

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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Already nearing the halfway point of my initial term, I believe I've settled into the position and have also taken on additional responsibilities that compliment both communication needs and my organizational abilities. I am pleased to be able to present the following report with an overview of the work accomplished in the last year and looking forward to the 2017 General Council.

Virtual Communications

The website is now operating in seven of the eight languages that we've been working toward for the last few years. Arabic is the final language that will be brought online, and it is in the final phase of implementation (with delays coming mostly due to an international move by the individual assisting on this project). Articles in each of the seven active languages are being translated on a regular basis.

One new feature of the website in the past year has been the relaunch of the blog. This area features a weekly compilation of news (with links) from member churches (every Thursday), as well as other periodic posts. These other posts have included the series "Reformed Tastes" (short insights into what members of the Communion are doing), essays and opinion pieces from the general secretary and others and brief news pieces from non-WCRC sources. Submissions for blog posts, especially "Reformed Tastes," are very welcome.

Two areas of the website will receive substantial work in the coming year: 1) general council and 2) resources. The general council area (wrc.ch/gc2017) will feature all of the material on the council, as well as be its online registration portal. The resources area will see significant new materials added to it, both free and for purchase and both virtual and printed. The resource area will contribute to achieving the WCRC's strategic goal of the WCRC being "the place to go for theological and practical resources."

Social media continues to be a valuable means to advance the goals of the WCRC and engage people in its work. During the workweek there are daily posts to Facebook and tweets on Twitter (with posts on weekends if necessary). Posts/tweets include calls to prayer and action, links to articles on the WCRC website, sharing of resources, visitors to the WCRC offices, activities of WCRC staff, news from member churches and more. The main WCRC Facebook page now has 3252 page "likes" (up 27% from last year). Weekly reach for the WCRC Facebook page averages close to 5000 with 200-300 "engaged." Increasing interactivity on Twitter with the WCC and other ecumenical partners sees around 3000 "impressions" made every week. It is anticipated that there will be continuing growth on social media in this year leading up to the general council, and it has been decided that the WCRC Facebook page and Twitter account (as well as the website) will be utilized for the council rather than creating separate accounts/pages/sites. This will strengthen Communion communications beyond the council itself.

The WCRC eNews continues to be sent out monthly, highlighting the stories, prayer requests and features posted on the website. It continues to exceed “industry” averages for “opens” and “click throughs.” The mass email system is also being used for correspondence to member churches by other WCRC offices.

The WCRC’s virtual communication platforms remain the key ways through which the organization makes itself known to its membership and to the world. Original news features and the items chosen to be included in the blog highlight the strategic plan’s five key directions, and all that’s communicated works to incarnate the organization’s values. The goal 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 transformation of the world” is especially key in selecting stories to develop and share.

Print Communications

Last year the *Reformed Communiqué* began publishing in multiple languages within a single issue but at the rate of three (rather than four) times per year. It is sent to all member churches as well as interested individuals at no charge and acts as a summary of news and features that have appeared on the WCRC website and Facebook page over the previous several months. Chris Ferguson also has a regular column (which is also posted online). The *Communiqué’s* primary strategic purpose is to ensure that all member churches receive the essential news of the past several months with the emphases as noted above, undergirding the five key directions, etc. At the same time, partners and donors receive the *Communiqué*. Thus, along with the annual report, the organization is regularly communicating with all these “target audiences” four times a year. With the upgrade and updates to the new database (see below), the *Communiqué’s* mailing list will be reviewed in the coming months. It is anticipated that its circulation will increase leading to the general council, after which another review will be undertaken, and the *Communiqué* will be increasingly used to publicize the council and the work leading to it.

Last year the executive committee agreed to the following (Action 42): “Appoint a small group to develop a strategic plan for the ongoing publication of *Reformed World*, taking into consideration matters such as theological editing, budget, investment of staff time, target readership and distribution, and details of publication, in order to best meet the goals of the WCRC with the resources that are available.”

An informal group met during the executive committee meeting, and those same people have served as a sounding board over this past year on a few items. As part of the implementation of this action the communications office was asked to assist in the production and distribution of *Reformed World*. A professional designer was hired to give the publication a design refresh and then lay out each issue. A thorough review and update of the mailing list was undertaken. Part of this process included a

letter to those receiving the publication who had not paid for their subscription or were not entitled to a complementary subscription, such as member churches. The letter asked for a response that could be a request for a complementary subscription, payment for a subscription or a “thanks but I no longer need to receive *Reformed World*.” The letter generated a good number of replies, many of which thanked the WCRC for sending them *Reformed World* over the past years. At the time of writing, replies continue to trickle in, and the mailing list has not yet been fully updated—though it is anticipated, given what's been received so far, that the number of issues printed and mailed will decrease. Final numbers will be available by May. This extensive updating of the mailing list (along with the upgrades to the WCRC's database (see below)) is in preparation to strategically target readers in the future.

Marketing

The introductory WCRC brochure was translated and produced in Korean in time for the anniversary celebrations of the PROK and PCK where both the general secretary and president had significant presences. This was another step in expanding the number of languages commonly used for communications by the WCRC.

After utilizing a variety of items as gifts from the general secretary at various events in 2015, a limited edition print of a specially commissioned painting, based on Romans 12:1-2, was produced. This print will be the designated gift leading to the General Council. It is anticipated that other Communion artists will be commissioned to produce these unique gifts in future years (and suggestions of artists are welcome).

Working with the general council coordinator (and with advice from the general council planning committee) a German marketing firm was retained for the development of the general council logo (see appendix 1).

This same firm will be used for all general council materials. A poster and introductory brochure have been developed and printed, both of which will be distributed at the executive committee meeting, along with some memorabilia.

At the time of writing, a branding plan for the WCRC is in development. This plan incorporates the usage of multiple logos all within a single corporate identity for the WCRC.

One component of the branding plan is the creation of a brand for the Reformed Partnership Fund, as mandated by last year's executive committee: to “communicate more widely the impact of the Funds and encourage applications.” Working with the assistant for the Reformed Partnership Fund, a logo is in development and will be deployed online and through print materials.

Development

The *WCRC Annual Report* was created as usual, along with a brochure to accompany the North American annual appeal. A special meeting in October in Grand Rapids, Michigan, brought together three of the North American trustees to brainstorm possibilities for increasing engagement between supportive church leaders and the WCRC. It was decided that an enhanced visitors programme for the 2017 General Council would be the best project to undertake in the next two years (see below).

The general secretary successfully initiated a process with the Waldensians to create a formal partnership between the WCRC and their *Otto per Mille* (OPM) programme. Along with Werner Joecker, I participated in a series of video conference calls with the OPM staff member charged with managing our partnership agreement. This process included the codification of several internal processes that would comply with OPM requirements and communication with potential beneficiaries to ensure everyone was kept updated on the status of the agreement. The next step in our new partnership with OPM will be to develop a publicity strategy to generate applications from Communion members to utilize the OPM money; thankfully, this dovetails nicely with marketing efforts already in motion with the Reformed Partnership Fund.

Work was also done on the creation of a funds development committee, as mandated at last year's executive committee meeting. This was an at-times frustrating process as many of the concerns we had about creating a global fundraising drive were born out. Discussions with a number of fundraising professionals reiterated doubts about even the possibility of conducting a global campaign. Thankfully there is enough interest to support the WCRC in the exploration of possibilities that a group is being brought together for an initial meeting, after which some challenging decisions will likely have to be made.

General Council

Communication matters for the 2017 General Council have been ramping up. A team of German journalists has been assembled to initially provide their expertise in council preparations. They will also function as part of the communication team at the council itself, assisting with press relations, especially to the German media.

As noted above, the logo for the general council has been developed, as have several other marketing items—brochure, posters, etc. There will be other communication needs for the council, including the creation of the official reports, an app, memorabilia, etc.

The experience and expertise I've obtained in councils/assemblies/synods, most notably with the discernment process, will continue to be utilized, especially in background materials and the development of council processes/flow.

Given the interest from North America regarding a strong visitors programme to the council, I've been in several meetings discussing the idea and then also drafting plans

for it. Marketing responsibilities will undoubtedly follow, and those plans are already in progress for North America.

The online registration system will take a fair share of time over the coming months. It will interface with the new database. The general council is a key opportunity to increase the amount and reliability of the information stored in the database—information that will be valuable for post-council communication and development work—and the registration system has the potential to be used for other purposes, including subscription management and online donations.

I will also give assistance to various publications and other council-related projects as needed over the next year, the first significant one being the preparatory booklet on the council's theme. At the time of writing this report, contributions to this booklet have not yet landed on the communication desk, but it is anticipated that the booklet will be ready for distribution this summer.

Administration/Operations

A variety of factors have seen me more involved in administrative/operational work in the past year. These factors include:

- with our finance coordinator offsite, I assumed daily supervision for all of the work of Anna Krüger, assistant for finance and communication.
- the work on the database, necessary for communications and development, has led to assisting on connected systems for event registration and subscription management.
- necessary editing work on documents, including the staff orientation manual and proposed revisions to the WCRC constitution, prompted deeper involvement in these areas.
- management of the email system and coordination with our contracted IT support added work during several staff transitions.

In addition, I traditionally travel less than the other executives so am more often named as acting general secretary. Additional admin/operations work is required during these spells.

The majority of this work has been a natural outgrowth of my responsibilities in communications and development. There are several items within this area I would like to report:

Database: Werner Joecker has done a tremendous job in transitioning from our old system (FileMaker Pro) to the new one (Salesforce). While the new system was relatively simple to configure, modifying the data from the old system to fit into the new one proved more challenging than anticipated. Not only was the data not

updated on a consistent basis for the past number of years (beginning in Geneva) but it was not maintained uniformly when it was. In other words, a single data field was used for multiple purposes; and, vice versa, a single type of data could be found in multiple fields. Werner thus had to sift through dozens of fields to consolidate them into a coherent system. I've likened it to giving him a collapsed building and asking him to build a new skyscraper out of the rubble. But he did it, and thanks should be given to him for this accomplishment. Toward the end of this process, administrative assistants and the interns worked to update the contact information on our member churches—via whatever means possible—starting with the (mis)information generated from routine correspondence on membership fees and the general council. We finally now feel that our data is updated sufficiently, although understand that this is an on-going activity. Next steps in this process: importing out-lying mailing lists (e.g. *Reformed Communiqué*), setting standards for data maintenance, training staff on the new system and solidifying plans to regularize data upkeep.

Volunteers: we were blessed with three short-term volunteers this last year. Duncan MacLean IV, a communications major from Hope College (Holland, Michigan) and member of Central Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan) was with us in June and July, working on communications projects. He assisted at our *Kirchentag* booth, wrote articles, inventoried our printed resources and attended the Reformed Church in Hungary's summer youth camp (see his article in the September 2015 *Reformed Communiqué*). Randy and Ann Argall were with us from September to mid-November. Randy is pastor and head of staff at First Presbyterian Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and was on sabbatical during this time. They continued the resource inventory, adding descriptions of each item, helped box up material to ship to the archives and made significant progress on the book containing policy statements from both the WARC and REC over the last twenty years. Given the work they did, it was only logical that I acted as coordinator/supervisor—though Paul Oppenheim was essential in securing accommodations for and providing orientation to them.

Interns: because we wanted to enhance the publicity for the internship programme, I took a lead position in making minor adjustments to the programme and applications for it. We were able to do this thanks to a slight delay in the funding of the internship programme. We were pleased with the wide variety of applications received and are thrilled with the two interns we were able to bring on board (Lin Wan-Jou (PCT) and Chung Doyoung (PROK)), thanks especially to the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan contributing additional funds to the programme. We anticipate a longer application process for the next round that will hopefully generate even more applications.

NEAAC: on behalf of the general secretary, I was pleased to be able to attend the Northeast Asia Area Council meeting in Seoul at the beginning of February 2016. Not only was I able to be with and get to know church leaders of the area better, but I also presented an overview of the WCRC's current work and the plans for the 2017 General Council.

There is no doubt that this work has had an impact on the amount of time I devote to communications. Several larger projects have been delayed—the policies book and the expansion of the resource area of the website are the two main examples—but, in consultation with the general secretary, plans have been put in place to ensure necessary work is being accomplished. And there is little doubt that my assumption of these responsibilities has been of benefit to the organization. I thus believe the “costs” to communication are more than offset.

Miscellany

I finally made it to Geneva in October and had a very productive two days at the Ecumenical Centre. Working relationships were reestablished with colleagues in the WCC while connections were also made with the LWF (which has subsequently hired a new communications director), FAP and ACT Alliance. Visits to the John Knox Centre and the archives were also included, with discussion at the latter focused on preparing additional material to move to the archives from Hannover. There was an immediate return on the visit as a joint WCC-LWF-WCRC campaign on the “16 Days of Activism” was successfully conducted later that fall. It is anticipated that visits to Geneva will become routine to ensure strong engagement with our primary, ecumenical, communication partners.

Lessons on German continue. After consulting with the communication core group last year, a new model was adopted: slow but steady. This has resulted in progress on the language without taking too much time away from regular work. Lessons are in two-hour blocks, generally at least once a week combined with increasing forays into the linguistic landscape of Hannover (including watching the latest *Star Wars* in German).

I will be at the halfway point of my initial contract this summer. Working with the general secretary, a plan for a home stay of several weeks has been put in place. This will be a combination of vacation, telecommuting and meeting with member church leaders.

Finally, I am stretching myself by leading the children in a “walk out” experience at the monthly RELISH—Reformed English Language Service Hannover. While my wife Gretchen takes to the pulpit, I take to the Bible storybook and arts and crafts with about a dozen children. I am pleased to report that since beginning last fall, RELISH is attracting a steady 40-50 people for each worship service, with a core group supplemented by newcomers each time.

**LIVING GOD
RENEW AND
TRANSFORM US**

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