

Called to communion,
committed to justice



World Communion
of Reformed Churches



ANNUAL REPORT 2017

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About the World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is comprised of 100 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian and other pre-Reformation churches. The WCRC, working with its 230+ 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

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will is of God, what is acceptable and good and perfect.” (Romans 12:2, NRSV).

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

The inseparability of communion and justice was a guiding vision through the Council. The Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination moved us closer to living out our commitment to being just and inclusive. We reaffirmed the relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar and Accra confessions. Mission remains at the centre of our life as a Communion.

We emerged from the Council strengthened as a communion and reinvigorated in our ecumenical vocation and our call to transformative justice. There is no doubt that we are 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 the diversity of voices that make up our family.

The agenda before us is enormous and enormously challenging! We give thanks to the God of Life that we emerged not only renewed and encouraged in our vision but also gifted with extraordinary leadership, blessed with an Executive Committee that represents our diversity in age, gender, region and talent.

God has infused us with the hope necessary so that we might “be transformed by the renewing of our minds” so that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Thanks be to God.

Najla Kassab
President

Chris Ferguson
General Secretary





CHRISTIAN UNITY

WCRC acts to overcome Reformation divisions

“Today is a historic day,” said Jerry Pillay, then president of the WCRC, at a ceremony on 5 July in Wittenberg, Germany, where Martin Luther lived and worked. “The documents we are signing today are significant and symbolic of the road we are to travel.”

Pillay was speaking as the WCRC formally associated itself with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, originally signed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church on 31 October 1999.

The LWF and the WCRC also signed a “Wittenberg Witness,” pledging to work ever more closely together “with concrete actions, convinced that God’s Word leads us to deeper communion.”

“Today we are not only signing a statement, we are building a church together,” said Najla Kassab in her sermon at the service in the *Stadtkirche* (City Church), where Luther preached.

The ceremony took place in the year marking the 500th anniversary of Luther’s denunciation of church corruption in his 95 Theses, an event that helped set in motion the Reformation and centuries of division between Protestants and Catholics.

“The present achievement and commitment are viewed by Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians,” said Jong Chun Park, World Methodist Council president.

Pope Francis, in a message read by Bishop Brian Farrell, described the ceremony as “an eloquent sign of our commitment to walking together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, on a journey from conflict to communion, from division to reconciliation.”





GENDER JUSTICE

WCRC promotes equality for women

“A Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women” was adopted by the General Council after important group discussions were conducted through the Council’s discernment process.

“Hard conversations are still taking place about whether women should be allowed to take leadership positions in the church or not,” said Isabel Apawo Phiri. “There are still few women who are participating in leadership roles including the ordination of women.”

Church leaders, said Phiri, needed to use their authority to speak out against any form of injustice, starting from within the church itself.

“Christians must be an example. We must know that there is a way to be different from those who are governed by envy, rivalry and personal greed,” Elsa Tamez explained in a Bible study. “Discrimination and murder of women are tantamount to self-discrimination and suicide.”

“The proposals on the ordination of women and on the creation of a gender policy and its implementation have received very strong support from the delegates,” said Lisa Vander Wal, chair of the team tasked with summarizing discernment groups’ reports.

“The adoption of this declaration shows where we want to be on gender justice,” said Dora Arce Valentin. “It opens a deeper discussion within our churches, and it sets a frame for discussion around the role of women in ministry.”

The approval of this declaration constitutes an additional step in the establishment of equality between women and men within the WCRC. But “gender justice is not limited to the ordination of women,” stressed Chris Ferguson. The way is open for further work on gender equality with the WCRC committing to engage in a process to accompany its member churches.

COMMUNION

Communion strengthened through discernment

“Church decision-making should look like church, not politics,” said Gradye Parsons. “And the process should make community, not fracture it.”

To achieve those goals, the 2017 General Council adopted a discernment-consensus process for decision making. After receiving written and verbal input together, participants discussed proposals in small groups and sent comments to a “Drafting Team” for incorporation into a final proposal which returned to the plenary for further discussion.

“Discernment Groups include voices from around the world,” Lucy Wambui Waweru said. “And every voice is heard.”

“Discernment truly is more about listening than speaking,” said Parsons. “It is important to listen to what others are saying. It is important to listen to what God is saying.

And it’s important to consider your own thoughts with regard to the issue and in light of what you have heard.”

After discussing a final proposal in plenary, delegates were asked to show their feelings by holding up either an orange or blue card.

Annedore Held Venhaus appreciated the notion of the coloured cards. “I like how the cards express a feeling,” she said. “I feel warm to this idea, I feel cool to it. I found that very interesting.”

Waweru agreed. She also appreciated that giving consensus did not mean that a delegate was 100% supportive or opposed to a proposal.

“Consensus-building does not solve every issue,” she said. “But the important thing is that we all journey in the same direction. And that we journey together.”







LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Global Institute moulds future leaders

They came from many nations, gathering at the top of what has been called the “holy hill.” The Global Institute of Theology (GIT) began at the Theological College for Church and Diaconie in Wuppertal, Germany, before joining the General Council in Leipzig just over two weeks later.

Each GIT gathers 50 students for an intensive short-term academic programme designed to provide an opportunity to learn and do theology in an inter-contextual and ecumenical way, situating the theological task in local, regional and world contexts.

The two locations were important for this GIT. “Wuppertal and Leipzig both played major roles in the history of German churches,” said Martin Engels, a former GIT student and now president of the Reformed Alliance (Germany). “The GIT connects history today and looks for new perspectives for our churches tomorrow.”

“The fact that the GIT coincides with the Council is a significant experience for these younger theologians,

most of whom will serve their churches in various ministries, including ordained ministry, or be involved in the theological life of their churches when they return home,” said Aruna Gnanadason, GIT dean of students.

“Our time in Wuppertal was an absolutely amazing reality of the beauty of God’s diversity—from the thoughtful setting, to the imaginative worship experiences, courses, exposure visits, to the clear and loving model of leadership provided by our lecturers and coordinators,” said Sanya Beharry, a student from Trinidad and Tobago.

Shawn Harmon, a student in Louisville, felt that the wide-ranging issues about the idea of mission helped him comprehend the global witness of the church and the importance of partnership in mission. The nationalities, cultures and languages among participants were diverse, but one overwhelmingly clear fact was clear: “You won’t be the same theologian when you go back to your home country.”





IMPACTING THE WORLD

Council reaches into the community

Like many European cities, Christians are a distinct minority in Leipzig. A purposeful decision was thus made for the General Council to interact with the public, making a show of faith in the community through a variety of means.

Two worship services were held in the famous St. Nicholas Church. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier welcomed the Council at one, and delegates led the church's weekly Peace Prayers at the other.

"Aus Tiefer Not" ("From Deep Distress"), a specially commissioned psalm by Geonyong Lee and Cord Meijering, made its world premiere at St. Nicholas while an organ concert, with a programme revolving around five psalms from the Geneva Psalter, was held in the St. Thomas Church, where Johann Sebastian Bach served as cantor.

"Psalms express sentiment in an extraordinary way," said Hanns Lessing, General Council coordinator. "They

address both sorrow and hope in a way that seems especially appropriate for modern times."

A Reformation Exhibition, showing not only history but current activities of WCRC members, debuted in Leipzig's city hall, remaining for the summer before moving to Wittenberg.

A dozen artists from around the world gathered to create artworks inspired by the General Council's themes of transformation and Reformation. The artworks that resulted from the gathering took various forms, including painting, performance, video and installation.

Council participants and the public gathered in a central square in Leipzig to view and interact with the art.

"We are called to come together. We are called to bear and share fruit," said artist Joel Schoon Tanis. "We try to do good in the world even though we don't always see what comes of our actions."

PEACE INITIATIVES

Working as a communion for peace

The WCRC partners with its member churches to advocate for peace, justice and reconciliation in some of the most challenging areas of the world. This commitment to be peacemakers was strongly reaffirmed by the General Council.

Hong Jung Lee (Presbyterian Church in [South] Korea) said that the Korean peninsula's "division is the starting point for a transformation towards reconciliation. We must keep our dream: someday, the Koreans will be reunited. One day, the children of the North and the South will grow together in a world without nuclear weapons." The WCRC is engaged in a broad ecumenical effort to heal, reconcile and reunify Koreans through peaceful means.

The peace agreement in Colombia "is so important as it brings to an end a conflict that has drowned Colombia in a spiral of violence, poverty and death," said Helis Barraza Diaz (Presbyterian Church of Colombia). The WCRC continues to support churches' local development

and education programmes to build peace, with an emphasis on human rights, inclusivity, sustainability and care for creation.

"We need the church to be empowered," a Presbyterian Church of South Sudan pastor said. "Church leaders, women and youth, need to be empowered to advocate for the peace initiatives in South Sudan. The church has already started it, they have done a lot for peace, especially at the grassroots." The WCRC is working with its members and other partners to empower this important work.

The Council, stating that "the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake," urged its members to examine their mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine. "It is time for Israelis and Palestinians to live alongside each other in peace, security and justice," the adopted resolution stated. "Many of us have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears the painful realities of life for Palestinians."



XXXV SESSION OF
The Church of
South India





COMMUNION

Supporting sisters and brothers

The WCRC both responds and proactively seeks ways in which to support its member churches in times of need. This important aspect of communion-building can be as simple as issuing a call to prayer for a specific incident, but it can also be as complex as accompanying a member church as it works to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to a war-ravaged area over many years.

The WCRC also supports member churches particularly in the Global South through its Reformed Partnership Fund, which 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.

The General Council called the Communion to focus on specific issues of need in the coming years, including the following:

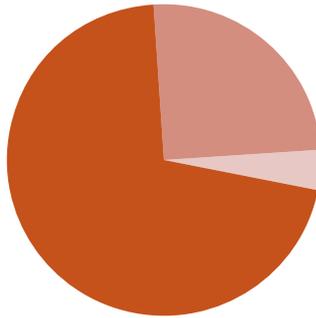
- » promote networking among regions and local churches to share best practices regarding migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- » offer support to the victims of the on-going activities of insurgents in Nigeria, particularly as it affects women and children in internally displaced peoples' camps, and in the rebuilding of devastated communities.
- » develop 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.
- » seek ways to accompany the churches in Central America in their efforts to counter violence and promote a culture of peace.
- » 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.





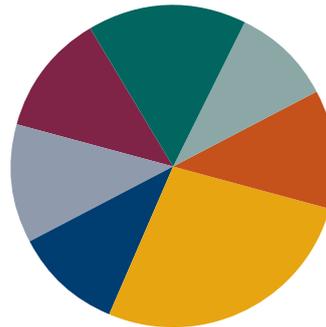
FINANCES

2016 Income



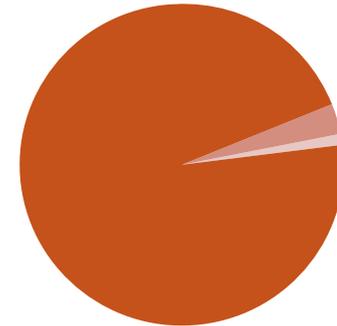
Membership Contributions ...	68%
Donations	27%
Others.....	5%

2016 Programme Expenses



Theological Dialogues.....	16%
Mission	10%
Gender Justice.....	12%
Economic Justice.....	27%
Regional Support	11%
Internship Programme	12%
Global Peace Initiatives.....	12%

2016 Reformed Partnership Fund Disbursements



Development	96%
Emergency.....	3%
Mission.....	1%





EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers

Najla Kassab, a minister in the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, was elected WCRC president by this summer's General Council.

"With her experience and many gifts, Najla's vision, insight, spiritual strength and grace make her the right person to lead us forward as president," said Alison McDonald, the convener of the Nominating Committee.

The four vice-presidents are **Samuel Ayete-Nyampong** (Presbyterian Church of Ghana), **Lisa Vander Wal** (Reformed Church in America), **Sylvana Maria Apituley** (Protestant Church in West Indonesia) and **Raissa Vieira Brasil** (United Presbyterian Church of Brazil).

Johann Weusmann (Reformed Alliance (Germany)) was re-elected to a second term as general treasurer.

Of the 22 members of the new Executive Committee, 10 are men and 12 women; 15 are ordained and 7 are lay people. Five of the members of the Executive Committee are young adults under 30 years of age, including one of the vice-presidents.

Newly Elected Members of the Executive Committee:

Clayton Da Silva
Independent
Presbyterian Church
of Brazil

Diana Erdélyi
Reformed Church
in Hungary

Hilary Hagar
Presbyterian Church
in Canada

Hefin Jones
Union of Welsh
Independants

**Annabell Lalla-
Ramkelawan**
Presbyterian
Church of Trinidad
and Tobago

Hong Jung Lee
Presbyterian
Church of Korea

**Coutinho
Maravilhoso Moma**
Evangelical
Congregational
Church in Angola

Veronica Muchiri
Presbyterian Church
of East Africa

J. Herbert Nelson
Presbyterian
Church (USA)

Tibonge Ng'ambi
United Church
of Zambia

Hannah North
Presbyterian
Church Aotearoa
New Zealand

Claudio Pasquet
Waldensian Evangelical
Church

Khid-arn Prawate
Church of Christ
in Thailand

Milciades Pua
Presbyterian
Church of Colombia

Mary Ekinde Salle
Presbyterian Church
in Cameroon

Susan Thomas
Church of South India

Regional Leaders on the Executive Committee:

Lydia Aku Adajawah
African Communion of
Reformed Churches

Aginaldo P. Gomes
Alliance of
Presbyterian and
Reformed Churches
in Latin America

Jan-Gerd Heetderks
WCRC Europe

Eric So
North East Asia
Area Council



Staff dressed in black for the #ThursdaysInBlack anti-violence-against-women campaign



STAFF

Chris Ferguson
General Secretary
United Church of Canada

Douwe Visser*
Executive Secretary for Theology, Mission, and Communion
Protestant Church in the Netherlands

Dora Arce-Valentín*
Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership
Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba

Philip Tanis
Executive Secretary for Communications
Reformed Church in America

Hanns Lessing
General Council Coordinator
Evangelical Church of Westphalia

Aruna Gnanadason*
Consultant for Theology
Church of South India

Mun-Kee Kim*
Coordinator for Peace and Development
Presbyterian Church of Korea

Gerhard Plenter
Finance Coordinator

Werner Joecker
Assistant for the Reformed Partnership Fund

Anna Krüger
Assistant for Finance and Communication

Katrina Mertz
Assistant to the General Secretary

Amritha Perumalla
Assistant for Justice and Theology

Paul Oppenheim*
Volunteer Assistant

**Completing service in 2017*

RESOURCES



WCRC website: wrcr.ch

Visit our website for worship resources, prayer requests, reports, publications, news releases and messages from churches. While visiting the site, you can make an online donation!



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facebook.com/worldcommunion



Twitter

[@reformedcomunio](https://twitter.com/reformedcomunio)

The staff of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is based at the Calvin Centre in Hannover, Germany.

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Reformed Communiqué

A thrice-yearly newsletter in multiple languages. Available free of charge. Ask for it at the WCRC website.

Reformed World

Published three times per year in English. Available by paid subscription through the website.

Monthly e-news summary

Sign up at the WCRC website.



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