

Called to communion,
committed to justice



World Communion
of Reformed Churches
ANNUAL REPORT 2015





ANNUAL REPORT CONTENTS

About WCRC	2
Introduction	3
Vision and Commitments	4
Communion	5
Justice	6
Theology	7
Leadership Development	8
Mission/Partnership Fund	9
Ecumenical Engagement	10
Member Relations	11
Finances	12
Governance	13
Staff	14
Resources	15



About the World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is comprised of 80 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches. The WCRC, working with its 225+ member churches, is active in supporting theology, justice, church unity and mission in over 105 countries.

United in Christ and rooted in the historic Reformed traditions, the WCRC with its member churches believe that God calls Christians to be part of the transformation of the world through the love of Jesus Christ by meeting spiritual needs and fostering justice for all.

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

INTRODUCTION

A Gethsemane Calling

[Jesus] said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”
(Mark 14:36, NRSV)

There is no doubt that God wants our world restored. Despite being riven by sins made manifest in countless injustices—seemingly endless wars, the unprecedented suffering of refugees, systematic racism, mass incarceration, exploitation of women, to name but a few examples—God through Jesus Christ looks toward a better future.

God’s promise begins its hard work at Gethsemane, as Jesus prayed the night before he was crucified. Gethsemane is a place of surrender—to the will of God. This does not just mean that we must simply leave it to God. It means that we must become the instruments and agents of God, seeking justice, reconciliation and peace in the world.

We in the World Communion of Reformed Churches are privileged to work with our sisters and brothers around the world to do just that, building our communion even as we work for justice.

You’ll see examples of these activities in this Annual Report, including campaigning against human trafficking, supporting leadership development, formally dialoguing with other Christian faith traditions, constructing bridges across continents, and

supporting our member churches through the Reformed Partnership Fund, solidarity visits and prayer.

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, we would also like to remind you of the opportunity to contribute to the endowment fund that is aimed at the long-term sustainability of the WCRC.

Gethsemane is a place of security. Gethsemane tells us that we can trust God. In spite of his anxiety and fear, Jesus was willing to confront the cross because he knew that a crown of victory awaited him.

We, too, should be confident enough to launch out in faith and hope and are grateful to all who journey with us as we continue to make a difference as a Communion in the lives of our members and in the lives of many who suffer in the world today.



Jerry Pillay, *President*



Chris Ferguson, *General Secretary*



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 funded by contributions from its member churches and church agencies. Gifts and grants also come from individuals, congregations, foundations and other sources. Supporters of the WCRC help make a difference in the world by donating to specific funds and scholarships, as well as to the organization as a whole.



COMMUNION



Bi-regional consultation provides support

A series of consultations on the Accra Confession is bringing together WCRC members from different regions. The first of these bi-regional meetings took place in Ghana in November with participants coming from a dozen countries in Africa and Asia.

The general objective of the consultation was to reflect through the lenses of gender perspective and different contexts on the challenges churches face regarding violence, injustice and the degradation of both human beings and nature.

“Gender justice is a significant subject to deal with by the church and the WCRC as it would bring inclusion of women who can bring on board rich ideas at all levels of decision making in the church, community and the world,” said Salome Twum, a member of the WCRC executive committee.

“This subject matter is important to me because it is addressing a nagging problem and an entrenched position that has affected humanity for a very long time,” said Lydia Adajawah, president of the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches.

“To my church, it helps us to break the silence and start the discussion towards finding solutions to the gender biases in our

system,” said Gifty N.Y. Ahadzi of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

Bringing two regional groups together also added to the discernment process by offering additional perspectives, contextual challenges and experiences.

“It is important to bring members from different regions because the more the members meet together to consult with each other the more we would realise that we have more commonalities than differences and hence this helps us to combat the root of injustice,” said Rosemary Nachilembe of the United Church of Zambia. “Meeting together provides a place where members can, through different stories, encourage one another that hope is not lost.”





JUSTICE



Group finds exploitation rife on US-Mexico border

Personal stories of migrants and those working to minister to them on the Mexico-Texas border gave members of the WCRC's Working Group on Human Trafficking a vivid understanding of the issues faced on all sides.

Moved by the shared experiences, Yueh-Wen Lu, WCRC vice president, commented, "Looking at how churches are responding to the issue of human trafficking enabled the working group to frame perspectives which enables our theological reflection on the issues of human trafficking."

During its week together the working group met with organizations in both Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas engaged in immigration, border ministry and ending trafficking, gender violence and femicide.

"The exposures reaffirm the analysis of the Accra Confession and the continuation of economic systems exploiting human beings," says Yueh-Wen.

At the University Presbyterian Church of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the group heard a moving testimony from a survivor of human trafficking. She explained her journey from Central America to the United States, dealing with smugglers, border patrols, detention centers and individuals who helped her find safety.

She closed by saying, "If we don't speak out, there will be no justice." By telling her own story she hopes that others will join her with their own voices to explain that violence continues to be perpetrated.

Earlier in the year, the Working Group released the "Broken for You" anti-human trafficking resource campaign for Lent. They analyzed its use among WCRC member churches and also reflected on the information they received from their experiences in Juarez and El Paso. They recognized that contributing factors to human trafficking included gender-based violence and racism within the frame of economic injustice and patriarchy.

Dora Arce Valentin, WCRC executive secretary of justice and partnership, said, "Human trafficking is a crystallization of the systemic violence that is embedded in and perpetuated by economic and patriarchal structures."



THEOLOGY

Deepening communion is goal of Anglican-Reformed dialogue

“Communion” is the theme of the first dialogue in more than 30 years between the Anglican and Reformed communions.

It is hoped that this dialogue will result in a “better understanding of each other during a time of rapid change, a better understanding of ourselves and how we may resolve disagreement better and an improved ability to concentrate on what matters most—namely, articulating the gospel of Jesus Christ today,” said Iain Torrance, president emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary and former moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The theme of the first meeting was “The Nature of Communion” and drew on the New Testament word *koinonia*, as it currently describes the nature of the interrelationships between churches. The perspectives on communion from the recent World Council of Churches document *The Church: Towards A Common Vision* played an important role in the conversation, as did presentations from a number of the participants.

The meeting, which took place in October in Kochi, Kerala, India, was hosted by the WCRC and facilitated by the Church of South India (CSI). The CSI, a member of the WCRC, is a union of churches from the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational,



Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. Two local scholars from the CSI joined in the discussions.

Their participation along with the location of the meeting made a positive impact, so much so that it was decided to invite representatives from local churches to future rounds.

“The highlight of the week was being based in India,” said Elizabeth Welch, minister of the Clapton Park United Reformed Church at the Round Chapel in Hackney, London. “This gave us an opportunity to hear from people from the Church of South India, a church in which Reformed and Anglican already participate together as one people. It also gave us an opportunity to listen to some of the challenges that Christians in India face, as well as sharing the delightful hospitality offered by our Indian hosts.”



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



Mentoring future leaders

They've come from Indonesia and South Africa, South Korea and Taiwan, the United States and elsewhere. These young adults with a commitment to ecumenism seek connections, experiences and opportunities.

"I am deeply passionate about the ecumenical movement and how to continue on this pilgrimage," says Joanna Hipp, a former intern from the United States.

During an intern's year with the WCRC, they participate fully in the life of the organization. They work with staff on a purposefully wide variety of projects. They attend consultations and meetings with participants from around the world. They dive deeply into the central issues that drive the WCRC's mission: Reformed theology and social justice.

And they come away with a richer understanding of the greater church, its role in the world today—and friendships that span the globe.

During Joanna's year with the WCRC she developed "a greater sense of how to live into my ecumenical calling and aid others in joining the ecumenical movement."

Other previous interns gained different understandings while with the WCRC.

Aiko Sumichan, from Indonesia, says that her internship experiences "pushed me past my personal limit, enlightened me of new talents and gave me the opportunity to meet wonderful groups of people I can now call my friends."

Fundiswa Kobo looks forward to using "the knowledge and these experiences as a tool to empower as I continue to find new ways to minister back in South Africa."

"I hope to learn to open the dialogue between churches, denominations and countries, to get to know the broader and deeper insights of ecumenism," says Lin Wan-Jou from Taiwan, one of the two current interns.

Meanwhile, Chung Doyoung of South Korea is focused on networking with fellow Christians: "The ecumenical movement begins with the human relationship. So I'd like to make many new and different kinds of connections to people around the world."

The WCRC's internship programme is funded primarily by a grant from the Evangelische Missionswerk (EMW) with additional funds contributed by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and individual donations.

MISSION/PARTNERSHIP FUND

Rescuing Syrian children

During the five years of the Syrian conflict more than a quarter million Syrians have been killed and 11 million have been forced from their homes, according to the BBC, with more than a million seeking refugee in Lebanon.

WCRC member churches in Lebanon and Syria have been at the heart of providing relief aid to the refugees. Last summer the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) identified another need: providing a “normal” life to refugee children.

The NESSL decided they would do this by setting up schools for refugee children in the Beqaa Valley, serving several refugee camps based there.

Even with contributions for the schools coming from several WCRC members, the money needed to begin the school exceeded the amount the Reformed Partnership Fund was able to provide. So the WCRC reached out to its member churches in North America to see if any would be interested in assisting.

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) responded immediately, providing enough money to fully fund the project.

“Nearly every RCA pastor and church member I have talked with



said it is important to them to show solidarity with every refugee in need,” said Duncan Hanson, supervisor of RCA mission in Europe, the Middle East and India. “They consider it theologically and ethically essential that the circle of their solidarity includes all people.”

Despite a series of logistical challenges two schools were operating by the end of February with a third being planned, both connected to Christian churches but welcoming children of all religious backgrounds.

The children are all taught Arabic, arithmetic, sciences and ethics. They are provided with books, stationary and a meal each day, as well as transportation by bus between their temporary homes and school.

“All the children seem happy and joyful,” reported Mary Mikhael for the NESSL. “God is great and what God wills God makes happen.”

The Reformed Partnership Fund provides small grants and other resources to churches that carry out mission-related projects important to the life of a church and its surrounding community, particularly in the Global South.



ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT

Ecumenical forum commits churches to peace in Northeast Asia

Prior to the centenary celebrations of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), both WCRC member churches, the pair jointly sponsored an ecumenical forum on peace in Northeast Asia.

More than 120 representatives and leaders of WCRC member churches and ecumenical institutions from 20 different countries attended the forum in September in Seoul. Both Jerry Pillay, WCRC president, and Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, participated in the forum.

The PROK and PCK hosted the event to revitalize and strengthen the ecumenical commitment to justice, healing, reconciliation and a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. These topics were all addressed during the forum, with a final message from the forum stating, “Peoples in Northeast Asia are longing for peace with justice; Korean reunification is an essential step in this process.”

The message celebrated the work of the PROK and PCK for peace and reconciliation while noting that it is not always easy: “It is a sign of hope that the PCK and the PROK hold this joint ecumenical forum... Not only in Korea but among the global

Ecumenical Forum on Peace in Northeast Asia 동북아시아 평화를 위한 국제 에큐메니칼 포럼 11-13 September 2015, Seoul Korea



Christian community, we are mindful that a costly unity among the churches is a prerequisite to a costly discipleship.”

The message continued: “The division of the Korean peninsula and its human costs contradict God’s will for the fullness of life. It is a sin against God and humanity. The Church is called to transform itself and to engage in healing and reconciliation. However, without resolution of the Cold War hatred and enmities, including among Christians, the Church cannot contribute to peace with justice.”

It concluded with a call for the PCK, PROK and National Council of Churches in Korea to convene additional peace gatherings and encouraged “partner churches globally to prioritize their ecumenical agenda to include action and advocacy on Northeast Asia.”

MEMBER RELATIONS



Church in Transcarpathia serves in faith

The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia (RCT) has been facing challenging times for most of its existence. Today, it finds itself a double minority—a Protestant church in an Orthodox country and an ethnically Hungarian community in a Slavic nation.

While the Ukrainian portion of the Carpathian basin is wedged between Slovakia, Hungary and Romania in Ukraine's western tip, the impact of the still-simmering war in the country's distant east is also causing trouble. Fuel shortages, inflation and government neglect (outside of enforcing the military draft) are just three of the problems caused by the conflict.

It's a grim reality and was especially so on a snowy weekend last winter when a WCRC Europe delegation paid an official visit. But what the delegation saw in Beregszász (Berehove) and Dercen (Dertsen) was a church stepping in to fill the holes permeating the fabric of society.

"We met a living church," said Jan-Gerd Heetderks, president of WCRC Europe. "They have an eye for Biblical traditions and beliefs but also for the circumstances of the society."

"Though it is a vulnerable community facing immense difficulties and uncertainties, it has a vision and practice of a serving faith community," said Balázs Ódor, a vice president of WCRC Europe.

"What's most impressive is their faithfulness in the circumstances in which they live," said Susan Brown, from the Church of Scotland. "It puts things in a slightly different perspective for your own church life. We have the luxury of choosing what to do and what not to do. They don't have that. If they don't do, it won't get done."

What the church is doing is wide-ranging. It includes supplying food, running schools, coordinating distribution of donated goods, acquiring equipment for the regional hospital and, in one village, maintaining a volunteer fire department.

"You cannot do church life without helping the needy and vulnerable," said RCT Pastor Miklós Zsukovszky.

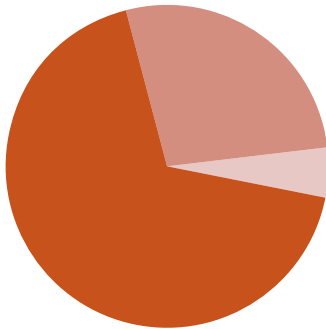
"We are really glad and blessed if we can give something to others," said RCT Bishop Sándor Zán Fábíán. "As confessing Christians we have to confess our faith each day to the people who live around us."





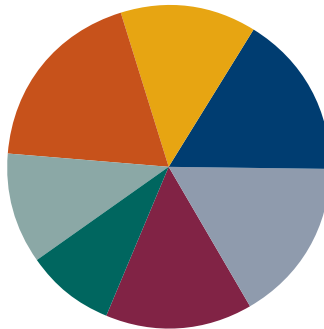
FINANCES

2015 Income



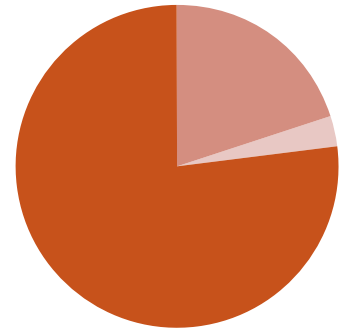
- Membership Fees68%
- Donations27%
- Other Income5%

2015 Programme Expenses



- Theological Dialogues10%
- Covenanting for Justice12%
- Economic Justice21%
- Gender Justice15%
- Leadership Development18%
- Missions8%
- WCRC Regional Support16%

2015 Reformed Partnership Fund Disbursements



- Development77%
- Emergency20%
- Mission3%

WCRC GOVERNANCE

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United Church of Jamaica
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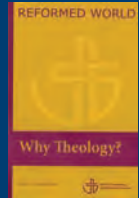
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