

Called to communion,
committed to justice



World Communion
of Reformed Churches
ANNUAL REPORT 2013





ANNUAL REPORT CONTENTS

About WCRC	2
Introduction	3
A New Home	4
Vision and Commitments	5
Justice	6-7
Communion	8
Theology	9
Mission	10-11
Partnership Fund	12-13
Member Relations	14
Ecumenical Relations	15
Finances	16
Governance	17
Staff	18
Resources	19

Cover photo: Members of the WCRC Executive Committee share a gesture of healing and hope during prayer at Elmina Castle, a former slave trade site in Ghana. (Photo: William Koopmans)



About the World Communion of Reformed Churches

We are a network of 229 Protestant churches in 108 countries committed to better understanding each other's theology and to working together on issues of common concern. Our member churches are Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed, Waldensian, United and Uniting with a combined membership estimated to be 80 million people.

The WCRC secretariat is in Hannover, Germany, having relocated there in January 2014 from Geneva, Switzerland. An office in Grand Rapids, Michigan, United States, manages the WCRC's American corporate entity.

Member churches pay annual dues that support the core costs of the communion: governance, communication, travel and staff.

INTRODUCTION

“Staying focused on the vision and mission”

2013 was a year of many challenges for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). It marked the end of 65 years of operating from Geneva, Switzerland. One might think that with all the activities associated with moving from one office location to another, the focus on what the WCRC is called to do would have been compromised. This was not the case. With a dedicated staff team and with the commitment of its Presidium and Executive Committee, the WCRC stayed focused on its vision and mission.

In the pages of this annual report, we share just a few examples of how the WCRC has been of service to its member churches and to the world in 2013. We were intentional about not letting the tasks involved in relocation deter us from focusing on our calling.

Our Theology, Communion and Mission office continued to be the leading agent in theological reflections relevant to our times. This office emphasized including young people and developing their leadership capabilities. The office also engaged in a very important consultation that brought leaders from churches on the frontlines of serious conflicts in the world together to reflect on mission in these contexts.

Our Justice and Partnership office continues to lead in a serious push towards unmasking human trafficking and saying “No” to sexual

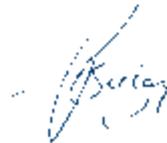
violence. This office also set the parameters for commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Accra Confession in 2014.

Our Partnership Fund continues to respond to churches in a manner that strengthens their projects for development and for mission.

We inaugurated a new look for our website in 2013 and continue to seek new ways of communicating effectively what we are called to do and what our member churches are doing.

We thank God for all who contributed to the work of the WCRC and ask that you continue to do so. In addition to contributing to the ongoing operations and programmes of the WCRC, 2013 reminds us of the opportunity to contribute to the endowment fund that is aimed at the long-term sustainability of the WCRC.

We are grateful to all who journey with us as the WCRC continues to make a difference in the lives of its member churches and in the lives of many who suffer in the world today.



Jerry Pillay, President



Setri Nyomi, General Secretary



A NEW HOME



The WCRC's move from Geneva to Hannover was marked by two services: one of thanks and farewell in Switzerland in December 2013 and one of welcome and dedication in Germany in January 2014.

In his message in Geneva, Jerry Pillay, WCRC president, described the time there as a significant chapter in the WCRC's life and the move to Germany as a new chapter. *"The chapters may be written in different places, but it is the same book and the same story."*

He continued the theme at the service in Hannover: *"I know in my spirit that as we see this as God's new location for us now as we*

continue the work of the WCRC, it is only a matter of time that we will be able to say, 'This is our home.' This is the new WCRC home from which we will continue to write the new chapters in the life, work and witness of the WCRC."

The WCRC's offices are now located at the Calvin Centre, owned by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany, where the Reformed Alliance has its offices. The WCRC expects to save 200,000 Swiss francs per year in its new location based on more favourable exchange rates and a lower cost of living.

VISION AND COMMITMENTS

Called to communion, committed to justice

We are the World Communion of Reformed Churches 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.

What we do

The WCRC coordinates joint church initiatives for communion, church unity, renewal, contemporary mission and economic, ecological and gender justice based on the member churches' common theology and beliefs. Our objectives are to foster unity among our member churches and promote economic, social and environmental justice.

Why

United in Christ and drawing from the historic Reformed creeds and confessions, the WCRC and its member churches believe that Christian faith is responding to God's calling to meet spiritual needs, foster justice for all and cultivate the responsible use of the earth's God-given resources.

How

The WCRC is committed to collaborating with other church movements on issues of common concern such as climate change, gender justice and theological dialogue. The WCRC is supported principally by membership contributions of financial and human resources. It also seeks funding for specific projects.





JUSTICE

New panel starts work on reform of financial system

A newly established ecumenical panel of economic experts began work in August on proposals to promote ethical, just and sustainable systems of economics and finance.

The Ecumenical Panel on a New Financial and Economic Architecture was created by the WCRC, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The panel is intended to take forward the work of the Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics and professor at Columbia University in New York.

“Suffering as a result of the economic injustice inherent in the current architecture is increasing,” WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi told the meeting. *“Both faith-based analysis and analysis in secular institutions point to the fact that the way the global economy is arranged is largely responsible for this injustice.”*

He urged the panel to *“develop meaningful prophetic conversations with the economic powers of our days aimed at life-giving transformation”* and tools and campaigns that churches in every context can use to challenge their own economic systems that are part of the injustice of the current economic architecture.





Churches support justice movements in economy and ecology

Church representatives at an Oikotree Global Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa, in March stressed the need to support people's movements promoting justice in the economy and ecology, a concern, they say, that lies at the heart of the faith.

The forum was organized by the WCRC, WCC and CWM and was attended by more than fifty representatives of churches, ecumenical organizations and people's movements.



The Oikotree movement was initiated by the three organizations as an ecumenical space where people can seek solidarity in faith while living in the midst of threats based on oppression, economic injustice and ecological destruction.

The Oikotree Global Forum identified land as an overarching theme for theological reflections, education, awareness building, networking, research and advocacy for the next two years.

"Oikotree is an important forum for the WCRC's Justice Program," says Dora Arce-Valentín, the WCRC's executive secretary for Justice and Partnership. *"It is a space for networking, a gathering of ecumenical institutions and people within them, committed to*

justice and theologically convinced that justice is the heart of the Christian faith."

"The formation of the Oikotree movement is a good way of bringing together ecumenical voices addressing injustice today," says Rogate Mshana, the former WCC programme executive for Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. *"The forum in Johannesburg affirms Oikotree as a 'movement of movements.' This affirmation is an inspiration for those who are addressing exploitation of the people and earth by global capitalism."*



COMMUNION

Pastors' gathering explores Reformed tradition, WCRC's role

Eleven pastors from six denominations gathered in Geneva in August to explore the future of the Reformed movement and the role of the WCRC in that movement. The gathering, sponsored by the WCRC and the Presbyterian Foundation, placed particular emphasis on ways the WCRC can connect with and serve congregations.

"I was glad for the conversations with pastors from various places with shared faith, diverse opinions and common desires to see the Reformed faith and its churches flourish and be strong witnesses for Christ," said Jerry Andrews, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in San Diego, California.

The WCRC, in its strategic plan, has placed particular emphasis on relating to local congregations. The group identified several areas of need among congregations and ways the WCRC could help address them:

- To capture and share stories of the Reformed tradition in its work today



- To focus more on relationships and less on institutions
- To continue to engage various groups to develop networks built around shared expertise and/or ministry passions
- To strengthen the Reformed identity by developing a significant voice in the culture to proclaim and celebrate core Reformed beliefs

"The WCRC is a body that is able to do an enormous amount of work that we as congregations on the ground cannot do," said Martin (Chunky) Young, pastor of St. Columba's Presbyterian Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. *"They have enabled me to engage my prayers with people's faces and to know that because of the work they do, justice and reconciliation have a real chance."*

"The conversations at this gathering were substantial and important for the future of the Reformed Tradition," said Tom Taylor, president and CEO of the Presbyterian Foundation. *"Bringing together these pastors and World Communion leaders could begin to shape what our tradition will look like in the future."*

THEOLOGY

Leaders encouraged to bring theology into daily life

“We must make theology accessible to our parish members. It should not stay on paper. We need ‘kitchen theology for the grassroots,’” says Liz Vibila Vuadi, a faculty member of the Theological College of Lanka in Sri Lanka.

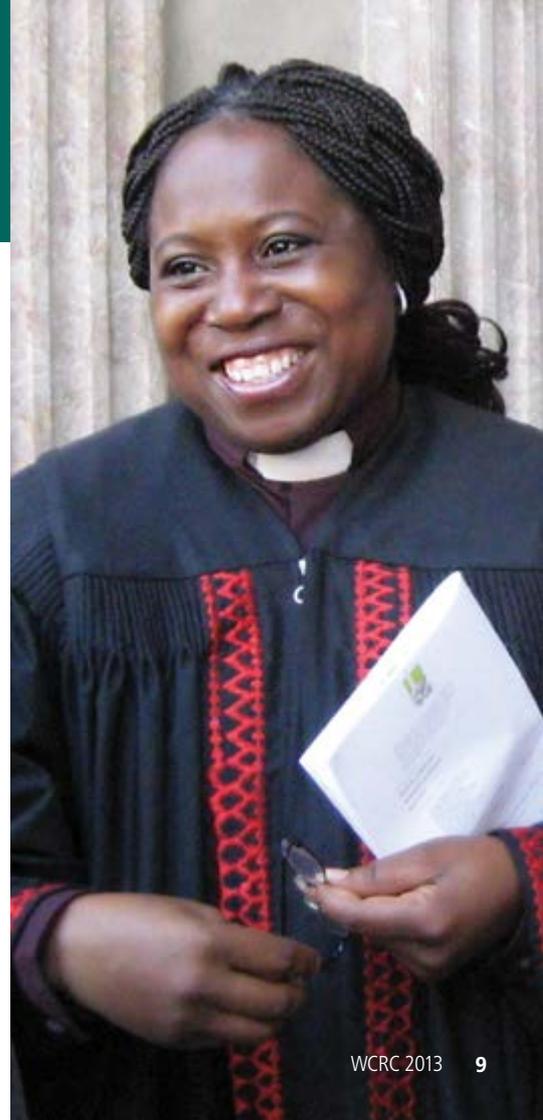
For the Congolese theologian who has witnessed the brutality of war in her home country and the legacy of violence in Sri Lanka, it is important to translate theological concepts to local congregations in their context. Vuadi was in Switzerland in March to attend meetings of the Global Network of Theologians of the WCRC.

Also attending was Rathnakara Sadananda of Mangalore, India, who shares Vuadi’s belief that theology can and must be rooted in daily life and conversation. In the opening meditation for the consultation, Sadananda encouraged participants to engage in “small talk” among themselves outside of the formal sessions where papers were to be presented.

“Small talk contributes a great deal to help us exchange views, learn or gain new theological insights, ideas and methods and also to share how we live as Christians in our own contexts with others,” Sadananda explains.

“I will have the discussions from this week fresh in my mind. It will be important to bring them down to earth,” Vuadi says. *“Theology must not stay on paper. It has to be a living theology for congregations in Congo (DRC) and Sri Lanka. My question is how I can be a bridge to bring the ideas from the consultation to my local Presbyterian church.”*

Sadananda, a professor of New Testament at Karnataka Theological College, notes that through informal exchange there was *“time to learn how Reformed churches continue their mission and ministry in very pressing and difficult situations such as in Lebanon, Syria, South Africa, Cuba, Sri Lanka and elsewhere.”*





MISSION

Churches help relief effort in midst of Syria violence

Amid continuing conflict in Syria, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) is providing relief and support to families affected by the crisis and to people who have been internally displaced.



“As the violence rages day by day and loss of life is but a continuous story, and destruction includes personal and common properties, the need for relief is greater,” the synod’s general secretary, Fadi Dagher, said in a letter to partners in October.

Presbyterian churches in Aleppo and Homs have been attacked and damaged. *“Although our Presbyterian church building was bombed, our Presbyterian church human body is still insisting on existence to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of the crisis,”* said Ibrahim Nsier, pastor of Aleppo Arabic-speaking Evangelical Church.

The synod has helped hundreds of displaced and affected families in Homs, Ghassanieh and Aleppo through monthly cash support.

A new synod relief programme was launched in August, led by Salam Hanna, director of relief and rehabilitation at the NESSL. It has provided impartial assistance to more than 2250 families from different backgrounds. In a report from October, Hanna said that people need help with rent, medication, winter fuel and clothes, as well as psychological care and spiritual support, which is being offered by many pastors and churches.

The programme is being implemented by 12 local Presbyterian churches. The WCRC’s Partnership Fund has provided financial assistance.



WCRC churches are on the frontlines of communal strife

Syria is one of the more obvious places where WCRC member churches find themselves embroiled in communal conflicts with religious dimensions. In November, the WCRC Office of Theology, Mission and Communion brought together representatives of many of these churches for a consultation in the quiet setting of Christian Jensen College, Breklum, in the heart of North Friesland (Germany).

The meeting heard reports from churches on the ground in Kenya and Nigeria; Egypt, Syria and Lebanon; Myanmar (Burma), India, Indonesia and Malaysia. In many contexts, religious rights and freedoms are violated. Interreligious relationships are frequently poisoned by suspicion and mistrust, complicated by economic and social problems, or undermined by differences in belief or ideology. Religious sentiments are often exploited for political domination or to control natural resources.

It also heard stories of how, despite all these difficulties, churches stand in mutual solidarity with communities of other faiths. Even in the midst of conflict, they pursue the mission of reconciliation and peace.

“Breklum 1 was the start of a journey,” says Douwe Visser, executive secretary for theology, mission and communion. *“It brought together only people from our own churches.”*

“Breklum 2 (24-29 November 2014) will allow us to meet also with representatives of other faiths, to explore how we can work for peace and reconciliation together,” he says. *“Hearing from our churches on the frontlines and working out ways to help one another can enhance the value of our communion – making it visible and bringing it to life.”*





PARTNERSHIP FUND

Another place is possible

Simon was 17 but seemed small for his age. He had a strange, quick way of moving, like Maradona dribbling the ball. His eyes were the eyes of an old man, only rarely lit by a glint of hope.

From his father he learned armed robbery. When his dad went to jail, he gave him his gun – “*a spotless 38, a really good piece.*” From his mother he learned to get through the day with marijuana, glue and paco. Made from the waste of cocaine production, cut with poisons and powdered glass, and lethally cheap, paco is the drug of choice for Argentina’s urban poor.

When his mother fell ill, his grandparents and uncles blamed Simon and barred him from her hospital bed. It was a struggle to see her before she died. Simon is one of many in the slums of San Fernando y Tigre, in greater Buenos Aires, served by the Evangelical Church of the River Plate, a WCRC member church since 1991.

At the turn of the century, the church set up an ecumenical social action programme in San Fernando, one of five projects in a plan to share the gospel with the poor. The programme, led by pastor Sabino Ayala, is based in a day centre, *Otro Lugar es Posible* (“another place is possible”) and focuses on the most vulnerable:



children, women and youth. The WCRC Partnership Fund has supported its work with a grant of US \$33,000.

The programme includes learning support, help to stay in school and for youngsters on probation; pastoral care for families; macramé, pottery and theatre workshops; summer camps; a guitar group and a youth orchestra; a regular clothes sale – and a mental health programme. It happened in this way: Sabino Ayala visited a particularly complicated family. “*Pastor,*” they joked, “*we are all mad. You need to bring a psychologist.*”

So he brought a team of psychoanalysts, who abandoned the couch for consultations in his car and later in the centre. Their aim was to show that living badly and dying badly is not fate, that even in the

shantytowns people can find another “place,” can work, study, start a family.

Not long after his mother died, Simon dropped into the day centre. How were things going at home? Sabino asked him. Did he and his sisters have enough food? He replied that he was “gleaning,” doing gardening or any odd job in the vegetable market. *“I do not want to waste my life.”*

Suddenly, Simon asked, *“You know what I did last week? I sold the 38. It cost me a lot to sell it. It was a great piece, and it was my dad’s.”*

That was three years ago. Last Sabino heard, Simon had been in and out of rehab, found himself a girlfriend and is working.

Not many stories in the slums end happily – perhaps not even Simon’s. But Sabino and the team in the day centre work hard, showing in word and deed that another place is possible, another world is possible.

This was but one of many projects supported by the Partnership Fund in the past few years. The Partnership Fund makes grants to help WCRC member churches carry out projects in mission or service that they otherwise could not afford. Enquiries from churches that have not applied before are especially welcome. *For information about how to apply, email partnership@wcrceu.*





MEMBER RELATIONS



Church unity is key to effective mission in the Philippines

“Together, we can proclaim God’s praise to the islands of the Philippines.” This was the message of Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the WCRC, when he spoke at both the General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines and to its biennial leadership training event (called Banyuhay) in April.

Nyomi noted that doing everything possible to foster the unity of the church is an essential part of effective mission work. Quoting from John 17, Nyomi indicated that: *“In the highly priestly prayer, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed that his followers may be one so that the world may believe.”*

He praised the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines for its commitment to mission and evangelism and for covenanting to have 150 new congregations in the next 12 years. The General Secretary encouraged the church to make a difference in fostering justice in the world.

Nyomi took his message of the importance of Christian unity and effective action against injustice to the WCRC’s other two member churches in the Philippines, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and the UNIDA Ecumenical Church.

WCRC will remain linked to Swiss churches

Setri Nyomi has paid tribute to the Protestant churches in Switzerland for their continuing support of the WCRC.

“You have given us leadership; your theologians have contributed and continue to contribute,” Nyomi told the conference of the presidents of the Swiss Protestant churches in Berne in October.

The Reformed church movement was located from 1948 to 2013 in Geneva, known for its role in the Protestant Reformation led by John Calvin. Nyomi underlined the role of the Swiss churches as the custodians of Reformed heritage, with the Reformed family tracing its theological and historical heritage through the Reformation led by Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Dentièrre and others.

“Therefore, wherever we are located and in all our 229 member churches worldwide in 108 countries, we will always trace our heritage to you. For this we are linked in a way that nothing can change,” Nyomi emphasized.

The president of the Council of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, Gottfried Locher, stated his appreciation for the work done by the WCRC for the Reformed family worldwide. Other presidents of the Swiss cantonal churches reaffirmed their commitment to the work of the WCRC.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Engagements remain strong in changing landscape

The WCRC's ecumenical relationships continue to be an important part of the organization's work. The WCRC officers, including the president and general secretary, participated in the World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea.

In a presentation at the Assembly, Setri Nyomi, WCRC general secretary, said that changes in global Christianity mean that confessional and ecumenical bodies need to find new ways of cooperating between themselves and to advance justice in the world.

"We need new forms of cooperation between Christian world communions and the WCC," Nyomi told one of the Assembly's "ecumenical conversations." The insights of bilateral dialogues between confessional bodies need to be brought into emerging



multilateral relationships, he said. At the same time, the justice agenda needs to be advanced, Nyomi underlined in his presentation to the ecumenical conversation on the theme "Called to be One: New Ecumenical Landscapes."

"The call is to be prophetic in our time, but there is not enough cooperation," said Nyomi, pointing to issues such as gender justice, sexual violence, migration and human trafficking.

As one example of cooperation, Nyomi described the work of the WCRC, WCC, Council for World Mission and Lutheran World Federation in developing proposals for a new global financial architecture.

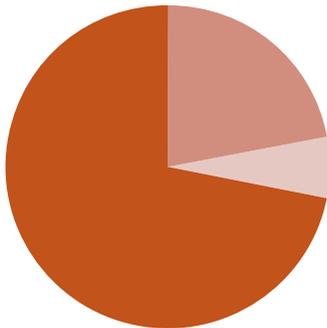
The group heard that factors in the emergence of new ecumenical realities include the growth of Pentecostal, charismatic, neocharismatic and non-denominational churches and the impact of globalization on different societies.





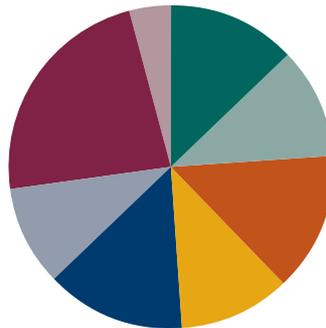
FINANCES

2013 Income



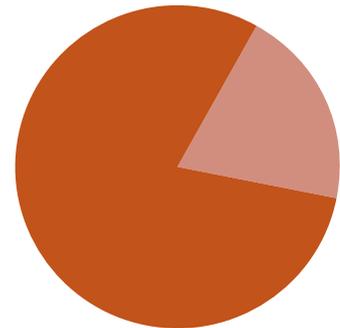
- Membership Fees 72%
- Donations 22%
- Other Income 6%

2013 Programme Expenses



- Global Institute of Theology (GIT) 13%
- Theological Dialogues 11%
- Covenanting for Justice 14%
- New Economic and Financial Architecture 11%
- WCRC Regional Support 14%
- General Secretary Programmes 10%
- Global Internship Programme 23%
- Other Programmes 4%

2013 Partnership Fund Disbursements



- Development 80%
- Mission 20%

WCRC GOVERNANCE

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South Africa



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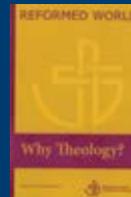
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The World Communion of Reformed Churches represents 80 million Christians in Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches throughout the world. Its 229 member churches are active in initiatives supporting mission, church unity and justice in 108 countries.



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