to take an active role in educating people on family health, family planning and efficient use of resources.

Our planet is the source of our life, yet we continue to exploit it as if it can take infinite amounts of abuse. That must end. Our planet cannot support our continued desire for more.

We must enable a mindset of social wellbeing rather than the selfish ambition that has been prevailing in our societies. We need a fair distribution of wealth. This involves paying a fair wage for a fair amount of work, where laborers are not treated as slaves but with respect.

Culture is our identity and should be upheld and respected for societal development and wellbeing. This calls for decolonization of colonized minds, self-love and respect. The church must play a vital role in empowering society by injecting ethical and moral values into the culture.

Those of us from countries traditionally associated with colonizing others believe that we must put pressure on our governments to end the paternalistic attitudes towards historically colonized countries. We do not believe that we should be the people to determine their future.

In conclusion, the voice of the youth delegates, representing views from so many countries around our planet have united to bring you this message. We learn in the Bible that if one part of the body hurts, the whole body suffers. If there is injustice affecting one part of our communion, we all suffer. For this reason, we see it imperative to speak out on topics that affect not just our own communities and churches, but all situations where there is injustice of any form.

PROPOSAL 1

That the 2017 General Council appoint a delegate under 30 as one of the vice-presidents.

PROPOSAL 2

That the General Council re-affirm its commitment to equal access to ordination for all members.

APPENDIX 5

SPEECH BY FEDERAL PRESIDENT FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER

Ladies and gentlemen,
Sisters and brothers,

I am delighted to welcome you all to Leipzig. A General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a special and rather rare occasion – it has been quite some time since you last convened in Germany.

In the year of the great Reformation anniversary, you have now gathered here in the country that was the birthplace of the Reformation. However, it really was only the birthplace, as reformed ideas were soon articulated in other European countries, too – in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and other places. At first, Martin Luther's main impact was on the Germanspeaking countries. It was primarily through Zwingli and Calvin that the Reformation became a powerful European movement. The reformed churches were a potent international movement from the start; and it is therefore in keeping with the early days of these churches that the World Communion of Reformed Churches now also represents parts of the world that people knew little or nothing about at the time of Luther, Calvin or Zwingli.

Christianity is indeed vibrant worldwide. But it also has different denominations around the globe. However, Christian beliefs will become ever less credible in today's world if they are expressed in such different ways. That is why I can only welcome the fact that the World Communion of Reformed Churches will adopt the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church here at this General Council in Leipzig. This is a major step towards ecumenism in all Christian beliefs.

You have gathered here in Leipzig and we celebrated a service here in the Nikolaikirche. In the course of its history, this church has witnessed many important events – we Germans of today have vivid memories of what was sparked here in the transformational year of 1989. The peaceful revolution would have turned out differently without the prayers for peace in the Nikolaikirche and what they subsequently inspired on the streets of Leipzig.

At the time, this church's lively Protestant reformed beliefs gave a home to those seeking shelter, courage to those in doubt and hope to the despondent. This is where people found the audaciousness to stand up against oppression and lies. This is where

people experienced the freedom that empowers them to stand upright. Yes, the freedom! Freedom is perhaps the most beautiful outcome of reformed beliefs – religious freedom, freedom of conscience, political freedom and political self-determination.

In many countries around the world, people can only dream of the freedom that was fought for in 1989, particularly here in Leipzig, on behalf of Germany and Europe as a whole. We should take a clear stance and say that our ongoing aim as Germans and Europeans is to see freedom achieved where censorship, repression and violation of fundamental human rights still prevail or are reoccurring.

We should also take a stance when people are persecuted because of their faith and convictions. People of many religions suffer persecution, but Christians in the Middle East are currently particularly severely affected. Our awareness of this cannot prevent each and every injustice. However, we can and we must state clearly that intimidation or, worse still, violence, are wrong. Freedom of belief is an inalienable human right!

The other large church in Leipzig, the Thomaskirche, stands for another precious legacy of the Reformation – the beauty of faith, the inwardness with which it moves our hearts and repeatedly lifts and comforts our souls. One can state definitively that the beauty, inwardness, consolation and joy of faith are expressed more sublimely than anywhere else in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. His greatest religious works, the cantatas and passions, were performed for the first time here in Leipzig. We have just heard a selection of them. No, the Protestant faith is not ascetic or austere. It also knows the elation of the heart and soul. It knows faith arising from “the joy in God” as Eberhard Jüngel says. Bach in Leipzig is our witness to this.

Your council will discuss various political and social issues and make several important decisions on church policy. However, one task seems clear to me – especially at a time when religion is often misused as a means of isolation and distance, indeed as a pretext for the most brutal acts of violence, now more than ever the reformed churches must make particular efforts to foster peaceful dialogue and to very consciously underline the power of religion to promote peace and reconciliation and most importantly, to be an example of this themselves. I wish you every success in all this, for the good of the churches and the people whom they serve.

However, we have already done the most important thing together – we have prayed, sung and worshipped together. Whatever else we do within our churches, whatever we do as Christians in the spheres of politics, the economy and ecology, the most important thing is and will remain that we give thanks and praise to the creator who has our welfare in mind. As a Protestant and a member of a reformed church, this is my

profound conviction. And it is equally important that we ask for God's help in a spirit of trust, as we just sang:

“Be our light in the darkness of this age,
Be the path we can follow with hope and faith, (...)
Be our door to a graceful and better world,
Be a table with space for young and old,
Be the bread and the wine for an open feast,
Come and lead us to justice and peace!”

APPENDIX 6
ASSOCIATION OF THE WORLD COMMUNION
OF REFORMED CHURCHES
WITH THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE
DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Preamble

1. In recent years a welcome degree of convergence on the doctrine of justification has been achieved. In 1999, after many years of committed dialogue, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. This agreement, on what had been a central church dividing issue at the time of the Reformation, is a landmark achievement which we celebrate. In 2006, the World Methodist Council and its member churches affirmed their fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The World Communion of Reformed Churches, after extended consideration and special attention to connections between justification and justice, now joyfully accepts the invitation to associate with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). For the Reformed, justification by grace through faith is an essential teaching of the gospel.

2. We affirm our doctrinal agreement with the common statements on the doctrine of justification (cf. JDDJ 14-18, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37). We rejoice together that the historical doctrinal differences on the doctrine of justification no longer divide us, and we experience this as a moment of self-examination, conversion and new commitment to one another manifesting new unity and advancing our common witness for peace and justice. In keeping with the Reformed principle, “*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum dei*,” we embrace the new reality this shared agreement promises. We hope to not only affirm but also enrich and extend the existing degree of consensus.

We embrace the model of differentiating consensus and the openness, diversity and richness of theological language it makes possible. We accept those passages where Lutherans and Catholics explain their doctrinal traditions in the light of the consensus (20-21, 23-24, 26-27, 29-30, 32-33, 35-36, 38-39) and we do not consider these diverse emphases sufficient cause for division between either party and the Reformed.

We will add our distinctive emphases to those already shared by others. We anticipate areas that invite further dialogue and clarification. We acknowledge the importance, in ecumenical dialogue, of listening to one another and listening to Scripture together.

3. There is a long and interesting history of dialogue on the matter of justification among Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic communions. In fact, a remarkable consensus on basic elements of the doctrine of justification was declared in the Regensburg Agreement of 1541 (Article V *de iustificatione*).¹ Calvin warmly welcomed this agreement (*Letter to Farel* 11.5.1541). However, because of the confessional struggle, the efforts failed and the agreement was nearly forgotten for more than 450 years.

We hear the consensus and agree.

4. We agree with the common affirmation that justification is the work of the triune God. The good news of the gospel is that God has reconciled the world to himself through the Son and in the Spirit. Justification presupposes and is grounded in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Justification means that Christ himself is our “righteousness (δικαιοσύνη – justice) and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). According to Reformed understanding, justification and sanctification, which cannot be separated, both flow from union with Christ.

Entering into union with him through the Holy Spirit, by means of word and sacrament, we receive a share in his saving righteousness. By grace alone, through faith in Christ’s saving work—and not because of any merit on our part—we are accepted by God. In Christ the Spirit renews our hearts while equipping us to do the good works that God has prepared for us to walk in. (§15)

5. We also agree that God calls all people to salvation in Christ. When we receive this salvation by grace through faith, we are justified by Christ alone, by faith alone (*sola fide*). Faith is God’s gift through the Holy Spirit. By word and sacrament in the community of faith, the Spirit leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life. (§16)

¹ In the Article V *de iustificatione* Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed theologians (Contarini, Eck, Gropper, Melancthon, Bucer, Calvin) stated:

“But this happens to no one unless also at the same time love is infused [*infundatur*] which heals the will so that the healed may begin to fulfil the law, just as Saint Augustine [De spir. et lit., c. 9,15] said. So living faith is that which both appropriates mercy in Christ, believing that the righteousness which is in Christ is freely imputed to it, and at the same time receives the promise of the Holy Spirit and love. *Therefore the faith that truly* justifies is that faith which is effectual through love [Gal. 5:6]. Nevertheless it remains true that it is by this faith that we are justified (i.e. accepted and reconciled to God) inasmuch as it appropriates the mercy and righteousness which is imputed to us on account of Christ and his merit, not on account of the worthiness or perfection of the righteousness imparted [*communicatae*] to us in Christ.” (Translated by Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue. An Evangelical Assessment*, London/New York 2002, 234-235).

6. We further agree that the message of justification directs us in a special way to the heart of the biblical witness. Based on God’s saving action in Christ, justification tells us “that because we are sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and can never merit in any way.” (§17)

7. We agree with both Catholics and Lutherans that the doctrine of justification has a central place among the essential doctrines of Christian faith. It is an indispensable criterion for teaching and practice in the life of the church. (§18)

We particularly appreciate distinctive insights in the JDDJ.

8. We appreciate the recognition in the JDDJ that we are powerless to save ourselves, incapable of turning to God on our own, and that the freedom we know is not freedom for salvation. Our response to God’s grace is itself the effect of God’s grace working in us. What Christ has accomplished by his saving obedience (*extra nos*) is made known and applied in us (*in nobis*) by the Spirit especially through God’s word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. No one can respond to God’s call apart from God’s prior work of grace. (§19-21)

9. We appreciate the recognition that sin leads to both guilt and enslavement; thus, God’s grace brings both forgiveness and liberation. God’s forgiveness absolves us of our guilt (justification) and God’s liberation frees us from bondage to sin so that our faith might be active in love (sanctification). Union with Christ, according to Reformed teaching, is the source of these two saving benefits. Sanctification does not entail attaining perfection in this life. We recognize the ongoing struggle—our situation of being at the same time justified and a sinner. Nevertheless, we believe that in our union with Christ “day by day, more and more” we are being conformed to his image and grow in grace. According to Reformed understanding, it is through our participation in Christ by faith that we receive a saving share in his righteousness before God (justification) and receive the gift of new life (sanctification) to be instruments of God’s love. (§22-24)

10. We appreciate the clear presentation that sinners are justified by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) and that faith is active in love. Grace is the source and ground of justification while faith is the instrument of its reception. The whole of the Christian life is a life of trust in the promises of God. Such faith cannot truly exist without love and hope in God. Union with Christ by faith entails both justification by grace and sanctification or growing in grace. “Faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works.” Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). Love for God and the neighbour is therefore indispensable to faith. “But whatever in the justified

precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.” The grace we receive brings renewal of life. (§25-27)

11. We appreciate the honest recognition that even though we are justified we nevertheless continue a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God which we must continually repent and for which we daily ask forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer. This struggle, however, does not separate us from God in Christ. We remain ever dependent on God’s grace, through word and sacrament, throughout our lives. Grace never becomes something we merely possess. (§28-30).

The Reformed have particular emphases and additional insights to bring.

12. The Reformed agree with the strong conviction expressed that the law is fulfilled in Christ and is not a “way of salvation” for us. The law discloses our sin to us and leads us to seek God’s mercy in Christ. At the same time, we understand that it is the teaching and example of Christ (who fulfilled the law) that remains the norm for life in Christ. For this reason, the Reformed maintain that the commandments of God remain valid for us in our lives as believers. This is the guiding role of the law, sometimes referred to as “the third use of the law.” This is the primary use in Reformed understanding—even more central than the first two: the “civil” use (to curb wrongdoing in the public arena) or the “pedagogical” use in convicting of sin. “Law and gospel” are not sharply contrasted but viewed as connected by their grounding in God’s grace. This sense of connection between law and gospel echoes a Reformed emphasis on the continuity (rather than contrast) between the Old Testament and the New Testament as one covenant of grace. For the Reformed *sola scriptura* entails *tota scriptura*. Both law and gospel are God’s good gifts to us. The law is God’s gracious provision of a guide for living. Reformed sensibilities concerning the law resonate with those expressed in Psalm 19, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear enlightening the eyes....” The renewal of life (sanctification) that accompanies justification strengthens us to live (more fully) in gratitude and joyful obedience to God. This is a gift of God’s grace at work in our lives. We may have confidence that the good work God has begun in us will be brought to completion. “Through Jesus Christ God has mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life.” (§31-33)

13. We affirm the testimony given here to the utter reliability of the promises of God. We witness to the irrevocability of the gifts and calling of God (Rom. 11:29). God’s covenant of grace given to Israel is unbroken and is extended to us by faith in Christ. The gift of faith provides us assurance of salvation. Faith without assurance would be

deficient or confused. Assurance is not based upon anything in ourselves—whether faith, works or evidences of the Holy Spirit—but upon the promises of God. Our God is a faithful God who keeps covenant with the people of God through the ages. God’s electing grace at work in the people of Israel is now at work in us also through Christ. For assurance we look to Christ and the promises of God in him. In times of doubt, temptation and anxiety we do not look to ourselves but to Christ. For the Reformed, assurance of salvation is particularly linked to the doctrine of election. Divine election is grounded solely in God’s electing grace. In the doctrine of election we recognize God who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). We have nothing that we have not received. Even our capacity to respond to God is God’s gift to us. So also, is our perseverance in faith. These insights evoke humility and gratitude in believers and provide assurance of salvation. God’s calling and God’s promises are sure. In Christ God has promised our salvation, and “the objective reality of God’s promise” which cannot be considered untrustworthy grounds our assurance of salvation. (§34-36)

14. We value the careful nuancing of the place of good works among the justified. They are the fruit (and not the root) of justification. Good works reflect the effect of God’s grace in us; faith that is active in love. Good works can only be done in dependence upon God’s grace. The Reformed would add here a comment on how we have interpreted the place of good works among the justified. In the Second Helvetic Confession (Chapter XVI, paragraph 6) there is an explication which clarifies that good works are not done in order to earn eternal life, or for ostentation, or for gain. Rather they are “for the glory of God, to adorn our calling, to show gratitude to God, and for the profit of the neighbour.” In this way, we have further elaborated the place of good works among the justified. (§37-39)

We wish to underscore the integral relation between justification and justice.

15. We wish to add a word on the relation we see between justification and justice. In 2001, representatives of the Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches met in Columbus, Ohio, to discuss the prospect of widening participation in the JDDJ. The thoughtful and constructive conversation held at the consultation led the Reformed to a deepened reflection on the JDDJ and to a commitment to inquire into one of our key questions: What is the relation between justification and justice? The similarity in terms invites reflection upon the nature of their connection. In the New Testament, the same Greek term (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaïosyne*) is used to convey both. It can be translated either as “righteousness” or as “justice.” We began a series of consultations

in our regional contexts about the nature of this connection. Our further discussions have been most profitable and we offer, in the paragraphs which follow, a few insights that have emerged.

16. For the Reformed, justice is not simply the ethical outworking of justification as a kind of second step; rather it is already entailed theologically in justification as such. This insight has now been elaborated in the final report of the fourth phase of the International Reformed–Catholic Dialogue, *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent of Justice*, “That both of these meanings are conveyed with the same word reflects the fact that they are profoundly related. The one who is justified by faith is called to act in a righteous way. As a consequence, the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression and violence in today’s world” (paragraph 56). Justification is, both a “declaring righteous” and a “setting right.” This insight may be at the root of John Calvin’s insistence that justification and sanctification are inseparable (*Institutes*, III.2.1); they are to be thought of as a two-fold grace (*duplex gratia*).² We acknowledge that the declaration of justification (in JDDJ 4.2) as entailing both “forgiveness of sins” and “renewal of life” points in this direction. We also welcome the invitation offered in paragraph 43 to further clarification of “the relation between justification and social ethics.” In what follows, the Reformed intend an initial offering on this relation.

17. In the Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God, we have affirmed that God is sovereign over all of life (not just the narrowly religious or spiritual aspects of individual lives). We affirm with the Psalmist that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein” (24:1, KJV). God has entered into covenant with all of creation (Gen. 9:8-12), and God’s covenant of grace intends a “setting right” that is world-embracing—including even political, economic and ecological realities. All of God’s covenantal acts are acts of justification and justice. We acknowledge that justice (like justification) is God’s work in and among us. Our understanding of justice has been obscured and our enactment of justice hampered by our sin. It is God who will bring the fulfilment of justice. We understand ourselves to be called even so to join in God’s world-transforming work. This has been lately underscored in the Accra Confession (Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth): “God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace.... Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners, and calls us to put justice for the ‘least of these’ (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18ff)” (paragraph 20).

18. This way of thinking has also been welcomed by the present partners. In the most recent dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation (*Communion: On Being the*

Church, paragraph 56), Lutherans and Reformed have together affirmed, “There is no area in life, indeed in all creation which does not belong to Jesus Christ who sends us into all the world to be a sign of God’s kingdom to preach and live the gospel of reconciliation in a common concern for justice, freedom, peace and care for the creation.” Similarly, in the final report of the fourth phase of the International Reformed-Catholic Dialogue (*Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent of Justice*), Catholics and Reformed have together affirmed: “the theological doctrine and reality of justification by faith and sanctification impels the Christian community to act on behalf of justice. The imperative for justice flows necessarily from justification and from the call of the whole Church to holiness” (paragraph 79).

19. There is a sense in which justification and sanctification may be thought of as ordered toward justice. In God’s saving work things are being “set right” in lives. We are drawn into right relationship with God and into the true worship of God (*solī deo gloria*). The true worship of God finds concrete manifestation in striving for justice and righteousness in society. Thus we are drawn into the work of setting things right in the larger social world. Calvin affirmed that “believers truly worship God by the righteousness they maintain within their society” (*Commentary on Matthew*, 12:7).

20. We maintain that “the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression and violence in today’s world” (*Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent of Justice* (paragraph 56).” In the message and ministry of Jesus justice was central. The Belhar Confession expresses the imperative of resisting injustice even more strongly. In Christ, God is revealed “as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people... . We reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel!” (paragraph 4).

21. The doctrine of justification is vitally important for the Reformed. Calvin spoke of it as “the main hinge on which religion turns” (*Institutes*, III.2.1). We view it as being in essential connection with other doctrines. Our unity around this central doctrine is to be celebrated. We are grateful that Lutheran and Reformed Churches in some countries have recognized one another as belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ and have declared full communion of pulpit and table. It is our deep hope that in the near future we shall also be able to enter into closer relationship with Lutherans in other places and with the Catholic Church, as well as with Methodists, in accordance with this declaration of our common understanding of the doctrine of justification.

Official Common Affirmation

In this Statement the World Communion of Reformed Churches affirms fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. The World Methodist Council affirmed their fundamental doctrinal agreement on 23 July 2006.

The signing partners of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification join together in welcoming the above Statement of the World Communion of Reformed Churches which declares and demonstrates Reformed agreement with the consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification as expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

Building on their shared affirmation of basic truths of the doctrine of justification, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching.

The present achievement and commitment are viewed by the four parties as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.

APPENDIX 7 WITTENBERG WITNESS

A Common Statement of The World Communion of Reformed Churches and The Lutheran World Federation 5 July 2017

Preamble

Today, in the city of Martin Luther and in the church where he used to preach, we gather to respond to the unique opportunities for continuing renewal which the 500th anniversary of the Reformation offers to the Church. On this momentous occasion, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, in the presence of representatives of the whole church, make a common witness. This Wittenberg Witness builds upon the steps towards unity taken by our member churches around the world and upon decades of theological dialogues, whose fruits we now claim.

1. ***Together, we give thanks to God and rejoice*** in the unity already ours in Christ, which we do not create and cannot destroy, since the Church is the work of the Triune God, the creation of Word and Spirit. The gift of unity does not require uniformity but can be found and celebrated also in diversity. The diversity of our confessional traditions and our churches are a legitimate reflection of our particular contexts, so that we are united, not divided by such diversity.
2. ***Together, we celebrate*** that we are one in Christ, sharing a common Reformation heritage and a common faith. We are united in confessing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We rejoice that there is no longer any need for our separation; our differences are not church dividing. We give thanks for the examples of those Lutheran and Reformed churches that have already declared church communion and now bear common witness together by sharing in worship, witness, and work for the world.
3. ***Together, we acknowledge, confess and lament*** that divisions still obscure our unity and hamper our witness. We regret that through our history we have too often formed divisive habits and structures, failing to discern the body of Christ. Injustice and conflict scar and scandalise our one body. We are implicated in colonialism and exploitation that have marked our history. We are saddened by the ways we have allowed race and ethnicity; class and inequality; patriarchy and gender bias; and arrogance of nation, language and culture to become divisive and oppressive in our churches and in our world.

4. ***Together, we hear God's call*** and acknowledge the claim of Christ upon all areas of our life. Listening for God's Word to us, we experience a call to continuous reform.

We hear this call when the Word is preached and the sacraments are celebrated.

We hear this call from those of our forebears who were deeply committed to the visible unity of the Church, who regretted schisms and called them sin, who described the divided church with sadness as a dismembered body.

We hear this call from the many protests born in pain, in the plight of refugees and migrants, in the frustration and humiliation and longings of so many in our common world, in the voices of young people who express concern for the future of the earth, our common home.

5. ***Together we long for renewed imagination*** of what being the church in communion could mean—for our world, in our time.

We need new imagination to live together in ways that would embrace our unity not only as gift but also as calling.

We need new imagination to dream a different world, a world where justice, peace and reconciliation prevail.

We need new imagination to practise spiritualities of resistance and prophetic vision, spiritualities in service of life, spiritualities formed by the mission of God.

6. ***Together we commit ourselves to respond*** to this yearning with concrete actions, convinced that God's Word leads us to deeper communion.

As world communions, Lutherans and Reformed, we commit to explore new forms of life together that will more fully express the communion we already have in Christ.

We commit ourselves to redouble our common efforts to embody our unity, together resisting the forces of injustice and exclusion.

We call upon our member churches to make our unity more visible in their local contexts. We invite our ecumenical partners to live out our shared commitment for unity and witness to the world.

7. ***Together we pray*** that the Holy Spirit may give us courage and imagination faithfully to live out our commitment to unity, expressed in shared worship, witness, and work in the world. We pray for liberation in the wider world and, by God's grace, a thoroughgoing renewal and reformation of our churches.

APPENDIX 8

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This document is not intended to be legalistic or punitive. It is meant to serve as a covenant for how, as a community, we deal with sexual harassment, seeking care, compassion and justice for all parties involved. It is our hope that the situation necessitating these guidelines will not arise.

1. Introduction

The Gospel affirms the basic dignity of all humankind, created in the image of God. This statement challenges the Christian community to act and respect all humankind regardless of their differences such as sex, age, race, ethnicity, class and religion. Human sexuality is a gift from God and it is to be celebrated. The roots of sexual harassment and abuse are not in human sexuality but in the abuse of power. Care must be taken that power is not used to violate, harass or intimidate. Although offenders may believe their behaviour is innocent or unintended, sexual harassment is defined by the perception and experience of the victim.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches affirms its commitment to the basic dignity and human rights of all people. We believe that we must strive to be a community, which challenges all forms of violence and disrespect and expresses the faith and principles of the gospel in appropriate action. A fundamental respect for each human being includes a commitment to the rights and dignity of all regardless of sex, race, age, class, caste or tribe. Sexual harassment is not exclusively a sexual issue but must be understood as an exploitation of power relationships.

It is a global reality that the human family is broken. One such form of brokenness is violence against the human person. This violence expresses itself in ways such as sexual abuse, child abuse and sexual harassment, and is directed predominantly towards women. The World Communion of Reformed Churches acknowledges that it has not only played a role in healing and restoring but that it also shares responsibility for this brokenness. Therefore, we commit ourselves to continue to work for the healing and restoration of the human family.

2. Definition of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as any form of sexual advance that is uninvited, unwanted and unwelcome. Sexual harassment may involve a wide range of behaviour, from

verbal innuendo and subtle suggestions to offensive and unwelcome hugs, squeezes, pinches, kisses, overt demands and physical abuse or assault. Unwelcome acts will be considered as violations of an acceptable code of conduct especially when the accuser has in some way made her/his feelings of what is “unwelcome” known in advance. The World Communion of Reformed Churches acknowledges that even within its gatherings, our families and churches, sexual harassment does occur.

3. Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to one or more of the following:

- Overt or covert sexual advances or contact.
- Mental abuse (which may include obscene jokes, innuendoes, unacceptable visual contact, seduction).
- Physical abuse or assault (which may include fondling, unwelcome hugs and kisses, and genital contact).
- Any intentional touching or fondling (either directly or through the clothing) of such areas of the body that are sensitive and personal.

4. What are some of the things you can do if you are being sexually harassed?

- Refuse any inappropriate gesture or contact.
- Make it clear to the aggressor by words or gestures that such behaviour is unwelcome.
- Draw public attention when or if harassment persists in public places.
- Share your concern with someone you trust.
- If you are sexually harassed or falsely accused, make a report to the Pastoral Team of the general council.

5. Procedures to be followed for Formal Complaints at the General Council

To begin the process, complaint or accusation of sexual harassment shall be brought to the attention of the Pastoral Team or the general council coordination office.

- The accusation may be verbal or written.
- The Pastoral Team will meet privately and conduct interviews with the complainant who may choose a friend to accompany him/her and to provide moral support.
- The Pastoral Team will schedule and conduct private interviews with the accused with the purpose of investigating the accusation.
- The accused shall be informed of the charge and advised that he/she may also choose an appropriate friend to accompany him/her and to provide moral support.
- After initial interviews, the Pastoral Team will determine whether or not to proceed with the investigation and follow up with appropriate action.

6. Actions to be considered by Pastoral Team

Issues to be considered by the Pastoral Team in making recommendations may include the intent of the accused, awareness of the appropriateness of the behaviour in question, awareness of why the behaviour is or is not appropriate, and willingness to take responsibility for the behaviour and its consequences.

The Pastoral Team may recommend the following actions to be taken in relation to:

a) Care for the victim:

1. The members of the Pastoral Team and the General Secretary shall respond with sensitivity and care to the victim.
2. Counselling and protection are offered to the victim.

b) The accused:

1. **Education/awareness:** In cases where the situation is not necessarily sexual harassment but shows poor judgement. Clear guidance needs to be given and counselling may be recommended.
2. **Educative warning:** In cases where the situation is unquestionably inappropriate and unwise behaviour, but is not clearly sexual harassment. A clear warning states why the behaviour is inappropriate, and calls for an immediate cessation of the behaviour.
3. **Disciplinary measures:** In cases where the situation involves sexual harassment and has resulted in relatively serious consequences. The following actions will be taken as deemed appropriate:
 - Restrictions to be placed on the participation of the accused during the meeting and the individual may be asked to leave the meeting and the premises at his/her own expense.
 - Restrictions to be placed on the accused from having contact with the victim.
 - In consultation with the victim, recommendations may include that an apology from the accused appropriate to the situation be made to the victim.
 - The victim may also choose to take legal action beyond action by the Pastoral Team.

The Pastoral Team for the General Council

1. Composition

A Pastoral Team consisting of the following persons has been established to deal with cases of sexual harassment:

- Chris Ferguson, General Secretary
- Dora Arce-Valentin, Executive Secretary, Justice and Partnership
- Cheryl Meban, Executive Committee member
- General Council Coordination Team member
- Martin Engels, a pastor from the local context (to also act as the liaison with police, legislative authorities as is needed).

The team brings the following principles and skills:

- Ability to maintain confidentiality within the team.
- Awareness of the implications and ramifications of the dynamics of power in social and human relations.
- Experience in pastoral counseling for such cases.
- Commitment to give of their time, to respond with care for the victim and to give assistance as is needed.
- Ability to give independent and balanced evaluation of the concerns of both accuser and accused.

2. Guidelines

- It is the aim of the Pastoral Team to act with fairness, justice, and discretion and it will seek to extend appropriate pastoral care in every situation.
- Persons accused of sexual harassment will be considered innocent until the accusation has been substantiated by careful examination of the evidence provided.
- The charges will be taken seriously. The team will be responsible for investigations and carrying out appropriate action.
- The investigation must not be discussed with anyone except those whom the team has officially decided to speak to and/or include during the investigation process.

APPENDIX 9 THEME INPUT DOCUMENTATION

Appendix 9a Concept Paper: Theology

TAKING UP THE “UNFINISHED AGENDA” OF THE REFORMATION

Inspired by the Reformation movements in France, Italy and the Czech Republic, in Germany, Switzerland and many other countries the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches meets in Europe and considers what it means to be a church of the Reformation. The theme “Living God, renew and transform us” takes up the call of the Reformers to renew the church and to transform the world and applies it to the challenges of the present.

The Reformation understood itself as an exercise in theological empowerment. All Christians should be able to read the Bible and to discern God’s will for the world. The catechisms and confessions gave focus and direction and prepared every member of the congregation to contribute to theological discussions.

The theology plenary at the General Council wants to reconnect with this spirit and encourages all participants to engage with the way the WCRC is doing theology. In the Reformed tradition, theological concepts and ideas do not claim eternal validity, but are being tested continuously in the light of the challenges that the world is posing to our churches.

The first chapter of this concept paper presents some questions that members of our Communion are asking in response to these challenges: How can we more fully live out the powerful legacy that we have received from our forebears in faith? How can the ideas handed down to us help to discern God’s will amid the problems of our time?

The proposal summarizes these suggestions and ideas in the light of the confessions of Barmen, Belhar and Accra. The decision of the General Council shall give theological focus and direction to the programmes of the WCRC.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT

1. The WCRC should develop **new insights into the Reformation**, which according to Reformed understanding is the ongoing need for the church to be renewed and transformed: What is the “unfinished business” of the Reformation? What are the themes and insights of the Reformation that we have not fully “made good on?”

- a. Have we fully realized “the priesthood of all believers” in our churches and in living out Christian vocation in the wider world?
 - b. The Reformers never desired a division of the church. Calvin even spoke of this as a “dismembering” of Christ’s body. Restoring unity is perhaps “unfinished business.”
 - c. How do we think about *sola scriptura* today in in our religiously pluralistic contexts where there are multiple “scriptures?”
 - d. Our theology is still shaped by western paradigms. How can we develop theological languages that give voice to the faith experiences of people of all continents?
2. WCRC’s vision of being “**called to communion – committed to justice**” should be further developed.
 - a. How can we express the connection between communion and justice in a way that it can be understood and embraced by all parts of our Communion?
 - b. How might we be informed by the Accra Confession with its economic and ecological focus as we pursue this vision?
 - c. The theme of “grounding theology in grace and the promise of flourishing of life” should be emphasized. The living God seeks fullness of life for all. How can we live out this gift in our theological work?
 3. The living out of our central vision “called to communion – committed to justice” could be focused by establishing **guiding ideas**:
 - a. *Wounded discipleship*: In response to the idolatries and theologies of glory of our time the WCRC emphasizes the significance of the cross: Theology done in response to the wounds of our world is theology in the mode of “suffering seeking faith and understanding.”
 - b. *Just accompaniment*: Theology should develop justice as the key theological concept that guides the relationships within the Communion and the world.
 - c. *Committed dialogue*: To be relevant, ecumenical dialogues shall pursue the unity of the churches and their shared witness to the world.
 - d. *Sustained discernment*: Reformed churches relate to confessions and declarations of faith according to the principle of “critical hospitality.” Every generation needs to revisit the confessions and declarations of our Reformed tradition and to live them out in response to the challenges of the present.

4. Seven years after the formation of our World *Communion* of Reformed Churches the WCRC should continue to explore the question: What is the meaning of “**communion**?”
 - a. There have been regional conversations on the meaning of communion across our regions in these seven years. What are the fruits of these dialogues? Each region may have something to contribute to our understanding of our identity as a communion. How can we develop our communion so that it embraces and fulfils all these different expectations?
 - b. How do we navigate our very different interpretations of Scripture that sometimes threaten the unity of our communion?

5. WCRC’s **vision** must be **contextually shaped** to address the challenges of our time faithfully and effectively.
 - a. The rise of authoritarian and populist movements in many parts of the world requires response. We have seen how racism, castism, xenophobia and religiously motivated violence that characterize our contemporary contexts constitute a threat to life. Our commitment to justice calls us to address the threat to the environment (eco-justice), the threat to women (gender justice), the threat to the poor (economic justice) and the threat to any who are designated as “the other,” particularly the racial or religious other (social justice). The demonization and dehumanization of people by the politics of separation and division is a rejection of God’s love and hospitality. New idolatries present themselves, and a prophetic response is needed.
 - b. What is the best way forward for this? The General Council could start a process towards a declaration to renounce the systems and structures that threaten life. This declaration could discern threatening developments in several contexts. Can the church rise up in a unified prophetic protest? Is something like the Barmen Declaration called for in our time? What might we learn from the Confessing Church?
 - c. Perhaps a first step is a call to “lamentation” along with a call to confession and to prayer. We need to find ways of bringing to speech what people are wanting/needing to say in the face of the threats to life named above.
 - d. Part of the task is reading the signs of the times and discerning what kind of response will be most helpful to our churches. Whatever our current response, whether declaration or lamentation, the church would not only confront the world, but also itself, because the church is as divided as our cultures and has contributed to the current problems in many ways.

PROPOSALS

1. Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

- to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;
- to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;
- to the partiality of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor;
- to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;
- to the priesthood of all believers;
- to peace, reconciliation and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;
- to the *sola scriptura* principle as basis for Christian communion; and
- to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Examples of what this might entail are listed below:

- a. Following the *principle of the Reformed Church always reforming according to the Word of God* the WCRC shall continue to express its identity in the present tense. The *Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra* guide the WCRC on its way to become a confessing communion that uses the confessional heritage to respond to the challenges of the present.
- b. *God’s justification in Christ* ultimately aims at setting things right for the poor and oppressed (Luke 1:46-55). In accordance with the Biblical witness the WCRC shall further develop a theology of life that emphasizes the *partiality of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor* to restore life for the whole of creation.
- c. *Evangelism* is sharing the Good News both in word and action. The WCRC shall continue to emphasize the *inseparable link between evangelization and justice* in all areas of its work.
- d. The WCRC affirms the *priesthood of all believers* in all areas of its work and calls upon its member churches to fully live out this central principle of the Reformation in worship and in the leadership of the church.
- e. The WCRC understands unity is a divine gift and calling and shall therefore promote *theologies of peace and reconciliation* and continue to engage in *programmes of unity* of the Christian church.
- f. In the context of ever sharper conflicts about the right approach to understand the Bible, we need platforms where people of different theological

convictions can meet. In these discussions the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation shall be emphasized as *basis of Christian communion*.

- g. Unity is God's gift to the whole world and reaches beyond the boundaries of Christianity. At a time where religions are increasingly co-opted to the justification of racism, xenophobia, violence and war the WCRC shall strongly engage in programmes of *interreligious dialogue and cooperation*.

2. Operating Principles

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

- the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;
- the commitment to contextuality, the diversity of voices, the multiplicity of languages and to the voices of young people;
- the commitment to do theology beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed and aiming at their liberation; and
- the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice.

A fuller elaboration of these principles is presented here:

- Theology shall be conducted in *global perspective*: All programmes of the WCRC shall give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents. Theological texts should therefore draw from theological insights from all over the world.
- Theology of the WCRC shall be *contextual* and express the *diversity of voices* in each context. Theological work shall embrace the *multiplicity of languages* and give space to the contributions of *young people*.
- In accordance with the confessions of Behar and Accra the theology of the WCRC shall *begin* with the *experiences of the poor and oppressed and aim at their liberation*.
- All programmes of the WCRC shall express the *inseparable link between communion and justice*.

3. Confessing Christ against separation and division

The General Council resolves to consult with churches in all regions to discern whether authoritarian and populist ideologies that violate the rights of people and deny full participation in society because of race, gender, caste, ethnic affiliation or religion shall be renounced in the form of a confession.

If taken up,

- such a process of confession should begin with lamentation and a call to confession of own complicities and failures;
- the exercise should draw from the many examples where Christians rejected separation and division and embraced God's love and hospitality;
- the confession should not only confront the world, but also the church. Many churches are as divided as the communities in which they are;
- the testimony should lead to a prophetic reconfirmation of the WCRC commitment to justice (eco-justice, gender-justice, economic justice and social justice).

4. Ecumenical Dialogues

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

- to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the General Council in Grand Rapids;
- to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners; and
- to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:
 - relevance for the WCRC and its member churches;
 - global perspective rooted in contextual realities;
 - and the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the communion.

Our engagement is marked by attention to:

- a. **Relevance:** Dialogues shall answer concrete needs of the WCRC and its member churches.
- b. **Global perspective:** Dialogues shall address ecumenical challenges from all the regions and give voice to theological languages from all over the world.
- c. **Application to discussions within the communion:** The WCRC shall prepare materials that will make methodologies and contents of ecumenical dialogues useful and fruitful for debates within the Communion. Many issues discussed in dialogues (e.g. acknowledgement of each other's ordination) are also controversial among member churches of the WCRC. The methodologies of dialogue opens ways to recognize differences but to nevertheless stay in communion.

Appendix 9b

Concept Paper: Justice

PREAMBLE

In 1989 at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Assembly in Seoul the seeds of the “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” programme (JPIC) were sowed, starting the organization on its path toward seeking justice faithfully. The programme for JPIC influenced the ecumenical movement and continued its journey through various ecumenical bodies and individual churches. The WARC continued its commitment to justice, culminating in the Accra Confession, *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*. This document boldly named Empire as that overarching system under which we live, and to which, we as the church, are called to resist. The Accra Confession acknowledged that (articles 17, 18):

We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (John 10:10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.

We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).

The Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), too, brought to the WCRC their involvement in justice and social issues. Reports such as “The Church and its Social Calling” (1980), “The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation” (1996) and the affirmation of the Micah Challenge (2005), addressing specifically economic justice, are some examples of the REC’s concerns and commitments to justice.

Following the call that the Accra Confession made to us and to the ecumenical movement—and what was affirmed in its centrality to the life of WCRC at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids¹—we arrive at this General Council affirming our responsibility to engage critically to work for justice in the world, read the signs of the times and discern the will of God according to the Gospel values that Jesus proclaims: human dignity and justice for all God’s creation.

That commitment has been expressed in many statements and declarations from the WCRC itself and in partnership with ecumenical organizations or denominational bodies. It has also been the frame of the programmatic work of the WCRC in the last years, following the spirit of its predecessor bodies. From *Covenanting for Justice in*

¹ Record of Proceedings United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, p. 137.

the Economy and the Earth, programmatic pieces to the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative, just to mention two key pillars, we felt the echoes of what the Accra Confession declares (articles 41, 42):

The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.

Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR JUSTICE WORK

As we think about justice as the building of right relationships, between us and God, us and others, with ourselves, with the Creation, we identify three important pillars that have been shaping the justice work of our Communion:

1. Reading the signs of the times as the first steps in understanding and discerning the will of God and where we have to come together in collaboration with God's plan. Reading the signs of the times is the imperative that Jesus calls his disciples into and implies that we must address questions of structural inequality in the world. To circumvent this is to avoid the roots of the problem and is a refusal to allow the radically inclusive love of God to reach all of God's creation.
2. Justice issues are all interconnected. They cannot be separated and treated individually but are undergirded with the prerequisite of true peace that is inclusive of social, political, ecological and economic justice.
3. The mission of the church can be summarized in working with God in building just and inclusive communities that are alternative spaces of resistance and hope in the midst of Empire that turn us against each other and break solidarity and human community. Specifically, this means that justice has to be at the core of the theology we produce to help churches in their mission. Justice has to be at the core of our passion to become a communion. It further means that there is a necessity to forge a communion that has justice at its very heart.

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

In the years since the Accra Confession was written, the world has changed dramatically. On the one hand we have had a seeming "adjustment to the economy" with the subprime issue. While many at that time believed that it was cutting at the roots of the system, unfortunately neoliberal capitalism has emerged stronger and the rich

wealthier than before. Looking back it seems to have been a way in which the wealthy gained not only more resources for themselves but state support for doing so.

On the other hand we now find a growing movement towards the political right that is driven by a racist and misogynist agenda on the one hand coupled with the collapse of the workers movement on the other. The unprecedented rise of what can best be described as Trumpism in the United States of America and the consolidation of political, military and economic power has come as a blow to progressive movements around the world. But the Trump phenomenon is just a reflection of what has been happening and continues to happen around the world. The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union for narrow, parochial and xenophobic reasons; the rise of right wing governments in Asia and increasing conflict in West Asia are just a few examples of this.

Further militarized resource extractions from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have only intensified and have worked to serve global elites in their continuous drive to consume while breaking the back of labour, bulldozing communities and bruising the land.

Even the rises of the Indian and Chinese economies have not resulted in greater equity for their own populations but have resulted in the appropriation of wealth and the exploitation of labour in these two countries and particularly in contested markets in Africa and other parts of Asia.

We are living in an age that is on the brink of self-destruction through nuclear warfare. Deadly war games in the South China Sea and escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula have made the threat of nuclear war an imminent danger. The posturing of nuclear testing has made war an ever-present reality.

The onslaught of the market and its continual search for resources has treated the Earth like a tap and a sink, imagining that there are unlimited resources and that we can pollute in unlimited ways. But the economic system is and always has been embedded in the ecology, and unrelenting economic activity is bound to have its effect. We now face an ecological crisis of unparalleled proportions. Climate change and drastic events are already harming the most vulnerable and threatening life as we know it. Our reliance on fossil fuels is only exacerbating the problem which is further fueled by changing ideologies which see humans as being distinct from the rest of creation and positioned to dominate it.

These global movements have resulted in a certain paralysis of analysis; the world is becoming more and more complex and discerning the signs of the times has become hard but all the more necessary. It is difficult to predict the way in which neoliberal

capitalism will morph and what it will co-opt and appropriate next. For example, we are living in a context where even resistance and environmental consciousness have been subsumed under the logic of profit making where “buy green” and “just trade” have become catch words of consumerism.

The alienation caused by the onslaught of market capitalism has simultaneously resulted in parochial identity politics that have been fed by religious fundamentalism. This is across board and across all religions. Moreover, this religious fundamentalism has turned to violence against the other, either with explicit state support or by non-state actors. The religious question has been further fueled by a growing Islamophobia across the world which further seeks to drive fear and right wing agendas.

While we are not sure what the future exactly holds or what neoliberal capitalism is shifting towards, we can be sure that there is an unrestrained, savage, imperial greed that is committed to ensuring the good health of Empire. We can also be sure that the future holds displacement, war, extreme poverty, fundamentalism and the persecution of religious minorities the world over. Further the life of the planet is at threat with a growing climate crisis, nuclear threat and military conflict.

In such a critical moment in the history of humanity and the Earth we acknowledge that the way before us can lead our paths toward a future devastated by climate change, by a paradigm of development based on destructive industries and a distorted vision shape by greed. Nevertheless, we always have the opportunity to “choose Life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). We must take the path that will lead us to sustainability, powered by renewable energy. We must reconcile as human beings with the Earth. We must leave to our children a thriving and healing planet.

This is the year we celebrate the five hundred years of the Reformation. Were we to read the works of the Reformers we would note that their prophetic voice was not just directed towards the church but towards society as well. Both Luther and Calvin wrote strongly about involvement in political and economical issues. Calvin was specially concerned about the rate of interest of credit. He made a distinction between when credit is taken to have access to basic needs and when it is done to produce profit. Even though he accepted the right of a rate when the credit is used to produce some profit, he affirmed and emphasized that a limit is necessary, otherwise it will be usury, and he particularly warned against that.

Calvin also proposed that we may take with joy the fruits of our labour and what the rest of creation gives to us but in such a way that we do not compromise the future of the coming generation or deprive others of similar possibilities. Also if we take into consideration the First Reformation Movement, like the Waldensians, we find strong concerns about the risks that wealth brings to faith.

Though we recognize that the Reformed tradition shifted away from nature at the start of modernity and industrialization, for the sake of ecological justice, it is time to overcome our alienation toward the natural world, listening to God’s wisdom in creation and her vulnerable people, restoring its sacred value and seeking answers to environmental challenges in harmony with creation, of which we are a part.

The immense ecological challenges we face demand as well a “green reformation.” More than a change in lifestyles, this entails a just transition to a zero carbon, post-growth economy. Such a transition needs to be supported by a new international financial and economic architecture that values and accounts for social and ecological tasks. It cannot but be nourished by a spirituality of resistance and transformation – exemplified by Indigenous concepts such as “Buen Vivir”² that comprehend that all beings are interconnected in a wondrous web of life.

We need to draw from the spirit of these reformers and see discerning the signs of the times as both a spiritual and theological exercise. To discern the signs of the times is to name the demons of our age and commit to their exorcism. This is not just an ethical imperative but is one that derives from a position of faith. It is a deep belief in a God of life and a God whose heart beats for justice—and that moves us towards responding to this God with faith that is justified by the doing of justice.

In recent times we have been witness to the Occupy and Black Lives Matter movements; student movements in South Africa and Central Europe as well as movements for life and livelihood and democracy have made inroads in South Korea and the Philippines. At the same time community, church-based and ecumenical initiatives have also succeeded in presenting alternatives to global capitalism. Success stories and best practices within the work of the Oikotree and Peace for Life show us that it is possible to not just imagine another world but to live faithfully in this one.

At such a time as this the justice work of the WCRC cannot stand by itself but is necessarily involved with the work of theology and communion of the WCRC. Justice needs to be undergirded by theology and theology is to be for the sake of justice. At the same time we cannot struggle for justice in the world without addressing the structural inequalities that exist between churches in the Communion and the struggles for life and dignity within each church.

A BIBLICAL PARADIGM

The WCRC is a communion of churches, congregations and people who come from all walks of life. Some come from communities which are broken by Empire while others

² *Sumak Kawsay* in the Quichuan language. The principle *Sumak Kawsay* orients the interrelation within the Quichua society and of this one with nature.

have seemingly benefited from its machinations. What we need is a biblical paradigm that can help us to articulate our vision for the future of the justice work of the WCRC.

Perhaps a helpful text is the story of the Egyptian midwives as found in Exodus 1: 8-22. It is a story that is located in the context of Empire in which people on opposite sides of the structural equation are able to find a common humanity that is rooted in resistance to the dictates of Empire. On the one hand it is about the Egyptian midwives that are afforded some amounts of privilege because of their ethnicity who undermine the dictates of their community and their community leaders to do what is right and work towards the protection of life. On the other hand it is about the abused slaves who enter into a tricky solidarity with those who are perceived as being from the oppressor community for the sake of the salvation of the children. This solidarity obviously involved deep amounts of trust of each other.

The story is further complicated by the entry of Pharaoh's daughter who does not commit class suicide like the midwives but is able to use her privilege for the protection of life, which ultimately results in the liberation of all the Hebrew slaves.

The text speaks to us in the context of our communion that struggles to live out the discipleship commandment of love with justice. In a present context that is torn by economic inequality and is supported by the power of military might which has divided us by class, nation and ethnicity the imperative is for us to come together in the building of unusual alliances that offers the possibility of living faithfully in the context of Empire. It offers us a way in which we can even resist Empire as individuals.

RESPONDING AS A WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

In the context of our celebration as a worldwide family it is crucial to recommit ourselves as a communion united in its passion for justice. That means we must affirm the bases of our work for justice as we move forward into the future. Hence, we affirm that reading the signs of the times is the imperative methodology to understand our call to resist and overcome Empire and protect life as a gift from God. We need to recognize that while some of our churches have benefitted from Empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Therefore we need to continue our work on nuancing Empire and its implications for the Communion and for communion. Lastly, we must continue to affirm the interconnections between all justice issues.

Accordingly, we also affirmed the mutuality with matters around communion, mission and theology. Therefore, partnership and dialogue between our two programmatic areas is an imperative for our work. Themes around **migration and forced displacement** should be addressed as part of the work around mission. **Interfaith and inter-religious engagement** should be approached not only from the justice perspective but in partnership with theology. Issues around **human sexuality** and its connections

with **human rights** should be part of common effort to link them as matters of justice as well as matters of communion, theology and mission. A very strong collaboration between justice and theology is needed to work with all matters around economic and ecological justice and climate change.

As the WCRC we have been working ecumenically in the NIFEA project by a mandate of the Uniting General Council. It is important in this General Council to affirm this initiative in partnership with the Council for World Mission (CWM), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC). Affirming NIFEA means we recommit to work in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. It also means we need to do our homework to make the NIFEA initiative one that belongs to our member churches and regional bodies. There is also a need to flesh out the economic issues behind racism and gender injustice and see how this feeds into NIFEA as being the central piece of the justice work. As part of the development of the initiative within our regional bodies and member churches we can move beyond the work of the ecumenical panel in and attempt to recognize the link between economics and humans and human relationships, also conscientious management of resources within the household of God in a way that provides for the needs of all. As part of that process the piece of work toward our regions and member churches can concentrate on alternative economics practices. NIFEA also will need to reinforce its vision and alternatives for a new financial and economic architecture that address climate change and promote eco-justice.

Likewise, this should be the opportunity for our member churches to commit to do more in promoting climate justice. There are steps our churches and regions can engage in addition to be faithful and bold in addressing people in their pews, in bodies within their own structure, governments, corporations, etc. about the ethical responsibilities we all have in protecting the Earth. Churches divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing only in companies that are involved in peaceful pursuits, like providing renewable energy to more than the 1 billion people in the world who lack access to electricity are things we must encourage among our worldwide family.

CALLED TO COMMUNION, COMMITTED TO JUSTICE

The Gospel calls us to collaborate around issues of justice. We perceive of justice as the practice of solidarity from below so as to transform society in ways that seek to align the world with the will of God. We therefore perceive WCRC justice work as having the following core areas as seen in the graphic below:



PROPOSALS:

1. The primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.
2. The New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be a central priority for the WCRC, in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.
3. The WCRC will initiate conversations between member churches on global systems of oppression, concentrating on the specific ways in which Empire changes who we are and the contexts in which we live. This will include a recognition that while some of our churches have benefited from Empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Resources should be produced collaboratively with regions and member churches to enable churches and communities to resist Empire and to live faithfully as disciples in this context. Churches should be able to present themselves as beacons of change and alternative communities in a context that crushes life.

4. **The WCRC will continue its advocacy to international forums and organizations, especially through collaboration with the PC(USA) and other ecumenical offices in the United Nations, to present concerns around economic and ecological injustices, militarization, peace and reconciliation, escalating xenophobia and fundamentalisms. (An immediate opportunity comes to write a letter on behalf of our community, representing 80 million Christians around the world, to the on-coming meeting of the G20, reminding the most powerful countries of the world of their responsibilities to ensure life and justice for every person in the world.)**

Appendix 9c

Concept Paper: Gender Justice

INTRODUCTION

As context for our work on gender justice, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of the General Council's theme: "Living God, renew and transform us." This theme is a prayer to the Living God in communion with whom we seek new life. As a petition, it acknowledges the brokenness of our faith and practice, that renewal and transformation are needed.

We lament injustice to women as a result of such brokenness. As the biblical reflections that follow will show, our ancestors in the faith lamented this injustice and sought justice before us. Their enduring and persistent faith is validated in the life and the ministry of Jesus who affirmed the faith of these women.

We recognize that this injustice is a result of sexism and patriarchy, which is historical and systemic. It is ancient and deep; scholars and theologians argue that patriarchy is the oldest form of oppression, and that it is one of the root causes of all domination.¹ Injustice to women manifests itself in myriad ways. At this General Council we will focus on two ways: institutional injustice in the churches where women are denied the full equality of the baptized (Galatians 3:28); and violence against women throughout society.

An example of the first is the denial to women of ordained ministry. This denial is contrary to the Gospel because both men and women are equally "created in God's image" (Genesis 1:27), and "God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:11). God has been calling

¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: T & T Clark, 2005); Maria Miles, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

both women and men to leadership, granting different gifts to different people. Still, traditional ecclesial rules and practices in some member churches have prevented women from responding to God's call. It is time for renewal and transformation.

Injustice to women is also manifested in various forms of violence. Evidence of gender-based violence discussed below is startling. Women—just because they are women—are targets of sexual assault, rape, and physical and emotional abuse. This gender-based violence is found all over the world, though to different degrees and with different consequences from place to place. It is alarming to note that this violence may be growing. Thus we as a Communion must respond to it with urgency. It is time for renewal and transformation.

Injustice against women is interconnected and entangled together with other forms of injustice. We must address women's issues together with other issues. For example, domestic violence against women is often related to poverty. Sexualized labour is a form of classism and racism. A helpful perspective is found in the World Council of Churches' statement, *Economy of Life, Peace, and Justice for All: A Call to Action*. Here the churches affirm that "...various aspects of climate, ecological, financial and debt crisis are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately any more. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of the natural resources."² When we look at economic exploitation and ecological violence against nature, it is not difficult to see how they are connected with the plight of those who suffer from poverty and violence. Women, children, the poor and even nature itself in the global south are most affected by the current neoliberal, male-dominated, capitalist structures of the global north. It is time for renewal and transformation.

This Council invites all of us, delegates and the members of the Communion's churches, to pray, discern and make necessary decisions towards gender justice, and thus towards the renewal and transformation of our churches and our world.

LAMENTS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN AGAINST INJUSTICE

Matthew 15:21-28, Luke 18:1-8, Judges 11:34-40

Lament, found in a number of biblical passages and in the lives of women today, means to "cry out." It can be a prayerful plea to God for help or a complaint to God over systemic injustice that needs redress. In these three texts women cry out against the unjust system of patriarchy, which has been codified in law, both societal and ecclesial.

² *Economy of Life, Peace, and Justice for All: A Call to Action* (WCC, 2012), paragraph 10.

In lament, these women and women who come after them seek to bring pressure for change on all who hear their complaint. The focus on gender justice at this General Council stands in this tradition. Through recommendations and calls to action, it presents a way forward for the WCRC to affirm equal place for women within its own structures and its member churches and also to witness to justice in the wider society. The General Council is called to lament, to cry out against injustice and to work for change.

In Matthew's Gospel a gentile woman approaches Jesus and asks for healing for her daughter. He ignores her, but she continues to cry out. The disciples find her cries so irksome that they ask Jesus to send her away. He responds only to the disciples, denying her appeal. However, the woman persists, imploring him, countering every argument he makes. In the end he recognizes she has strength of character that will persist in calling out—naming the injustice of limiting God's call to a particular religious and cultural group—until he responds. In the story she, a gentile woman with a demon-possessed daughter, is someone Jesus and his disciples would be expected to ignore, but she refuses to be ignored and cries out against such unjust cultural and religious expectations. Jesus recognizes the strong faith within her to lament and to keep on lamenting until her cries are heard, and a positive response results.

In the story of the widow facing the power of an unjust judge (From the Gospel of Luke), once again we hear lament, a crying out against the unjust structures that keep her life less than it should be. She cries out in vain again and again until the judge seeks to have her dismissed, fearing she will give him a "bruised eye." In first-century Palestine the widow is the one who is supposed to receive protection under Torah law. As recorded in Exodus, Torah law indicates that if a widow cries out, calling attention to any abuse, God will hear her cry and God's wrath will burn hot (Exodus 22:21-24).

Through her lament, her ongoing cries for justice, the widow goes public to make her case. She condemns the system for what it is and calls it to be what it should be. Walter Wink, addressing systems of domination, states, "Whenever anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth—that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain too....If the main pillar of a system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth."³

The third story, found in the book of Judges, comes from a young woman and her female friends. Notice in all three of these stories, the women remains nameless.

³ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 98 as cited in William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). See also pp. 215-232.

Jephthah has made a foolish vow. So desperate is he to win a battle over the Ammonites that he promises God that whatever first comes out of his house to greet him on his return home, he will sacrifice to God. When his daughter greets him, his first response is to blame her.

However, he does not have the last word. She takes over the story, asking that she be given time to go to the hills with her friends to lament her fate. In the end her father does to her as he promised. No god saves her as the God of the Hebrews saved Isaac. Ensuring that evil does not have the last word, every year after her death her friends return to the mountains crying out against a system that murdered their friend, a cry that women through the centuries have continued to make.⁴

Lament—a powerful way to cry out against oppressive systems and to call for redress. In her definition of how patriarchy works, Elizabeth Johnson acknowledges that “the traditional pyramidal pattern of social relations in the government, families and the church and the like has become so much the way things are that this pattern appears natural.”⁵ But it is a lie, and like the widow in Luke’s gospel, once again we go public and declare the system or patriarchy in all its forms to be sinful. Its structure is not divinely ordained but humanly constructed. Even as we say this, we are aware that religious patriarchy is the most difficult system to dismantle because it understands itself to be “divinely ordained.”⁶ Thus as the WCRC we need to look at our role in perpetuating violence against women both in their bodies and in their souls before pronouncing a statement on the issue of violence against women. No system should be supported that is biased against women, causing marginalization and in many cases violent death.⁷

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Today lament is becoming more and more a crying out from women in every corner of the world, suffering because of what is called gender-based violence. Gender-based violence has been understood and defined by the United Nations as violence that happens as a result of the vulnerability of women based solely on their gender. “Violence against women occurs in a patriarchal cultural context. The control and submission of women by men has traditionally not only been tolerated but also legitimized. This is structural violence, and it arises from a series of sociocultural norms, which both

⁴ Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988), pp. 53-70.

⁵ Elizabeth E. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), p. 23.

⁶ Johnson, p. 23.

⁷ Please see the concept paper for Theology .

justify and downplay the oppression of this type of conduct. In short, gender-based violence has its roots in the inequality between men and women. It is instrumental in character: it is not an end in itself but rather an instrument of domination and control. We are speaking here about a type of violence which is not individual in its origins, nor in its consequences, but which does certainly result in individual acts of aggression.”⁸

That is the primary reason the planning team of the Women’s Pre-Council decided to rephrase the General Council theme as: “Living God, in a world of violence, renew and transform us.” The program for this Pre-Council is focused on gender based violence and takes various entry points to address the challenge of being a church, a communion of churches around the world that hears the laments of women everywhere and responds in ways that make us faithful to the Gospel we preach. As gender-based violence prevents women and girls from attaining the abundant life of which Jesus speaks we must respond according to our call. In unmasking patriarchy and the violence that sustains it, we believe we work for justice and contribute to building among our member churches the communion we aspire to be.

In strengthening our communion, the WCRC and all its member churches in various regions should continue to embrace the various global campaigns: the “Thursday in Black Campaign,” the United Nations Campaigns “Orange Day” and “HeforShe”, and commemorate November 25th as the “Day against Gender-Based Violence” as well as the “16 Days of Activism” prior to this day.

WOMEN’S ORDINATION

As we lament injustice to women across the globe and long to find effective ways to right the wrongs, we come face to face with injustice to women within our own Reformed churches. One significant action proposed to this General Council is the adoption of “A Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination.” The text can be found in this workbook. The Declaration addresses two kinds of institutional injustice to women in our churches and calls for urgent remedial action. The first injustice is the refusal to receive women in ordained offices of the church. The second is treating ordained women as inferior to ordained men. General Councils at least since 1989 have consistently urged the churches to remedy this injustice.

The Declaration first affirms the conviction, grounded in the Bible, that “God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.” We observe, both in the Bible and in the subsequent history of the church, that it has often been hard for people of faith to see God calling women to leadership in

⁸ Taken from a report on violence against women in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Special Report from the Ararteko institution to the Basque Parliament, December 2003.

the community of faith because of cultural assumptions that claim women's inferiority to men. Still we also observe that God has indeed been calling women to leadership and granting them gifts and graces necessary to carry out their ministries. It is a matter of justice to reject assumptions of women's inferiority to men and to recognize publicly those women God is calling to leadership in the church.

The Declaration then calls on the churches of WCRC to "pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation must be determined on the same basis as for men." This call to a common practice with regard to women's ordination is both a call to live out a public witness to the justice we proclaim, and also a call to live more fully into the communion⁹ that WCRC increasingly embodies.

Our Bible study for 1 July, on Romans 12:1-2, will call for transformation and renewal to discern the will of God. What follows is Paul's description of the church as the one body in Christ with many members who have different functions according to the graces God has given them. There is no suggestion that the graces are divided according to gender. Indeed, Paul in Romans 16 acknowledges that his women colleagues have received such graces of leadership.

Adoption of The Declaration represents a challenge to all our member churches. Those churches that do not yet ordain women will be challenged to rethink the way they read the Bible or the way they witness to their faith in the world. The churches who do ordain women will be challenged to explore whether ordained women are treated with the same respect as men. We hear voices from churches in the North, South, East, and West lamenting the unequal treatment of women ministers. All our churches will be challenged to accompany one another in solidarity as they try to be faithful to the pledge they have taken together.

PROPOSALS

- 1. That the General Council adopt "A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination."**
- 2. That the General Council directs the Executive Committee to produce and adopt a Gender Policy and that they collaborate with the regions to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches.**

⁹ Please see the concept paper on Strengthening Communion.

Appendix 9d

Concept Paper: Communion in Mission

Liberating Discipleship: Living out faith in the face of idolatries of power and privilege

Mission is at the centre of the witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Guided by the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra the General Council discerns the challenges of our time and calls the WCRC to affirm a theology of discipleship that from the large richness of mission theology put emphasis on those concepts that will support the church to live out its faith in the face of idolatries of power and privilege.

PREFACE

“Be it known to you, O king, ... that we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up” (Daniel 3:18).

The **Accra Confession** called many Reformed Churches to a **faith position that denounced the injustice of our economic systems as sin**. This theological critique exposed the unjust forces and powers which pollute, exploit and corrupt the world God made and loves. At the heart of this are powerful interests that have fundamentally inverted the relationships God calls to be at the heart of life and have deliberately engineered an economic and political system that favours the few and threatens all of life. The Accra Confession committed churches within the Communion to “covenant in obedience to God’s will” as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings (37).

The critique of the Accra Confession was to see how Reformed discipleship was being subverted by loyalties to powers and systems counter to God’s vision of life. These are **idolatries** and they arise from a devotion to counter powers to God’s power. Faithful people today are like Daniel’s people under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, under the threat of idolatries which silence and co-opt us to the systematic looting of the treasure God has made in all life. The WCRC understands this to be the idolatry of the “golden statue,” which Accra named as neoliberal globalization, and its constituent gods (deregulated markets, commodification, consumption, technology etc.) function at the centre of systems of power to co-opt, seduce and silence all counter visions and voices.

If this was the case in 2004, it is even more so in 2017. The WCRC comes at the questions of this time conscious that we are in the midst of powers and structures seeking to co-opt or silence us, and realizing that we are called in and by mission to counter and subvert such powers and systems. Babylon has many faces and forces today, and the peoples’ and planet’s visions and voices that New Babylon oppresses

long for redemption. At the heart of Babylon are chauvinistic, patriarchal, racist forces which must be resisted by common, inclusive justice-creating movements, which befit the Spirit of God who walks through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace **to show the true power of God alongside the victims of Empire.**

The Accra Confession was built on an honourable, joyful and radical tradition of speaking truth to power. This General Council meets in the context that voiced the **Barmen Declaration** in 1934. This act of defiance to fascism offers inspiration and challenge for today's context where many see fascist ideologies emerging again. There are signs now of the Gospel being domesticated and co-opted to violent and supremacist ideologies now as there was in Nazi Germany. The Council can be mindful as it meets in the contexts of today's threats to life of the costly discipleship of Bonhoeffer and Niemöller and the Confessing Church movement. The Reformed tradition knows the sin of racism must be named and resisted. The Belhar Confession also commissions this Communion to be bold in its announcement of a joyful vision of common humanity and its denunciation of racism in all its forms.

Bound by this tradition the WCRC feels called upon to testify against a series of idolatries believing in God's converting and de-colonizing power and presence.

IDOLATRIES OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE: EXCLUSIVE AND EXCLUDING NATIONALISMS

Many of our member churches and regions are testifying to the **racism, xenophobia and violence** swirling around issues like migration, human diversity and poverty and disenfranchisement. Hatred and intolerance are manifesting themselves in many forms, in political and community life. The implications of political changes like the election of President Trump, Brexit, etc., are still becoming clear but already the rights of minorities, migrants, indigenous people and people of colour are at risk, as is commitment to action on justice issues like climate change. Chauvinistic conservatism and ultra-nationalisms have captured the political will of many nations. It is visible in Europe in emerging and established far right political populist parties in France, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands, in the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, in the anti-immigrant policies of Hungary, in Erdogan's shift to autocracy in Turkey. This reflects Putin's Russia and Assad in Syria. The state of Israel continues to repress Palestinian rights to their land and legitimizes its ultra-nationalist settler programmes. Hindu ultra-nationalism holds sway in India under Prime Minister Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Islamic style nationalisms of Pakistan or Malaysia. China's Communist Party uses more and more nationalist rhetoric in its internal and external politics.

Civic visions of nationalism have been usurped by exclusivist interests and are accompanied by supremacist and chauvinistic ideologies which threaten minorities and

migrants, risk international consensus on key justice issues, from climate change to human rights, and will threaten peace at a national, regional and even international level. This makes many fear and suspect a **global rise of fascism in various forms**. Gathering in Germany for this General Council reminds us it is the lesson of the 20th century that fascism must be resisted, and is best resisted at its earliest stages. The values of the Gospel are at stake as societies oppress the weak and churches are called to costly discipleship in the face of such power and politics.

IDOLATRIES OF INEQUALITY: EXPLOITATION BY DOMINANT AND DOMINEERING GROUPS

Eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, according to a report published by Oxfam in January 2017. The World Economic Forum identified economic inequality as one of the most urgent global risks in 2012. **Wealth continues to be sucked up by the wealthy; there is no trickle down.** Oxfam cites that the incomes of the poorest 10% of people increased by less than \$3 a year between 1988 and 2011, while the incomes of the richest 1% increased 182 times as much. In the United States, new research by economist Thomas Piketty shows that over the last 30 years the growth in the incomes of the bottom 50% has been zero, whereas incomes of the top 1% have grown 300%. This is to amplify and accelerate all that Accra denounced.

The fact that this wealth is also owned by men highlights **gender inequality**. It has become an almost routine assertion to say that poverty itself is unequal and impacts on women disproportionately. Men and women differ in their access to almost every aspect of life, from health care to education, human rights to access to power. Sexism at an individual level and patriarchy at an institutional level continue to overshadow gender relations and thus thwart gender justice. Unequal access to wealth and employment continue to show subordinate position of women in almost every context. The prevalence of gender violence, domestic violence and female genital mutilation shows the objectification of women. Experiences of exclusion from education, decision-making, positions of leadership and even citizenship within society or civil institutions, including churches, testify to the social, political and religious sanction of ongoing discrimination. The diversity of human identity is often repressed and exploited, whether it be in terms of gender, sexuality, ability or ethnicity. Many of these communities experience violence at the hands of dominant groups, often sanctioned by religious power.

Racial inequality is also interconnected with patriarchal systems. Racism and xenophobia is showing a marked increase in political movements and policies, and it breaks out in acts of intolerance and violence. It is systematic and often religiously rooted. It continues to be a global issue for black people, particularly as a legacy from the trans-

atlantic slave trade. The United Nations has dedicated 2015-2024 as the “International Decade for people of African Descent” in order to bring respect and justice to the black diaspora communities around the world. The US-based “Black Lives Matter” movement reminds us why this is urgent; a movement which has emerged as an act of resistance and pride following the killings of black people by police and vigilantes, within a social and legal system virtually criminalizing blackness.

This echoes the **experience of many ethnic groups**. Dalits and Adavasi in India experience acute religiously inspired oppression, and even some churches practice caste. Minorities like the Rohingya in Myanmar, Uigars in China, Yazidis in Syria, Bihari in Bangladesh and more continue to experience violence and exclusion. Alongside this anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are evident at many levels of social, political and religious life. Indigenous peoples’ lands and rights continue to be denied and exploited. Inclusion and discrimination continues to be a battle ground, be it in the areas of race, gender, sexual identity or disability and by and large “religion” is identified as an exclusivist anti-social force. Ethnic violence is also characterizing community and tribal relationships in Africa and destabilizing national identity and minorities and migrants are experiencing violence.

IDOLATRIES OF CONSUMPTION AND PROFIT SEEKING: THE DEEPENED ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Accompanying these heightened inequalities are the connected and consequential crisis of human-caused **climate change**, driven by the economic system and values of the global economic system. Global warming continues. 2016 marked the third year in a row that record global temperatures were set. The average global temperature change for the first three months of 2016 was +1.48°C, essentially equalling the 1.5°C warming threshold agreed to by COP 21 negotiators in Paris 2015. We are witnessing heightened storms and extreme weather events. Heatwaves that previously occurred once every three years are now happening every 200 days thanks to global warming. With rising temperatures come rising sea levels; the two major causes of global sea level rise are thermal expansion caused by the warming of the ocean and increased melting of land-based ice, such as glaciers and ice sheets.

This is already **threatening life now** with species extinction, threats to food and water security and loss of land, threatening population groups and entire nations. It is also causing forced migration. In the last six years, some 140 million people have been forced to move because of climate-related disasters. According to the UN, by mid-century one in 30 people could be displaced, many as a result of climate change. Existing global inequalities are exacerbated by the injustice of climate change that severely affects the poorest and most vulnerable, those who have contributed least to the climate crisis.

IDOLATRIES OF BOUNDARIES: FORCED MIGRATION

The UNHCR Global Trends Report finds 65.3 million people, or one person in 113, were displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution in 2015. Twenty-four people were forced to flee each minute in 2015, giving a refugee population four times larger than a decade earlier. **Forced migration** is a general term that refers to the movements of refugees, trafficked people and internally displaced people as a result of conflicts, as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects. This global displacement of people affects almost all nations' politics while impacting heaviest on many of the poorest nations of the world. In all, 86% of the refugees under the UNHCR's mandate in 2015 were in low- and middle-income countries close to situations of conflict. Worldwide, Turkey was the biggest host country, with 2.5 million refugees. With nearly one refugee for every five citizens, Lebanon hosted more refugees compared to its population than any other country. According to the UNHCR children made up 51% of the world's refugees in 2015; many were separated from their parents or travelling alone.

Accra exposed many of the factors driving this. Economic and ecological injustice, coupled with militarization drives this crisis, exacerbated by xenophobia and intolerance. But at the same time as nations enforce their boundaries the global economic system is prospering **human trafficking**, which has become an illegal global business second only to the illegal trade in weapons. It is fed by the economic system that always drives down the cost of labour and wants to dismantle labour rights. It is made possible by the commodification of people, especially those that patriarchal attitudes deem less important, and it is often rooted in the nexus of poverty, climate change and militarization.

IDOLATRY OF SELF-INTEREST: MILITARIZATION, RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

The World Bank estimated in 2015 that 1.2 billion people, roughly one fifth of the world's population, are affected by some form of violence or insecurity. **Militarization** is evident in such conflict areas as Syria, Iraq and Palestine. But it is also evident in the militarization of police and security forces in places like the US and Africa. The urgency of peace-making is clear on the Korean peninsula, Syria, Israel-Palestine, Kashmir and West Papua.

Religiously motivated conflicts continue to be on the rise at communal, national and international levels. One third of the world's population meet hostility because of their religious affiliation, be they Christians, Muslims, Jews or of other belief systems. Inter- and intra-religious conflict is also a factor in displacing populations and in destabilizing communities. It can be seen in the waves of Islamophobia in US politics, violence across Israel-Palestine with the systematic oppression of the Palestinians,

religious and tribal unrest in Nigeria, violence targeting non-Muslims in Pakistan, Hindu nationalism in India, the persecution of Rohingya refugees in Myanmar and beyond.

Our world is confronted with sophisticated form of **religious extremism** that expresses itself in terrorism. Religious teachings have been perverted and co-opted to justify heinous acts of violence against humanity. All of these points to a multi-faceted political, social, psychological and religious struggle in our midst which is causing enormous harm; stands as a judgement over our discipleship.

In response to God's encompassing love of all creation we must redeem religion as a means to justice and as a source of peace.

COMMUNION IN MISSION - SOLIDARITY IN RESISTANCE

These are the missiological implications of this reading of the signs of the time for the work of the WCRC in the coming time.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE MIDST OF DISAFFECTION AND DISENCHANTMENT

Populist disaffection and disenchantment is driving a shift to authoritarian attitudes and policies. Across the West, establishment parties of the right and the left are being disrupted. The losers from globalization are finding champions of anti-globalization that are challenging the formal mainstream orthodoxy. Thus, the traditional distinction between centre-right and centre-left is breaking down as the WCRC is not alone in seeing that economies do not support all our communities. After the collapse of the housing and credit bubble, following the great financial crisis, economic discontent is proving a powerful tool in politicizing and radicalizing populations away from the centre ground. A recent German-led study shows that from 1870 to 2014, a financial crisis has tended to be followed by a 30% increase in voting share for far-right parties. People are turning to new movements. There are signs that youth movements in settings like South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Papua New Guinea are pressing beyond those institutions in seeking to raise freedom's voice.

But the **disaffection** sits alongside **disenchantment** with the promises of change and those who make them. In the Western context this has accompanied generations of disenchantment with and decline of political, social and religious institutions. Many member churches can testify to the decline in religious affiliation, especially to mainline churches—and no longer just in Europe. Daniel tells the story of those who live out their faith in Babylon, who must be true to the sovereignty of God under the shadow of the emperor.

While Christians are amongst the persecuted in many settings, we are not alone in being the persecuted, not should we forget we also number strongly against the perse-

cuting. There are disturbing signs of Christians and churches taking ultra-nationalist and even white-supremacist views or seeing that so called “Christian values” are supported by such movements. Many of the idolatries named above have their location in Christian ideologies and practices. Churches have and do connive with domineering powers and model themselves and God in that image.

The WCRC is a communion seeking to be in mission together, in communion with God and with each other. Can one Christian community speak to this alone? Certainly Reformed perspectives can and should be given, informed by various theologies and histories and contexts. Yet the scale of the issues has reached beyond the confines of one part of the Christian community, especially given the limitations of resource and leadership. Thus, partners and neighbours must risk together resisting the idolatries of Babylon.

But these issues also ask if only one religious community can speak to this? The issues here stem from living in divided and destructive ways and so they are human issues, affecting us in common, because they are arising from us as a species. The ecological crises befalling the life God created come from one part of its life. These threats strike at the heart of all life, and the sustainability of our life as a creation, because of a “flood” humanity has caused. **Thus, our vision of communion should be challenged to embrace all whom the Spirit of Life gives life and all who share in visions of justice and transformation.**

GOD’S CONTINUOUS CREATION IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISES OF OUR WORLD?

Pockets of resistant life can be seen in the face of the authoritarian powers and the idolatries we have named. In this 500th anniversary of the Reformation we bless and invite how the church stands in hope and danger of being reformed from the margins, and in ways which defy easy ecclesiological categories. The threats we have named emanate from humanity’s common life and endanger all of human life, indeed all creation’s life. We are one part of the Christian family, one set of clans amongst the human tribe, and we can see that our vision of communion needs transformation. Many of the forces we face can only be overcome by common action. Our refusal to honour life’s relatedness across the boundaries of identity, faith, nation and personhood is prospering violence and those who profit from violence. The task is to deepen our inclusive practice for many are participating in the continuous creation God invites. **Texts forged in the face of Empire will suggest signs of where God’s continuous creating presence is at work.**

SUBALTERN VOICES SHAMING IDOLATRIES OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

The **Bible** has many **subaltern voices confronting human and divine authorities**. Prophets speak truth to power as they confront the political power of kings or the religious power of priests (Nathan, 2 Samuel 12). Patriarchs and matriarchs call the divine

to account over unfulfilled promises and longed for life (Genesis 18: Abram and Sarai). God comes in Jesus as God from below to speak from this subaltern position. Like the prophets he confronts powers, and his words bring life and hope and change. Even Jesus is confronted from below: The particular privileges he experienced as a Jewish male are confronted by a Gentile woman (see Matthew 15:22-28, etc). This results in the transformed health of the woman's daughter. But so are the boundaries of the community and their sense of to whom God belongs.

Transformation from below is lived out amongst persons and communities living lives counter to the idolatries named here, and communion should be sought with them. **The Communion's mission is to further subvert the systems of dominance on the earth and within the churches as part of our vision of the Sovereignty of God.**

PROPHETIC VOICES CALLING OUT THE IDOLATRY OF CONSUMPTION AND PROFIT-MAKING

All faiths are being co-opted to the narcissistic desires of the idolatrous powers systems we live amongst. The church is amongst those being conformed. It is evident from the histories and complicities of the mainline churches to the emphasis on the prosperity across a range of new religious movements.

Yet **all faiths have nurtured alternative communities** where new visions of life have emerged to counter the predominant values of their day. And amongst them lone voices have emerged. Voices like Jeremiah whose message to the sons of Josiah condemned consumption and profiteering, asking them "Are you a king because you compete in cedar?" and announcing, "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wage" (Jeremiah 22:12ff).

The prophets broke like waves on the borders of Empire, and they mark out the contested spaces where God's counter-creation emerges or is destroyed. Thus the signs of prophetic individuals and communities must be sought, places that hold briefly God's alternate vision of life, even if they do not name God at the midst of it. **The Communion needs attend to the prophets of today to discern a new ecclesiology of mission which opens fresh ways to live out the discipleship of Christ.**

VULNERABLE PERSONS TRESPASSING OVER THE IDOLATRY OF BOUNDARY

Migrants and refugees are scorned worldwide, reviled and despised amongst communities of all faiths, the church included. The first act of human violence in the biblical story symbolises the tension between settled communities and migrant ones (Genesis 4). The rivalry, anxiety and enmity between Cain and Abel is visible in our world today. Many are marked like Cain with suspicion of migrants like Abel. Yet the prophet

Ezekiel was sent by God into migration, made an exile to symbolize God's rejection of Israel's idolatries of power (Ezekiel 12). Communion with such individuals and nations is to tabernacle with the angels God sends amongst us (Hebrews 13). **Theirs is the vulnerable power to renew** closed and callous communities, and in their bodies they redraw the geography and community of humanity.

As we discern what God is counter-creating in the midst of such dominant powers and idolatries the task is to develop discipleship for life in Babylon—a discipleship which inhabits the realities of the world as it is and the potentials of the world God is calling forth in counter-creation. Such discipleship will have the hallmark of resistance to Empire and hospitality to its subjects and victims. **The Communion in mission can only be in mission if we make common cause with the need for justice for the earth as well as the dispossessed, it will be to live out a mix of challenge and blessing, it will be to live out a mix of challenge and blessing in the face of power and privilege, such as can be seen in another prophet of Babylon, Jeremiah** (e.g. Jeremiah 29:4ff).

IMPERIAL VICTIMS EXPOSING THE IDOLATRY OF SELF-INTEREST AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW WORLD

“Mission from the margins” invites fresh perspectives on the direction from which God brings change and with whom. Those whom the architects and builders of Empire reject turn out to be the most important of all. As those called to confess Jesus is Lord we do so recognizing this is now as seditious an act as it was originally. The Lordship of Christ was revealed in irony by Pilate as the religious authorities of Jesus' day sought him silenced. Imperial political power and imperial religious power acted from the impulse of self-interest, and as Jesus reminds his people, those who seek to save their lives will lose them. The life our systems seek to save, assert and prosper are a form of death, both because of the dying they inflict on creation and human community and because they are counter to the life God invites.

The reformation of faithful holy community begins amongst and with those our systems sacrifice. In this then is a vision of evangelism that authentically witnesses to the life and Lordship of Jesus, who is not the uber-Caesar but the contra-Caesar. **In Christ's companionship and alongside those his Spirit calls, this Communion must articulate afresh and in living ways a vision of mission which counters domination with life-centred reformation.**

RECONFIGURING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY AND ACTION IN SOLIDARITY

The dominant paradigm for the representation of religion in contemporary society is as a sectarian and intolerant force. Religions are often co-opted to a “culture of war” view of contemporary life. This language is evident in the analysis of religion from outside faith perspectives and is clear in the rhetoric within some religious movements.

Religiously justified violence is evident at many levels of local, national and global life. And all the world faiths are complicit at some level in this violence.

But, there are also **signs of dialogue and solidarity**, where people of all faiths and none are gathering to address together for common concerns and threats to life. This challenges the dominant paradigm of religions as anti-social and anti-human, but such forms of dialogue and solidarity are often suspected and criticized within the faith traditions. Inter-religious solidarity and dialogue is a key part of entrenching a culture of peace and anti-racism and discrimination work. This serves as an urgent call that is so loud for the church to bear witness. It is vital in sustaining hope if humanity is to overcome global threats to our common humanity. **For the church to be the church, it must endeavour to intentionally engage with other faith communities and all people of goodwill to confront the evil forces and principalities that cause segregation and intolerance for others.**

PROPOSALS

1. **The General Council resolves to recommit the World Communion of Reformed Churches to the following affirmations that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on mission, justice, theology and communion and its strategic plan:**
 - a. **God's encompassing love, which sustains the world inside the church and beyond, offers humanity the power and purpose for transformation through acts of justice, mercy and peace.**
 - b. **The living God renews and transforms us in mission as the reign of God appears among us. In the global crises and threats, we call for ways of mission that take the form of genuine peace-building, partner with all humanity, and anticipate the oneness of life shown to us in God's Spirit, (Ephesians 2).**
 - c. **Our witness begins amongst and with those our systems sacrifice. Here we find a vision of evangelism that authentically witnesses to the life and Lordship of Jesus.**
 - d. **Babylon has many faces today. We acknowledge that religions have made idolatries of themselves and admit that they have been misused to perpetrate injustice, intolerance and violence and have brought despair and dispossession, even and especially in God's holy name.**
 - e. **Religions need to be redeemed as a means to justice and as a source of peace. God persistently calls us to resist the ultra-nationalist, patriarchal, racist forces of Babylon. God's Spirit enters our realities and creates alternatives to the wrongs we face, offering us cause for hope and even joy in the face of the evils of our time.**

2. The General Council resolves to:
- a. reaffirm its commitment to the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra and shall continue to testify against the idolatries of power and privilege, inequality, consumption and profit seeking, of boundaries and of self-interest;
 - b. call on the Communion to work with mission boards of the member churches and partner mission bodies to develop mission programmes for “Liberating Discipleship.”
 - c. recommit itself to a praxis of evangelism that does not devalue, but partners with all whom the Spirit empowers in seeking liberation and reconciliation. The WCRC shall continue to emphasize the inseparable connectedness between mission, justice and communion in its life and will implement it in all its programmes.
 - d. agree that its mission shall be inspired by those who, like Jesus, assert their faith as an alternative and counter to those with power. The General Council therefore supports the World Council of Churches’ assembly in Busan in its call for a “mission from the margins” and calls upon its member churches to study the “Together Towards Life” document and to take up its concluding affirmations;¹
 - e. move together with all who accept the invitation of the WCC to participate in the “pilgrimage of justice and peace”² to advocate for life-affirming economies, to prevent climate change, to promote non-violent peacebuilding and reconciliation and strive for human dignity and calls upon its member churches to join the pilgrimage;
 - f. engage with other religious communities in interreligious advocacy towards justice and to stand together in solidarity with people who are oppressed and in situations of conflict;
 - g. confirm that it will stand with those who are persecuted for their faith in the God of justice and peace and calls for the protection of freedom and belief of all people as a fundamental human right.

¹ “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”, in: *International Review of Mission*, v101 n2 (November 2012): 250-280, §§101-112.

² Cf. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

Appendix 9e

Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion

Setting the stage for Strengthening Communion within the context of Contemporary Global Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was born out of a historic merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council when they met in June 2010 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, at the Uniting General Council. This union was intentionally interpreted as a missional invitation of the member churches to embody the unity promised in Christ for common witness and service to the world. However, the concept in itself is open to different interpretations by the member churches depending on their ecclesial traditions and doctrines. In spite of the fears that some churches had about the appropriateness of the term for an ecumenical body, its missional invitation to draw closer as a communion was accepted by the majority with justice affirmed and embraced as a core value. The rallying call of the World Reformed Communion family is: *“Called to communion, committed to justice!”*

The Triune God is one whose relationship is rooted in communion. The call to communion is a call to participate in God’s own communion. The divisions in the world necessitate that the churches be in communion to offer authentic witness and service because praxis authenticates communion. The missional witness offered by the Reformed churches in the struggle against apartheid in solidarity with the member churches in South Africa and the 2004 Accra Confession (that called for global economic and climate justice) made issues of justice central to the understanding and practice of the unity that Christ gave to the church. The experiences of member churches of the WCRC, who are united and uniting, have radically moved the understanding of communion to rise above the false barriers of denominationalism to emphasize oneness, and that moves beyond the structures of the church to engagement in ministry and mission.

COMMUNION: WHAT IS WCRC CALLED TO BE AND DO?

The purpose of this plenary is to trigger debate on how the understanding and practice of communion can be strengthened within the WCRC family. In its mission statement the WCRC affirms:

We are called to be a communion of churches joined together in Christ, to promote the renewal and the unity of the church and to participate in God’s transformation of the world... responding to God’s call to meet spiritual needs and foster justice for all in the transformation of the world through the love of Jesus Christ... collaborating with other

*church movements on issues of common concern such as climate change, gender justice and theological dialogue*¹

However, the communion (*koinonia*) identity and vocation of the Reformed family of churches is an “*already-not yet*” existential and eschatological experience. It was given by Jesus, the head of the church, but remains an unfulfilled potential of the church’s ministry and mission. In every era, communion must be contextually appropriated and applied. The communion experience is available in each local ecclesial gathering in worship and witness where people share communion with God and with others around them. The attention given by the global Reformed community to the phenomenon of communion over the years has focused on acceptable theological formulations than on practical application. In spite of major developments in different forms of unity among Reformed churches, communion within the family has remained a phenomenon that is talked about rather than a reality that is lived out.

OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNION

The challenge in 2017 is linked to the WCRC’s quest to strengthen communion in the life of the community. The quest for strengthening calls into question whether *becoming stronger* should be the goal of communion or whether it should be embraced as an invitation to resist and subvert life-denying systems of power in this world. *What are the qualities of the communion we seek?* The process of strengthening must further expand on the understanding of communion considering the *diversity within the Reformed family*. The histories of the member churches are different. Their contextual realities have given each a unique missional identity and witness. Should these different contexts be interpreted as putting limits on the understanding and practice of communion? While it is important to discuss and understand the limits of our communion, we should also gaze at the eschatological vision of fuller communion to which we are called. In every context there is need to stress wholesome relationships that value the dignity of all people. Therefore, the key questions to be interrogated seem to be: *Why communion? Whose need is it seeking to meet?*

If the intention of this discussion is to facilitate meeting inner ecclesial needs then the process is destined to fail. However, if the communion being sought is one that leads to engagement in risky boundary crossing discipleship, reaching out and sharing fullness of life (John 10:10), and building life giving relationships with others—this form of Reformed communion is good news.

¹ 2011 Executive Committee Minutes, page 146.

THE CHANGING CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

The 21st century has seen the “ascendancy of moral lowlives” as the standard of leadership in many institutions of governance.² The perennial temptations of avarice and abuse of power and privilege by leaders has become toxic and is destroying public trust in national leaders. The fast pace of social change has created “pluralities and diversities that sometimes breed conflict, and many persons are no longer willing to give their allegiance to any centre. Democracy in the contemporary neoliberal model functions like a bubble in a very delicate state of existence that can easily burst and have its life-sustaining contents spilt.”³ Neoliberalism seeks to define human beings by the self-serving interest of the market. Billionaires and their large corporate lobbies seek control over national governments and their policies to protect themselves from the constraints of democracy, from paying fair taxes, following environmental rules and paying living wages to their workers. Removal of political red-tape and de-regularization of key rules of good governance allow big corporations to make their own rules without being accountable to the people of the land. Through their insatiable appetite for acquiring more, they become dysfunctional, and governments use taxpayers’ money to bail out the companies and mortgage the nation’s future wellbeing. The ultimate objective of neoliberalism is the removal of political and economic power from the majority of God’s people.

The contemporary era of global Christianity has entered a new phase in which certain types of conservative brands of evangelical Christianity have become allied with extreme nationalistic political and economic forces promoted by populist and amoral political leaders. It has resulted in deep public disappointment with those that bear the name Christian and church because of their commodification of the gospel and ineffective public engagement with issues that deny millions the fullness of life.

We live in a world of growing conflicts and divisions caused by radical inequalities and the re-emergence of racism, gender discrimination and other discriminatory practices. Yet we do also notice the overcoming of historical divisions within and between churches as well as the growing presence and visibility of women in church and society.

A new wave of global people movement has been triggered by migration, refugees, modern slavery and wars. The impact of technology and computation have created advanced forms of communication that is unlike any other time. With the immeasurable

2 Roderick Hewitt, *The Moral lowlife in Political culture*, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100903/cleisure/cleisure2.html>, accessed April 4, 2016.

3 Hewitt, R. R. 2014. *Spirituality for democracy: Spiritual resources for democratic participation in the 21st century*. Verbum et Ecclesia, AOSIS Publishing Services, Cape Town.

benefits have also come negative consequences that are best demonstrated in growing dehumanization. Secularization has unleashed both positive and negative challenges and opportunities for the church's ministry and mission. For example, the focus on individual rights and freedom has led to the release of creative solutions, but on the other hand has also contributed to the weakening of institutional life that places emphasis on communal endeavours.

The church is facing a global credibility crisis because of the betrayal of the gospel of Jesus. Persons who have become disappointed with Christians and the church are seeking authentic spirituality that fosters relationships, healing, reconciliation, and redemption. The growing influence of the "Prosperity Gospel" as an ally of political and economic nationalism deceives the poor and the vulnerable with false hopes. This has weakened the authenticity and credibility of churches and their leaders in the public spheres who are also seen as proponents of greed.

The ongoing challenge of climate change has exposed the culpability of human beings as disobedient stewards of God's creation. Such behaviour must be radically transformed if the planet is to be saved. Urgent attention is needed to fostering an economy of life, ecological justice and an in-depth reflection on eco-theology. Fortunately what we are also seeing is the growth of people's movements of resistance challenging present systems of injustice and exclusion locally, national and globally.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD: HOW CAN COMMUNION BE STRENGTHENED?

Communion Accompaniment: A Journey from Theoretical Obsession to Missional Praxis

The challenge of strengthening the Reformed expression of communion necessitates that attention is shifted from "*knowing about communion*" to "*doing or practicing communion*." Communion must move from being a noun to become a verb! *The language of communion must be refashioned* to accommodate the language change of the contemporary era that values praxis over mere theory. Communion must be celebrated and strengthened, not so much for what the church believes but what it does that is life affirming. Therefore, authentic communion must work towards the building of solidarity among all people around the world who are afflicted and oppressed by the dehumanizing neoliberal policies.

Such radical communion in practice eschews all forms of racism, xenophobia and gender-based discrimination and all forms of social exclusion and nurtures wholesome relationships. If we experience God's grace as Paul and Peter experienced it, then *communion with "the other" must value the dignity of all peoples*. For example, Peter's transformational encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), led to his acceptance of people with other faith experiences; and Paul's encounter with Onesimus (Philemon 1) also confirmed how genuine encounter with "the other" can lead to

radical positive changes in social relationship that are rooted in love and justice. The Luke 24:13-35 narrative describes Jesus' post-resurrection accompaniment walk with his depressed and disillusioned disciples on the road to Emmaus and how that "communion relationship" led to missional transformation that catapulted them into becoming witnessing agents. These different perspectives on the understanding and practice of communion seem to suggest that the concept cannot be an exclusive phenomenon but rather is inclusive—open to all who are willing to cross boundaries to risk sharing life. Therefore, there is an inherent contradiction in communion: there is value in being in communion with those that don't necessarily believe the same things, and may not necessarily want the same things, but nonetheless actively seek out to be a member of a communion that seeks justice for all.

CONCLUSION

To be true to its missional identity and vocation the WCRC must move beyond an understanding and practice of communion that meets inner ecclesial needs and risk engaging in the sharing of fullness of life with others. This necessitates that the WCRC prioritize justice and peace-building acts of solidarity to overcome and resist the global threats to life. The agenda for this kind of justice-serving priority must be set by the felt needs of others, especially those that live on the margins in different contexts. Authentic discussion on this relational and missional subject of communion will make some members of the family uncomfortable. But the understanding and practice of communion within a context of diversity cannot be expected to be done in comfort. If the goal of communion is to do what the Lord requires of you, then the mandate is to "...do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

THE KEY THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED:

Inseparability of justice and communion: As a communion we become paralyzed and fail to do justice because of our fear that it may affect communion. We cannot have communion at the cost of justice. Jesus, in Luke 11:40-42, states, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth...but you neglect justice and love of God..." Therefore, authentic radical communion seeks ecological and economic justice, gender justice and justice to all those on the margins. The issue of ordination of women to priesthood is an issue for the communion to address. The communion of the suffering community is both a place and space where the Triune God in Communion expresses love for all peoples and all of creation.

PROPOSAL 1:

That the WCRC promote the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.

The centrality of the Bible: Issues that can be a threat to communion such as racial injustice, gender discrimination, poverty and migration can be challenged by the

churches because there are many biblical texts to support us in the struggle against these issues. But the Bible has also been open to misinterpretation and abuse in some instances. The WCRC must promote a Biblical model of communion and justice: The biblical examples of the mission of Jesus including gentiles in his work confirms that the experience of finding the God who is “already there,” allows the new Christian followers of Jesus to model his ministry and risk engaging in mission with the people at the margins of the community, which allows Christian followers to journey through a process of “moving beyond” knowledge about Jesus to belong, to believe and become disciples of Jesus that risk radical engagement in an open and inclusive community.

PROPOSAL 2:

That the WCRC engage member churches in a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture inspired by the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all and provides resources as necessary.

Communion and Sexuality: As the Communion and its churches struggle with the issue of human sexuality, we encounter a wide variety of biblical texts that celebrate human life and oppose all forms of injustice and discrimination. The Scripture that inspires us to act with justice needs to be highlighted even as we respect each other as honest readers and interpreters of the Bible. Even so, we acknowledge that the Bible has often been used to defend discrimination against women and sexual minorities; therefore, there is need for a deeper and critical hermeneutical approach to reading and engaging with Biblical texts. It is complex because such uses of the Bible have been overemphasized for centuries and have been used to support discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the issue of communion and sexuality should be addressed by raising the liberating role Bible teaching can play in the life of the churches. How can the Communion keep all in the family together and create safe spaces for members to stay together and encourage each other to discover what is just and right?

PROPOSAL 3:

That the World Communion of Reformed Churches:

- a. **Set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and sexuality—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge and mutual accountability become key values.**
- b. **Facilitate means in which to engage each other to embrace our diversity, to accompany real people, to draw on the theological resources of our Reformed tradition and to utilize our critical reading of Scripture.**
- c. **Accompany churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexuality.**

Empowering Leadership in the communion: The fundamental question that faces the WCRC is linked to the quality of missional leadership that is offered to the society. The Reformed identity is based on an affirmation of the priesthood of all believers—of lay and ordained, women and men, young people—offering leadership to the world. The *character of the practitioners* who offer pastoral and missional leadership must therefore be radically formed, and the commitment to walk together despite differences is crucial. There is no structure or theological statement that can alone strengthen the communion without personal commitment. This is of special importance since most people define their identity as being “against [to].” Communion is therefore a life transforming reality and experience, where we see God’s presence already at work in the life of the other. Otherwise the person who does not agree with us or is different from us is made the “other”—as someone who must be convinced or defeated or even eliminated—rather than as being a sister or brother in Christ who is different from us. The special insight that must be brought to the table is not just a theological dialogue but an encounter of sisters and brothers with different backgrounds and experiences of God’s justice and grace.

PROPOSAL 4:

That the WCRC embarks on a process of engaging the churches in a critical analysis of leadership considering the communion we seek; by modeling new and inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—his resistance to the ethics of domination and control.

Affirming the centrality of the regions in the work of communion: The strength of the WCRC is in embracing the local, regional and global levels. Regions can and should play an important cohesive role in this bonding between the global and local. This important work, however, is not where it should be, as was noted at a consultation held in February 2017. It must be ensured that the regional expression of the WCRC with each of their contextual diversities plays a pivotal role within the construction, contemplation and action of the communion.

PROPOSAL 5:

The General Council:

- a. **Reaffirms the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches; and providing spaces for dialogue and action;**
- b. **Reaffirms the participation of regional representatives in decision making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions;**
- c. **Affirms working styles that energize the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.**

APPENDIX 10 KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Appendix 10a Keynote Address

Towards a Communion of the Multitude: Living God, Renew and Transform Us George Zachariah

CONFESSING FAITH IN THE “TENSE PRESENT”

Chris Ferguson, our general secretary, in his reflections on the theme of the 26th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, observes that, “the Reformation commemoration is for us not about theological nostalgia. It is about putting the Reformation into the present tense. This means not just the here and now; it means bringing Reformed traditions, theology and the confessing faith stance into the tense present—into the tensions, conflicts, violence, suffering, beauty, wonder and promise of this historical moment.”¹

We see a similar affirmation in the words of Yolanda Pierce in her reflections on the “tense present” that the African American community experiences today in the United States of America. “Even as the disciples of Jesus grieved at the foot of the cross, they understood there was work to be done. The work of justice is deeply political and requires an engagement in this present world. With tears in our eyes, we are called to march, rally, petition, sing, dance, create art, and use whatever gifts and talents we possess for the work of justice. The work of justice is deeply theological. A grieving people need a theology for such a time as this, a theology that speaks to this present age.”²

How do we theologically engage with the “tense present?” How do we live out our Reformed faith and tradition in the “tense present?” How do we re-imagine our Communion and our churches as signs and sacraments of life in the “tense present?” What

¹ Chris Ferguson, “Preface,” in *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme*, (Hannover: WCRC, 2016), i.

² Yolanda Pierce, “A Theology for the Grieving People,” In *Sojourners*, 8-10-2015, <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>

is the meaning of renewal and transformation in the “tense present?” How do we define the meaning of “us” in the “tense present?” Brothers and sisters, I invite you to a journey seeking tentative answers to these questions to guide us in our deliberations during this Council meeting. Perhaps the prayer that Yolanda Pierce wrote on the wake of Ferguson, “A Litany for Those Not Ready for Healing,” may inspire and inform us in this journey even as we grapple with these questions:

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother’s child, this father’s child...someone’s beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder. Instead...

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation’s original sin.

Let us be silent when we don’t know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.³

³<http://yolandapierce.blogspot.in/2014/11/>

Reformation was a movement of the unheard. It was a counter-hegemonic movement from below to de-centre the church. All human initiatives in history, unfortunately, have the potential to become oppressive, thanks to the reality of sin and our inability for self-redemption. When we absolutize our fragmentary liberation experiences as ultimate victories, we fail to recognize the pervading hegemonic presence of the empire within us which lures us to internalize and embrace the logic and culture of the very systems that we destroyed in our liberation struggles. History of Christianity testifies that the church is not immune to the possibility to get degenerated into life-denying institutions that legitimize and perpetuate injustice and dominant interests. Betrayal of the original vision is therefore a tragic possibility inherent in all human initiatives including the church.

Nevertheless, history also teaches us that such situations inspire the emergence of radical movements of renewal and reformation from the margins. Biblical witness of the life-giving Spirit that hovers over chaotic situations and brings about life and meaning further inspires us to believe in the divine project of renewal and transformation. Said differently, Reformation was the divine project of making all things new, and we are called to continue to participate in this mission in our times. Even as we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of Reformation, we need to place Reformation in the tradition of all subversive movements in history that tried to critique the distortion of movements into hierarchical and authoritarian institutions and to midwife the birth of alternative movements to foster life in community. To put it differently, the vocation of the Reformed church is not to romanticize the past and to live in the present, glorifying the past; rather our vocation is to reclaim the subversive faith inherent in our tradition, by putting the spirit of “protest” back in our tradition, theology, faith practices and public witness. Here, the voices of the unheard are the signs of the time that should lead us and inform us in our public witness. With this commitment, let us listen to the laments, melodies, slogans and shouts of the unheard so that we will be renewed and transformed to be a healing and transforming presence in our respective communities.

LIVING GOD..

Remembrance is always a doxology, and the remembrance of Reformation is an act of thanksgiving for the divine inspiration that challenged people in different generations to be audacious enough to confront the powers that be and proclaim, “here we stand” at the cost of their very lives. Our theme for this gathering is a prayer, and in this prayer, we confess God as the living God. Confessing God as living God is a profound political statement in our context of empire where we are surrounded with the ungod who bless and sanction genocide and ecocide to satisfy the greed and domination of a tiny minority. Reformed faith is more than a confession; it is a confessing faith. It is a faith that incarnates in particular historical contexts by confessing the God of life,

contesting the lordship of the ungod. In other words, our theme is more than an innocent prayer, it is a call to identify the ungod of our times and to contest and annihilate them.

Prayer, according to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism and falsehoods.”⁴ Prayer is a subversive activity that contests and overthrows the prevailing sinful order and its presiding deities. The story of the golden calf invites us to critically evaluate our faith to see whether we have replaced the living God of the oppressed with the ungod of power, prosperity and privilege. Idolatry is nothing but the fetishization of our imperial projects, and liturgy in the context of idolatry celebrates the sacrifice of the powerless and the voiceless in the altar of neo-liberal globalization, racism, patriarchy, homophobia and fascism.

The history of Christianity is also the history of the worship of the golden calves. Ungods are created in history to offer spiritual and theological legitimization to the pyramids of injustice and exclusion. For Sebastian Kappen, the Indian Christian Jesuit theologian, the Christian ungod “is the god whom Christians fashioned to legitimize their lust for wealth and power. It is the Christian ungod who authorized the Christian kings to colonize and enslave all pagan nations and to exterminate indigenous tribes. It is the Christian ungod who permitted the trans-Atlantic slave trade involving more than 30 million Africans. In short, the Christian ungod is a god who takes the side of the affluent against the poor, of the powerful against the weak, a god with hands dripping with the blood of the innocent.”⁵

Articulating the experience of the enslaved Africans, Vincent Harding describes their encounter with the Christian ungod, the American Christ: “We first met this Christ on slave ships. We heard his name sung in praise while we died in our thousands, chained in stinking holds beneath the decks, locked in with terror and disease and sad memories of our families and homes. When we leaped from the decks to be seized by sharks we saw his name carved in the ship’s solid sides. When our women were raped in the cabins, they must have noted the great and holy books on the shelves. Our introduction to this Christ was not propitious and the horrors continued on America’s soil.”⁶

⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001, 263.

⁵ Sebastian Kappen, *Spirituality in the Age of Recolonization*, Bangalore: Visthar, 1995, 3.

⁶ Vincent Harding, “Black Power and the American Christ,” in Floyd Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 86.

As the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, and we need to listen to their voices. When the German churches legitimized the fascist tyranny of the Nazi regime, the Confessing Church came out with the Barmen Declaration affirming that, “we reject the false doctrine that the Church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day.” In the context of apartheid, the Confession of Belhar rejected “any doctrine which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.”

The Accra Confession, in its covenanting for justice rejected “any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations—gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.” The *Kairos* document in its critique of state theology observed that, “State theology is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonizes the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.” The campaign of the National Council of Churches in India, “no one can serve Christ and caste,” was yet another attempt to recognize the presence of ungod within us, and to denounce them.

We invoke the God of life in a context where dominant expressions of Christianity, with their distorted theology, liturgy, and morality continue to recruit its followers to be idol worshippers. We have lost our ability to distinguish between the God of life and the ungod of prosperity and power. We have become devotees of the golden calves. In our times, it is not only illegitimate to speak against the golden calves, but it can also cost our life. Egypt is around us and within us, and we need to discern it and gather the prophetic rage to destroy the golden calves of our times. It is our faith imperative to occupy our churches, our spiritual practices, and our theologies, so that we may reclaim them from the worship of the ungod. We become the disciples of the living God in our unending journey towards freedom, dismantling the pyramids of systemic sin and evil. Even as we pray together, Living God, during this General Council meeting, it is a lament that mourns and exposes the co-option of our faith, doctrines, spirituality, Scripture and even our god by the forces of death and destruction. It is a prayer of confession that our faith is being incorporated into the logic of the empire. It is also a prayer of protest and re-imagination; reclaiming God as the Living God, the one who authors life and flourishes the movement of life in the midst of life-negating forces.

Reformed theology is reforming theology, and hence “Living God” is a contextual confession of the Reformed faith. As Jürgen Moltmann beautifully describes, Reformed theology is a reformatory theology which is not “grounded in confessional statements laid down once and for all, nor is it based on a tradition of infallible and irreformable doctrinal decisions.... It is grounded in the ‘reformation’ of the church ‘according to the Word of God’ attested in Holy Scripture, which is to be confessed anew in each new situation.”⁷ Said differently, Reformed theology is reforming theology, and its vocation is to make reformation a permanent experience in the life of the church. Reformation is therefore “an event that keeps church and theology breathless with suspense, an event that infuses church and theology with the breath of life, a story that is constantly making history, an event that cannot be concluded in this world, a process that will come to fulfillment and to rest only in the Parousia of Christ.”⁸ However, it does not mean that reformatory theology with its emphasis on contextual articulations reduce theology and faith into political and ethical rhetoric and actions. Reformulating the doctrine of God and searching collectively who Jesus Christ is for us in our context are profoundly theological acts which will make Reformation a contemporary experience. “Living God,” is therefore a contextual theological reformulation of God in a context of “impossibility of life.”

RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION: BEING CONFESSIONAL IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Confessions are theological statements that articulate the fundamental doctrinal positions of the church. In many cases confessional statements are fixed in content and form and non-negotiable as they contain the universal and timeless truth and beliefs of the church. However, Reformed churches are confessing churches, where the confessional statements serve as guidelines for churches in particular contexts to become confessing churches, affirming contextual reformulations of the confessions. As Jürgen Moltmann rightly observes, “confessions are not supposed to be rigid formulas, incomprehensible to many. Confessions are meant to express in concrete terms what needs to be said in the name of God concerning matters of faith here and now.”⁹ Therefore, it is imperative on us to negotiate our non-negotiable confessions, informed by our discernment of the signs of the times, to transform them into gospels of renewal and transformation in our neighborhoods and communities. In that process, we become a confessing church proclaiming our faith in the living God, by disrupting life-denying powers and principalities.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, “Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda,” in David Willis and Michael Welker, eds., *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Tradition*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999, 120.

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, “Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda,” 121.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, “Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda,” 123.

Seong-Won Park succinctly presents the Reformed understanding of confessing in the following words:

Confessing is the resistance of saying no to the idolatrous powers that claim ultimate authority. Confessing is the denunciation of powers that are evil and demonic. Confessing is the firm belief in God who is sovereign over life on earth, in God who promises the new garden of life in the new heaven and the new earth. That is to say, confessing is the visioning of this new life. Confessing is the foundation of all imaginations about a new future. Confessing is the celebration of the feast of life in times of *kairos*. Confessing is the taking of a stance on a definite alternative, even if it is not perfect and ultimate. Confessing is participation in the movement of resistance in solidarity with the people. Confessing is a humble posture, being open completely to all persons of deep religious or philosophical commitment.¹⁰

This understanding of confessing is not a theoretical construction developed in a library. Rather it is the commentary of the daring witness of our ancestors—ancestors in the Reformed tradition, who were filled with prophetic courage and consciousness and witnessed the living God in the public sphere contesting the lordship of the powers that be. *Status Confessionis* is, therefore, the church becoming the real presence of the living God in concrete historical situations. According to Milan Opocensky, it “stems from the conviction that in an alarming situation of oppression, exploitation, hypocrisy and heresy, when the boundaries between right and wrong, between good and evil are blurred, the integrity of the gospel and its proclamation are at stake.”¹¹ In such situations, the confessing church emerges and witnesses publicly the gospel of the living God, destabilizing the forces that unleash death and destruction. Our theme is, therefore, an invitation to practice this Reformed tradition of prophetic witness in the public sphere, through our spiritual and political engagement for renewal and transformation.

RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION: A CALL TO CREATIVE MALADJUSTMENT

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the *renewing* of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). How do we understand the meaning of renewal and transformation in our context even as we prepare ourselves to become a confessing church? For Apostle Paul, the present eon is a state of corruption, and hence being conformed to the present eon is to participate in its corruptness. Non-conformism is not a nega-

¹⁰ Seong-Won Park, “A Journey for Life: From Debrecen to Accra and beyond,” in *Reformed World*, Vol. 55, No.3, September 2005, 198.

¹¹ Milan Opocensky, “Processus Confessionis,” in Wallace M. Alston Jr., and Michael Welker, eds., *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003, 394.

tive response. Our non-conformism towards the present eon is creative as it leads to resistance and transformation. As Paul Tillich reminds us, “a church in which the divine protest does not find a human voice through which it can speak has become conformed to this eon.”¹² Non-conformity is the resistance to idolatry. It is the critique of our attempts to absolutize ourselves, our church, our tradition, our nation and our community.

Non-conformism was a favorite slogan for Martin Luther King, Jr. For him nonconformity is creative when it is directed by a renewed and transformed life. “There are certain things in our social system to which all of us ought to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating method of physical violence... The salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.”¹³ In a sermon based on Romans 12:1-2, King further elaborated his theology of creative maladjustment: “The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.”¹⁴

To be creatively maladjusted is an alternative worldview and behavior, a radical departure from what is usually expected. Creative maladjustment means to be aligned with the gospel imperative to be persistent on reversing any trend toward exclusion and discrimination, and to be engaged in the struggles of the marginalized. Creative maladjustment means to be inclusive and to reject the purity maps and codes of the dominant. Creative maladjustment, as Paul observes, is not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Renewal and transformation begin with a new baptismal vow where we denounce conformity to the prevailing order and intend to live a life of creative maladjustment. This requires the courage to identify systemic evils, to name them, to challenge them, and to eradicate them by participating in the ongoing struggles of the subaltern communities. Renewal and transformation challenge us to radical discipleship to incarnate God’s power and embodied presence in history through our creative maladjustment for the sake of life.

¹² Paul Tillich, “Do not be Conformed” in *The Eternal Now*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963, 142.

¹³ James Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, New York: Harper Collins, 1986, 89.

¹⁴ <https://www.transformingcenter.org/2016/01/transformed-nonconformist/>

RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION: TOWARDS A BORDERLESS CHURCH

The Reformation commemoration is an occasion for the church to become self-reflexive and to undergo radical renewal and transformation. Church reformed is a church in need of continuous reformation. Like the Babylonian captivity of the medieval church, today the church is under new doctrinal and ecclesiastical captivity. Our theological formulations continue to remain elitist and racist, and our biblical reflections and liturgical practices are not sufficiently capable to inspire and inform the congregations in their discipleship journey to bring about healing and restoration in our communities. The church continues to remain as a centralized, hierarchical power structure without sufficient commitment to the virtues of democracy, transparency and accountability. Voices of dissent and non-conformism within the church are silenced violently. Subaltern communities who embraced Christianity as a means of liberation from structures and practices of discrimination and exclusion feel betrayed as they confront the same powers and principalities of darkness within the church. In a context when the church speaks the language of the empire and its liturgy and theology legitimize and perpetuate imperial interests, we need to sit in ashes and pray together, Living God, crucify the church!

Reformation continues to happen when spirit-filled communities assume their agency, assert their identity, and question the dominant power relations within the church. In that process, they identify theologies and ecclesial practices that legitimize and perpetuate injustice and marginalization. These are irruptions from the underside of the church, which are informed by the re-reading of Scripture and tradition, privileging the body-mediated experiences of those who are made voiceless and powerless. We see several such reformation movements within the church today, and they continue to destabilize the elitist, racist and patriarchal foundations of the church. M.M. Thomas articulates passionately the importance of continuous reformation in the church: “What is real church history? It is not the history of its Popes and Archbishops—no, not at all. It is the history of people who filled with the vision of a redeemed church, created strife and division within the church. It is the history of its reformers, of its heretics excommunicated, of its infidels martyred for causing revolution in the church. If we are to be worthy of that heritage let us make quarrels and more quarrels for the sake of its redemption.”¹⁵

The model of house is a dominant model that we use for church in our theological reflections. The house provides us a sense of identity and offers us security, social acceptance and power. Our membership in the church is based on our allegiance and obedience to the rules, regulations and the hierarchy. The social acceptance and the cultural capital of the church lure us to consider taking membership in the church not only as a symbol of

¹⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Question within Christian Commitment*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1983, 29-30.

pride and status but also as a wise investment. The identity of the house is determined by the fortified walls that keep the Other away from it. Said differently, it is our practices of exclusion which provide the house its identity. Our supremacy and honour are mediated through our practice of exclusion which discursively constructs the Other as impure, shameful and inferior. Another problem that is inherent to the model of house is its possibility to become an idol. When the household becomes an idol, we lose our ability to experience the Divine beyond the idol. A genuine soul search should help us to see whether we have reduced our tradition, liturgy and practices into new golden calves.

Church is not a monument that is built on the foundations of traditions and doctrines; rather it is an empowering and transforming experience that happens in the lives of the communities at the margins. Here church becomes an event. Church happens as fellowship, solidarity, love, care, compassion, justice and restoration in the lives of people, who go through the tragic experience of utter God-forsakenness. The model of the church here is no more the household with fortified walls and exclusive claims of supremacy and purity. Rather, the alternative model for the church happening is the model of street. In the context of death and destitution, the street represents our availability and accessibility to each other. It is this sense of mutuality and relationality that helps our brothers and sisters on the margins who barely hang on to life to face life with determination and reclaim their God-given humanity. Street is the abode of those who are thrown out from their homes. Street is also the home of those who are denied entry into houses because of their race, caste and sexual orientation. It is in the street that the “homeless” has redefined the concept and practice of “home.” Hence the street invites us to experience the happening of church in the most unexpected places. Is it possible for us to get out of the security and comfort of the idolized church to become part of the transformative experience of the church happening in the street? The Church of South India’s resolve to become a borderless church is worth mentioning here.¹⁶

The mission of the church is not to protect or defend our heritage, liturgy, doctrines, ecclesiastical offices or even Bible. Rather, we are called to midwife the process of making these means of grace and the rich resources of our faith to incarnate in the street

¹⁶ Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, the general secretary of the Church of South India says, “Today we live in a neo-colonial, capitalistic world where exclusive communities, club memberships and gated communities are emerging. In such a scenario, how can the Church become a borderless community, discovering and acknowledging Christ among people of living faiths and religions? The theological understanding of a borderless community begins with faith in one God, the Creator. God’s glory penetrates all creation. It is in the act of creation that relationships are designed and expressed. Everything created are related to each other, and God relates Himself to creation.” [Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, “From Mission Compounds to a Borderless Church – Living in Harmony in a Multi-Religious Context: Contribution of the Basel Mission in the Light of Conversion and Religious Tolerance Debates in India Today” in *Interkulturelle Theologie* 1/2016 (January 2016): 115.]

by exposing them to the challenges in the street. Church happens in our constant leap from house to street. When the church happens in the street, the street becomes an epiphanic space. The witness of the church in the street—our songs, our ministries of compassionate justice and care, our actions of solidarity, our struggles, our rituals—provides the community the foretaste of the eschatological banquet. “Church is not the end; it is the wrappings that cover the Divine gift that we await with anticipation: The Reign of God.” Our call is to strive together for the blossoming of God’s reign. In that journey, as Vitor Westhelle, the Brazilian Lutheran theologian reminds us, “church is a provisional reality; a transitional organization; and the vestibule of the Reign of God.”¹⁷

If we want to make reformation a living experience in the life of the church, it requires a costly commitment. As M. M. Thomas rightly observes, “there cannot be true church with the continuity of existence in the world. It is a contradiction in terms. Die and get resurrected—everyday a new fellowship—a new creation—not the old one continuing. That alone be Christ’s Church.”¹⁸

RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION: TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT WALLS

“We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all.” Yes, Accra was right. We live in a scandalous world that rejects the abundant life that the living God offers to the entire community of creation. This is not due to natural calamities or fate or the laziness of the poor and the marginalized. It is the manifestation of structural sin and systemic evil that are inherent in our contemporary projects of globalization, development and nationalism. Let us listen to the Zapatista movement: “Our misery meant the wealth of a few; that on the bones and the dust of our ancestors and our children the powerful built their house. That our steps could not enter that house, and that the light that brightened it was fed by the darkness imposed on our people. That the abundance on the table at that house was fed by the emptiness of our stomachs. That house’s roof and walls were built over the fragility of our bodies; and the health that filled its space resulted from our death; and the wisdom lived in that house nourished itself of our ignorance. The peace that sheltered it was war waged on our people.”¹⁹ Yes, we live in a scandalous world.

A renewed and transformed church is called to be a witnessing presence in the public sphere, and hence it is a public church. State is a divine instrument to bring about legal justice in a fallen world. However, the church must be suspicious of the idolatrous

¹⁷ Vitor Westhelle, *The Church Event: Call and Challenge of a Church Protestant*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

¹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Question within Christian Commitment*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1983, 31.

¹⁹ Quoted in Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, 173.

tendencies of the state and be prophetic in denouncing all state theologies. Particularly, in the context of rising fascism, cultural nationalism and exceptionalism we need to draw inspiration from the Barmen Declaration and become confessing churches in our respective contexts. “We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.” We need to invoke the memory of our ancestors and be present in our history reminding the state of its moral limits.

In a world infected with racism, casteism, patriarchy, xenophobia and homophobia, the Reformed tradition invites us to revisit the Belhar Confession and to become an alternative community that practices reconciliation and celebration of diversity. As Belhar reminds us, “Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.” Renewal and transformation should enable the church to become an Easter community that manifests proleptically the signs of the reign of God in the here and now. The first step to become an Easter community is to be conscious of our privileges as individuals and churches and immerse in the struggles of the Other. All lives do matter. But remember this slogan did not arise in a vacuum; it was a response and a counterpoint to the Black Lives Matter movement. Along with Pope Francis, we should show the courage to pronounce divine judgment on people and rulers “who think only about building walls, and not building bridges.”

What has Reformed faith to do with subaltern political activism in the public sphere? In what way do the politics that emerge from the creative expressions of the excluded and the incarcerated inform the theological in our times? In our times, public witness seems to be reduced to an apolitical advocacy work, which Arundhati Roy calls “the NGO-ization of resistance.” For her, such social interventions “defuse political anger” and turn “people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance.” “Apolitical (and therefore, actually, extremely political) distress reports from poor countries and war zones eventually make the (dark) people of those (dark) countries seem like pathological victims. Another malnourished Indian, another starving Ethiopian, another Afghan refugee camp, another maimed Sudanese...in need of the white man’s help. They unwittingly reinforce racist stereotypes and reaffirm the achievements, the comforts and the compassion (the tough love) of Western civilization. They’re the secular missionaries of the modern world.” NGO-ization of our witness “turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance.”

Roy’s critique of dominant forms of social interventions are extremely relevant for us as we explore the nature and challenges of our public witness as Reformed tradition. Remember, “the NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-

mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary.”²⁰ Renewal and transformation should lead us to radical discernment in choosing the politics of our public witness.

How do we theologically articulate our political witness? According to Mark Lewis Taylor we need to begin our theological re-imagination from the context of the weight of the imposed social suffering and its theological legitimization. The weight of the world, for Taylor, is the imposed social suffering caused by racism, economic injustice, gender discrimination and the diverse ways in which communities are being constructed as the “other.” Emancipatory politics is the agonistic politics of the communities that are forced to bear the weight of the world. They are not merely weighed-down victims; rather they are communities with moral agency—the new subjects of the emancipatory politics, who are committed to “weigh-in.” “This weighing-in occurs wherever weight concentrates, not just in the prison houses, but also in the warehouses of neglect that hold our infirm, aged and mentally distressed—in the shanty towns of the poor, every “Gaza” where bodies are amassed, abandoned, reckoned disposable, weighed, finally, as of no account.”²¹

The theological, as Taylor proposes, “traces and theorizes the ways that persons and groups rendered subordinate and vulnerable by agonistic politics and its systemic imposed social suffering nevertheless haunt, unsettle, and perhaps dissolve the structures of those systems. The theological traces and theorizes the way this haunting congeals into specters and forces both threatening and promising alternative patterns and lifeways.”²² It is in such places, as Arvind Nirmal reminds us, that the church should engage in public witness: “The ‘original’ and the ‘given’ in this context is our own situation, our own history, our own struggles, our own aspirations, our own fears and our own hopes. God is dynamically present in these. He [sic] is savingly active in these. This is where we have to discern the Gospel happening and becoming.”²³

RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION: TOWARDS A REDEEMED EARTH

Ecological justice has been central to the life and witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches for the past several decades. Exposing the correlation between neo-liberal capitalism and the ecological crisis, the Accra Confession concludes with the passionate assertion that “we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our

²⁰ <http://massalijn.nl/new/the-ngo-ization-of-resistance/>

²¹ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, 46.

²² Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*, 46.

²³ Quoted in Franklyn J. Balasundaram, *Prophetic Voices of Asia—Part II*, Colombo: Logos, 1994, 81.

descendants might live (Deuteronomy 30.19).” Choosing life is a political action, and we need to be intersectional in our analysis and engagement to redeem the earth.

“Upper caste farmers use machines to plough their land, heightening the climate crisis with fertilizer and other things. Our impact on the climate is much smaller. Larger farmers grow money, we grow food.”²⁴ This is an observation made at the COP 15 Summit in Copenhagen by Dalit women from India. For Berta Cáceres, the Honduran indigenous rights campaigner, “there is an imposition of a project of domination, of violent oppression, of militarization, of violation of human rights, of transnationalization, of the turning over of the riches and sovereignty of the land to corporate capital, for it to privatize energy, the rivers, the land; for mining exploitation; for the creation of development zones.”²⁵ What we find in these observations is an alternative problematization of the ecological crisis which exposes the correlation between racism, casteism, patriarchy, capitalism and the ecological crisis. Reflecting upon the experience of the Pacific islanders, Maina Talia from Tuvalu observes that, “Relocation literally means our death, as it entails profound losses for us—loss of our land, loss of our culture, loss of our language and the loss of our identity.”²⁶

These are voices that contest our “feel-good environmentalism” where we valorize terms such as “*oikos*” and “our common home,” and at the same time engage in the politics of wall-building, privatizing the *oikos*. James Cone shifts this discussion into a different level by stating that, the basic question for us is not whether we are concerned about the future of the earth, but “whose earth is it, anyway?”²⁷ What we find in Cone’s disturbing contestation is an invitation to go beyond romanticizing the *oikos* and to perceive the ecological crisis as an injustice caused by the colonization of the commons and to engage in the struggles for the decolonization of the earth.

The historic struggle of the Standing Rock is a conflict between two world views. On the one side, we see the proponents of the doctrine that commons is merely a warehouse of lifeless materials that have been given to some of us by God or conquest, to consume and exploit. Human vocation, according to this doctrine, is to convert water, soils, minerals and wild lives into corporate wealth, and the state is committed to support

²⁴ <http://idsn.org/resources/case-stories/upper-caste-farmers-grow-money-we-grow-food/>

²⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/20/honduran-indigenous-rights-campaigner-wins-gold-man-prize>

²⁶ Maina Talia, “We Have No Right to be Silent: The Cry of a Climate Victim,” in *Theologies and Cultures*, Vol. XII, No. 2, December 2015, 17.

²⁷ James H. Cone, “Whose Earth is it, Anyway?” in Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen (Eds.) *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church’s Response* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2001), 30, 32.

and protect this plunder. On the other side, we see people who consider commons as a nourishing gift to all beings. The fertile soil, the fresh water, the clear air and the creatures require gratitude and respect. These gifts are not commodities. It is the communion of the subsistence communities that ensure the flourishing of the commons.

Commons are sanctuaries of the community of creation, created co-creators, who continue God's creative work by birthing, nurturing, protecting and celebrating life. It is in the commons that we practice our vocation to till and to keep the earth. The commons is the sacred space where we celebrate communion with the Creator in the community of our siblings—the plants, the birds, the water bodies, and the air. Commons is the Scripture that reveals the glory of God, and our life together as community of creation in the commons is the true doxology. Colonization of the commons is, therefore, a desecration of this sacred space and sacred communion, and hence a sin against God.

Renewal and transformation should enable us to discern commons as God-indwelling sanctuaries. A non-anthropocentric theological anthropology, informed by the paradigm of commons, invites us to be the priests of the commons. In the context of the ecological crisis, we as a Communion are called to be a subversive and creative presence, engaging in the mission of “commoning.” “Commoning” signifies commons as verb; an active political engagement through which the community of creation flourishes its life and continues to nurture, protect and celebrate life. Church happens when “commoning” becomes a reality in our communities. “Commoning” invites us to create sanctuaries that provide solidarity and hospitality to refugees and undocumented people, defying the policies of our states and religious communities. In the context of social, economic and ecological injustice, “commoning” is the appropriate form of public witness of the living God.

US: TOWARDS A COMMUNION OF THE MULTITUDE

Today, in Leipzig, we begin a journey as a Communion that confesses our faith in the God of life. It is a journey of thanksgiving, introspection, confession, repentance, intercession and affirmation. It is a journey that will equip and inspire us to a new discipleship journey to witness the living God in the midst of empire. Where do we go from here? What do we mean by “us?” How do we re-imagine Communion in our context? Drawing from the insights of the Indian theologian Yahu Vinayaraj,²⁸ let me conclude with the vision of a communion of the multitude.

We are all caught up in the reality of empire which imposes its subjectivity on all living beings. Empire as sovereignty forms our subjectivities with a neo-liberal capitalist

²⁸ Yahu Vinayaraj, *Empire, Multitude, and the Church: Theology after Hardt and Negri*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 017.

worldview. Multitude is the new communion of subjectivity that resists empire from within, challenging its borders. It is the living alternative that grows within empire. Multitude consists of a host of “irreducible singularities.” Multitude is a political subject with radical social consciousness to transform the world. While retaining their differences, multitude strives together for a common alternative life—the Commonwealth. It is a democracy that invites all to share and participate in the commons—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, all nature’s bounty—the habitat of the community of creation. Multitude is, therefore, an anti-imperial communion of diverse communities, practicing the art of resistance and creating alternatives to empire.

A communion of the multitude is a communion of de-imperialized subjectivities. It is a community that refuses to be co-opted by empire to be incorporated into the imperial logic. Cross is the assurance for us to believe in the possibility to become de-imperialized subjectivities. The vocation of the communion of the multitude is to disrupt the culture of empire. The communion of the multitude is a communion of the marginalized and it embodies the politics of the Crucified Christ. It is in our communion with the subaltern social movements that we re-imagine the meaning of “us” and become the communion of the multitude.

“Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling—their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”²⁹

Living God, renew and transform us so that we may become a community of the multitude with anti-imperialistic imaginations and subjectivities. Living God, renew and transform us so that through our alternative politics we may destabilize the power of empire. Living God, renew and transform us so that we may permeate our surroundings with the de-imperializing gospel of the Cross and flourish the movement of life in the commons.

²⁹ Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006, 86.

Appendix 10b Keynote Address

“Living God, renew and transform us”

Jurgen Moltmann

This theme of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a prayer that sounds like a hoarse cry from the depths:

We have grown old, tired and cold—renew us, give us a new heart! We have become confused and uncertain—transform us. Awaken a new spirit within us!

Hear the answer of the living God from my favourite verse in Psalm 103:

“Who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:5).

I first spoke at a General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational) in Nairobi in 1970—47 years ago. I followed the World Council of Churches’ Programme to Combat Racism, and in 1976 I contributed to WARC’s human rights programme, “The Theological Basis of Human Rights.” I was present at the tragic act in Ottawa in 1982 when black South Africans refused to take Holy Communion with white South Africans, and the latter went away during the night. That same year, 1982, the Belhar Confession appeared in South Africa and paved the way for the disappearance of apartheid ideology from South African churches. I welcomed the covenanting of the Reformed Churches in Accra in 2004.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches has only spoken up loudly every seven years, but then it has always been close to the “living God” and close to human need.

What is on the agenda for the Christian life in a world that has grown old, tired and cold, and for confused, uncertain human beings?

I have three points:

- I. The living God and the gods of death
- II. The joy of the living God and the desolation of atheism
- III. The sun of righteousness. Just law and the fullness of life.

I. THE LIVING GOD AND THE GODS OF DEATH

1. The living God

The living God is a God who brings life. The dead gods are the gods of death.

To what extent is the true God a “living God”?

a. The living God is also the eternal God. Eternal life is God’s substance. Eternal life is not only unending life but life of such intensity that it flows over and calls forth other life. All finite life stems from the infinite life of the living God. Hence all finite life longs for the eternal source of life.

b. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:2). “My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Psalm 84:2).

c. The “living God” seems attractive through God’s own liveliness. God’s living power goes forth from itself and seeks the thirsty souls and bodies of people hungry for life. There is movement in God’s eternal life. The living God goes forth in Christ and brings life. He looks for the lost. He lights a lamp in the “dark night” of the soul. The living God is not “unmoving” like the god of Aristotle. God can move the divine self and be moved by the cries of suffering creatures (Exodus 3:7).

d. Where the living God bears life, there arise fullness of life and fulfilment of life. “My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.” There our lives are eternally affirmed, there arise lust for life and joy in life with all our bodily senses. There arises a fervent love of this life. When our “heart and flesh sing for joy,” spirituality and vitality are one. There arises a new spirituality of the senses and the earth:

“The spirit (of life) is poured out ‘all flesh.’” The joy of body and soul in the living God is at the same time the joy of the living God in the body and soul of God’s beloved creatures.

e. I see how a comprehensive theology embracing life is arising throughout the Christian world: Pope Francis showed the way to Catholic theology with the encyclicals “*Gaudium Evangelii*” and “*Laudato Si.*” In Reformed theology an OHN theology has emerged in Korea and an “*oopmaak*” (gateway) theology is coming up in South Africa, i.e. a theology of opening.

2. The dead gods—gods of death

a. The German racial ideology began with Nazi terror on our streets and ended in Auschwitz with 6 million murdered Jews. For the Nordic race that was destined to take world supremacy, the eastern European peoples were considered “*Untermenschen.*” With the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 the “Plan for the East” was that 30 million

people should starve in order to provide *Lebensraum*, space to live, for the German race. The German army (*Wehrmacht*) let over two million Russian prisoners of war die of hunger and thirst in camps. The German race-godhead not only brought appalling suffering upon the peoples but burdened the German people with intolerable guilt.

For a long time the racial boundary ran between white and black: white was good, black was bad. In the United States and in Germany white racism has not disappeared. It is deeply ingrained in our souls. Angels are all white; all the devils are black. My daughter discovered a black angel in Venice that now hangs on our Christmas tree.

b. The gods of the fatherlands have the First World War on their consciences: the “European Ur-disaster.” “Holy fatherland” we boys sang with our fathers: “a man must defend his fatherland,” and dying for the fatherland was considered a holy sacrifice. The great powers of Europe annihilated each other from 1914 to 1918 and sacrificed their youth, although there would have been ways of making peace. In France and Belgium the crosses stand in serried ranks in soldiers’ cemeteries just as their owners stood to attention in the barracks yard.

What a tragedy! When my generation was expected to die for the *Führer* of the German fatherland we ran blindly into death. Only afterwards did it become clear: there is no fatherland in a dictatorship. Our patriotism no longer applies to our own people but to the democratic constitution, with human rights as the fundamental rights of all people. The fatherland-god is a dead god and a god who was sacrificed in vain on the battlefields of the First and Second World War. May God preserve us from “Germany for the Germans” and “America First!” The first will be last, Jesus said.

c. The god of capitalism is a god who promises wealth and produces poverty. The god of capitalism divides our societies and consumes what we have in common. There is enough for all, but 60 million people are threatened by starvation. The freedom of the “free market economy” does not serve the life of all people. Freedom in a society of privileged and unprivileged is good for the former but not for the latter. The only thing that benefits disadvantaged groups is just laws, with international organizations to enforce them. Long before Marx, Luther called the god of capitalism Mammon and termed it the most common idol on earth. Let us resist this idolatry!

d. Today we are experiencing terror from below. The 21st century has invented suicide bombers; or, more accurately, suicidal mass murderers. In terrorists we encounter a new “religion of death.” “Your young people love life,” Mullah Omar from the Taliban told western journalists, “Our young people love death.” After the mass murder in Madrid on 11 March 2004 a letter claiming responsibility was found with the same content: “You love life, we love death.” A German who joined the Taliban in Afghanistan declared: “We don’t want to win, we want to kill and be killed.” Why? I think that

killing bestows power, the absolute, divine power over life and death. That is why terrorists seek maximum publicity. Spreading terror brings huge pleasure. We saw this love of death in European fascism: “*Viva la muerte*,” cried an old fascist general in the Spanish civil war: “Long live death.”

Terrorism arises in people’s hearts and minds and must be overcome in people’s hearts and minds. It is the language of peace, not of violence, that creates life. “Terrorists only understand the language of force,” we are told from all sides. But this “language of force” has caused the number of terrorists to soar from a few hundred at the time of bin Laden to tens of thousands in ISIS and Boko Haram today. It is good when joint Christian-Muslim peace initiatives deter young men from volunteering to kill and being killed in Syria, winning them back for life and love. It is good when Muslims and Christians care for abused child soldiers and heal them from the trauma of death.

The living God does not demand sacrifices, but instead sacrifices himself for love in order to be with his godless people. Faith creates life; idolatry is lethal.

II. THE JOY OF THE LIVING GOD AND THE DESOLATION OF ATHEISM

Christianity is a religion of joy in God. At any rate, the Christian faith in the resurrection makes life into a festival, “a festival without end,” as church father Athanasius said one Easter Day in Alexandria.

Let us measure the positive dimensions of “great joy” in the broad spaces of God, who is closer to us than we think, and widens our lives more than we suspect. Joy is the strength to live, momentum to love and pleasure in the creative beginning. We are made for enjoyment.

Let us look first into the Psalms in the Old Testament: God’s love and presence call forth joy, not fear:

“You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
In your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

This enlivening presence of God is often described as the “shining face” of God. When does a face shine? When someone wants to make a gift—or when a mother looks at her newborn child, their faces shine. God’s shining face radiates the blessing that brings fulfillment to human life and heightens its festive side.

Joy is amazingly also linked with God’s judgment: when God comes, it is to judge the earth, and joy will bring nature to bloom.

“(...) let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming to judge the earth (Psalm 96:11-13).

When God comes to judge the earth it is like the sun rising. God will straighten up the bent and make the withered green again, heal the sick, revive those who are flagging, and give the weary back their youth.

When God comes to humans there is a double change of direction—in God and in people. God turns from the “hidden face” (*hester panim*) to the “shining face.” This change in God—away from aversion to human wrongdoing to the kindness of God’s grace—calls forth a corresponding change in the person concerned:

“You have turned my mourning into dancing;
You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy” (Psalm 30:12).

And when the ransomed of the Lord return, “everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

God will rejoice with those who have been saved.

“He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love, he will exult over you with loud singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Isn’t that a wonderful picture? The exultant God, rejoicing with his ransomed creatures? From this compilation from the Psalms and the Old Testament prophets we see a great, wonderful harmony of joy—God’s joy—the joy of the earth—the joy of the ransomed. Back in 1940, Helmut Gollwitzer called his exposition of Luke 15 “God’s Joy.”

Joy is more original than faith. After all, what does the gifting God expect other than that the gifted human rejoices? In Greek, *charis*, grace, and *chara*, joy, are linguistically very close. Paul can use faith and joy interchangeably when he writes:

“We are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith” (2 Corinthians 1:24).

The Pharisees publicly reprimanded Jesus’ amazing behaviour towards “tax collectors and sinners” (“This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2)). Luke interprets it by recounting three parables: of the lost-and-found sheep, of the lost-and-found coin and of the lost-and-found son (Luke 15:1-32).

“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7)

This theology is not exactly correct: the “joy in heaven” is quite right, but Jesus did not only accept repentant sinners and eat with them. In addition, the lost sheep could not contribute much to being found, let alone the lost coin. The “joy in heaven” lies first with the seeking-and-finding God.

“When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices” (Luke 15:5).

The prodigal son (German: “lost son”) is the only one who repents. He turns away from his misery in a foreign land and goes back towards his father’s house, wanting to tell him:

“Father I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke 15:21).

Yet before he can make this special confession, the father comes before him:

“But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

Only then does the found son confess that he was lost, yet his father is not bothered; he rejoices:

“This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:24).

The God who seeks and finds the lost rejoices, and those who are found rejoice with God. Finding a lost person is like awakening someone who has died. Rejoicing in that means tuning in to God’s joy. It is about welcoming life, where there was death.

2. The desolation of atheism

Compared with the fullness of life in the living God, modern atheism offers a reduced life. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas famously echoed Max Weber in saying he was “religiously unmusical.” We can live without music but it is a poorer life. We can also live without religion, but it is a reduced life. The modern world directs its residents towards humanist ideals, but mostly towards naturalist or capitalist approaches to life. A life that has abandoned the living God is, so to speak, a life without an overhead light, without transcendence. A life that has lost transcendence becomes a life without self-transcendence. Your relationship to yourself dries up and your conscience may be twisted. Yet rationales for atheism may differ greatly.

I experienced humanist atheism in my own family. My grandfather Johannes Moltmann was Grand Master of the Hamburg Masonic lodge but had to leave it because of his criticism of religion. He agreed with the humanist ideals of Gottfried Ephraim Lessing and the religious critique of Ludwig Feuerbach. He wanted to make the human being great and yet yearned for a “future God,” the title of his last essay.

I experienced the atheism of the Nazi dictatorship in my personal life. That was racism and idolatry: Give an order, *Führer*, and we will follow you. This was political idolatry, and the idol was called Hitler.

In the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) I also got to know Stalinist atheism, with its motto: “Without God and sunny weather, we will reap our crops together.”

In the 19th century there was theological “protest atheism.” People protested against God because of the suffering of the innocent of the earth. They protested against God and the state, because throne and altar had allied themselves against the people. “Neither God nor state,” proclaimed anarchist Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) in Tsarist Russia. In the 20th century Catholic novelist Heinrich Böll (1917-1985) said: “I don’t like these atheists. They are always talking about God.”

Today protest atheism is rare in Europe. Banality atheism is widespread. People have lost their faith in God and hardly feel the loss. Human beings have become “economic animals” and allowed life to be commodified. The “post-secular” generation has moved beyond theism and atheism, faith and idolatry.

When atheism wins and theism disappears, what will become of atheism? It will disappear too, because, along with theism, atheism will also destroy itself. It offers nothing positive!

III. THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. JUST LAW AND THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

1. The justification of the victims

The World Communion of Reformed Churches has now approved the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification agreed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. Yet there is something missing at the heart of Reformation theology. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa brought it to light: the justification of the victims of the sins committed.

The Reformation doctrine on justification arose from the medieval sacrament of penitence. The power of evil is called sin—godlessness. We talk of “the forgiveness of sins by God’s grace alone, by faith.” That is also true and important but it is only half the truth. The sinner who committed the wrongdoing is forgiven, but where do the

victims of this sin stand? We pray “forgive us our sins,” but where are the victims of our sinful action? The sacrament of penitence is one-sided, focusing on the perpetrator. The doctrine of justification forgets the victims. There is a gap here in the Christian doctrine of grace.

That is already recognizable in the teaching on sin of the apostle Paul. In Romans 7 he writes, honestly and self-critically:

“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:19-20).

Why does Paul not direct our attention to those to whom he has done evil and not done good? Why is he only concerned about himself?

In the Old Testament Psalms we find God’s righteousness in the forgiveness of sins:

“In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me” (Psalm 71:2). However, God’s righteousness is on the side of the victims of sin:

“The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed” (Psalm 103:6).
“He works justice for the poor, the widows and orphans” (Deuteronomy 10:18).

God’s righteousness is not a justice that only determines good and evil. It is a creative righteousness that works justice. For the victims, it is a righteousness that brings them justice. For the evil-doers it is a righteousness that reinstates justice and puts things to rights.

The first issue is not the penitence of the perpetrators but the pain of the victims. What can the justification of victims look like? Here is a suggestion:

1. The first step is like the sacrament of penitence: *confessio oris*. It is a step into the light of truth. The victims of injustice and violence must emerge not only from their suffering but, even more, from their spiritual humiliation. This closes their mouth. In the case of sexual violence, there is the additional shame at the violation they have suffered. They need a free space recognizing their suffering, so that they can cry out their pain. They need a listening ear, someone to whom they can tell their story, so that they can regain self-respect. The victimizer’s confession of guilt can help them here. But they should not wait for it because they also have to be liberated from fixation on the victimizer—they must not remain “victims” forever. In the God “who works justice for those who suffer violence” they rediscover their human dignity. They also need a protective space of a community in which they can feel recognized.

2. The second step is raising up the victims from humiliation, and their raising their heads to God. The victims, too, need repentance. It is a turning away from self-pity and self-hate, into the wideness of a loving self-affirmation. That is the precondition for the third step.

3. It is not reprisals but forgiveness that makes us free. Everyone who suffers a wrongdoing or some offence will dream of revenge. That is quite natural. But if we return evil for evil, we do not gain justice, but only a doubling of evil. “Do not be overcome by evil,” Paul rightly says (Romans 12:21). Nor by the evil by which evil is repaid. Whoever murders a murderer is also a murderer.

“Overcome evil with good,” Paul continues. If we forgive those who sin against us we do not only them good but also ourselves: we overcome the evil that has entered our lives.

2. Just law

It is well-known that Reformed Christianity has a passion for “law and justice.” After all, Calvin was a lawyer and our fathers regarded the *tertius usus legis* as the goal of the law and the actual use of the law: “Actions speak louder than words.” Freed for just life! The Heidelberg Catechism deals with God’s law, the Ten Commandments, in its Part III on “Gratitude.”

All peoples suffer today from social impoverishment and are crying for social justice. For over 40 years we have heard the lament of governments that, despite all efforts, the divide between rich and poor is widening. You just need to read the Poverty and Wealth Reports in Germany. Not only in less-developed countries does a small, rich, upper class dominate a mass of poor people; also in the industrialized democracies the gap between astronomic manager salaries and the income of unemployed people is grotesque.

Democracy is founded not just on the freedom of its citizens but also on their equality. The democratic idea of equality is incompatible with an economic system that produces ever greater inequality among people. Without equality in life opportunities and without equality of life conditions there is a loss of common good and social cohesion.

In a society of very high and very low earners, freedom for the most vulnerable can be fatal. Only just laws protect life. The alternative to poverty is not property. The alternative to poverty and property is community. You can live in poverty if it is something everyone puts up with together. It is only injustice that makes poverty hard to bear. The contempt for solidarity shown by rich tax-evaders enrages people. When everyone is in the same situation, they help each other mutually. If, however, equality ceases because some are winners and the others losers, that is the end of mutual assistance.

By community I mean manageable social security systems based on solidarity and also the welfare state. The internal cohesion of a society is social balance and social peace. Social peace calls for just social legislation. The state must reclaim the right to regulate the economy and the finance because it is the only one able to enforce social legislation. With the present economic and financial globalization, international organizations from the EU to the UN must adopt and enforce rules for just economic dealings and for fair trade. Rather than a “free” market economy, I am for a *just* market economy.

“Competition” and “competitiveness” are strong driving forces, certainly, but only in the framework of a common life, i.e. only within the boundaries of social justice. There are areas of life that must not be subjected to the expansive logic of the market because they follow other laws. Patients are not “customers” of our hospitals and students are not “consumers” of our faculties at the universities.

“Security” must not become a “commodity” that only the rich can afford with their private security firms. The state and the police are responsible for the security of citizens, otherwise societies will be divided into gated communities and slums. In gated communities the police are unnecessary, and slums are places they do not enter at night. When that happens, the state is turning into a “failed state.”

Security is not a commodity, it is a fundamental right of citizens. It must not be privatized. The modern state has a monopoly on the use of force and must not delegate this to others.

3. Human rights and the rights of nature

For the last 40 years I have followed and participated in the discussion about the ecological turn taken by theology. I recently reread WARC’s statement of 1976, “The Theological Basis of Human Rights” and its 1989 paper called “Rights of Future Generations—Rights of Nature—Proposal for enlarging the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” I was surprised to see how up-to-date they are today. They are also unique in that they develop the legal side of human rights and also the rights of future generations. The rights of nature are seen as the basis for solving the environmental crisis. That is something I have not found in any of the theological books on the ecological crisis. It bears the signature of Reformed theology:

“Community with all creation on this earth nonetheless remains a pipe-dream unless it is realized within the community of law for all life. Such an earthly legal community must open the human legal community to rights of other forms of life and to rights of nature. We must open human laws within universal laws of the life of the earth, if we want to survive” (Studies of the WARC 19, 1990, p. 24).

We have developed human rights from the law of God to man, as suggested by the biblical account of God-likeness (*imago dei*). Human beings are created in the image of God, they become the covenant partners of God, and in the community of Christ sons and daughters of God and heirs to the kingdom of God. This applies to individuals as well as to the human community. We have therefore adopted the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, like the International Covenants of 1966, in order to balance individual freedoms of the person and the social rights of the community. We then laid special emphasis on reformed right of resistance (p. 66). We have called “the right of future generations” as tasks for further development, because people live in generations, and “the right of nature,” because people live in the life community with the earth.

A small working group of lawyers and theologians led by Lukas Vischer met regularly in Geneva and presented its findings at the WARC General Council in 1989 in Seoul, South Korea (Studies from the WARC No 19). The “rights of nature”, the earth, of plants and trees, of animals and the ecosystems were developed theologically from the covenant with Noah in Genesis 9. The resolutions (12-13) were sent to the United Nations organization but also to the individual nations. Thanks to these resolutions, Lukas Vischer and Prof. Peter Saladin, Geneva, were able to influence legislation in Switzerland.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches should take up these resolutions from Seoul again and keep working on them. They can then complement the well-known Earth Charter (2000) which evolved following the UN’s Earth Summit of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

The Accra Confession of 2004 cannot be praised highly enough. Finally we have a document in clear language with a series of affirmations [“We believe in...”] and statements of rejection, saying “no” [“We reject...”/“*Wir sagen Nein...*”] instead of the many pointless “dialogues.” The “god of capitalism” is met with the confession of the living God. And the call for justice for the poor and the Earth is raised globally in addressing economic and financial “globalization.”

The work on just laws done in WARC from 1976 to 1989 must be combined with the Accra Confession. Accra 2004 must be supplemented by Seoul 1989: the “rights of future generations” and the “rights of nature” must be refined and enhanced. And there is something else: every Reformed confession mentions the right of popular resistance. That is found in the *confessio scotica* (Art. 14) and in the 1572 *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* by Philippe Duplessis Mornay. It is found in the Belhar Confession of 1982 and in the Accra Confession. This right of resistance presupposes a quite specific understanding of the state: covenant politics instead of sovereignty doctrine, democracy

instead of authoritarian rule. Who should implement human rights and the rights of nature better than a just state? We have neglected constitutional theory for too long.

4. Fullness of life

When the “sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2) rises, the *sun of life* rises at the same time. It is the same in spring: the sun awakens everything to life, the flowers spring out of the ground, the trees turn green and the animals are aroused from sleep. It is like that when the “spirit of life” is “poured out” on all living things: humanity begins to blossom, strength grows, there is hope for the future, the diversity of life unfolds, a wealth of talents comes to fruition. “Let a hundred flowers bloom,” Mao once said. We need a vision for the future for the new scientific and technological possibilities we have today, otherwise they will be used for the death and destruction of humanity. “Fullness of life” is that kind of vision of the future, reaching far beyond what is possible here—into eternal life.

The cry for justice always comes too late, when violence and wrongdoing make the life of vulnerable people difficult. But it has to come, if we take the future vision seriously. Yet negating the negative does not lead to anything positive. Overcoming wrongdoing does not of itself produce what is right, and nonviolence does not lead to service for peace. That is why we should not only talk to the poor about their poverty, and the victims of violent systems must not always remain victims. There is no right to be right nor to non-violence.

The poor are only “poor” by comparison with the rich. In my experience they do not want only to be approached about what they do not have and are not, but rather about what they are and what they can do. The victims of violent acts and systems must not always remain fixated on the perpetrators and violent systems—they must free themselves from a fixation on the perpetrators and find their way to themselves again.

Who defines them actually as “poor” or “victims” or “oppressed” or “losers?” It is the wealthy or those who have “made it,” or the violent systems. When we stand up for the poor and the victims of oppression, who are we? The poor or the non-poor, the victims or the non-victims? The message of Accra was a necessary message to the industrialized world, to the non-poor and the non-oppressed. It was still not a message from the “poor” or the “victims.” If in future we await not only the “sun of righteousness” but, first and foremost, the *sun of life* we will be seized by a passion for the life of the “poor” and the “victims,” for life together.

Anyone who trusts the living God does not just see the world in terms of its reality. Realists do that and they always arrive too late. Anyone who trusts the future sees the world according to its potential. “All things are possible for one who believes,” because “all things are possible to God.” All reality is surrounded by a sea of possibilities. All re-

alities are realized possibilities or non-realized alternatives. For a long time historians told history as though it were a fatal necessity: it had to happen! Today we recognize that the First World War did not have to happen; there were options for peace but no one seized them.

We will therefore become seekers of possibilities of life and justice, and will avoid the recognizable options of death and annihilation. In the cockpit of a plane I found the motto: “Think ahead of the aircraft.”

In order to recognize the objective chances for life we need to be especially attentive: Watch and pray, says the New Testament, and the new emphasis is on watching. In order to discern favourable opportunities for life we must stretch our imagination, our creative fantasy. For our daily lives we need our imagination in order to look after our interests. Why don't we use it for the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and for life and its beauty? You do not need to be a prophet to do that. You just need to wake up and, with Christ, hope and love. All great organizations of church life, mission and diaconal ministry were founded by Christian “inventors.” They had an idea, were alert and seized their chances. We think of the Reformers Luther and Calvin, 500 years ago, or of John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf 300 years ago, or of the founding fathers of the huge churches in Korea, or of the women and men of new South Africa. They all were seized by God's creative spirit and created something new.

“LIVING GOD, RENEW AND TRANSFORM US.”

That happens when the “sun of righteousness” lights our path. Since the coming of Christ into this world it has shone over the earth. The sun has already risen. The future life has already begun.

Appendix 10c

Keynote Address

Gender Justice

Isabel Apawo Phiri

INTRODUCTION

In this session, we, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Philip Vinod Peacock, have been given the responsibility of reflecting on the theme of justice drawing from the experiences of Africa and Asia while bearing in mind that injustice permeates every dimension of human relationships and our relationship with the earth be it from the Global North or the Global South. Furthermore, we are working with the assumption that while humanity has the ability to control, oppress and exploit others and the earth, those

with power also have the capacity to use it to do good by enabling, empowering and emancipating the oppressed, especially when inspired by their belief in God of justice who is the creator of humanity and the universe. God has given power to all. Those with more power have a greater responsibility to stand, speak and act with and on behalf of those with less power like the marginalized and discriminated against. In this case, the world is calling upon the faith leaders to use their power for justice for the excluded and discriminated against and for the exploited planet earth.

We are also working with the understanding that in the World Communion of Reformed Churches we call each other to account for the implementation of issues that bind us together. As a Communion we exercise our ministry of solidarity by listening to one another and accompany one another towards fulfilling our mandate from our Lord Jesus that all those who are created in the image of God are assisted to live their lives according to the declaration of Jesus that he came that all may have fullness of life in abundance (John 10:10).

In our presentation, we engage the concept of gender justice through the lens of post-colonial theory. We affirm the comment of Musa Dube, a postcolonial New Testament scholar that:

The struggle for liberation of postcolonial feminist readers is located within the framework of resisting global and natural structures of oppression – be they politically, economically, socially, or culturally based. Since gender oppression pervades all sectors of life, postcolonial feminist readers add gender analysis to the struggle of Two-Thirds World communities of resistance to ensure that national and international efforts of establishing justice do not side-line gender justice. Postcolonial feminists thus ask how various forms of national oppression affect women and men, how international forms of oppression affect men and women, how gender oppression functions with other forms of oppression such as class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. They also propose various ways of reading that will chart social justice and that take on gender justice in national and international relationships.¹

Given the above framework, we see a link between postcolonial theory and the justice discourse within the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

¹ Musa W. Dube, “Rahab Says Hello to Judith: A Decolonizing Feminist Reading,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, 142–158 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publisher, 2006), 142.

OUR OWN LOCALITY AND EXPERIENCES

Feminist scholars globally have argued for experience as the foundation and valid starting point for any liberating theology.² These experiences are believed to be contextually based, but even within the same context, these experiences take different turns due to various factors such as culture, religion and status. Thus, feminist thought emphasises the need to consider specifics and the location of experience. Given the significance of this argument, it is important to specify our own locality of experiences, especially as related to the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

I, Isabel Apawo. Phiri, was introduced to gender justice discourse through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians starting from 1989 when the Circle was founded.³ My Christian faith has been shaped by the Presbyterian tradition in Malawi and South Africa. In addition I have lived most of my Christian life with the tension of conservative evangelical tradition and ecumenical experiences. Coming from Malawi where literacy rate of the adult population is 65.75% (i.e. aged 15 years and above of whom 73% are men 59% are women),⁴ I cherish the privilege to have come from a family that valued education, especially of girls. Having studied and worked in the academic world in secular institutions but closely connected with institutions of the church, I came to experience the complexity of power dynamics when a female lay person who identifies with a feminist framework is significantly contributing to the education of the male clergy. In the context of Africa, I am constantly asked: “How can one be an evangelical Christian and also be an activist for gender justice?” This hard question comes from women who are in the church and have a conservative understanding of the Bible and women who are gender activist who feel that the Bible is a patriarchal book and that the structures of the church are too patriarchal for their comfort. In my case leaving the church is not an option. It is my home where I live out my faith in God while drawing from prophetic theology which has turned me into activist for justice of all forms, of which gender justice is one. Working for the World Council of Churches (WCC) has been an opportunity to bring local activism on justice issues informed by prophetic theology to the international platform where I have learnt to speak the truth

² For a detailed discussion on the significance of experience for feminist theological thinking, see Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, “African Women’s Theologies,” in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* edited by Diane B Stinton, 90-100 (London: SPCK, 2010), 91-93.

³ The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians was founded in 1989 by Mercy Amba Oduyoye with the purpose of creating safe space for African women Christians, Muslims, Jews and Indigenous Religions to come together and theologise about gender justice in the contest of African religions, culture, political and economic context. African women wanted to generate literature about their experience of God and the society.

⁴ According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (March 2016), 65.75% of the adult population (aged 15 years and above) in Malawi are able to read and write. For adult men, the literacy rate is 73% and for women it is 59%.

to power with and on behalf of the marginalized of our society. Leading the implementation of the pilgrimage of justice and peace in the programmatic work of the WCC has made me appreciate the connection between peace and justice issues and the unity of the church. The unity of the church is the basis on which we walk together for justice and peace. I have seen the importance of the creation of intergenerational safe spaces for the people of God to listen to one another and be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.

In my life there have been two significant contacts with the then-World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) which were life transforming and are relevant to the topic of gender justice. The first was my participation in a women's consultation on the topic "Walk My Sister: The Ordination of Women: Reformed Perspectives"⁵ which took place at Kampen Theological Seminary in 1992. The consultation was organized by the Women's Desk of WARC. At this time WARC had just established the Programme on Partnership between Men and Women in the Church. Its aim was to "encourage churches to promote partnership of women and men modelled in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Partnership was understood to be a gift of the Holy Spirit in which there is a new focus of relationship in Jesus Christ that brings wholeness and justice in communities."⁶ Of significance was the fact that this was during the period of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) built on the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985).⁷ The consultation organized by WARC left a big impression on me as we searched the Scriptures together to understand afresh what God is saying to us about the place of women in the church. At that consultation I found my Reformed sisters from all over the world who were raising the same questions I was raising in my own PhD studies as I worked with women and men of the Nkhoma Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Central Africa in Malawi. That consultation confirmed for me what Mercy Amba Oduyoye said in *Who Will Roll the Stone Away: The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity With Women*,⁸ that the Ecumenical Decade was more of women in solidarity with each other than the churches in solidarity with women.

⁵ Phiri, Isabel Apawo, "The 'Proper' place of women (Genesis 1 and I timothy 2) A Biblical Exegetical Study from a Malawian Chewa Presbyterian Perspective." in *'Walk my Sister' The Ordination of Women: Reformed Perspectives*. Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Vol. 18, July 1993, 42-33. And Phiri, Isabel Apawo, "Women's/Feminist Challenges for Wholeness" in *Reformed World*. Vol. 43, No. 4, Dec. 1993, 159-168.

⁶ See the letter of Nyambura Njoroge to the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian written in 1995 when she was the Executive Secretary for the Women's desk of WARC.

⁷ See the work of Dr Fulata Mbanjo Moyo on <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/women-and-men/history>

⁸ Published by World Council of Churches, 1991.

The second significant contact was in 1995 when the executive secretary of the women's desk, Rev. Dr. Nyambura Njoroge and the then-general secretary, Rev. Dr. Milan Opocensky, wrote letters to my church in Malawi to express concern over the reaction of my church to the peaceful march of church women to present a petition raising issues of: lack of partnership between men and women in the church, violence against women, lack of participation of women in leadership roles including the ordination of women to the ministry of word and sacrament. The church women made history for being on such a march as it was the first of its kind. This should be understood in the context of the then-just realized political transition to democracy in the country where the church had played a significant role in taking a prophetic stand against all forms of injustices experienced by Malawians. Through the petition the women were demanding that the political and economic justice that the churches were seeking for all Malawians should include gender justice for women who are in the church and society too. In other words, the church women were already pointing to the interconnect-edness of oppression and the need for the church to be comprehensive in its resistance to all forms of oppression that dehumanizes God's children irrespective of gender, race, age and class. The leadership of the church reacted negatively to the petition of the church women by setting a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the issue. Among other issues the Commission of Inquiry recommended the suspension of women church workers who were part of the march. The Commission also recommended that I leave the Blantyre Synod and go to the synod of my ancestors, Nkhoma Synod. I wrote back to the church to protest all the recommendations. Among other things I said: "I have no intentions of leaving the church unless I am asked by the church court to do so. My life has been lived in the grip of the church. I have my roots in the CCAP."

Of particular significance to today's plenary topic was the letter of Opocensky which stated;

...the peaceful demonstration and the issues it had attempted to address had been widely publicized in Malawi, and thereby caught the attention of the international community, and that the world church was concerned indeed.

People who are aware of WARC's involvement in Malawi during the political transition are inquiring from us what we are doing to address the injustices the women have expressed in their petition to the church leadership in Malawi. Since Dr Njoroge has not received any response from your office, I kindly urge you to treat this matter with utmost priority, and send the report of the inquiry as soon as possible I am sure that you are aware that the implications of this whole affair go far beyond the issue of suspension. We are requesting the church to look seriously into how the whole church treats women and deals with their concerns. **Justice delayed is justice denied. The church has the responsibility of "breaking the**

chains of injustice”,⁹ as the theme of the next General Council of WARC attests. The credibility of the local as well as the world church is at stake if concrete action is not taken to address the issue at hand: discrimination of women in the church and society.¹⁰

A pastoral team of six Reformed members was organised by WARC and sent to the Blantyre Synod to discuss the role of the church in promoting justice in the country and the partnership of women and men. The letters from WARC and the pastoral visit had a huge impact on the church’s commitment to resolve the issue because it was made clear that there is a link between what was happening in a member church with the wider Reformed family. It is about accompaniment and accountability to each other in the body of Christ, which I believe should always be the case to witness to the world that we are one.

Thereafter a process was established for church members and the leadership of the church on partnership between women and men in the church. This was the beginning of change and the concerns of the women were addressed over a period of five years. As from 2000, the Blantyre Synod has been ordaining women to the ministry of the word and sacrament and continues to work on the partnership of women and men in the church. This is an example to show that it is possible for a church in our communion to go through total transformation in the area of gender justice and continues to do more and more.

DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

At a global level and within our Communion, we have seen that the partnership of women and men has continued to be pursued through asking different hard questions based on context. In some of our churches the conversation has continued to be about whether gender differentiation is as a result of creation by God and therefore given and to be accepted as the norm or to accept the argument of those who believe that gender is constructed by cultures and religions in our particular context and therefore is open to change with time as humanity evolves.

Difficult conversations are still taking place about how Jesus dealt with the question of gender differentiation in the society that he belonged to and what we today can learn from his way of being a man which was different from the men of his time.¹¹ Questions are being asked whether or not to include studies on patriarchal masculinities and liberating masculinities in our theological institutions or during seminars in our churches.

⁹ The use of bold letters is mine to emphasize the importance of what he was saying for us today.

¹⁰ See the letter of Rev Dr Milan Opocensky to Blantyre Synod in 1995.

¹¹ See the work of Tinyiko Maluleke, Gerald West, Kä Mana and Ezra Chitando.

Our use of worship language is still in question. There are also debates still taking place about whether we should use inclusive language in our worship or continue to use male dominated language on the understanding that man stands for all humanity despite the fact that in 1975 the UN declared that the term man does not stand for all humanity.

Furthermore, hard conversations are still taking place about whether women should be allowed to take leadership positions in the church or not. There are still few women who are participating in leadership roles including the ordination of women. Some of our churches had been moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to start ordaining women to the ministry of the word and sacrament and to become church elders. To everyone's surprise the steps forward have since been rescinded. Who is on a pilgrimage of justice and peace with such churches to accompany them in their struggle for the implementation of justice for all?

Still hard conversations are happening about what to do with the ordained women. Peggy Mulambya Kabonde's PhD thesis,¹² which I had the honour to supervise, made me realize how difficult life continues to be for Reformed ordained women in terms of churches establishing true partnership between ordained women and ordained men, let alone between ordained women and their congregations. Kabonde also highlighted that most of our theological institutions are yet to include gender as a tool of analysis in research or when teaching theological subjects. This is also connected to lack of inclusion of feminist theological studies and gender studies in our theological curriculum.

I have come to accept that there is a link between the way the churches have handled the issues of the leadership of women in the church with the support or lack of it for women in political leadership. Torild Skard in *Women of Power*¹³ has demonstrated that where participation of women in the faith institutions is a difficult conversation, faith communities as citizens of their country tend to vote for a man than for a woman for the position of president or prime minister of their country. She has shown that by 2012, there were 10% female and 90% male presidents and prime ministers worldwide. She argues that culture and religion account for this screwed percentages even in countries where democracy has been in existence for a long time. In the thinking of many, including women, they find it difficult to vote for a female president or prime minister because in their reflection of God and human leadership, they understand

¹² Peggy Mlambya Kabonde, "Ordination of Women: Partnership, Praxis and Experience of the United Church of Zambia." University of KwaZulu Natal, 2014, Supervisor: Prof. IA Phiri, co-supervisor: Dr. Julius Gathogo.

¹³ Torild Skard, *Women of Power Half a Century of Female Presidents and Prime Ministers Worldwide* 2014.

that it is the will of God for men to lead and women to follow, even though the Bible and the experience of women today tells a different story.

INTERSECTIONARIES OF OPPRESSION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

The extremely difficult conversations of our times have been about all forms of sexual and gender based violence in the church and society. Sexual and any form of violence against minorities and marginalized groups of people is about power and control. Of particular concern for us today, which has become a global phenomenon, is when the gender-based violence is happening in our own churches and homes. Pope Francis led by example by refusing to be silent about the sexual abuse of children by church leaders. The joint publication of the World Student Christian Fellowship and the World Council of Churches entitled: *When Pastors Prey: Overcoming Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women*¹⁴ is another example of refusing to join the conspiracy of silence over sexual and gender based violence in the church and in Christian homes. Campaigns like “Thursdays in Black,” which has been observed at this General Council, is a significant symbol of our solidarity to end any form violence in the church and society.

The huge wave of migrants and refugees from the Global South to the Global North and the internal displacement of people in their countries or outside due to conflict or economic reasons or due to environmental disasters has exposed the existence of modern day slavery and racism. Human trafficking is on the increase and many more children and women migrants and refugees are going through sexual and gender-based violence in camps, enroute to their new countries and in the host countries. They cannot afford to use the legal system to seek protection because they cannot afford it or they are afraid of being sent back to their countries. Testimonies are shared through media of terrible conditions in many camps where the migrants live, exposing them to sickness. Fear of migrants and refugees, which in some cases is understandable when viewed in the context of increased terror attacks from extremists, is also exposing racist tendencies. At the same time we acknowledge the excellent work done by people from the Global North who have opened their homes and churches to welcome and assist migrants and refugees. On this pilgrimage of justice and peace, what can we do together to address the fear of the receiving countries, racism and support the migrants and refugees?

Then there is the state sanctioned or community inspired sexual violence or killing of people who are sexual minorities. While the message of the gospel is about inclusivity, as communities of faith we are not speaking out loud enough to stop the killing of people on the basis of their sexual orientation. As people who stand in solidarity for justice for all God’s people, we cannot afford to be quiet when life is destroyed through

¹⁴ Edited by Villi Boobal Batchelor. WCC publication, 2013.

what is termed righteous anger directed towards sexual minorities. On a pilgrimage of justice and peace we are walking together and discussing about human sexuality in its totality. We celebrate God's gift to humanity of sexuality. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit we listen to each other's stories with love and compassion. As we listen we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us to see the topic of human sexuality from God's perspective as revealed to us for our times.

As a person who comes from Malawi, which is listed among the least developed countries, I cannot fail to point out the interconnectedness of extreme poverty, experiences of drought and floods, food insecurity and lack of access to clean water and poor health, and exposure to HIV. The effects of climate change and degradation of our forests is very visible. The majority of people in Malawi still use firewood for cooking, which in turn brings health complications as they are constantly exposed to dangerous fumes from firewood. It is not enough to say that people should stop cooking using firewood when they cannot afford the alternatives which are being offered. It is the agenda of the churches to advocate for a life lived with dignity for all people by holding governments accountable to prioritize the basic human rights of their people. Churches have a long history of involvement in the provision of health services, agriculture and education, just to mention a few. Let us not get tired of doing good but continue to engage with the Sustainable Development Goals from a faith perspective to promote justice for all so that no one is left behind.

I could go on listing the issues that are calling for hard conversations and action. But it is better that we now turn to discuss why I believe we ought to act differently in the face of all the hard issues that require our agent attention and action.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON JUSTICE

Our Christian faith empowers us to live a life of hope for transformation in the face of brokenness. We have hope because we believe that the Bible has shown us that God created every human being with inherent dignity through being created in God's image, male and female.¹⁵ As argued by Suzan Berber, "on this basis Christians affirmed the equality of men and women in God's sight. This means that every community or culture shaped by Christian theology, with an understanding of the unique and inestimable dignity of each human being, should be one in which women and men live alongside one another in peaceful and just relationship."

I find the story of Exodus 2:16-22 very inspiring as it deals with injustice and justice issues in an interconnected way. The story is as follows:

¹⁵ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁶ Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

¹⁸ When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

¹⁹ They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

²⁰ "And where is he?" Reuel asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. ²² Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land."

What I like about this story is the way power is being used over the issue of water. Moses is a man of power from outside this community. He sees the injustice done to the seven daughters of Reuel, the priest of Midian, another man of power. The seven girls arrived at the well first, but were pushed aside by the shepherds who came later than the girls. Moses uses his male power to defend the rights of the girls. He does not allow gender to be used to disadvantage the girls. He even helps the girls by watering their animals. The shepherds noticed that Moses was a man of authority; they listened to him and allowed the girls to go first. Reuel the father of the girls is surprised that today they have come home early; did he know that his daughters were being harassed by the shepherds? I believe he did but did not use his position as priest to protect his daughters. He normalized their oppression and made them also accept it as normal.

I would like to conclude by urging our church leaders to use their authority to speak out against any form of injustice, starting from within the church itself. The time of normalizing the oppression of the minorities in our churches is over. We are now leading by example by protecting those who are not able to speak for themselves or those whose voices are not listened to. Let your voices be heard in your countries and in international spaces as you speak out for justice.

CONCLUSION

The hymn below inspires me when I think of justice promoting Reformed churches. It says:

1 The Church is wherever God's people are praising,
knowing they're wanted and loved by their Lord.

The Church is wherever Christ's followers are trying
to live and to share out the good news of God.

2 The Church is wherever God's people are loving,
where all are forgiven and start once again,
where all are accepted, whatever their background,
whatever their past and whatever their pain.

3 The Church is wherever God's people are seeking
to reach out and touch folk wherever they are —
conveying the Gospel, its joy and its comfort,
to challenge, refresh, and excite and inspire.

4 The Church is wherever God's people are praising,
knowing we're wanted and loved by our Lord.
The Church is where we as Christ's followers are trying
to live and to share out the good news of God.¹⁶

Appendix 10d Keynote Address

Justice

Philip Vinod Peacock

My name is Philip Vinod Peacock and I come from India. I am a Dalit Christian and an ordained minister of the Church of North India. Today, Dr. Phiri and I would like to address the issue of justice, and I think that I would like to state from the outset that we do this to you as Christians. Also I would like to specifically say that we do this as Christians located in the Reformed tradition and inspired by the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). As those committed to being the disciples of Jesus, called to live faithfully but at the same time to discern critically. To state at the outset itself that our engagement with issues of justice and our solidarity with the oppressed is not because this is a good idea, and we are reminded that good ideas do not fall from the skies, but that because this is an act of faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Justice beats at the heart of the God we believe in and to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly is what this God requires of us. And this is important to us as a Reformed community, that our struggles for justice arise out of our faith and

¹⁶ Church Hymnary (4th ed.) #522, Author: Carol Rose Ikeler (b. 1920), Publication Date: 2005, Meter: 12 10 12 11 Irregular, Scripture: 1 John 3:1; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:32-35; Ephesians 5:1; Hebrews 13:16 Topic: Our Response to Christ: In Discipleship; Our Response to God: in the worship of God's house; Children (2 more...), Copyright: © 1963 W. L. Jenkins.

our commitment to struggle to be faithful disciples of Jesus in our world today. To put it in other words, it is not Christians who should be involved with acts of justice, rather it is doing acts of justice that make us Christian as the Accra Confession puts it:

Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another.

I would like to begin by offering a story from Orissa, a state that lies just south of where I live. It is a story of the Niyamgiri Hills, home and sacred space to the many indigenous people who live in the area. The Dongri Kondh is only one of the many indigenous communities that live in the area. In the year 2003, Vedanta, a United Kingdom headquartered metals and mining company, owned by an Indian and having mining interests in India, Zambia and Australia, entered into a memorandum of understanding with the state government of Orissa to mine bauxite, a necessary ore in aluminium production, from the Niyamgiri Hills. And I name these countries to point out to you the transnational interests at work here. In the year 2004, the Ministry of Environment and Forests gave Vedanta environmental clearance to mine three million tons of bauxite per year from the Niyamgiri Hills land that is sacred to the Dongri Kondh tribe. Vedanta was to start an aluminium factory near by that would process the bauxite into aluminium. For those of you who know, the processes of making bauxite into aluminium use copious amounts of water and release effluents into the eco-system which have large and long-term effects on the environment. Local people and women in particular rose up in protest against this threat to their life and livelihood and in usual fashion this uprising was met with violence, both overt and subvert. The coercive forces of the state, police and paramilitary, and the propaganda machinery released an onslaught against the indigenous communities and their struggle for life. Liberals over the country invoked the logic of development and the language of progress to shut down any element of resistance! Make no mistake the people of the Niyamgiri Hills were up against the violence, logic and the violent logic of the forces of death.

What we have here is a classic example of the inner workings of the machinations of death which take away the lives and livelihood of the most vulnerable that live on this planet. It makes clear to us the coming together of military, economic and political power that the Accra Confession spoke about. The destructive intentions of Vedanta would have not only had its impact on the environment but on the lives of the community who would be displaced, possibly to the slums of the cities in India. The lives of women would be dramatically changed with increasing difficulties in finding water

and fuel, the cultural life of the tribe and their sacred relationship was going to be twisted in unimaginable ways. And this is not just the story of the Niyamgiri Hills, across the world it is also the story of the Dakota pipeline, it is the story of aboriginal communities destroyed by mining activity in Australia, of communities in Africa, of fishing communities around the world!

And this is the deepening crisis of the world we live in. That the forces of death, that principalities and powers, to use the words of Ephesians, incarnate and manifest in the weapons of the military complex that can destroy the world many times over, as though once is not enough, that these forces of death are manifest in the so-called invisible hand (and it is not funny the number of people that have been murdered by this invisible hand) of neo-liberal capitalism that upholds the idolatry of profit over all else, it is manifest in a rabidly growing racism that is either extinguishing young black men or locking them away. It is being manifest in a whole new wave of Islamophobia the world over. And these forces combine in special and unique ways to inflict violence on the bodies of women and sexual minorities. The military-industrial-patriarchal complex is a many-headed monster that is destroying life and denying the promise of life in its fullness.

Fourteen years ago the Reformed family gathered in Accra and offered to the ecumenical world a gift, a gift of naming what is going on the world. And naming what is going on is a necessary part of discernment. Words are powerful. On the one hand words enable us to describe our experience; without the right words we will not be able to articulate our experiences we face. But a far deeper power of words is that not only do they enable us to describe our experiences, words also have the power of enabling us to understand our experiences. The ability to have words, to have language then is the ability to both understand as well as articulate what is happening around us. It is therefore always in the interest of the powerful to be able to control language. To control language is to be able to control people. The feminist theologian Mary Daly informs us that our theological task is to find new words and give old words new meanings. As Christians we are called to offer good news to the poor and the oppressed; this necessitates that we name that which is bad news, that which causes death.

It was in this context that we offered the word “empire” as a way of naming what is going on in the world. It offers us a means of understanding, articulating and therefore naming the experiences of those who suffer under the present global regime. Even further we can claim that the word empire offers us a hermeneutical lens to uncover and expose the dynamics of power that we possibly find ourselves in.

Yet if we are honest we have also lost ourselves in a noose of words, that while we have made an offering of naming empire as a way of looking at the world, we have lost our way in arguing and defining what this word actually means and what it possibly could

mean. Don't get me wrong, this process of naming, defining and arguing is not just important, it is necessary, it is our theological task and perhaps the way that the church moves forward, albeit slowly, the fact is that the forces of death have not only morphed but have grown stronger while we have argued.

And therefore the story is not just about Niyamgiri; it is a story that is unfolding on the bombed streets of Syria, in the occupied lands in Palestine, in the favelas of Brazil, in the demonization of the working class in Europe, in the jails of the United States of America. It is the story of Soni Sori, an indigenous woman who had acid thrown on her because she dared challenge the power of the state. It is the story of Alan Kurdi whose body was found on the beach on the Mediterranean Sea. It is the story of Ken Saro Wiwa, killed by the militia of a multinational corporation in search of oil. It is the story of Junaid, lynched because he was accused of having eaten beef. It is the story of Juan Ramon Guerrero from Orlando, shot and killed because he was gay. It is the story of Philando Castile, murdered by the police because he was black! And while we struggle to name the beast we are knee deep in the blood of those that the beast has slain!

The Bible tells us that the God of life, whose name we invoke at this gathering, is revealed to us in Scripture, in the form of a story, and specifically of a God who takes the side of the powerless in the story. This is the unique character of God as shown to us in the Bible—the God of the Bible chooses the Hebrew slaves over Pharaoh. God chooses to appear to Moses in a lowly bush and not in a mighty cedar. God chooses David, a small boy, over Goliath as well as over Saul and the other mighty men of Israel—including David's own brothers for that matter. A Jewish midrash tells us of how when Miriam was dancing because the horse and the rider were thrown into the sea, the angels also descended from heaven and danced with her. And while they were dancing they wondered what God was doing, and the angels went up again and visited God and they found God sitting sullenly. And the angels asked God why God was not dancing? And God answers saying, how can I dance when my people are drowning? That the God we believe in is always on the side of the suffering ones.

Liberation theology has often used the language of the preferential option for the poor. Perhaps this is mistaken. God is always on the side of the poor. The question we have to answer is: which side are we on?

And therefore the discernment of the signs of the times is not a neutral observation of what is happening around us but is a call for us to take sides with those whose lives are being destroyed. It is a call to resist the forces of death, to join in the struggle to transform the world. It is not just a way of looking but a way of participating. Nivedita Menon, the Indian feminist, tells us that a feminist gaze is an intentional position from the margins which seeks to dismantle all hierarchies. It is no wonder then that

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza spoke of it in terms of the dismantling of kyriarchy, the radical disruption of all lordship; the dismantling of the imperial project if you will.

But perhaps two caveats: firstly, we as Christians make much of the idea of the presence of God. While I know that it is popular for us to speak of God being everywhere, I think it is also time that we humbly accept that sometimes we need to speak in terms of God absence, God behind the veil so to speak. I would believe that all of us here have experienced moments of God absence—times when we have cried out to God asking, “Where are you?” To question God in this manner is a legitimate question in the face of human suffering, and it is also the experience of Jesus on the cross when he cries out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” This experience of the absence of God is abundantly clear to those who face the forces of death on a daily basis.

Yet what we must remember that even in moments of God absence we are not alone. The absence of God necessitates the presence of human community, even I would argue the presence of the community of the redeemed. Perhaps this is a reminder for those of us in the Reformed communion, that our commitment to justice necessitates the presence of the Reformed community in those sites of struggle that experience God absence on a daily basis. To Christ on the cross human presence was exemplified in the presence of the woman, the faithful disciples who stood by Jesus in his moment of despair. Even when God was absent and he cried out to God, it was the women who were present at the foot of the cross; showing us that it is really only women who were the true disciples of Jesus. It is this radical commitment of solidarity that is a necessary component of justice.

Secondly, we must acknowledge the church’s complicity with these forces of death. And this is not just to be found in our silence about what is happening and has happened around us but in our actual complicity. I would argue that the first thing that this requires us to do as a communion is to be able to delearn and defamiliarize ourselves. We as a church have the notion that we have all the answers, that we know how to we are to transform the world. And we are fantastic preachers always telling others what to do, rather than being able to learn from others. A theology and a spirituality that is directed towards the other is not one that tells the other what to do, but rather is one which is willing to listen to the other, to hear and learn from the other. While it is true that what Paul is speaking of in prophesy is that the church be willing to speak truth to power, to name and to dismantle the structures of power that oppressed others. Perhaps we cannot do the same today without understanding our own location in the midst of power. That the church is no longer a minority who is being hunted down by empire, but that the church today is empire. We are powerful and are responsible for much exclusionary violence around the world. The fact is that we have privilege and we have to be able to unlearn our privilege. In fact I would argue that we have to

unlearn our privilege and actually be able to see our privilege as our loss. That precisely because we as a church are in positions of power we can no longer speak the truth that we are losing out on salvation as a result. We need to defamiliarize and unlearn our notions of power as individuals and as institutions as well. What we have to do is to learn some humility and set out to learn from the very people we intend to teach.

As a communion, we have seen some hard times and learned some hard lessons. But the question is how can we learn to be better Christian leaders through all of this. Perhaps it is easy to see the other as being wrong, the other as needing correction, and this is not just for some of us, it is for all of us, the question that we have to ask ourselves is not what we can teach the other but what have we learnt from the other. Unless we are able to listen to the other and learn from the other we have lost out on something. And we have lost out on becoming better Christians.

But the question is how do we unlearn our privilege and learn to listen to others; this should not be an accumulation and an assimilation of the knowledge of others into our own systems, this is not to judge and learn from the mistakes of others, but to be able to learn from the good of others, even those we consider having wronged us. This means that we allow the other, and particularly the marginalized, broken other to derange and destabilize us, to completely and fundamentally change us. That listening to the other really should twist us out of shape in a way that we are no longer the same.

I would argue that at this moment of time what we need is faith, hope and love. It is not insignificant that Paul speaks about these three aspects of the Christian faith in the context of communion, in a letter to a church that was struggling with the idea of unity. As an organization that is called to communion and committed to justice, where communion and justice are held together, perhaps these words speak out to us now more than ever.

To have faith is to be faithful to our calling as disciples to turn the world upside down, that we are not just to reform the world, but to radically change it, to revolutionize it. To hope is to be subversive, it is to long for that which is not present; to pray let your kingdom come is also to pray let this empire pass away. And to love, to love radically, dangerously, transgressively and boldly. But where are we to find this faith and hope and love? I believe that we are to find it in the cusp of the struggle for life in the midst of the forces of death, on the margins and with the people. For there is where Christ is and there is where the church should be.

Appendix 10e

Keynote Address

Mission in Communion

Farid Esack

In the Name of God, the Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace.

Delegates present here today, President Jerry Pillay, General Secretary Chris Ferguson, I greet you as a Muslim with the greetings of Islam—*As Salamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu*. May the peace and blessings and mercy of God be upon all of you.

I am absolutely delighted to be here with you today.

This assembly is a bit of a break from many of the international Christian organizations, when they invite someone from another faith, they look for somebody who is the ideal “moderate Muslim,” somebody who will make them feel comfortable, somebody whom they want to see in their own kind of image. So, they go in search of what is described as the “moderate Muslim.” This is largely part of a project I think is based on the idea that Muslims in general are increasingly awkward—to put it mildly. The construction of the moderate Muslim—often also a task enthusiastically embraced by Muslims themselves—is part of a project to civilize the Muslim barbarians.

So, thanks for breaking this tradition. You don’t have a moderate Muslim in front of you. In fact, you have a radical one. And now, I bet, that I have some of you really worried. “What on earth did the organizing committee have in mind when they invited this guy to address the plenary?”

I am aware that I stand in front of you as a distinct representative of a more than 1400 year-old tradition; however, I also stand in front of you as family. As a representative of that tradition of Islam, I represent a religious tradition that rose up in Arabia in the sixth century and spread across the world—a movement that started as one obsessed with social economic injustice, with the role of women in society and that challenged the dominant norms.

There is a very poignant verse in the Quran that challenges infanticide, the common practice amongst Arabs at that time, embarrassed at the birth of a girl child. When a woman was pregnant with a second or third child the family, in anxiety and in terror at the prospect yet another child who may—God forbid!—may be a girl, would often go into the interior without announcing to their neighbours that the woman is pregnant.

When they gave birth to a girl child they would bury her alive and return back to the village they are from as if nothing had happened. About this the Quran says “*wa idh al-maw’udatu su’lat, bi ayyi dhanbin qutilat?*” (“And when the innocent girl child is asked, for what crime were you murdered?”)

So, this is a tradition that came to challenge not only the criminals of infanticide but also the gatherers of wealth. The Quran speaks in poignant and moving terms about the gatherers of wealth who think that their wealth gives them a sense of permanency and divinity. This is a tradition I come from that gave the world math, medicine and algebra. That gave the world a model of coexistence in a place in Andalusia in what is known today as Spain before all of us Muslims and Jews were expelled more than 400 years ago by Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, and we with the Jews went into exile.

And today this is a tradition wherein we are also victims, the victims of Islamphobia; our countries are invaded, war is inflicted on our people, utilizing weapons largely manufactured in the Global North, where its leaders and people still claim to be heirs of Christian tradition.

I stand as representative of a community that comprises the largest percentage of refugees from war and victims of terror in the world today. Both the minor terror wars that are more physically depicted on our television screens and the major ones—the major ones experienced by the homeless and by the hungry. We are victims because our leaders are captured and act as the local proxies of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism, and our people are subjected to their whims.

But, brothers and sisters, we are not only victims.

I stand before you today as representative of a community that are also victimizers. Sometimes our victims are more stark in the sense in the victims of the ISIS and in the case of the Yazadis in Iraq. And at other times our victims are less stark in the case of Christians in Pakistan where you are refused to drink water from the cups, eat food from the plates from the Muslims in restaurants simply because you are a Christian. It is a country where we claim that Islam liberated us from the caste systems of Hinduism, and then repeat all of those patterns and subject the Christians living in our societies to all of the same kind of daily humiliations that Dalit people experience in India at the hands of the upper caste.

I come from a tradition where my people have captured God and cast him in a narrow Muslim cell and want to own the word “Allah,” the Transcendent, and want to imprison that term and apply that term to a small bunch of tribalists called “Muslims.” Thus we criminalize the use of the word “Allah” by Christians in a country like Malaysia.

I come from a tradition where many of the men in our tradition think of women as slightly better than dogs but less than donkeys. I come from a tradition where we elevate the sexually normal amongst us and consign to the dungeons of marginality the so-called sexually abnormal amongst us. Where the wealthy amongst us keep imprisoned, sometimes even in the hotel rooms in the West, our Filipino, our Bangladeshi and our Indonesian workers. You see them in airports in tow, behind the rich and imprisoned in five-star hotel rooms inside the West.

This is my community. And all of this is done in my name, and therefore I stand before you with my hand sullied, with my hands dirty.

But like your tradition, mine is a mixed bag. You know, I often speak about making a distinction between the notion of powerlessness and less-powerness. Very often we fall into the trap of thinking of ourselves as powerless. We are the victims. None of us are only powerless. I, in relation to the military industrial complex, may be “powerless.” I, in relation to a darker skin person, in relation to a female, I am powerful. So, none of us are absolutely powerless. We have less power than what others have, and at times we have more power than what others have.

But I also stand in front of you as family; I am not just the other. First, I am one of you as part of this community that in Islam is referred to as the People of the Book tradition. But above all, I stand in front of you as family, my brothers and sisters, in the prophetic tradition in confronting what this assembly calls the idolatries of power and privilege. That injunction of the Quran where God commands Moses, “*Idh-hab ila Fir`awn; innahu tagha*” (“Go and challenge Pharaoh, he is an oppressor”). I stand in front of you as part of that tradition that recognizes that not a single prophet of God ever came into this world and made his or her fundamental question, “How do I fit in with power?” This is one of the great heresies of our time when religious communities and religious leaders make it their primary question: “How do I get a seat at the table of power?”

Prophets did not ask how do I fit in with an unjust system, “How do I fit with in with the powers that be?” Their fundamental question was “How do I challenge pharaoh?” This leads to the tension between often many of us being in positions of religious leadership and authority on the one hand and therefore seeking, and sometimes—for the sake of the survival of our communities we have to be in conversation with—to get the recognition of those who are in power. So, we live with this tension of wanting to be recognized. And in brackets, I think there is something also perverse about this, only something, by the way. There is something that often draws religious leadership to power and authority and all the trappings that go along with it. However, I also acknowledge that the interests of our communities very often demand that we also be

in conversion with those who are in power. This on the one hand, and our prophetic requirement to be in solidarity with the vulnerable, to be in solidarity with the least.

So, how do we embrace this vulnerability when we are in this solidarity?

In Islam, the dominant ethos today, regrettably, is one of power. In fact, it finds expression in a Muslim adage “*Al-Islam ya` la wa la yu`la alaihi*”—Islam is dominant and is never dominated. Islam is in power and never controlled. Yet this is a tradition that claims to be following a Prophet who comes into the world fatherless. Muhammad (may the Blessings and peace of God abide upon him)—his father dies six months before he is born. He was reared by his single mother. His mother dies two years after he is born. He gets passed on to his grandfather who leaves the world, when he is at the age of eight years. We are the followers of a Prophet who is a marginalized figure in his society, who does not leave behind any boy children as heirs in a society where you only acquire value once you are the father of a male child.

This Muhammad, peace be upon him, when he receives revelation rushes to his wife and asks his wife to embrace him and to cover him and support him. And this is the Muhammad who says, “I have been born amongst the poor, I will live amongst the poor, I will die amongst the poor and on the Day of Judgment I pray God raises me amongst the poor.”

This tradition has become so subverted that we end up with the idea that that Islam can only ever be dominant over others—never in a relationship of absolute equality with others.

So, how do we embrace vulnerability?

How do we negotiate a space beyond this need to move away the idea Islam as political power to the embrace of vulnerability and, at the same time, to not use vulnerability as synonymous with victimhood, and use our victimhood as a weapon to oppress others?

The terrible tragedy is what has happened to most of our Jewish brothers and sisters. Caught between the owning of ruthless utilization of victimhood as a weapon on the one hand and the real presence of anti-Semitism on the other. This continent was responsible for the Nazi Holocaust, the religious tradition, Christianity, that all of you are heirs to—with a good bit of support from my tradition, Islam, was responsible for providing the textual justification for the oppression of Jewish people throughout human history. The collusion between that tradition, Christianity on the one hand and a pernicious victimhood on the other hand conspiring to create new victims in the shape of the Palestinian homeless, dispossessed and occupied. How do we not fall victim to a manipulated and Machiavellian victimhood?

And so, to conclude—and these are just random thoughts, I didn't want to prepare a speech for being here today. I wanted to share to you from my heart and share some of these reflections and thoughts on our theme here of liberating discipleship.

And so, we have the challenge: how do we understand this deity, this God that we worship, this God we worship and submit to in a liberating discipleship? How do we understand that the God that we worship is *Akbar*, when Muslims say, and sadly it has become to be used as a slogan of war, *Allahu Akbar*, greater than—not “The greatest.” God is greater than. Allah as the transcendent, that He is greater than me and my small community, that I won't reduce God to a mascot on the eve of a cricket game and pray to God for victory against the Indians or Pakistanis or whoever you are going to play in a cricket or soccer match today, that I will not reduce God to a flag-waving patriot on the eve that we decide to launch our bombs on other helpless victims. We will not cloak our God in the flag of a particular nation or the flag of a particular sect or the labels of a particular tradition. God is greater than.

And in this acknowledgement that God as “greater than,” how do we stand in solidarity with the least, particularly if the criminals inflicting this injustice against the least come from our own ranks?

We must be willing to challenge the other. In your conversations with Muslims, or in your conversations with Jews, or whoever you are in conversation with as a Christian community, be ready to challenge. Acknowledge that there is more to us and our games than just being victims. Call us out on our crimes! Our demands for justice inside Europe and our denial of justice to those inside our own societies and in doing so I can do none other but say how do we continue to confront the self.

And this is one of the most amazing things about your tradition—the tradition of the Reformed churches. The whole idea about *status confessionis*, this idea of acknowledging your guilt in the presence of the Almighty and your complicity in the presence of each other.

So friends, brothers and sisters, as I have read through the conference documents for this assembly, I was deeply moved by this. But I am also aware of our own limitations as human beings and ultimately our utter dependence on the grace of God and God's assistance as we move forth from this assembly to our communities and take forth both the inspirations and lessons that we have gathered here.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all!

Appendix 10f Keynote Address

From Wittenberg to Finkenwalde Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

Mission means confronting barriers and crossing boundaries, in word and deed, with the liberating love of God known in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Participating in God's mission—"Missio Dei"—is intended to be at the heart of the church's life and identity. Thus, mission is no program or Christian enterprise conducted as another activity which the church, or its multiple para-church organizations, fits into its agenda. Rather, it lies at the core of the church, defining its presence in the world, grounding its witness and framing its discipleship.

God's mission is incarnational, rooted in the sending of God's Son into the world. It takes on flesh and blood, the real stuff of life, engaging and confronting the fresh realities of the world with the intent of renewal and transformation. Therefore, *Missio Dei* is always intensely contextual. The work of the gospel, empowered by the many tongues of the Spirit present at Pentecost, constantly crosses boundaries of language, race, class, gender, nation and culture, creating communities that embody the promise of a new humanity.

This day at the General Council is focused on God's mission in the world today, in light of our theme ("Living God, Renew and Transform Us"). You have seen the concept paper titled "Communion in Mission" which provides a compelling picture of the forces shaping, and misshaping, the world today. These are identified as chauvinistic nationalism, growing economic inequality, destabilizing climate change, unprecedented forced migration and increasing militarization and violence. This paints a picture, at least in part, of the grim economic, social and political landscape of today's world. Within these realities the gospel of Jesus Christ is announced, in flesh and blood, through the ongoing movement of God's mission.

Crucial to all this, however, is a fundamental question. Are we confronted today simply by another set of vexing economic and social developments which require our attention? Or is something deeper at stake? Are we facing forces which constitute a spiritual assault on the integrity and truth of Christian faith in today's world? Is this a time when our response, however well intended, will be inept unless it is grounded in a spiritual resilience that confesses faith in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit, which unmask and defies powers that would subdue and crush the public integrity of the gospel in the world?

This is, in truth, the crucial question for us to discern as a Communion. And it is deeply serious. I'd pose it this way. When rising forces of nationalistic exclusivism are fueled by racial bigotry, when a naked global struggle for money and power shreds bonds of human solidarity, and when unbridled greed threatens planetary survival, is the truth and integrity of our faith at stake? Is the only response capable of addressing the roots of this crisis one of spiritual resistance and renewal rooted in what it means to confess Jesus Christ as Lord? In other words, is it a *kairos* moment calling us to a clear discernment of what it means, in this present context, to confess our faith? And must such a confession then shape the communities of those believe the gospel? In my view, the answer is yes.

We of the Reformed tradition should understand this. One of our unique contributions to Christian history is the conviction that our confession of faith is never over. It does not end, and is not complete, with any specific historic expression or creed, however significant and enduring that may be. Rather, this process of confession, and its reforming impulse, is continuous. This is one of the keys to how, in the words of our theme, the Living God renews and transforms us.

We've experienced this in the journey of our Communion in a dramatic fashion with the Belhar Confession. In the struggle against apartheid, the response of much of the Reformed community and others became rooted in this confession of our faith, centered on unity, reconciliation and justice. That confession has grown globally, out of its immediate context, framing the confession of faith by Reformed communities around the world, including my own, the Reformed Church in America.

The Accra Confession presents a similar challenge, proposing that global economic inequalities, and the deepening injustice imposed by the prevailing systems of imperial-like power, present realities requiring a fresh confession of our faith. For the past dozen years this proposed Confession has circulated in the life of our Communion in consultations, debate and reflection. The realities which it named in 2004 have now been compounded with politically potent expressions of aggressive chauvinism, racial bigotry, and a creed of national selfishness that dismisses even the pretense of moral obligation for humanity's common good. The election and policies of Donald Trump most recently and alarmingly epitomize this trend, but it reverberates globally.

The most cogent historical lessons, however, for framing our Communion's mission and witness in this time might be found in the soil and history of the land that is the gracious host for our 26th General Council. We are gathered here in Germany to refresh our memory and our hearts with the passion, faith and truth which propelled the Protestant Reformation. For this reason, we will travel to Wittenberg, and recall the courage which it took to confess God's Word and Truth in the face of a prevailing system whose corruption seemed matched only by its unassailable power.

However, I'd suggest that the 26th General Council be a "tale of two cities"—Wittenberg, on the one hand, and the other being Finkenwalde. This city lies on the east side of the Oder River, 365 kilometers north and east of where we meet. Today it's in Poland, and named Zdroje. But before 1945 this was part of Germany, and Finkenwalde was a suburb of Stettin. It was here, in 1935, that Dietrich Bonhoeffer founded an underground seminary of the Confessing Church.

An heir of the Reformation, Bonhoeffer struggled to discern the shape and character of the church's mission and witness in the context where he found himself, during the rise of the Third Reich in Germany. He witnessed a nationalism which was becoming chauvinistic and exclusive, contaminated by racial pride and exploiting economic grievances through bigotry and rejection of those who were different. Political and economic power were married and harnessed to obstruct dissent and reinforce a mindset of cultural superiority in the name of rectifying national grievances.

In all this Bonhoeffer and others saw the established church as deeply complicit, functioning with inexplicable comfort toward this emerging order, whose values so clearly violated the message of the gospel. The conflict intensified as the National Socialist government moved to establish direct control over the "German church." This led to the Barmen Declaration, drafted primarily by Karl Barth and adopted in 1934, laying the theological foundation for establishing the Confessing Church, with the leadership of Martin Niemöller and other German pastors.

Bonhoeffer went to Finkenwalde in 1935 to start an underground seminary that would train pastors to serve in the Confessing Church. He perceived that established Christianity in Germany was failing in the test of that time. It did not produce the depth of discipleship, the strength of commitment, nor the spiritual foundation deep and resilient enough to offer the witness that was required to face the fearsome idolatries propagated by an emerging evil empire.

In response, life together at Finkenwalde focused on building a Christian community capable of nurturing Christian faith that understood the cost of discipleship, and nurtured the means for its practice. Students were encouraged to dwell in the Word, rest in prayer, support one another and turn in solidarity to those most vulnerable in society. Bonhoeffer sought to create a Christian community capable of instilling and forming a depth of faith capable of resisting the onslaught of evil he saw arising in his country's life.

In 1937 the Gestapo shut down the underground seminary at Finkenwalde and arrested many of its students. Apparently, the authorities recognized the threat posed by those who simply read the Bible and prayed about the nature of God's mission in the specific context of their time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer continually asked this question:

“Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” That question, asked in any time, and accompanied by a clear discernment of the times, will undermine the power and authority of any regimes intent on imposing a reign based on the prerogatives of privilege, race, wealth and might.

It is also our question at this *kairos* moment as our Communion discerns the shape of God’s unfolding mission in today’s world and our participation in this work of the Spirit. Asking this question drives us, like those at Finkenwalde, to seek those practices and form those communities whose life and work embody a faith with the power to confront and overturn the idolatries of this era. That rests on a resonant and fresh confession of our faith, and propels us to embrace those ways of discipleship that can sustain our witness in the long run.

This requires far more than the right words. Let’s be honest. Getting the words right is both one of the strengths and weakness of the Reformed tradition. We know how important it is to say what we believe and what we mean. Whether in drafting 95 Theses, or meeting 1,163 times in Westminster Abbey to write a Confession, or memorizing the Heidelberg or adopting the Belhar, we know that words matter. But the danger is to believe that once we say it correctly, and get the words planted in our heads, then our hearts will automatically follow, shaping our lives.

We face this temptation as well at ecumenical gatherings, like this General Council. It’s been my privilege to participate in scores of ecumenical meetings over the past decades. And with English as my mother tongue, I’ve frequently been placed on drafting committees. Countless sleepless nights have been spent with others struggling over finding agreement on what to say, drafting phrases that would matter to shared memory, and seeking words with the capacity to inspire. Sometimes parts of those statements and reports make a difference, clarifying truth and prompting commitment. But many other times they are adopted after tedious debate parsing phrases in plenary sessions and then neglected and forgotten.

It requires more than the persuasion of well-crafted words analyzing our present context and commending action to prompt participation in God’s mission in such a time as this. This takes the unfettered allegiance of people’s hearts, and the formation of their lives of discipleship. Countless pernicious forces press in the opposite direction, lulling the church back into complicit comfort, condoning narrow, nationalistic loyalties, offering the subtle idols of personal success and material reward and promoting forms of spiritual escapism. It takes spiritual resistance, nurtured in communities of faithful disciples, to confront and overcome those forces. That was Bonhoeffer’s lesson at Finkenwalde and should be our own today.

I am not maintaining a simplistic parallel between the rise of the Third Reich and Adolf Hitler's attempts to directly suppress and subvert the church with political realities faced today in the world. Times and contexts are different. But the similarities of forceful appeals to nationalistic chauvinism, racial bigotry and cultural exclusivism as manipulative reactions to economic anxieties, particularly in the United States and Europe, are chilling. What is parallel to that time and this, for all of world Christianity, is the call to freshly confess faith in ways that shape the church and form disciples with enduring capacity for the spiritual resistance, renewal and transformation required for this moment in the world's history.

Mission rests on the faith we confess, understood incarnationally in the context of our time. That confession shapes communities of discipleship. Our response to God's mission has its roots in these communities, expressions of the body of Christ in local congregations. It is here, in the congregations where you and I worship, nurtured by Word and Sacrament, that the shape of the gospel is to be seen and understood, in flesh and blood, by others. That's why it is said that "the local congregation is the hermeneutic of the gospel."

People don't just want to hear about faith. They want to see what it looks like in the communities of men and women who claim and are claimed by this faith. When participation in God's mission is placed at the heart of a congregation's life, the Living God renews and transforms us. Yet, God's mission is never something which the church confines and controls. Leslie Newbigin said this best:

Mission is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church its missionary journey.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, as it plans its work following Leipzig, would do well to focus on how congregations are formed and nurtured which instill faith formation and discipleship that spiritually confront the idolatries of our time. In other words, what does it take for congregations to be shaped by their confession of faith today? How can the Communion gather, connect and strengthen such communities of faith as a means for participating in God's mission?

Such work would be different than in the past. Instead of working primarily on crafting words, we'd focus on shaping lives. Thousands of congregations in the Communion are struggling with the call to respond faithfully, in mission, to the pernicious forces shaping so much of our world. But that can't be done in isolation. Just as individual members cannot live independently from others in a local church, congregations cannot thrive in their witness if they are isolated from others. That's why we have named ourselves a "Communion."

Could we imagine ways that take seriously congregational journeys in vastly different regions and situations which all strive for costly and faithful engagement in God's mission? Could we connect such congregations in a virtual electronic community, sharing and networking together pilgrimages, and answering from their own contexts the question, "Who is Jesus Christ *for us today*?" Instead of simply Facebook, what if the Communion created "**FaithBook**"? What better way to build avenues for future emerging leaders in the Communion to find their voice and their allies?

The missional call to confess faith in today's context also points us beyond WCRC to the wider ecumenical community. This prompts us to reflect on who we mean by "us" when our theme proclaims "Living God, renew and transform us." Today, understanding the radical changes in world Christianity is essential to discerning our context for confession and mission in this time. The geographical shift in Christianity's presence in the world, now firmly placing the dominant future of Christian faith in Africa, Latin America and Asia, is the most dramatic change of its kind in Christian history. But this is about far more than geography. Most of the Christian world is now developing its faith and witness outside the modern Western culture, and the framework of the Enlightenment, which has been Christianity's predominant home for four centuries. World Christianity is now emerging as a non-Western religion.

With this has come the rapid growth of Pentecostalism throughout the globe. One of our four Christians in the world today now identifies as a Pentecostal or charismatic believer. Similarly, other highly contextualized expressions of Christianity now are emerging in the "global South." Global evangelical bodies shaped by these changes have stances toward human rights, economic justice and climate change that overlap with the well-established ecumenical agenda. Growth in the Catholic Church is being driven primarily by those from these regions, led for the first time in over 1,000 years by a Pope from the "global South."

All this should reshape the WCRC's understanding of who constitutes "us." Solidarity with the wider church is more essential than ever in the face of growing global threats to life. This stretches our boundaries and past categories of ecumenical partners. The Communion's future outreach should be structured not as much by attention to divisions created by historic church traditions, such as Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, etc. Rather, we should address the growing cleavage between churches rooted in the "global North," with their identity as older, historic churches with a long continuity of faithful witness, and those rooted in the "global South," with their identity mostly as younger, emerging churches, with thriving vitality but often a more narrow, sectarian mindset. That division is reflected within the WCRC as well as in the whole of world Christianity.

The dominant growth of Christianity in non-Western settings also presents a new agenda of theological challenges. The WCRC, with its history of formative theological reflection in the wider ecumenical community, can contribute here as well. In the most general terms, these cultures and the churches nurtured within them begin with a different starting point from Western modernity in understanding the relationship of community to the individual. Further, their assumptions for how the spiritual and material dimensions of life relate are sharply different from those spawned by the Enlightenment. And the place of reason and rationality in understanding truth also presents a different paradigm. Despite some attempts, these differing theological and cultural frameworks are not being adequately addressed as core issues determining how faith will be fashioned in the future.

The participation of WCRC in God's ongoing mission, then requires: 1) that the Communion network and nurture communities of missional discipleship, 2) that we expand the breadth of our ecumenical partners and 3) that we engage a fresh theological agenda and lived Christian experience emerging from the non-Western world. Such mission finds expression in solidarity with the marginalized and most vulnerable and in fact emerges from those communities. The crisis of global refugees and migration, for instance, not only makes welcoming the stranger a daily existential reality for many in our Communion. We also discover that worldwide, about half of those moving from one country to another today are Christian. An emerging, powerful migrant church is on the move as part of the unexpected expression of God's mission today. As Jehu Hanciles from Sierra Leone says, "Every Christian migrant is a potential missionary."

Moreover, when we follow the trajectory of God's Spirit leading us in mission, we are joined in God's work of redeeming the creation, so imperiled by the willful and wanton destruction of its sacred, life-sustaining capacities. Participating in mission means we are sent as God's people, crossing comfortable and constraining boundaries, and expecting God's liberating love to renew and transform individual lives, communities of discipleship, social structures and the gift of the created world.

Reflecting on our participation in *Missio Dei* today also urgently raises the challenge our relationship to those of other living faiths, outside of Christianity. How we understand and practice evangelism, our grasp of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world ahead of and beyond the church and a calling to build bonds of inter-religious fellowship and trust in resisting life-threatening forces, all are now challenges inescapably on our agenda. We are assisted here by ecumenical wisdom, and particularly the recent document by the WCC's Commission on Mission and Evangelism, titled "Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes." Perhaps its most important contribution is to place an illuminating theology of the Holy Spirit at the

center of our understanding of God's mission, which opens promising avenues for the WCRC's future work.

(Our esteemed colleague Dr. Farid Esack will assist us shortly in exploring the inter-religious dimensions of our calling.)

In conclusion, as we meet on this religiously historic landscape, I'm inviting our Communion to embark on a pilgrimage from Wittenberg to Filkenwalde. It's a journey from the necessity of words to the formation of lives, from the announcement of our declarations to the pronouncement of our discipleship and from the frenzy of our activity to the building of Christian community. This pilgrimage poses these questions along the way: Are we ready to live into our identity as a *communion*, expecting that we are covenanted together as communities of faithful discipleship obedient to the *kairos* nature of this time? Can we truly place our commitment as the WCRC to join in the movement of God's mission, at the *center* of our Communion's life and identity? Are we willing to direct our Communion's material and spiritual resources toward learning from the practices at Finkenwalde, and all the places like that today, from Belhar to Bethlehem, and from Matanzas to Manado? Can we nurture the formation of Christian faith in communities of missional discipleship that can respond to the test of this time? And will this compel us to participate courageously and joyfully in God's reconciling and redeeming mission in the world? That is the pathway for the Living God to renew and transform us.

Appendix 10g **Keynote Address**

Strengthening Communion Collin Cowan

INTRODUCTION

With great delight and a sense of privilege, I bring greetings and best wishes to this General Council on behalf of the Council for World Mission. Council for World Mission is an international mission organization, committed to working ecumenically in addressing contextual issues that we believe the God of life is concerned about. CWM is committed to working with local church communities, various organizations and people's movements across local communities and international borders, because of our conviction that God is at work in and through these and other media to proclaim the good news and practice life in fullness through Christ for all creation.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is one of the organizations with which CWM has established a solid working relationship, and we are indeed grateful for the opportunity for this level of partnership. Over the years we have worked together on issues such as gender justice, partnership of women and men in mission, justice in the economy and the Earth and, since the last General Council, on the audacious journey of imagining a New International Financial and Economic Architecture, a journey that involves also the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. In this partnership, we share the best of who we are and what we have to advance God's mission, and the most valuable of these resources are the indispensable gifts of people and ideas and experiences that can enrich our lives and encourage us in our struggle and search for meaning. We give thanks to God that our partnership is defined by mutual respect, commitment to God's mission and a shared vision of fullness of life through Christ for all creation.

I have accepted this invitation to offer input into the theme conversation on strengthening communion, conscious of my limitations but mindful that we are an integral part of the Communion. Twenty-nine of the thirty-two member churches of CWM are also members of WCRC. Your president, two of your vice presidents and several of your executive members are also part of the CWM family. I, myself, have served on the Executive of WARC from Accra to Grand Rapids. We are in it together.

I come at this theme from a missional perspective, given that CWM is a missional organization, "called to partnership in Christ to mutually challenge, encourage and equip churches to share in God's mission" (CWM's mission statement). CWM has determined that mission has to be interpreted within contexts of peoples struggle and search for meaning and in the context where creation groans at the injustices that infest the Earth. We believe that God's gift of hope is that which inspires us to radical engagement with the world as we know it to the end that healing may be experienced by all and peace become the new basis for life in community, which I regard as the sum total of communion. In this presentation, therefore, I will invite us to consider three movements:

- Communion as a call to being and doing
- Communion as counter-empire
- Communion as transformative praxis

COMMUNION AS A CALL TO BEING AND DOING

In the concept paper on strengthening communion the critical question seems to be whether the strength of the Communion is an end in itself, becoming bigger and more united; or whether strength is a means to an end, that end being capacity for transformative praxis in response to *Missio Dei*—the will to discerning and doing God's

mission in the context of a groaning creation. So, I declare my intention at the beginning that I share the view of the writers that:

...if the communion being sought in one that leads to engagement in risky boundary crossing discipleship, reaching out and sharing fullness of life (John 10:10) and building life-giving relationships with others—this form of Reformed communion is good news (SC- 2).

WCRC's confessional position on justice and communion finds resonance with CWM. "Called to communion, committed to justice" are opposite sides of the same coin in the understanding of CWM. In the ongoing discourse, within WCRC's circle, we say, "there can be no justice without communion and no communion without justice." It may be argued, however, that if we are called to one and simply committed to the other, the impression may be given that one is an imperative and the other a mere interest. Such redaction would be unhealthy, and therefore I call our attention to the concept paper, which states:

If the goal of communion is to do what the Lord requires of you, then the mandate is to "...do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God" (SC - 3).

I agree. In my understanding, embedded in the very identity of the Reformed community is the understanding that communion is both the result and the doing of peace and that there can be no peace without justice. In his address to this General Council, the German Federal President calls the Communion to "foster peaceful dialogue and to very consciously underline the power of religion to promote peace and reconciliation and most importantly, to be an example of this themselves." This poignant call comes against the backdrop of what he calls the misuse of religion "as a means of isolation and distance... as a pretext for the most brutal acts of violence." The president is right; this is a call to be a communion in which our identity and lifestyle are marked by peace, and our engagement is that of peace-making; it is to be and do that makes us a Communion. Therefore, holding in creative tension the call to be a justice community and fixing its gaze on communion as God's indisputable intention for God's creation, makes the WCRC a Christian organization that fully understands and embraces *Missio Dei* as both *koinonia* and *diakonia*. If we were to accept such an understanding then WCRC would see that its identity and vocation are inextricably intertwined; and that as disciples of Christ, who we are and what we do are inseparable.

We live in a world where the quest for profit takes precedence over value for life and the common good; where life-saving actions such as access to medication, food and safety are unashamedly weighed against the bottom line and often denied. We are witnesses to a regression from advances we thought we had made against the violence of racism, nationalism and many other ideologies of supremacy. Gender-based violence

scourges our communities; we struggle with the inclusion of persons living with disability or with embracing persons of different sexual orientation—all this in spite of the abundance of dehumanizing legacies littered across history and living memory. As we grapple with the present evil of extremism, we are reminded of how much we need each other—our partnership, our faith, and our hope in God—to not be overcome. It is for this reason that the importance of relationships of integrity and the commitment to encounters and engagements with the diversity of our existence cannot be overstated.

WCRC and CWM have been challenged and enriched by each other; we share a partnership that is based on reciprocity, where our values and passion for justice define the relationship; our staff join each other in thinking through the meaning of life in the midst of turmoil and planning ways of response in light of the call of Jesus of Nazareth to join him in establishing an alternative community, based on justice and peace, a community in which all are accepted and embraced and none refused or excluded. I am pleased to affirm that CWM remains committed to this partnership, as together we discern and devote ourselves to doing God's mission in the context of empire.

Understanding the context in which we do mission is important to the question of communion; because unless we are prepared to confront the death-dealing ideologies that divide and destroy we are only making a mockery of the meaning and import of communion. Without being willing and ready to name the context in which we do mission, to critique it and confront it, we run the risk of playing the usual ecumenical politics, claiming that bigger is better even when size is no more than parading ourselves as paragons of virtue in the name of unity. This is the kind of attitude that Jesus rejected in the teachers of the law and the Pharisees when he called them "...white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside, are full of the bones of the dead..." (Matthew 23:27). The call to Communion is a call to "come out from among..." and be the "light of the world" that leads the way for all and to all. This is what leads to my second movement, Communion as counter-empire.

COMMUNION AS COUNTER-EMPIRE

Now I know that the language of empire has been challenging for some of us; but it is important that we take the time to wrestle with it as it surely informs our conversation on the place of justice in communion, as a matter of faith; and the challenges of living out that faith in a context hostile to communion. CWM makes bold to name empire as the context in which we do mission. And we have adopted the definition of empire from the joint Globalisation Project of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa and Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany as:

a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today, that constitutes a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by

humankind yet enslaving simultaneously; an all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while imperiously excluding even sacrificing humanity and exploiting creation; a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed—the worship of money, goods, and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed; the colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking in compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.

We have also taken into consideration the definition of empire given at the 2004 Accra General Council of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which states that:

Empire is the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

Naming empire as the context in which CWM does mission is the result of our calculated wrestling with the Accra Confession, our reading of the signs of the time and our discernment of what God is saying to us as an agent of God’s mission. Accra, 2004, was a watershed moment in the life of the Christian community. Our visit to the Elmina Castle, the slave dungeon, confronted us with the cruelty and callousness of humanity against itself; with our raw emotions in the face of such hostility; and with the harsh reality of the existence of a dormant anger, for which we little knew we had the capacity. Confronted with the ferocity of such hostile history, and mindful that even as we met, the forces of systemic evil continued to rear its ugly head, the WARC General Council named empire as the source of such evil; challenged the church to rise from complicity for the sake of the faith we profess; and declared that “never again” would we stand aside and allow such evil to dominate and decimate God’s creation (See the Accra Confession for more on this subject).

In a joint WARC/CWM 2006 consultation in Malaysia, called to think through how we might live out the Accra Confession, we accepted that “we are driven towards a state of madness by the forces of domination, the logic of empire (C 19) and the neo-liberal temptation to worship mammon, not God (AC 22),” and we declared that:

The Accra Confession’s great challenge for churches in our time is to reclaim the true theological and biblical meaning and activities of economy (*oikonomia*), from the way it has been distorted, indeed poisoned, by the modern neo-liberal economy. Theological concepts such as trust, riches, fidelity, bond, exchange, saving, fiduciary, even business—in Chinese (*Seng Yi*) literally “meaning of life”—have

been co-opted by the dominant neo-liberal economy, and must be reclaimed or rescued by the churches (From the statement produced at the 2006 consultation).

In 2010 CWM developed its theological statement, which points to Jesus who conducted his mission in the context of empire; and who not only set the example for us to follow but called us to join him in that mission (CWM theology statement, Mission in the context of Empire, 2010).

Today CWM remains resolute that empire is alive and that it is in such a context that we do mission. We are conscious of the death-dealing systems that seek to replace God with itself; to “own the earth and everything in it,” and to do whatever it pleases with impunity. We see manifestations of empire all around us, and we recognize them by the trail of social dislocation, sense of powerlessness and vulnerabilities it creates in its wake. For sixty years, generations have been born and taught to accept the Cuban embargo as a just cause in a fight for human rights. We have not been told that it is a punishment for defiance, retaliation against loss of economic control. If it were truly all about a noble protest against human rights abuses, then where is the embargo for all the rich oil producing countries where public executions are commonplace, and women are second class citizens? Where is the embargo for the cruel apartheid system happening right now in occupied Palestine? Where is the embargo for the infanticide and forced sterilizations of China’s thirty-five years of one-child policy? And yet, the little move that has been made to bring about a better working relationship between Cuba and the USA is under threat by the Trump Administration. Empire divides and weakens.

It is for such reasons that I argue that Communion is counter-empire; the two cannot walk together because there is a fundamental ideological dissonance between the one and the other. Communion is counter-empire because communion exposes empire; communion expresses a theological conviction that in God’s *oikos* there is a place for all, whilst empire feathers the powerful at the expense of the majority. Empire is based on “lordless domination” and “destructive self-interest;” communion is based on relationships of integrity and trust, spiritualities of hospitality and generosity of spirit and a commitment to the journey of healing and hope.

COMMUNION AS TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTIS

The call to communion is a call to become a united force, a life-giving and life-affirming community, equipped and energized to join Jesus in his radical love for the world. “By this shall all people know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” This agape is neither self-serving nor self-seeking; instead it is a love that takes us into the trenches of immense pain and loneliness to which the social untouchables are relegated, compels us to cross barriers of arrogance and prejudice and to interrogate and challenge ideologies of supremacy and invites us to embrace the likes of Mary

Magdala, so eloquently applied to contemporary realities and presented earlier in this General Council. Communion defined by this love knows that justice is at the heart of faith and that its very reason for being is to partner with God in the radical work of renewal and transformation—to heal the breaches and inspire hope.

In his very moving presentation to this General Council Jürgen Moltmann challenged us to consider that “the ecumenical movement is missing the Reformation agenda.” I agree that the Reformation agenda is being stymied by our love for remaining the way we are and maintaining the way we are viewed, irrespective of how many categories are created and excluded in the process. We say that it is in the interest of the unity of the church; but I fear that true unity, true communion is being compromised, even sacrificed by this “colonization of the imperial logic.”

The greatest paralysis facing the world today is the belief that what we are doing is right. Whether it is the United States or the Philippines or North Korea or China or Russia or Israel or Indonesia, governments and peoples alike all believe that we are right in what we are doing; that the system may need a little tweaking here and there, but it is good enough to sustain us for the long haul; that poverty is the result of laziness; and that corruption is the reason for such a thing as underdeveloped or developing countries. Even the Christian community has been sold into this imperial logic and as such our capacity for counter-cultural, counter-empire engagement is crippled to the point of impotence. The world is gone mad with the lust for power, the love of money and a callous indifference to the plight of God’s creation.

Based on this extremely disturbing description, my simple argument is this: A faith community that talks about hope as the language of life and the embodiment of a future (CWM), a faith community that talks about a pilgrimage of justice and peace (WCC) and a faith community that prays for renewal and transformation (WCRC) cannot at the same time close its eyes to the fact that our whole society is being “colonized by this imperial logic” and that all our decisions and dreams are based on a death-dealing culture. If there is to be a future, then there must be a counter-imperial social order and ideology, one that stands in striking opposition to the present order. Imperial ideologies can be resisted if faith communities, such as the church, are sufficiently conscientised to the root of the issue and challenged to a different way of engagement with this broken system. The call to communion is a call to discipleship, and this means that we must be prepared to stand with the Jesus of Nazareth who confronted the power of the day with a radical message and lifestyle of an alternative way of being and doing. As a Communion, we are people of hope and future, and as such, we must be prepared to present ourselves as a true re-presentation of Jesus of Nazareth and imagine and pursue together the alternative for which he lived and died. As a Communion, we are the embodiment of the alternative; this means that we must

be prepared to model the alternative by creating safe spaces and sanctuaries of healing and hope for all and by confronting the demon of exclusion with a strong message of No. Communion is an antidote to hostility, inhospitality, callousness and indifference; therefore we are a people who embrace and embody values of justice in relationships, mutuality, equality and interdependence, unity in diversity and generosity of spirit. We are a Communion because we are disciples of Christ, called to a communitarian lifestyle, which is in striking contrast to the death-dealing paradigm of this present social order. The call to communion is a call to transformative praxis, to be “salt of the earth,” beacon of hope and stewards of peace.

In his study of Ecumenism, *Christian Origins and Practice of Communion* Nicholas Sagovsky¹ examines the significance of communion for contemporary ecumenical theology, tracing the development of contemporary understanding in critical engagement with the thoughts of great thinkers like Aristotle and Plato, the Scriptures and also Augustine of Hippo. Of particular interest are the reflections on the practice of communion which in reference to ecumenism, is described as “a gift to be received and a discipline to be cultivated in the continuing practice of ecumenism.” Reflecting on the various thoughts against the realities of human communion, it is a recurring theme that upon the realization of the fragility of our human relationships—our broken communion, and yet conscious of an inherent longing for a *koinonia* that cannot be broken—“a shared communion with God that can be traced back to the beginning of time and forward to its ending.” In our human experience, we must observe that communion involves conflict, reconciliation and risk. However, among believers or between communities of believers, although the same dynamics persist, they “are explicitly set against an eschatological horizon of unbreakable communion, the unbroken co-inherence of the Trinity.”

Sagovsky points to the sacrificial ministry and death of Jesus as the paradigm of earthly conflict, risk and reconciliation. He takes us back to Jesus’ lonely ministry where even his own disciples failed to understand him when he articulated the will of God for his life, and, at times, withheld their support when he most needed it. The scene of the garden of Gethsemane portrays vividly the call for total commitment to sustained *koinonia* that flows from the unwavering conviction of God’s will for God’s creation. It is the sobering cry of Jesus, at the realization that not only must he face his death without his beloved disciples at his side, but now seeks to know why must God forsake him also. “It is at this point at which communion can only be sustained as it were ‘one-sidedly’, whether by the fidelity of God to the one who experiences no

¹ Sagovsky, Nicholas. *Ecumenism, Christian Origins and the Practice of Communion*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

communion” or even as it has been described in the presentation of Rev. Dr. Zakariah earlier of the encounter of enslaved Africans with Christ in the belly of slave ships and amidst the horrors they were met with on the American shores, “by the fidelity of the forsaken to the God who forsakes.” I use here the example of the enslaved Africans, but there are many others, including, for instance, post-Holocaust Jewish theology as mentioned by the author.

CONCLUSION

This General Council gathers under the theme: “Living God, renew and transform us.” This is a most apt theme, which I know came about through a collective process of discernment. The theme appropriately locates renewal and transformation in the hands of the living God and places also, in those hands, the people of God as mere clay. The theme identifies God as not just capable but willing and ready to mould us into vessels of compassion, with a hunger for peace and justice, and a vision of communion of all creation—life-giving and life-affirming communities in which there is a place for all.

Sagovsky argues that “the unity of the churches will not come through the steady flow of ecumenical agreed statements that spell out the virtues of *koinonia*, though they have their part to play. The way forward must include the practice of a common life, which provides a context for the continuing debate.” He proposes that

...it is vital that when the moments of discouragement, of apparently irreconcilable difference come, that the effort to build *koinonia* continues, even at the risk (even experience) of separation. What makes such risk-taking possible is the presence of the Spirit, for the substance of relation is the substance of the Spirit; and it is the presence of the Spirit in each human encounter, whether between individuals or communities, whether for a moment or miraculously sustained, whether in agreement or disagreement, which makes each such encounter a moment of hope. It is the activity of the Spirit that generates the common life; ...it is the worship of (God) and the service of the world that bears witness to this common life as a *koinonia* in the life of the triune God.

CWM joins WCRC in this radical prayer of resistance, hope and submission; and pledges its hopeful actions of solidarity and engagement towards fullness of life for all and the experience of Communion.

APPENDIX 11 SERMONS

Appendix 11a Berlin Worship Service Sermon on Luke 4:18-19: Witness to Justice

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
To bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”
(Luke 4:18-19)

Chris Ferguson:

In the midst of war, conflict, injustice, and hopelessness under Roman oppression, Jesus, filled with the Spirit, turns to Scripture to urgently announce his mission to suffering people in Galilee. By choosing the passage from Isaiah Jesus boldly places his ministry and mission in the line of the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew people. He speaks directly to the social, political, economic and spiritual context and shows that the work of Spirit is to transform and liberate.

The text from the prophet shows that God’s saving action through the Spirit is fulfilled in Jesus’ life and ministry. God’s mission is directed to the poor, the prisoner, the broken and the marginalized, the differently abled and the oppressed. God is shown to be the God of justice, peace and reconciliation.

The Spirit works to lift up the poor and liberate and free the oppressed and care for the earth. The liberating work of God’s mission through Jesus seeks justice, peace and liberation for the entire society and all of creation. The year of the Lord’s favour refers to the time when slaves are free, the land is returned to its original owner and earth itself is allowed to rest. The Spirit works so that God’s will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Today we are called to follow Jesus in God’s mission in our own contexts as the Spirit works to transform and liberate. God’s mission, Jesus’ mission and the liberating work of the Spirit become our task in this world fallen among thieves. Our global context is also dominated by war, violence, massive forced migration, gender-based violence with economic and ecological injustices destroying people and planet.

Turning to the Living God requires us to seek both personal transformation and social justice and to act locally and globally so that all may have life and have it abundantly.

We now hear how the spirit works through us to bring Good news to the poor in the Caribbean:

Yvette Noble-Bloomfield:

Poverty causes the degradation of the human mind, body and spirit.

This is the reality of the Caribbean, where the extremes of poverty and wealth cohabit. There are the places of dire unemployment, hunger, pain, sickness, crime and violence in Jamaica, Haiti and other Caribbean islands and then there are also the ivory towers of opulence and power in some places in the Caribbean and in neighbouring North America. Poverty's realities are stark and leave those touched by it vulnerable, naked, homeless, depressed and distressed.

One of the most difficult realities is the existence of poverty among women and children. When women are economically dependent on male counterparts, when women work for unequal pay, when women are used and abused and robbed of their livelihood and dignity, poverty becomes aligned with victimization and abuse and leads to the denigration of not only the victims, but robs society of its wholeness. And when women suffer poverty, it tends to extend itself to the children in their lives.

The Gospel then must be in full force as the authority which speaks out against the aegis of poverty and the church must in its proclamation of the Gospel present the alternate to the world's pain.

Therefore good news to the poor means: the strong belief that God has sided with the disposed and as such God has a vested interest in the alleviation of systems that create or maintain poverty or oppression.

And: the proclamation of God's sovereign will for justice and righteousness to reign and the staunch rejection and resistance of any violation that causes pain or distress to the "least of one of these."

Chris Ferguson:

In the biblical message we hear that the oppressed will go free. In a context where the coexistence of different cultures and religions becomes fragile or is at stake, the proclamation of freedom is urgently needed:

Aiko Sumichan:

I come from Indonesia. A land of unity in the midst of diversity. And yet, we often think of ourselves as part of a group, and in that sort of thinking there is always a majority

and one, or many, minorities. And too often, the minority groups feel oppressed. I say feel, because they are not always really, truly oppressed. When you feel like you are an oppressed minority, it is easy to become afraid of others. It is also easy to become bitter. So bitter that when you finally feel like you've gained freedom, you end up using that freedom to oppress others. In some areas in my country, along our history, it is this sort of thinking that eventually led to violence and continued hatred. I do not know what sort of oppression you may feel in your lives, but today Jesus is telling us that we are free. And I hope we remember not to use that freedom to oppress others. We are free, and now we have to go and use that freedom that we have to let others know that they too are free.

Chris Ferguson:

In Greece we hear the witness of a church called to God's mission to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sights to the blind:"

Alexandra Nikolara:

In Greece, in the city of Katerini, as Christians we were called to serve—holistically—people we moved on 13 March 2016 from the mud and despair of Eidomeni, when the borders closed. People who lost freedom and light, so we offered them a house, safety, food, legal and medical support, education, care in order to "stand on their feet!" Over 2,000 people have been served so far, and we continue to respond responsibly to the precious gifts of freedom and light in Christ so that through our behaviour, actions, lives we can be a lighthouse for the world and genuine children of Him!

We do this because we believe that the preaching of Jesus Christ for freedom and light is directed to: the world of comfort, efficiency, prosperity and possibility that is based on the ideology of the strong and also to the world of captivity, suffering, weakness, poverty, refuge that is based on the ideology of the weak.

If we persist in our ideologies we place ourselves "opposite," seeing each other Christologically as a "*prosopon*-person" we become "*plision*-near." As "*prosopon*-person" we see each other and perceive the need for our reformation.

Freedom and light as gifts of God imply the response of humankind and our responsibility towards society and the world. We are called to respect and to restore and to renew our life, our attitude, our spirit as the Apostle Paul mentions in Romans 12:2.

Chris Ferguson:

Justice is a matter of faith. In the Accra Confession the Reformed Family proclaimed: "We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness and walk in God's way (Micah 6:8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and

the destruction of the environment ‘so that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream’ (Amos 5:24).”

As a family of Reformed churches always reforming, we ask for the power of the Spirit to work through us so that all may have life abundant according to God’s will—we pray together “Living God, renew and transform us!”

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Appendix 11b

Wittenberg Worship Service Sermon

Najla Kassab

Here I stand, a Middle Eastern woman in the pulpit of Luther; if just Luther imagined that, this could have been his 96th question to the church—not why there is a women in this pulpit, but why did take this long?

A person visited a construction site and asked the workers **what are you doing?** One worker told him I am building a wall, the other told him I am building a room and the third told him I am building a new house. It makes a great difference while we are building where is our imagination focused at: a wall, a room or a house. Our attitude of our minds and heart makes all the difference.

Paul challenges the Church in Corinth using a metaphor “You are God’s building.” After Paul has spent 18 months in Corinth he came back to find out that the community of faith was distracted from the original foundation and teaching that Paul lay. The community was overwhelmed with divisions and wrong practices. He stresses the need to check on the way that others would continue in building on the foundation Jesus Christ, from laying the foundation, through the actual construction, to the final inspection and each one has to be careful how to build on it. They are a community of believers but a distracted a one. This is why he gives them instructions on how they are to build.

If we were to understand the image that Paul is conveying here, we have to think of how houses were built in the old way. In old times building required great time and energy and a great number of people. Usually a mine was established close to the construction site. The stones were carried through a chain of people from the mine to the building site. The stones would be passed from one person to another till it reaches the construction site. If anyone in the people-chain dropped the stone or failed to do his or her part, the building task will be affected.

The image of passing the stones teaches us that to be God's building and builders is to learn to build in full partnership with the community of faith. To build God's church, each one is asked to take part in building and sharing his stone so that the building is completed and looks beautiful. And that is what the Communion is all about; it is us coming together focusing our eyes and imagination on becoming the building of God. In this image we have to note two things:

Our stones do not necessarily look alike, but rather with our diversity we come together to present in humbleness our stones believing that the outcome of our work will be beautiful. We have a collection of diverse rocks.

If anything valuable that the Reformation did teach us is the value and beauty of diversity; how we learn to respect each other, even when we do not think exactly the same. Our diversity is the beauty of the Reformed identity, although many churches claim that our diversity confuses them.

Another aspect that we need to learn from the process of building, is that **the final plan for the building is in the hands of God**. No one church has the final plan. No one person has the final plan whether Paul or Apollos or you or me. This is why we build in faith. We build confessing that we know little, but our God does unfold to us graciously what will the final image of the church look like. This teaches us humbleness and patience. This is why we strive to keep reforming till we day after day get closer to the image God that God wants us to be.

It is worth noting that Paul urges us to be **careful how we build** on the foundation. He emphasizes the method or manner of building more than what is done. There is no success in building Christ's church away from feeling of the need of each other to build right. This is what brings us together today in a very symbolic place where Luther was trying to build the church on the right foundation. Luther challenged the distraction then in the life of the church, and his intention was to make sure that the practice of the church does not deviate from the right foundation.

Today we stand together from different parts of the world and different cultures and backgrounds, to commit ourselves to be coworkers in building the church of Christ, and no success in building the one church of Christ away from joining hands and efforts from all, so we can build in the right way. Today we commit ourselves to build the church and build it together, to scrutinize the way we build together. It is not what we are building but rather how we are building. If we were to be God's church today only when we work together in Christian way, it is then that we discover that we are building on the right foundation. **Paul's challenge is to use the right way of building.**

Another challenge that Paul presents is **whether we are using the right values**. Paul challenges us that we will be held accountable for whether our work will stand in the fire or not. To translate what Paul means here does not necessarily talk about the final judgment, but rather we will be held accountable today. One of the most striking statements that I learned during the celebration of the 500 years for Reformation is that the Reformation taught us accountability and no matter where we are in the church we are accountable, and we are called for continual accountability and reformation.

One of the stories that struck me lately in the news is about a 14-year-old child, a Syrian refugee Aboud Kaplo, who was forced out of his home in Aleppo, Syria. Filmmaker Susie Attwood met Aboud and his family at a Syriac Orthodox monastery, where she knew Aboud had a great interest in music and was trying to teach himself using YouTube videos. The filmmaker got interested in his talent and contacted Oxford University, which decided to lend the teenager the restored 19th century violin that was taken out of a collection of historic instruments held by Oxford University and sent to a young Syrian musician living as a refugee. They decided to put the historic violin in the hands of a suffering and struggling refugee.

Dear friends, this year we celebrate the wealth of our 500 years of Reformed heritage, that is precious to all of us, but unless we put it in the hands of the suffering around the world, we will not make a difference. Unless we put our precious violin in the hands of those who suffer injustice, we miss the meaning of real celebration. Unless we put our precious heritage of Luther words “Here I stand” and speak against all that dehumanizes people and leave them poor, with no homes and dignity, we miss the celebration.

Today we stand in front of our God to be accountable. We are called to use our imagination to make a difference in the world for a better world where justice, peace and reconciliation will prevail. We are called to lift up all the wonderful heritage to say “our heritage is for the people and for all the people.” To stand up and claim the importance of looking at the inner human being and say you are valuable in the eyes of God no matter what your color or gender or race or passport. And you have the right not only to eat and live, but even to play a new tune for the world. To believe that the future is as valuable as the past and together we will live in the present and make a difference. We stand in front of our reformed teaching to answer what impact we have on the world today. We will be tested with justice with the shalom of the people. We will be tested if we really look like our Jesus.

At our graduation at Princeton, Fred Craddock, the well-known preacher surprised us in his sermon, “The last temptation of the church,” saying that the church will die. We were surprised with such a message, as we are just heading to start our ministry in the church. What a discouraging message. Then he says if the church is to be in the steps of her master she has to die with him in order to resurrect with him.

We are called to die with our Lord, to empty ourselves so that we may be filled again with the power of resurrection. To pay a price even if that meant to give your valuable and precious violin.

Today we are reminded of Luther's words from his pulpit:

A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.

This act of coming together as churches and signing the Wittenberg witness is a commitment to lend our violins and to join hands in building together. If we were asked what we are doing, we are not merely signing a statement, we are building together God's building.

Today we shout together **Living God, renew and transform us.** Come, Holy Spirit, renew our imagination.

To God all glory,

Amen.

APPENDIX 12

PUBLIC WITNESS COMMITTEE REPORT

Jürgen Moltmann warned that a concern for the victims of injustice was lacking at the centre of Reformation theology. “We pray ‘forgive us our sins,’ but where are the victims of our sinful action?” Moltmann asked. “The first issue is not the penitence of the perpetrators but the pain of the victims.”

German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier appealed to us to demonstrate the peace-making role of faith at a time when religious beliefs are misused to justify violence: “Now more than ever the Reformed churches must make particular efforts to foster peaceful dialogue and to very consciously underline the power of religion to promote peace and reconciliation.” He added, the Nikolaikirche “is where people found the audaciousness to stand up against oppression and lies. This is where people experienced the freedom that empowers them to stand upright... religious freedom, freedom of conscience, political freedom and political self-determination...(this) is perhaps the most wonderful outcome of Reformation faith.”

The General Council has opportunity to claim the heritage of our Reformation and have the audacity to raise up those who have been trodden down, by both Church and society over the decades and centuries, and to remind us all of the importance of hearing the voices of those who have been most disenfranchised by the dominant economic and ecclesiastical models, and offer opportunities for people to be able to stand upright and realise fullness of life. It is important for the General Council to hear the voices of those who are sharing their pain and to seek ways to respond. This is what the Public Witness Committee has sought to do. Through paper presentations and hearings with the proposers, we have sought to bring to the General Council the voices of those who want their concerns to be heard that we might all respond and through our combined prayer and action offer some hope of the freedoms which have been part of the very history and fabric of our faith - and for all to join in sharing that great offer of freedom from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

1. MIGRATION, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND REFUGEES

Human trafficking has been identified as a form of modern day slavery. Human traffickers take advantage of people in vulnerable situations, including many thousands of children every year. It is an injustice that affects millions of people every year on every continent and at all socio-economic levels. It also has a direct effect on the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of the victims. During the initial trafficking, victims are often forced and deceived. People may be trafficked for labour and sexual exploitation, within an individual country or across international borders. Their

movement is often restricted; their personal documentation withheld, and they may experience significant physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse, including being killed for organs. Victims are often held in indentured slavery which prevents them from escaping.

The movement of hundreds of thousands of refugees has highlighted a situation that confronts the Churches. Women, men, young, and old are fleeing war, poverty and persecution. Every day, people put their lives at risk as they seek life, peace and justice. As Reformed Churches proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a vision of life in fullness for all (John 10: 10), we cannot and will not accept this as inevitable. The people seeking refuge are not merely an ethical or political challenge confronting the Church, they challenge our Churches in their innermost theological identity and mission. In faithful accordance with the biblical witness, its calling and mission, the Reformed Church has a long-standing tradition of being committed to the life, dignity and wellbeing of the refugee and migrant.

As people of faith, we are called to “love the sojourner” (Deuteronomy 10:19) and to treat “the foreigner residing among you...as your native-born” (Leviticus 19:34). Issues of human migration do not exist in a vacuum, and they can only be fully comprehended when we understand how they connect to other issues of justice around the world that are of critical importance to WCRC member churches. These stories and motifs have had profound effects on the history of the church, especially the Reformed tradition as many early reformers were themselves refugees. Reformed communities around the world were created not only by missionaries, but by migrants as well.

The General Council:

1. Condemns all acts of human trafficking; asks all member churches to do likewise; recommends member churches engage with the WCRC programme: “Broken for You” (<http://wcr.ch/justice/broken>); and urges member churches to hold their government to account in countering Human Trafficking.
2. Recognizing that the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers requires close cooperation and a common response by churches in all parts of the world, encourages the Executive Committee, working in cooperation with its regions, member churches, and other bodies, to find ways:
 - to analyze what happens to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the countries they leave, pass through, and settle in;
 - to promote networking among regions and local churches to share best practices, in collaboration with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)
 - to consider the theological, spiritual and pastoral challenges confronting member churches;

- to find a common answer to the question of how we deal with one another as human beings and people of faith in this situation;
 - to consider, together, how we may address governments, media and citizens in our countries so that all that is necessary is done and people receive the help they need and deserve as our fellow human beings.
3. Urges member churches to hold their government to account in supporting migrants.
 4. Urges all member churches to support affirmative action policies and programs to create opportunities for migrant workers, refugees, and trafficked people.

2. UPROOTED AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN MAURITIUS

The General Council received information from its member church in Mauritius that the Chagossians of Diego Garcia, relocated to the island since 1966, face 20 more years of unsettled livelihood on the island of Mauritius. This extension was done without the consent of the government of Mauritius but strictly on a bilateral agreement between the United States of America and the United Kingdom, just as they unilaterally decided to turn the home of the Chagossians into a military base of the USA and forced the latter to relocate to the Seychelles and Mauritius, whose culture is alien to them.

Since then, the relocated Chagossians - about one thousand people - encounter familiar issues of subsistent living, uncertain employment, and living as unwelcome residents among unfamiliar cultures, languages and customs. Many continue to live with the trauma of unemployment and stigmatism. The government of Mauritius has refused to accept the extension of the agreement between the UK and the USA, It is contesting the agreement even as it continues to bear the brunt of physical and spiritual cost of serving as the temporary home to the Chagossians.

The General Council:

1. Encourages the Secretariat and member churches to support the multi-level humanitarian efforts of the Mauritian Church on behalf of the Chagossians living in Mauritius.
2. Instruct the Executive Committee to organise, in cooperation with member churches and other ecumenical partners, a pastoral delegation to Mauritius to demonstrate support for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Mauritius, and other churches, in supporting the displaced people.

3. TREATMENT OF CHRISTMAS GLOBALLY

The Public Witness Committee heard concerns from Middle East, Africa, some European countries, and South East Asia of the treatment of Christians. Nigeria has a population of about 180 million people. The North is predominately Muslim, while the South is predominantly Christian. Sharia law exists in some parts of the North. Some

recent government and group actions have exacerbated fears of a calculated attempt to impose an Islamic agenda on the whole nation, including the Christian minorities in the North.

The General Council:

1. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, with support from member churches, and the regional bodies, and other ecumenical bodies, to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence and the protection of the rights of minorities.
2. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, to work with member churches and regional bodies, in heightening global awareness of the persecution of Christians - including asking for government and UN action where necessary.
3. Urges member churches to offer support to the victims of the on-going activities of insurgents in Nigeria, particularly as it affects women and children in Internally Displaced Camps (IDP) camps, and in the rebuilding of devastated communities.
4. Urges member churches to offer support for rebuilding churches in Nigeria when destroyed by governments or other groups.

4. KOREA

A WCRC delegation visiting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, in September 2016, heard the urgent wish for the de-escalation of provocation and tension, the need to re-establish dialogue and negotiations and the desire to change the armistice into a peace treaty. The visit took place in the context of the longstanding commitment of the WCRC, the World Council of Churches, and the wider ecumenical movement to be in contact with Christians in North Korea, and to advocate for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. The presence of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) which hosted the visit was much appreciated. The most recent geopolitical developments are extremely alarming, for there has emerged imminent dangers of the use of thermo-nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula which could bring about the total destruction of all living beings, possibly affecting the whole world.

The National Council of Churches in Korea has been leading a prophetic pilgrimage to transform the armistice into a peace treaty and to normalize relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with the Republic of Korea, the USA, and Japan. A Peace Treaty will promote a consensual process for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and constructing the nuclear free North East Asian *Oikoumene*, including USA. Confidence-building measures are essential prior to the normalization of relations, e.g. the lifting of all the existing sanctions against the DPRK, the cessation

of all military exercises, and any kind of ‘brinkmanship’, or demonization of each other on-and-around the Korean Peninsula, and the withdrawal of foreign troops, according to the mandate of the UN Security Council.

The General Council:

1. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat, convening a North East Asia Ecumenical Peace Convocation to weave various initiatives of the global, regional and national ecumenical councils, to design an Ecumenical Accompaniment Process for Healing, Reconciliation and Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula from 2017 to 2025 (80th anniversary of the liberation from Japan and the division of the peninsula).
2. Agrees that WCRC shall join in the Peace Treaty Campaign Movement as one of the programs of the above Ecumenical Accompaniment Process.
3. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to highlight the Korean Peninsula in its program on Justice and Peace in order to actualize efficiently the above plans, developing a common vision of peace in North East Asia as well as that of the world.

5. PALESTINE - AN URGENT ISSUE OF FAITH FOR THE WORLD COMMUNION

This year marks 69 years since the creation of the State of Israel, and the General Council can reaffirm its commitment to justice, peace and security for the Israeli people and state. The creation of the State of Israel had a significant consequence: the loss of homeland for the Palestinian people, and the creation of 750,000 Palestinian refugees. It is also 50 years since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. It is time for Israelis and Palestinians to live alongside each other in peace, security and justice.

In an open letter to the ecumenical movement published on June 21, 2017, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine has called the situation “on the verge of catastrophic collapse” declaring that this is the “last chance to achieve a just peace... and to save the Christian presence in this land.” They have appealed to the world church for costly solidarity with them to end their oppression and gain their freedom, through solidarity visits, reviewing theology, economic actions, and support for their freedom to exercise their religious, social and political rights.

Many of us have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears the painful realities of life for Palestinians. We have been witness to the daily, grinding humiliation of women, men and children; the deaths of civilians; the demolition of homes; the confiscation of water resources; the isolation and ongoing diminution of the Palestinian population of Jerusalem; severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, commerce, electricity, healthcare, and access to holy places; the unlawful practice of administrative detention, including of children; and the taking of land through the construction

of illegal settlements and a separation wall built on Palestinian land. Palestinians who live in the State of Israel, while citizens with the obligations of citizenship, also suffer injustice through discriminatory policies in housing, employment, and more. The re-configuration of Jerusalem in particular jeopardizes the historical place and shared identity of Jerusalem, which is part of its holiness.

We acknowledge and confess that the Christian faith has been used to justify the injustice against the Palestinian people. Any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. All who suffer share in the groaning of the Holy Spirit for the liberation of all peoples and their joining in one spiritual communion. The ongoing condition of occupation, and the continuing denial of Palestinian rights has cast a shadow over generations of Jewish Israelis who have borne the social, psychological and spiritual burdens of the role of occupier.

The General Council:

1. Affirms that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.
2. Instructs the General Secretary to initiate a programme to:
 - Collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society....make them available to member churches.
 - Undertake study and discernment, using the resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement, regarding theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action.
3. Instructs the Executive Committee, with the Secretariat, to respond (before the end of 2017) to the letter of June 21, 2017 from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine indicating what actions can be taken in response to their cry for costly solidarity. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/letters-received/open-letter-from-the-national-coalition-of-christian-organizations-in-palestine/>)
4. Encourages member churches to examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law.
5. Instructs the Executive Committee to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with

the present day Christian community - the “living stones”- of the Holy Land, to witness their situation and express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination.

6. Encourages the Executive Committee to seek to strengthen initiatives for dialogues, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention and transformation.

6. VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIVIDUALS BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

In the global struggle toward freedom to pursue God’s vision of wholeness-of-life-for all, progress is being achieved in some areas of the world. Yet death – and acts of death – continue to loom: homosexuality is still illegal in 72 countries, and punishable by the death penalty in 13 countries—implemented in at least eight. Trans and gender-diverse people face extreme violence, with 2,343 being reported murdered in 69 countries since 2008. Last year was the deadliest year on record for transgender people in the United States, with 27 homicides reported, nearly all racialized women. In Brazil one LGBT person is murdered every 25 hours. Killings, violence, and oppression are routine in many parts of the world. The United Nations has called on the international community to confront the issue of anti-gay violence and discrimination.

Scripture is clear and repetitive in conveying God’s vision of – and invitation to partnership in – the ushering in of abundant life. As partners and stewards with God in co-creation, as agents and stewards of Jesus’ promise of abundant life, choosing life and seeking life abundant for all is central to our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The WCRC recognizes the connection between spiritual health and wholeness with the systems in which our lives operate and are ordered. When the weak, oppressed, and marginalized among us suffer diminished life, we do not go unaffected. Seeking abundant life for others is inextricably tied to our own experience and quality of life. While we may not be of one mind on the topic of human sexualities, we are all united, by the waters of baptism and the table which Jesus hosts, in our commitment to pursue God’s call for life abundant for all with courage, boldness, and a deep faithfulness.

The General Council:

1. Condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theological views, around the globe;
2. Confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence.
3. ~~commits to speaking about “human sexualities” rather than using the term “human sexuality”~~
4. Continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom, and a safe world for all persons to flourish.

7. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous people all over the world have suffered great losses and oppression since colonization, and continue to suffer from the historical dehumanizing colonial attitude which was justified by the Church's Doctrine of Discovery, church pronouncements which allowed for conquest of new lands and peoples. This attitude perpetuates oppression and the marginalization of indigenous people globally. Today this Doctrine of Discovery justifies large corporations in their exploitation of indigenous lands and, in the name of industry and economy, it allows them to strip the earth of her life-giving resources, including water.

The disruption of indigenous cultures and their governance systems has caused many internal and external problems, including disrupting family and community values. In Canada, the effects of colonization continues in hate crimes against indigenous women and youth who go missing and are found murdered. In other countries, women have become victims of human trafficking. In Canada and Taiwan, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been created to address social, political, and spiritual injustices. In Australia, a Commission is being sought to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations, and truth-telling about their history.

Early missionaries failed to see how the Holy Spirit was already at work in the lives of indigenous people, even before the arrival of the Gospel of unconditional love and peace in Jesus Christ. The Spirit cannot be contained. The indigenous world view was an attitude of kinship with all humanity and all life forms as brothers and sisters. This kinship spirituality acknowledged the poverty of human nature, which was constantly in need of the Creator's mercy and humility. Regarding an animal as a brother or sister when hunting for food was a way of checking human nature - which tends to take too much. Today indigenous people all over the world have great concern about survival on the earth due to the abuse and exploitation of the earth herself. Just as we are one body in Christ, we are one body on this earth. When one sister or brother suffers others will suffer the same way eventually. For such is the kingdom of God on earth.

The General Council:

working together as equal and mutual partners with indigenous people to guide and inform its processes and discernment:

1. Commits itself to a process of developing right relationships with indigenous peoples by initiating a study towards seeking repentance of wrongdoing, an apology, and a process leading to reconciliation with indigenous peoples, including liturgical resources for use in churches.
2. Instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to organise a theological engagement with the Doctrine of Discovery that can recognise its harmful effects and its justification of genocide on indigenous peoples.

3. Instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to create a special working group, with a majority of indigenous members, to gather, develop, and share indigenous theology, practice and advocacy resources.
4. Encourages member churches
 - to study the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People as a framework for developing relationships with indigenous peoples, and to advocate with their governments to adopt the Declaration.
 - to help human rights agencies which support indigenous peoples as they struggle for their rights.
5. Remits to the Executive Committee, in consultation with the regions, to consider:
 - including one indigenous member, or youth, on the WCRC Executive Committee.
 - financial support of an indigenous delegation to the next WCRC General Council.
6. Requests the Secretariat to write to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in support of the Transitional Justice for indigenous peoples' initiative.

8. DROUGHT AND HUNGER IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Several countries in the Horn of Africa are suffering from severe drought, caused by changing weather patterns and human actions, leading to food shortages in Ethiopia, Eritrea and northern Kenya, and famine in South Sudan, Yemen, Nigeria and Somalia. The Accra Confession warned against these consequences of environmental change and calls upon us to work together to alleviate the suffering caused by ecological problems.

The General Council:

1. Instructs the Executive Committee to work with member churches to seek to mobilize the international community, local churches, and church agencies to urgently address the challenges of food security and famine.

9. CUBA

At the end of the Barack Obama administration, a set of steps began aimed at improving the relationship between the United States and Cuba, which reached its most visible expression with the announcement, on December 17, 2014, that the two governments would work for the normalization of relations between both peoples and governments. This gesture received the immediate approval of both sides, and the international community, moving toward ending more than five decades of conflict, suspicion, and unjust actions that has brought so many sacrifices, losses and suffering among the population, and deep pain to both peoples. Today, there is anxiety because of the possibility of a retreat from the path of reconciliation, which will have a negative

impact on the efforts of the peoples of the US and Cuba to reestablish normal relations of goodwill.

The General Council:

1. Expresses its conviction that the peoples and governments of the USA and Cuba should continue on the path towards friendship, reconciliation and just relations, and is concerned about unilateral actions to limit progress towards reconciliation.

10. VENEZUELA

Venezuela is experiencing a convulsive and conflicted time. There is marked political polarisation, and a non-conventional war, in which there are no clear military confrontations or armed combatants, but rather an unsustainable conflict which encompasses economic, social, and political sectors, and where the media generates intentional disinformation. Within the country there are people paid to be agitators, and outside there are powerful groups attempting to take over the natural resources. It is difficult for the people to find basic food products. There are few people seeking the greatest good for all. There is a need for a stronger commitment to dialogue (by the government and those who represent the opposition). Only then will it be more possible to bring the violence to an end and build a culture of peace.

The General Council:

1. Encourages the Secretariat, member churches, and AIPRAL to support the church in Venezuela in addressing the need to build a culture of peace which makes dialogue and reconciliation possible; this support could be offered through prayer and visits to better understand the reality and contribute to overcoming the communications blockade.
2. Urges the Secretariat, and AIPRAL, to be involved in advocacy with international organisations, especially the UN and Organisation of American States.

11. VIOLENCE IN NORTH TRIANGLE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

The three countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have experienced 15 years of violence generated from gang conflict, organised crime, and narco-trafficking. Peace accords did not address the different problems of these countries. The endemic gang culture, coupled with the socio-economic realities of poverty, unemployment, low wages, domestic violence, and the resultant dysfunction and psychological problems, produces enormous problems for families, society and the churches. The population is also young, with around 50% of the people under 24 years. Youth are most affected by crime and violence; many young people are dying, and the region is being robbed of its future.

Churches are carrying out their work under very difficult conditions. In El Salvador, the churches have been supporting different efforts to dialogue with youth gangs, but have had no support from the government, which is now calling gangs, and those who seek to dialogue, terrorists. The churches seek support to promote a culture of peace and prevent violence.

The General Council:

1. Urges member churches, and AIPRAL, to share their experience and expertise in support of the churches advocacy efforts, dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation in the northern triangle of Central America.
2. Instructs the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, through and with the support of member churches and AIPRAL, to seek ways to accompany the churches in Central America in their efforts to counter violence and promote a culture of peace.
3. Urges the Executive Committee to work with AIPRAL and member churches to make representations to the governments of these countries expressing deep concern about the rampant violence and impunity for those who commit it.

12. SUPPORT AND ACCOMPANIMENT FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PEACE IN COLOMBIA

Colombians have lived for over 50 years with an armed conflict which has left over 7,000,000 people internally displaced, 25,000 forcibly disappeared, nearly 250,000 dead, over 16,000 targeted assassinations, almost 2,000 massacres, and more than 400,000 people who have sought refuge in other countries. In 2013 Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos initiated dialogues with the armed groups to achieve a peace accord and put an end to so many years of violence. These dialogues resulted in the signing of an accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), which is currently in process of implementation.

In February 2017, the Colombian government began public talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN), another armed group in Colombia. The peace accord with the FARC-EP and the dialogues with the ELN are a sign of hope for the great majority of the Colombian people, who desire to live in peace and justice and without violence. This hoped-for peace is endangered because a sector of Colombian society that has maintained its privilege and has profited from the war insists on seeking a military victory in this long conflict, and rejects the peace accords. In this scenario, the risks increase for communities that have lived alongside the armed groups. Guerrilla ex-combatants who are laying down arms and rejoining civil society are at risk. In 2016

and the first half of 2017, nearly 150 human rights defenders and community leaders who seek peace have been assassinated, and many more have received threats.

The General Council:

1. Instructs the General Secretary, and encourages all member churches, to share experiences in peace-building to the promotion of a pedagogy for peace and reconciliation in Colombia, seeking to strengthen a culture of nonviolence and peaceful resolution of the historic conflict.
2. Instructs the General Secretary to work with member churches and ecumenical partners to organize groups and peace witness visits to Colombia to accompany the communities that are trying to build a just peace while living under threat of armed groups seeking to continue the war.
3. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to urge the Colombian government to swiftly and effectively implement the agreements reached with the FARC-EP and continue the dialogues with the ELN, until a negotiated end to the conflict is achieved and peace with social justice becomes a reality.
4. Urges its members to support the churches' programs of development and education in communities and social sectors that work locally to build peace with an emphasis on human rights, inclusivity, sustainability, and care for creation.

13. CONFISCATED PROPERTY OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN ROMANIA

After the confiscation of Church property during Communist rule, the restitution of the properties since 1990 has been difficult for the Reformed Church in Romania and other religious minorities. Since 2014, a court decision stopped the restitution of property, and sentenced those involved in the process to suspended imprisonment. The General Convention of the Hungarian Reformed Church issued a statement in June 2016 to reclaim the Church property. The President of the WCRC also made a solidarity visit in 2017.

The General Council:

1. Expresses its concerns about the developments in Romania regarding the status of restitution of property of churches confiscated during the Communist dictatorship before 1990; and expresses its support for member church's struggle to reclaim property.
2. Urges member churches to offer support to minority communities - both Christian and ethnic - in exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief.

14. TAIWAN

Taiwan elected the first woman President in its history in January 2016. President Tsai Ing-wen promised transition justice for both the victims of martial law, including the

Feb 28, 1947 massacre and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan. However, as a result of the election, China continued to put immense pressure on all international organizations to deny Taiwan membership in international organisations, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and Interpol. Moreover, the World Health Organization Assembly refused to issue an invitation to Taiwan to participate as an observer in 2017; Taiwan has been invited each year since 2009.

Since 2015, the United Nations has been enforcing its regulation for visitors to its premises by requiring IDs issued by member states. Such a requirement excludes 23 million Taiwanese from visiting all UN offices as tourists or to do academic research. Since President Tsai's election, three countries have withdrawn their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Today, only twenty small countries maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, leaving Taiwan further isolated from the international community. Indeed, for all practical purposes, Taiwan is an international orphan.

Taiwan elected the first woman President, Tsai Ing-wen, with an historic majority because she promised transitional justice for both the victims of martial law, and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan. Two Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been created to follow up these issues, and the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in seeking to hold the government to account.

The General Council:

1. Urges the Executive committee, Secretariat, and member churches to support the Taiwanese appeal to the international community, especially the United Nations, to affirm the legitimate right of the Taiwanese people to participate in international organizations in order to enjoy the guarantees of international standards and norms at all levels of their life;
2. Calls on the member churches to pray for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) as it seeks to continue to be the conscience of the nation ensuring transitional justice for the victims of martial law, and the 18 indigenous tribes of Taiwan.
3. Welcomes the establishment of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum to ensure that the ecumenical movement continues to accompany the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) to face the difficult challenges in the international arena.
4. Explores the possibility of a conversation for enhancing mutual understanding between PCT and the China Christian Council.

15. BLACK LIVES MATTER!: COMBATting RACIALIZED VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOR BY POLICE FORCES IN THE UNITED STATES

Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Charleena Lyles, Sean Bell, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, and so many others are just a few of the countless lives of unarmed black people who have been lost due to the racialized violence enacted against people of color by police forces in the United States. None of the officers involved in the aforementioned killings were convicted of their crimes. In this context, a progressive social movement emerged—Black Lives Matter—to combat white supremacy and racism in America’s police forces as well as other forms of state-sponsored violence against people of color.

The United States participates in a global system of white supremacy, one for which people from all nations are affected. For the sake of their own wealth and power, often with the support of our Reformed ancestors, European nations conquered and occupied indigenous peoples and instituted the Transatlantic Slave Trade between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Many black Americans today descend from persons taken from Africa in the slave trade and sold into chattel slavery. Today, white supremacy continues to render the lives of people of color insignificant in global economic, political, and social systems. Police-involved killings of people of color in the United States are one brutal example of this death-dealing system.

Whether in USA, or on other continents, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a significant voice of public witness in the global community. A number of churches asked that WCRC raise its prophetic voice to speak to the sin of racialized violence.

The General Council:

1. Pray for the victims and communities affected by police brutality against people of color in USA, as well as for those who perpetrate such violence.
2. Write letters of support and contact partner churches when instances of racialized violence occur in the United States.
3. Contact their country’s United Nations Ambassador to demand justice on behalf of victims of racialized violence by the police.
4. Urge the United States government to craft regulations that effectively end institutional racialized violence by law enforcement officers against people of color.
5. Urges the Executive Committee to engage with US member churches to develop educational and liturgical resources that challenge complicity in white supremacy and foster deepened sense that our salvation is bound up with one another.

16. ACCOMPANIMENT OF AFRICAN CHURCHES IN MISSION

The legacy of colonization is still rife in many aspects of life - human and non-human, but especially political, economic and ecological aspects of life. Churches are called to address issues of economy, ecology, food security, gender-based violence, refugees and internally displaced persons, education for girl children, human trafficking, involvement of youth, and addressing substance abuse.

While many of the needs identified by the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches are part of the existing mission and programs of WCRC, the African contexts must be considered as these programs are implemented.

The General Council:

1. Encourages the Executive Committee to incorporate into the WCRC programming the particular issues raised by the African Churches, including attention to African Theology and Black Theology of Liberation.
2. Requests the General Secretariat and member churches to continue to accompany the ACRC churches in capacity building and cooperative witness.

17. THE 2017 GENERAL ELECTION IN KENYA

Kenya is preparing to hold a General Election in August 2017. During the 2007 General Election, there was pre and post-election violence in which 1,133 died and nearly 600,000 were displaced from their homes. Kenya is at risk of repeating that violence. (<https://www.cfr.org/report/electoral-violence-kenya>).

The General Council:

1. Appeals to all churches and ecumenical bodies to take the important role of intercession, and mobilise individual and corporate prayers, and practical support (such as election observers and civic education), for the peaceful election process in Kenya.

18 CREATION AND UNITY

The Holy Spirit works through scientific thought to help Christians move towards environmental stewardship. Alarming scientific research calls for a reformed way of life for the citizens of our common planet, revealing that: Global grain yields have declined by 10% from heatwaves and floods connected to climate change, unleashing hunger and displacement. Over 1 million people living near coasts have been forced from their homes due to rising seas and stronger storms, and millions more are expected to flee in the coming years. Our planet's atmosphere and oceans are heating up ten times faster than any time in the last 65 million years. In 2015, India experienced its worst heatwave ever recorded, with the loss of over 2,300 lives. Warming is increasing the severity of drought, as a warmer atmosphere sucks more water from the soil. Through 2015 and 2016, drought and rising temperatures left over 36 million people

in Eastern and Southern Africa facing hunger. Due to human-caused climate change, the storms, cyclones, hurricanes, and typhoons we see today are bringing noticeably heavier rainfall, causing increased flooding, wind damage and storm surges. Science is clear: our planet is under threat, and we are complicit.

A Time for Creation has been declared for the five weeks from Sept 1 (the start of the Orthodox Church's liturgical year, and a day of prayer for the environment) to Oct 4 (the commemoration of the feast of St Francis of Assisi). There are many worship resources from the churches and ecumenical movement available online to support congregations focussing their worship on God's creation in this period. Inspired by God's command to care for the whole creation; and continuing the Reformed tradition of seeking to serve faithfully in the world, the World Communion of Reformed Churches can join with the broader ecumenical movement, and churches around the world, in encouraging all members to consider the issue of our planet and its long term fruitfulness, and incorporate this into our everyday lives, and especially into our worshipping life.

The General Council:

1. Urges all to advocate for the care of God's creation in worship, study, and ecumenical and political action.
2. Instructs the Secretariat to support, and urges all members and member churches to mark, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, and the Time for Creation (Sept 1-Oct 4) in their personal and corporate worship services.
3. Instructs the Executive Committee and Secretariat to ensure the staff and structures of WCRC embody and encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy, and urges churches and individuals to model creation care and be a means of visible outreach to concerned people.

19. INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Many member churches live in religiously pluralistic contexts. The rise of religious fundamentalism, paired with political struggle, has created serious challenges between peoples of differing faith. Some churches speak of their difficulties in finding effective ways to witness to the Christian faith and disciple new Christians. Some churches are looking for assistance in finding ways to live in meaningful and constructive relationships with people of different faiths.

The General Council:

1. Requests the General Secretariat to partner with other ecumenical bodies who are developing educational and dialogue resources and share these resources with member churches
2. Requests the Executive Committee to consider how WCRC might engage in interfaith relationships on behalf of and in support of member churches.

20. ISSUES UNABLE TO ADDRESS

The PWC was unable to address some issues that came before us due to the lack of information, the clarity of expected outcome, or the lateness of the proposal. We recognize these issues are important to member communions.

The General Council:

Remits to the Executive Committee those submitted proposals which were not addressed by the Public Witness Committee.

APPENDIX 13 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Setri Nyomi, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana
Jordan Redding, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
Chanyoung Yoo, University of Pretoria

Appendix 13e

Non-Member Church Observers

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Bhakta Isaac Sukumar Chirra, Council of Reformed Churches of India
Susanne Erlecke, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*
Silfrido Gordillo Borrallles, *Comunion Mexicana de Iglesias Reformadas y Presbiterianas*
Johannes Grashof, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland*
Jean Luc Pondi, Evangelical Ministry of Cameroon
Vijay Raju Gadepe, Council of Reformed Churches of India
Anja Vollendorf, *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*
Gerald Bonaventura Zilahenda, African Evangelical Ministries
Heleen Zorgdrager, International Reformed Theological Institute

Appendix 13f

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Appendix 13g Speakers

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Collin Cowan
Farid Esack
Nadia Marais
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Jürgen Moltmann

* Regional Council leader

** Advisor

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Philip Vinod Peacock
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Mitri Raheb
Janneke Stegman
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George Zachariah

Appendix 13h **Staff**

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Dora Arce-Valentín, Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership
Phil Tanis, Executive Secretary for Communications
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Appendix 13i

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Ester Pudjo Widiasih

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AFRICA

Algeria

Reformed Church of Algeria

Angola

Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola

Evangelical Reformed Church of Angola

Botswana

Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana

Burkina Faso

Association of Reformed Evangelical Churches of Burkina Faso

Cameroon

Evangelical Church of Cameroon

Presbyterian Church in Cameroon

Presbyterian Church of Cameroon

Protestant Church of Africa (Lolodorf)

Central African Republic

Protestant Church of Christ the King

Congo

Evangelical Church of Congo

Democratic Republic of Congo

Baptist Community of the Faithful in Africa

Evangelical Community in Congo, Church of Christ in Congo

Reformed Community of Presbyterians, Church of Christ in Congo

Reformed Presbyterian Community in Africa, Church of Christ in Congo

Presbyterian Community in Congo, Church of Christ in Congo

Presbyterian Community of East Kasai, Church of Christ in Congo

Presbyterian Community of Kinshasa, Church of Christ in Congo

Protestant Community of Katanga, Church of Christ in Congo

Egypt

Evangelical Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile

Equatorial Guinea

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Equatorial Guinea

Ethiopia

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Ghana

Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana

Presbyterian Church of Ghana

Kenya

Reformed Church of East Africa

Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Lesotho

Lesotho Evangelical Church

Liberia

Presbyterian Church of Liberia

Madagascar

Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar

Malawi

Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Blantyre Synod

Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Nkhoma Synod

Mauritius

Presbyterian Church of Mauritius

Morocco

Evangelical Church in Morocco

Mozambique

Evangelical Church of Christ in Mozambique

Presbyterian Church of Mozambique

Reformed Church in Mozambique

United Church of Christ in Mozambique

Niger

Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger

Nigeria

Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria

Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ

Presbyterian Church of Nigeria

Reformed Church of Christ for Nations

United Church of Christ in Nigeria

The Universal Reformed Church of Christ

Reunion

Protestant Church of Reunion

Rwanda

Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

Senegal

Protestant Church of Senegal

South Africa

Dutch Reformed Church

Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (NGKA)

Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (NHKA)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa

Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ

Network for African Congregational Theology

People's Church of Africa

Presbyterian Church of Africa

Reformed Church in Africa

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

South Sudan

Africa Inland Church Sudan

Sudanese Reformed Churches

Sudan

Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and Sudan

Swaziland

Swaziland Reformed Church

Togo

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo

Uganda

Christian Reformed Church in East Africa

Reformed Presbyterian Church in Uganda

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa (Uganda)

Zambia

Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Zambia Synod

Reformed Church in Zambia

United Church of Zambia

Zimbabwe

Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Harare Synod

Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

ASIA

Bangladesh

Church of Bangladesh

Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian Church in Bangladesh

China

China Christian Council

Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

East Timor

Christian Church in East Timor

India

Church of North India

Church of South India

Congregational Church of India (Maraland)

Evangelical Church of Maraland

Presbyterian Church of India

Reformed Presbyterian Church, North East India

Indonesia

Christian Church in Central Sulawesi (GKST)

Christian Church in Luwuk Banggai (GKLB)

Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS)
Christian Church in South Sumatra (GKSBS)
Christian Church of Java (GKJ)
Christian Church of Sumba (GKS)
Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM)
Christian Evangelical Church in Sangihe-Talaud (GMIST)
Church of Toraja Mamasa (GTM)
East Java Christian Church (GKJW)
Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera (GMIH)
Evangelical Christian Church in Papua (GKITP)
Indonesian Christian Church Synod (GKI)
Evangelical Church in Bolaang Mongondow (GMIBM)
Evangelical Church in Kalimantan (GKE)
Indonesian Protestant Church in Buol Tolitoli (GPIBT)
Indonesian Protestant Church in Gorontalo (GPIG)
Indonesian Protestant Church of Donggala (GPID)
Karo Batak Protestant Church (GBKP)
Pasundan Christian Church (GKP)
Protestant Christian Church in Bali (GKPB)
Protestant Church in Indonesia (GPI)
Protestant Church in the Moluccas (GPM)
Protestant Church in South-East Sulawesi (GEPSULTRA)
Protestant Church in West Indonesia (GPIB)
Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor (GMIT)
Toraja Church (GT)

Japan

Church of Christ in Japan
Korean Christian Church in Japan

Korea

Presbyterian Church in Korea (Baek Seok)
Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
Presbyterian Church of Korea

Malaysia

Presbyterian Church in Malaysia

Myanmar

Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
Independent Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

Mara Evangelical Church
Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

Pakistan

Church of Pakistan
Presbyterian Church of Pakistan

Philippines

Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines
United Church of Christ in the Philippines
United Evangelical Church of Christ

Singapore

Presbyterian Church in Singapore

Sri Lanka

Christian Reformed Church in Sri Lanka
Presbytery of Lanka

Taiwan

Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Thailand

Church of Christ in Thailand

Vietnam

Presbyterian Church of Vietnam

CARIBBEAN

Cuba

Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba

Dominican Republic

Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic
Dominican Evangelical Church

Grenada

Presbyterian Church in Grenada

Guyana

Guyana Congregational Union
Guyana Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church of Guyana

Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Trinidad and Tobago

Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago

EUROPE

Austria

Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria

Belgium

United Protestant Church in Belgium

Bulgaria

Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches in Bulgaria

Croatia

Reformed Christian Calvinist Church in Croatia

Czech Republic

Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

Denmark

Reformed Church of Denmark

France

Malagasy Protestant Church in France

National Union of Protestant Reformed Evangelical Churches of France

United Protestant Church of France

Union of the Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine

Germany

Church of Lippe

Evangelical Reformed Church

Evangelical Old Reformed Church in Lower Saxony

Reformed Alliance

Great Britain

Church of Scotland

Presbyterian Church of Wales

Union of Welsh Independents

United Free Church of Scotland

United Reformed Church

Greece

Greek Evangelical Church

Hungary

Reformed Church in Hungary

Ireland

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Italy

Waldensian Evangelical Church

Latvia

Reformed Church in Latvia

Lithuania

Evangelical Reformed Church in Lithuania

Luxembourg

Protestant Reformed Church of Luxembourg

Netherlands

Covenant of Free Evangelical Churches in the Netherlands

Protestant Church in the Netherlands

Remonstrant Brotherhood

Poland

Reformed Evangelical Church in Poland

Portugal

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal

Romania

Reformed Church in Romania

Serbia

Reformed Christian Church in Serbia

Slovakia

Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia

Slovenia

Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia

Spain

Spanish Evangelical Church

Sweden

Uniting Church in Sweden

Switzerland

Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches

Ukraine

Reformed Church in Transcarpathia

LATIN AMERICA**Argentina**

Evangelical Church of the River Plate

Evangelical Congregational Church

Reformed Church in Argentina

Bolivia

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Bolivia

Brazil

Evangelical Arabian Church in Sao Paulo

Evangelical Reformed Churches in Brazil

Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil

United Presbyterian Church of Brazil

Chile

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Chile

Presbyterian Church of Chile

Colombia

Presbyterian Church of Colombia

Costa Rica

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Costa Rica

El Salvador

Reformed Calvinist Church of El Salvador

Guatemala

National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala

Honduras

Christian Reformed Church of Honduras

Mexico

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Mexico

National Presbyterian Church of Mexico

Presbyterian Reformed Church of Mexico

Uruguay

Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate

Venezuela

Presbyterian Church of Venezuela

MIDDLE EAST

Iran

Evangelical Church of Iran

Lebanon

National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

National Evangelical Union of Lebanon

Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East

NORTH AMERICA

Canada

Presbyterian Church in Canada

United Church of Canada

United States

Christian Reformed Church in North America

Cumberland Presbyterian Church

Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Hungarian Reformed Church in America

Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad

Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Reformed Church in America

United Church of Christ

PACIFIC

American Samoa

Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa

Australia

Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

Uniting Church in Australia

French Polynesia

Maòhi Protestant Church

Kiribati

Kiribati Protestant Church

Marshall Islands

Reformed Congregational Churches

United Church of Christ-Congregational in the Marshall Islands

New Caledonia

Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands

New Zealand

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Niue Island (Polynesia)

Congregational Christian Church of Niue

Samoa

Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (Western)

Solomon Islands

United Church in the Solomon Islands

Tuvalu

Tuvalu Christian Church

Vanuatu

Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu



World Communion
of Reformed Churches

