

REPORT OF THE JUSTICE AND PARTNERSHIP OFFICE

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Introduction

This report includes the last part of the priorities for our justice agenda approved in 2013 and developed until 2015, although there are themes and issues that will continue as part of our content until the end of this period, 2010-2017.

As part of the evaluation of the status of our strategic plan during the last executive committee meeting, the report also intends to sketch the directions for the year ahead in terms of priorities.

In addition to that, the pattern we present follows our previous reports according to the plans approved.

I. 10th Anniversary of the Accra Confession and Accra+10

The consultations celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession in 2015 led us to the need to follow up the contents raised by our regional meetings and confirmed at the global gathering. As such, we developed what we named Accra+10 bi-regional meetings under the theme: “Gender reading of the signs of the times.” The general objective of these gatherings was to reflect together through the lenses of the gender perspective and from different contexts on our challenges as churches facing the global context of violence, injustice and degradation of both human beings and nature. On the specific objectives of them we wanted:

1. To encourage the use of gender analysis within our member churches.
2. To enrich the reflection on current realities through bringing Global North and Global South perspectives together.
3. To bring to the conversation what we have recognized (in last year’s consultations) as the effects of an unjust neo-liberal economic system in a more integrated manner that analyzes and responds to these unjust social, political and economic realities.
4. To support each of the area councils’ commitments as part of last year’s consultations, within the context of a worldwide family.
5. To empower groups like women and young people as part of our commitment to full participation in our next general council.

We organized two bi-regional consultations in partnership with some of our regional councils. The first one was held in Ghana, November 16 to 21, 2015. It brought together young women, pastors (male and female) and lay leaders from member churches in ACRC and just one participant from NEAAC. Some difficulties to engage the NEAAC leaders in the preparation

culminated in just four people registered from the churches in Korea and Taiwan, but just one was present. The second meeting was organized in partnership with CANAAC and AIPRAL, January 20 to 25, 2016, in Matanzas, Cuba. This meeting also brought together young women and men engaged in gender justice issues, leaders of the regional bodies and male and female pastors. Both bi-regional meetings released final documents that are part of this report (appendices 1 and 2). These consultations raised again the need to deepen the gender analysis that brings together many justice issues we have to address as churches such as race, sexuality and disabilities. The need to bring closer the confessions of Accra and Belhar also emerged as an important task in the current context.

Our participation as one of the founders of the Oikotree movement continues to be an opportunity for us to work in partnership with WCC and CWM on justice issues and be closer to social movements with faith inspiration and their struggles for justice around the world. Oikotree is trying to expand the vision and trying to focus around specific themes around the working groups on transformative education, transformative theology, joint struggle, network and communication and resource mobilization. We are hoping to present to the executive committee the last two books published by Oikotree. At Oikotree Global Forum in Johannesburg 2013, we decided to launch a study process on the issue of land. Since then, the Transformative Theology Working Group had carried out the study process and finished its first step at the end of last year and it is now a book: *Listening to Land! Responding to Cries for Life*. In February 2015 in Matanzas, Cuba, the Transformative Education Working Group organized a longstanding workshop on the issue of transformative education in which we were engaged. Participants were asked to present a paper on the topic from their context and these papers are collected and have been published together with a comprehensive report of the Matanzas workshop: *Life-Enhancing Learning Together*. We hope hard copies will be available in our meeting. Nevertheless, electronic copies are available on our website.

II. Human Trafficking

As part of our efforts to create awareness about human trafficking as part of economic systems that transform human beings into commodities, we are continuing to develop the “Broken for You” project. As in years before we continue to expand our networks and get to know better how some of our member churches are already working around the issue of human trafficking. We also continue our collaboration with our United Nations office in New York.

From July 20 to 25, 2015, the working group met again in El Paso, Texas. We had the opportunity to organize it closely with the PC(USA) Presbytery of Tres Ríos and their co-mission workers for the churches in the borders. In that sense we had the opportunity to visit and engage in conversations with churches, church projects and communities working specially with the theme of trafficking, the pandemic waves of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, (on the

border with the USA), the impact on the communities, how different organizations are working to support the families of the victims and for legal actions against the victimizers.

We developed the working plan for the next two years with a focus on gender violence and violence against sexual minorities, as a result of the previous experiences. Part of the outcome of the meeting was framing our objectives as:

1. Focus on systemic patriarchy with a just life approach and facilitating connections of churches, sharing life stories.
2. Engage churches with systemic injustices, sharing stories of resistance from a theology of just life.
3. Provide materials to focus on gender violence through a contextual approach.
4. Offer the ability to engage with networks in their context giving tools to discern.

We agreed to deepen the theological reflection around all those approaches so among other things we are preparing, in partnership with our theology office, one issue of *Reformed World* focused on human trafficking.

As part of our engagement with some of our regional councils we participated in a consultation on human trafficking organized by WCRC Europe and the *Reformierter Bund* in Germany, October 22-24, 2015, where member churches reported from their own contexts. Prior to that meeting we had the opportunity to share more about our “Broken for You” project in a human trafficking conference in Scotland through one of our working group member located in the UK.

III. New International Financial and Economic Architecture

According to the document produced by the staff involved in this ecumenical project (WCRC, WCC, CWM, LWF), “Working Together Towards a New International Financial and Economic Architecture,” (cfr. Document 4: Justice and Partnership, Report to the Executive Committee, III.1) we affirmed the need to work together the six priorities the ecumenical panel identified. We also convened for 2015 to jointly work on the following two priorities: the Ecumenical School for an Economy of Life and the Interfaith Conference on Alternative Banking.

The Ecumenical School for an Economy of Life arises from the Sao Paulo Statement which called for “[a]n ecumenical school of Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) [to] be established to develop economic competencies and empowerment within the ecumenical movement.” Envisaged to take place annually, the school aims to equip churches with the tools to enable them to engage in advocacy for a new international financial and economic order at global and national levels. It will contribute to the larger objective of building movements advocating for an economy of life. To take place in Hong Kong the pilot course will train 30 church leaders and young people selected by the four ecumenical organisations. The WCRC

named our executive secretary for theology and communion, Douwe Visser, to represent us in the process of organizing and preparing this initiative. The school will take place during the summer of this 2016 and the WCRC will have the responsibility as a dean of the school.

An interfaith workshop on faith and finance took place in Bangkok, Thailand, November 27 and 28, 2015. It was organized by the WCC with participants from Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths. The outcome of this gathering is also attached to this report (appendix 3), and a book is in process and will be published with the support of the WCRC.

At the moment we are preparing this report we are organizing a meeting of a working group to implement next steps to re-launching NIFEA as a joint ecumenical initiative under the leadership of the WCRC with the objective to make a global impact on the current economical systemic injustices and move forward with the priorities proposed by the ecumenical panel.

IV. Gender Justice

As in previous periods we continue to manage the theological education scholarship for women. At this moment we have five women studying with our financial support, from Myanmar, Ethiopia, Venezuela and India. Although in the last year we have been able to reach more member churches we still need to improve the ways in which we promote this initiative that is part of our commitment to empower women through theological training toward ordination. We are working in cooperation with the communication office in promoting the scholarship and sharing stories about the women and member churches around the world who benefited from it.

We continue our work in partnership with our UN Office to promote UN campaigns against gender violence through Orange Day, SayNo-Unite and HeforShe. They are all designed to create awareness about violence against women and children, working toward the end of them. As we do every year, we actively participated in the "16 Days of Activism," producing resources for churches, lay people, etc., and engaged each day to learn more about sexual and gender base violence. The 2015 the focus was girls with power and dignity. Our participation on this joint effort includes also our communication office.

The Task Group on Women's Ordination met twice face to face. The first meeting took place October 16-18, 2015, in Hannover, Germany. The second meeting took place January 25-28, 2016, in Havana, Cuba. A summary of both meetings is attached to this report and includes the document named "Towards a Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" for your consideration.

V. Other activities

The executive secretary participated in the meeting of the Oikotree facilitating group in Seoul, July 6-9, 2015.

The executive secretary participated in the workshop organized by the office of the coordinator for the general council, in preparation for the booklet on the conference theme in Hannover, September 28-29, 2015.

The executive secretary participated in the meeting of the planning group preparing the “16 Days of Activism” in Geneva, October 2, 2015.

The executive secretary represented our general secretary in a church leaders consultation on the refugee crisis organized by the WCC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (ELKB), in Munich, October 29, 2015.

The executive secretary led Bible studies at the 3rd International Theological Colloquium for Transformative Ecumenism, organized by Korea Institute for Future Ecumenism (KIFE), 11-16 January 2016, in Moshi, Tanzania.

The executive secretary participated in the Migration and Aggression in Europe conference, organized by WCRC Europe and *Reformierter Bund* in cooperation with other partners, 17-20 February 2016, in Emden, Germany.

The executive secretary worked in partnership with our general secretary and the executive for communication in promoting solidarity with member churches at their request or our regional councils' request. Issues related with gender and economic and environmental injustices as communities struggle for peace were the fundamental content of our stands in communion with them.

The executive secretary worked in close partnership with the executive for communication in providing information and support to use in our social media and on our website to promote our work for justice. The executive secretary also worked closely with our theology and mission programme to develop theological support to our commitment for justice and communion.

VI. Final considerations

A spirit of gratitude for the commitment of my colleagues, our officers and the members of our working groups and the core group supporting our work for justice as the heart of our ecumenical engagement.

To God be the glory!

JUSTICE AND PARTNERSHIP OFFICE: APPENDIX 1

MESSAGE FROM THE ACRC/NEAAC BI-REGIONAL CONSULTATION, HELD AT APAADE LODGE HOTEL, TESANO, GHANA FROM THE 16TH TO 21ST NOVEMBER, 2015

Delegates of the two regions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)—the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC) and Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC)—met in a bi-regional consultation under the theme “*Gender Reading of the Signs of Times: Bi-regional Conversations, Accra Confession + 10*” in Tesano, Accra, Ghana, 16-21 November 2015.

The general objective of the consultation was to reflect together through the lenses of gender perspective and different contexts on our challenges as churches facing the global situation of violence, injustice and degradation of both human beings and nature.

Opening each day with a Bible study, the consultation set off on quite an engaging mode, with various voices attempting to deconstruct as well as read various texts in the Bible—Esther, Gospel of Mark and Revelation, from a womanist perspective.

In the keynote address, the centrality of the Word of God was reiterated. Drawing from the experience of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches from which came the Accra Confession, the radical implications of the reading of the signs of times and Scripture to our faith was emphasized; unless we act out of faith against the realities we see, our integrity is at stake. A question worth asking is whether things have changed since the General Council in 2004, and how the church can then continue looking on when there is so much brokenness: human trafficking, enslavement in our very countries, current arrangement of the world’s economy, domestic violence, unemployment, sexual harassment. We heard also from Northeast Asia Area Council about discrimination and violence against diverse sexualities. The conclusion was that the Church needs to put its house in order first and be able to critique itself. Various presentations, which reflected experiences from various contexts helped to emphasize the point above; the struggle continues.

To enable the delegates to have a deeper understanding of the question of justice from the painful history of slavery, the ACRC organized a moving visit to the Elmina Castle in Ghana. The hypocrisy demonstrated in having a Reformed chapel above the female dungeon where human beings were commoditized, maltreated and starved to death when they resisted inhuman actions like rape, and the general treatment of all the slaves demonstrates how the Church can allow itself to become the cultural guardian of the symbols of domination and subjugation—an apostasy to the mission of the church.

The delegation was honoured to be warmly welcomed by leaders of both the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Ghana (EPC) and a host of other local members which included a choir. The week’s experiences will remain memorable, as well as serve as a catalyst as we prayerfully engage in working and waiting for the new earth, a context in which righteousness and justice flow like a river.

After a process of discernment and studying the Word of God the delegates committed to work at the following issues and call the attention of all the member churches to the same:

1. Churches to facilitate training and re-training of ministers in order to have life-affirming biblical interpretation.
2. Work at amending policies and constitutional provisions that impede the full participation of all, for instance in the area of women and ordination, so that men, women, youth and children are not only represented but have a voice.
3. Develop a Bible study model for use in local churches to encourage participation.
4. Enhance the network between the member churches, regions and the international Communion and support their work as well as ensure fair representation in the same for all delegations.
5. Create/strengthen justice desks in all our member churches.
6. Break the silence!

JUSTICE AND PARTNERSHIP OFFICE: APPENDIX 2

25 January 2016
Matanzas, Cuba

May the grace, mercy and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you!

It is with great joy and gratitude to our God that we share the outcomes of the continental consultation, *A Gender Reading of the Times: Bi-regional Conversations with Accra 10+*. We gathered in the *Seminario Evangélico de Teología* in Matanzas, Cuba, to celebrate, consider and evaluate the reality of our countries under the guidance of the Word, around the contemporary implications of the confessions of Belhar and Accra. The breadth and diversity of our Americas and the Caribbean space of our gathering challenged us to contextualize our dialogues.

The Bible studies, lectures and learnings we shared launched our reading of violence throughout our continent and worldwide through six lenses:

1. *gender studies* as an instrument for the empowerment for women and as a space for the articulation of new masculinities towards the encouragement of equity in gender relations and a life of solidarity;
2. the ominous and problematic reality of *discrimination on the basis of race and origin* throughout our region, and the insidious ways in which this discrimination is particularly disenfranchising to indigenous communities, persons of African descent, and peoples who are displaced and migrated;
3. *discrimination based on the socioeconomic status of the individual*, the reality of poverty in our countries, and the relentless increase in the gap between the rich and the rest of the population;
4. the *complex and undeniable correlation between poverty, racism and the undervaluing of women, and their sociocultural, political and religious elements*;
5. the *manifold manifestation of violence, a plague throughout our Americas*, and the ways this violence is primarily present in the lives of women, children and disenfranchised peoples; and
6. *the environment requiring actions of protection and reconstruction from the People of God*.

The conversations that ensued revealed multiple convergences and proposals towards pastoral and missional work that witness and act to justice. We affirm that the work before us challenges us to understand ourselves as members of a great Christian Reformed family that shares mission and ministry in solidarity and collaboration as the Body of Christ throughout our continents. This level of solidarity requires of us that we reclaim a spirituality that encourages our relationships and Reformed theological thought.

We are called to a mission of justice that requires from us public and political action. We are called to denounce the unjust systems and to work toward justice and equity, to articulate new models of relationship, and to sojourn with the people for and towards peace. In that walking with the people, we are expected to denounce the way mass media continues to create images that encourage discrimination and the commodification of people. This

requires a church leadership that is committed to our Reformed faith and mission and to these projects through local, national and regional acting.

We recognize that there is much that lies ahead on our way to live up to the ways the Belhar and Accra confessions call and challenge our global Reformed family. We also affirm how the Gospels challenge our mission, and how they articulate an unavoidable call to denounce the issues mentioned above. And so we call upon the WCRC—the Executive Committee, its secretaries and directors, and the 2017 General Council—to affirm the essential unity of the Christian Reformed family through concerted efforts toward peace, solidarity, human dignity and creation justice throughout our continents and the world.

In the love of Christ,

Joy Evelyn Abdul-Mohan, Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago

Dora Arce Valentín, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba and

World Communion of Reformed Churches

Darío Barolín, Waldensian Evangelical Church of the Río de la Plata, and the

Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL)

Helis Barraza Díaz, Presbyterian Church of Colombia and vice president for Latin America,

World Communion of Reformed Churches

Luis Berner Romero, Presbyterian Church of Colombia

Molly Casteel, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Yoharllys Cribeiro, Presbyterian Church of Venezuela

Loida de Valera, Presbyterian Church of Venezuela

Rosa Herández Bustos, Presbyterian Church of Colombia

Gaitri-Singh Henry, Guyana Presbyterian Church

Shannon Jammal-Holleman, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Karen Horst, Presbyterian Church in Canada

María Jiménez, Presbyterian Church of Venezuela

Kelvin Marte Sena, Evangelical Dominican Church

Yvette Noble Bloomfield, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and vice president

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Ofelia Ortega, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba

Gustavo Quintero-Casadiago, Boriquén Presbyterian Synod of Puerto Rico,
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Miguel A. Rosa Morales, Boriquén Presbyterian Synod of Puerto Rico

Yilza Saliva, Boriquén Presbyterian Synod of Puerto Rico

Amaury Tañón-Santos, Presbyterian Church (USA), Hispanic/Latino Caucus

Karen Georgia Thompson, United Church of Christ

Edelberto Valdés, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba

Lisa VanderWal, Reformed Church in America and

convener of Caribbean and North America Area Council (CANAAAC)

JUSTICE AND PARTNERSHIP OFFICE: APPENDIX 3

An Interfaith Call for Justice and Compassion in Finance 29 November 2015, Bangkok, Thailand

We, the participants of the Workshop on Faith and Finance, came together in Bangkok, Thailand from the 28th to 29th of November 2015 to reflect upon the role of money and finance in the current economic and social order from our perspectives as Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims. Building on previous ecumenical initiatives and interreligious discussions, this workshop organized by the World Council of Churches sought to identify common ground for joint engagement and build mutual trust towards developing interfaith initiatives to transform the current international financial architecture which harms people and Earth. What connects us is our shared conviction of the need to revisit the market logic of the global financial system and critically re-think and constructively re-envision the functions of money and finance.

A Framework for Engagement: An Interrelated Narrative of the Self

A viable and holistic framework for addressing structural greed recognizes it as promoting a delusional narrative of the self as an isolated entity that is rightfully obsessed with its individual interests. Such a fragmented and fictitious understanding undermines and destroys an inter-relational narrative of the self which is at the heart of our faith traditions.

In a globalized context which echoes the belief that “outside the market there is no salvation,” financial structures have normalized greed through the dynamic of continual growth. This growth, which is ecologically unsustainable, is driven by usury, indebtedness, fractional reserve banking and speculation. The pervasiveness of this system often elicits our complicity.

Constructing a new international financial architecture for an economy of life requires a counter-narrative based on inter-connectedness and ethics of reciprocity. This is at the core of our spirituality and helps us to rediscover that the source of our well-being lies in our ‘inter-being.’

Spiritual precepts found in our faith traditions such as *Kalyana Mitra* (good friendship), *Koinonia* (fellowship/communion), *Ubuntu* (“I am because we are”) and *Ummah* (community) refute the current monoculture that “I am what I have,” enabling us to regain the essence of our common humanity.

A Search for an Economy of Life driven by Generosity, Community and Solidarity

Despite using the rhetoric of freedom, our present financial system is highly exploitative and enslaves all. It disenfranchises and impoverishes many while enriching a few. Both rich and poor are dehumanized. The logic of prioritizing profits before people and the Earth reduces human beings and nature into a set of commodities, stripping them and disembodimenting them of their social, cultural and spiritual dimensions.