

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE WCRC IN EUROPE

Rev. Jan-Gerd Heetderks, president

In this report I will give an impression of the work the steering committee and the council did last year.

Attached to this report is an extensive newsletter. So it is not necessary to repeat all the items which were named in the newsletter. I will just highlight a few things and elaborate some items which could not make part of the newsletter yet. The newsletter should be read as part of the report.

Solidarity visits

In recent years, the steering committee has had a policy of making solidarity visits as part of its work. These have taken place alongside regular business meeting of the Committee. We are extremely grateful that the churches visited have received us with open arms. We think that it is a valuable sign to the smaller churches of our communion that our communion looks after them and shares their joys and sorrows. The hospitality is always touching, and we are blessed to share time in prayer with the churches.

As mentioned in the newsletter, we visited the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia and met representatives of the Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia. The steering committee would like to continue the practice of these visits.

Consultation on human trafficking

Together with the Reformierter Bund, the steering committee organized a consultation on human trafficking. You can read about the content in the newsletter.

Like at the consultation on asylum, we shared stories in this consultation on human trafficking. Many of our member churches are involved in the work against human trafficking. Human trafficking is the third largest sector of organized crime; huge economic interests are at stake. The work of the churches is not always welcome. One of the delegates told about how he and his family had been threatened. The victims need, among others, the work of our churches.

Refugees and asylum

1. In 2014, the steering committee, together with the Reformierter Bund, organized a consultation about asylum. Many of our member churches were and are involved in the work with refugees. Last year, hundreds of thousands of refugees came to Europe. We saw that many of our member churches were again involved in work for the refugees in lobbying and practical help. At the other side, it seemed that the governments and institutions were powerless at some stage. And we saw that solutions were boycotted.

As the steering committee, we wrote letters in the autumn of 2015 to Martin Schulz, president of the European Parliament, and to Jean-Claude Juncker,

president of the European Commission. We asked them to bring their influence to bear to ensure that the refugees who have come to us are treated with humanity, compassion and dignity, and that, in this time of crisis, political ideology and national self-interest be put aside. We asked them to urge all European Union member states to work together, both to meet the needs of those who have recently arrived, and to formulate a common, humane policy on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers.

2. The steering committee agreed that support for our member churches is needed. It decided to take responsibility for an *Erasmus Project* financed by the European Union. This project will be co-ordinated by the Reformierte Kirche (Leer) in Germany in cooperation with the steering committee. Project partners are the Reformierte Kirche (Leer), the Reformed Church of Hungary and at least one more member church of WCRC Europe. The objectives of the project are the exchange of best practices between the partners and the development of an international concept to support volunteers and institutions in their work with refugees.
3. As decided by the Council of WCRC Europe in Belfast, the steering committee organized, together with the Reformierte Bund, a further conference about migration. The conference was planned because of the importance of the topic of asylum and migration for people in Europe and because of the need for a common vision of our life and community in Europe.

This conference was held in Emden from 17 to 20 February of this year. 75 people from eight European countries and South Africa participated in the conference, which was entitled, "Tolerating Strangeness – Migration and Aggression in Europe." This conference sought to think together about the question of how we can live with the stranger in the midst of our societies on the way to communion. It provided opportunity to learn more about a Reformed "Theology of migration" and to recognize and rebuild our engagement in Europe. The topic was discussed from political, sociological, historical and theological perspectives. There were lectures from Dr. Achim Detmers, Professor Susanne Lachenicht, Professor Robert Vosloo, Dr. Klaas Dieter Voss, Dr. Andreas Mertin, Professor Gustavàv Bölcskei, Professor Herman Selderhuis, Vice-President Martina Strunk and Professor Klaas Huizing. There was also a panel discussion on this item.

In my opinion, it was a very good and fruitful conference. Looking both at the biblical witness and at our own history and theology (especially the Huguenots and Calvin) brought a lot of inspiration for the way we can look at asylum and migration in our times.

Meeting of the Council of WCRC Europe

In March the Council of WCRC Europe met for a 24-hour-meeting in Kloster Kappel (35 km from Zurich, Switzerland).

The main theme of the meeting was the request to all member churches to think about the “Proposal of a Reformed Signing Statement to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” The working group on theology of WCRC Europe prepared the discussion and there was a strong debate on this item. The procedure and the time schedule were criticized. Some churches indicated that there is not time enough to discuss this item in the synodal committees of the member churches. There was no clear outcome of the discussion.

The steering committee formulated a few points for the further discussion:

- WCRC Europe is dedicated to the Reformed–Lutheran dialogue. In our bylaws there is a strong relation to the CPCE and the Leuenberg Agreement.
- Some of our member churches are United churches. They were also result of the Reformed–Lutheran dialogue.
- In the ecumenical contacts an affiliation or association is helpful.
- We urge our member churches to react on the letter and statement that was sent. We ask them to react on the process and on the content of the statement. We ask our member churches to give advice to the executive committee and to the general secretary about handling this item.
- We had a broad discussion in the council; we ask the member churches to involve the delegates in the deliberations in the churches.
- We offer the lecture of Professor Zeindler to our member churches.
- We ask the general secretary to give more clarification to the process for our member churches.

Further the council was informed about

- the Reformed church life in Switzerland;
- the involvement of member-churches in the asylum-work.

The steering committee will install a working group that deals with issues related to asylum.



World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

Newsletter

An occasional publication from the Steering Committee of the Council of WCRC Europe

November 2015

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2016 WCRC Europe Council meeting

This will take place in Kappel Kloster near Zurich from 3rd -5th March and will concentrate on preparation for the 2017 General Council.

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Report of the Core Group on Theology

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European Refugee Crisis

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Conference on Human Trafficking

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Church officials, representing 40 Churches from 27 nations across Europe, met to discuss a variety of issues and receive a number of reports of common interest. The WCRC's last European Council met in the Polish capital Warsaw in March 2014.

Reflecting on the two-day meeting, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael Barry explained that the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a valuable network of

churches in the reformed tradition that share common roots in the 16th Century Reformation.

"I was delighted to be able to welcome so many church representatives from across Europe to Belfast. It was a privilege to fellowship with ministers and officials from churches as far away as the Uniting Church in Sweden to the north, the Spanish Evangelical Church in the south and the Transylvanian Reformed Church to the east.



"During our time together we were able to demonstrate the work of our own church in Ireland and hear

about the work of our brothers and sisters in Christ in their nations. There were also opportunities to pray together, share Communion and provide our guests with hospitality," Dr. Barry said.

Describing the Council as "very productive and informative" WCRC Europe president Rev. Jan-Gerd Heetderks of Holland's Protestant Church in The Netherlands, explained that at each Council meeting members also discuss a specific theme that is relevant to the place in which it meets, but has a contemporary relevance across Europe.

"We decided that we would discuss nationalism in a European context. How it expressed itself across Europe and the relationship of churches to nationalism and nationalist movements from a theological point of view.

“We were very grateful to Rev. Doug Gay from Trinity College, Glasgow, who has researched and written extensively on this subject. He gave a key note address with insightful inputs from colleagues from Hungary, Switzerland and Italy,” Rev. Heetderks said.



Rev. Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, gave an overview of the Church’s work across Ireland. Council members were also informed of initial plans to commemorate the 500th anniversary in 2017 of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses and discussed January’s ‘Solidarity Visit’ by WCRC Europe members to the Reformed Church of Transcarpathia in Ukraine.

The delegation visited Beregszász and Dercen in the southwest of the country close to the Hungarian border. “Part of our role is to encourage and support one another,” explained Martina Wasserloos of Germany’s Reformed Alliance and a vice president of WCRC Europe.

“Listening to the report we noted that though it is a vulnerable community facing immense difficulties and uncertainties, the Church has a vision and practice of a serving faith community,”

“The high level delegation learned about the challenges of being an ethnic and religious minority, both historically and currently, remembering the dozens of Reformed Hungarian pastors who

were exiled, jailed or killed during the Soviet era. They also saw how the church is now working with local governments to plug the many gaps in the social support framework,” she said.

WCRC Europe’s next Council meeting will take place in March 2016 in Zurich.

Reprinted from the PCI website

Solidarity visit to Croatia

The Steering Committee met with Rev Branimir Bučanović, Synod Secretary of the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia and pastor of congregations in Zagreb, Pleternica and Bleiševac, and with Rev Tamás Bódis and Géza Kócán, Pastor and Lay President respectively of the Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia.

Tamás Bódis gave a presentation about the Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia. He brought greetings from his church. He placed Slovenia in geographical context. The church is active predominantly in the far north east of the country, next to the Hungarian border. The other

churches present are mostly Lutheran, while the rest of the country is predominantly Roman Catholic. They are not that far away from Zagreb. Many of the people on the other side of the Hungarian border are reformed.

The church has four congregations with a total of 150 members. They have only one church building. The biggest congregation, in Szentlászló-Motvarjevci, numbers 120 people. They find that people who are not members attend services because they like to be able to worship in Hungarian.

The church began to be organised in 1919. This was a response to the drawing of a new border by the Treaty of Trianon. The first pastor was appointed in 1935. He came from Croatia. He left in 1947. Around 1949 he was sent to prison and, after his release, went to Germany. His brother, Póth Lajos and others conducted services, but it is not known how often. During the times when a pastor was not available, Lutheran pastors looked after funerals. Another pastor, Rev Narancsik Pál, served from 1952-1986, travelling around by train and bicycle, visiting for a long



weekend every third month. He lived in Kopačevo in eastern Croatia, right next to the border with Serbia.

The war in 1991 meant that the contact with the Reformed Christian Church in Yugoslavia was broken, but relationships were re-established with the church in Hungary, reflecting the fact that when one border closed, another opened. From 1993-2008 they had a pastor, Rev Nagy Dániel from the neighbouring village in Hungary, Szentgyörgyvölgy, who held services once a month and, since then, Tamás Bódis and Emőke Rozgonyi have served full time, the first time in sixty-one years that the congregation has had a full time pastorate.

Work has been undertaken to renovate the church building. They are working too to strengthen local communities. There was a sense that the church was dying but the possibility of having full time pastors has given new hope. There were nine children in the church when they arrived, all of whom have since taken their confirmation vows. Currently, there are eleven children in the congregation.

The church is active with events such as World Day of Prayer, a children's summer camp, conferences for presbyters, a children's service during the main service, and other initiatives. The work with young people appeals to Reformed children as well as many others from different traditions.

Despite being very close to the Austrian border, there are no direct relationships with the Reformed Church of Austria, mainly because the Austrian church does not have any congregations in the part of Austria adjacent to Slovenia.

There is now not much by the way of ecumenical relations with Lutherans or Roman Catholics.

The church was financed for a while by the Hungarian minority in Slovenia but, some years ago, that stopped. Help is now received from the Reformed Church in Hungary to pay for the salary of the pastor. The church is registered in Slovenia but the pastor comes under the church discipline of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Members also give as generously as they can. There is no support from the state. This is because they have fewer than 1000 members. It took from 1991 to 1993 to be recognised as a church rather than a sect. Membership of WCRC is helpful in proving the bona fides of the church. It is also necessary to be able to show that the church existed in the time of the first Yugoslavia.

Tamás and Emőke decided to live in Slovenia after their theological training. The Bishop asked them to go there, in part because Emőke came from Serbia and had some ability to understand Slovenian. They came for a year but decided to stay so that the church would not die.

Slovenia is a very secular country. Despite this, Reformation Day is a national holiday. This is because a Lutheran Croat, Primož Trubar (1508-1586) helped to establish the Slovenian language.

There is a legacy of trauma from over a century of different conflicts and the forced resettlement of people. The fact that the district has come under the jurisdiction of a variety of countries has hardly helped. A number of people, particularly the older ones, still live with a sense of fear - of the police, of the army, of any kind of authority - as a result of having had bad experiences. Many families had been divided by shifting borders.

Much work is being done now to rebuild connections.

Unemployment in the area served by the Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia is running at 20%. Many people run small farms of under 10 hectares. Most of those who do also have to have other employment. Since the 1960s, many people have emigrated.

Most people, particularly the old, feel that they are poor and getting poorer. Pensions are at a low level or even non-existent. In Slovenia as a whole, there are problems with the quality of political leadership. Corruption is a problem and people fear that it is getting worse and worse. One Prime Minister, Jenez Janša, has even been jailed.

There are many single people, especially single men, many of whom are now old. Many young people leave the area for employment. There is more social support for people who do not marry, so many couples do not do so. Slovenia is still run by a political class whose origins are in the communist party. They have changed their labels but leopards do not change their spots!

Tamás and Géza Kócán, the Lay President, were warmly thanked for coming to meet with the Steering Committee, and for sharing the story of their church so fully and openly.



The Reformed Christian Church in Croatia

Branimir Bučanović, the Synod Secretary and pastor of the church in Zagreb, took up the task of telling about his church. The Reformed Christian Church in Croatia has existed since the time of the Reformation. The confessional identity as Calvinist has developed over time. Historically, most congregations were in the east of the country. In 1604 a law was passed in the Croatian parliament against Protestantism and persecution ensued. Previously, the country had been under the control of the Turks, who had provided a measure of freedom of religion but, as the Turks were expelled, the counter reformation took hold and things got distinctly worse for Reformed Croats.

Many of the original churches were, in time, completely destroyed. Freedom of religion was restored in 1781. Congregations were rebuilt, consisting mainly of Hungarians, Germans, Czechs and Slovaks but very few Croats. Freedom of religion was really only for 'foreigners', Croats being required to be Roman Catholic.

By 1918, there were about fifty thousand Protestant believers in Croatia, but that number has been in decline since then. This is in part because the Reformed tradition was considered to be a foreign or imported form of religion. Another reason is that most members remained ethnically isolated, and kept to their own identities. German speaking congregations changed to speaking Croatian, while Hungarians kept to their language, despite the isolation this caused.

There are now twenty three congregations, fewer than half of which are fully functional. There 3500 members. There are 8 men and 4 women pastors. Leadership, such

as being bishop and synod secretary, rotates every 6 years, though individuals may serve more than one consecutive term of office.

About 70% of the church buildings were destroyed in the 1991 war. There was much destruction, especially in the east of the country, where there are still uncleared minefields. Twenty thousand people died. Half a million were internally displaced. The church is still mostly in the east which was the area which suffered most in the war. Some have recently been rebuilt which has required much in the way of resources. Many church are still in bad shape. The government is giving some help, but only if the building is of cultural significance. Some of the buildings are very old, going back to the 16th Century.



From 2003, a small amount of money, though huge for the church, has come from the government. The church has the freedom to decide what to spend this on and has used it to cover some rebuilding costs and the pastors' salaries, cars and travel costs. Local congregations are responsible for care of their buildings, but some weaker ones are receiving help. There is no congregation which could fully pay the salary of the pastor.

Property and land stolen by communists is being restituted. A lot has been given back, especially in rural communities.

The church is looking for ways to be relevant to today's society and how to reach people with the gospel message.

Most of the churches which had been destroyed were Hungarian churches but the damage was done by Yugoslav communist army and Serbian soldiers. Funds for rebuilding have come from a variety of sources, mainly from the Croatian government but with some also coming from the Hungarian government, the Reformed Church in Hungary and from sources in the USA and Germany too. Houses and other buildings were destroyed too. Many people were wounded and lost a great deal. Emotional recovery is very slow. The number who died formed a significant proportion of the population. Hardly any Croat family did not lose at least one member of their family to the communists. There is still bitterness and anger. As the buildings are restored, people are recovering too. People are encouraged by their pastors to repent and forgive. The memory of the war is receding and people are consciously and deliberately living in the present rather than the past. The level of tolerance and forgiveness is surprisingly high. The war was not as bad as in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where over 300,000 people died as a result of conflict. Experience in Bosnia and Serbia has shown that it is much harder to deal with the legacy of the war in these countries.

Branimir felt that the war was a direct result of the existence of Yugoslavia, which was an artificial construct which could not last. The good thing about Yugoslavia was that it was not such a harsh country as those which fell under Soviet domination. People could travel. When Tito realised that his regime was about to collapse, he opened the border. Several million people moved to other countries, many of

whom sent money back to support family left behind.

Things in Croatia are much better now. There is freedom of speech. Stolen private property has been restored. There are still problems about establishing ownership. There was serious corruption in the past, some of which lives on. Many politicians still have an old fashioned communist mentality, and promote a nostalgic view of the old days. Tito was not a typical communist dictator, keeping Yugoslavia outwith the iron curtain, while not being fully westernised. He was, however, a mass murderer.

In the opinion of Branimir, the big challenges being faced by the church are around the sense that a big part of the congregations are living in a past which does not exist. They are not being salt and light to the communities. There is a challenge to be relevant to Croatian society. The country is becoming very secular. There are very good relationships with the Roman Catholics church. There is not that much discussion on freedom of religion, which seems to be reasonably well established.

Mission is a big challenge - how to communicate the core gospel message of fullness of life in Christ. There is a real need to build multi-ethnic congregations, where Hungarians, Germans, Croats, etc mix well.

Recently, there had been problems in the leadership of the church. These problems have largely been solved, not least by cultivating contacts with larger churches abroad and with WCRC. A split was effected about fifteen years ago, when one pastor seceded, taking property with him. There is currently another similar case and a court case is anticipated.

The relationship with the Reformed churches in Europe is greatly valued and the Reformed Christian Church

in Croatia is committed to maintaining and deepening that relationship.

Branimir asked for prayer for Croatia and for this part of the world.

Jan-Gerd offered the thanks of the Steering Committee for the hospitality shown to the Committee by the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, stressing the commitment of WCRC and its member churches to support one another in solidarity.



On Sunday morning, the President, Jan-Gerd Heetderks, Vice-President Balázs Ódor and Secretary Sandy Horsburgh accompanied Branimir to Bjeliševac, a village in the east of Croatia of some 300 souls, where there is a small but thriving Reformed Congregation. The Secretary preacher on the text, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Yours are the words of eternal life." The sermon was translated into Croatian by Branimir, who also celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The president brought the greetings of WCRC Europe to the congregation.

2016 WCRC Europe Council meeting

This will take place in Kappel Kloster near Zurich from 3rd -5th March and will concentrate on preparation for the 2017 General Council.

The theme of Justification will be the main focus. All member churches are going to be asked to affiliate to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of

Justification, but it is recognised that many will need information upon which to make a decision. Therefore, the Council will include theological reflection to resource member churches to take part in the process of adopting the Joint Declaration and to equip church leaders to undertake discussion and decision making on the joint declaration in their own churches. It is anticipated that this would be both an important and potentially difficult subject.

The WCRC Europe theological group has been asked to lead the discussion. The Steering Committee considers it particularly important that the Reformed should be prepared to make a declaration alongside the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic in Wittenberg in 2017.

An interesting programme of interaction with the cantonal Church of Zürich, including visits to some historical sites and to current projects is also being planned.

Report of the Core Group on Theology

Reformed – Catholic Dialogue, Gent, Belgium

Fifteen delegates met this year in Gent, Belgium (nine Reformed and six Catholic). This meeting was the fifth and final meeting of the two delegations in plenary and most of the time was dedicated to the writing of the final report of which there is now a draft. In autumn a small group will meet to finalise the report.

The theme is: "Justification and Sacramentality, the Christian Community as an Agent for Justice."

This meeting also discussed the possibility of the WCRC affiliating with the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." The Pontifical Council for Promoting

Christian Unity would very much welcome this. The 2010 Uniting General Council gave mandate to consult the member churches about this.

The core group discussed the importance of strengthening the connection between justification and justice, which is addressed in this study. The core group expects that we will receive the report as soon as possible, along with a report from the TMC secretary outlining the implications of the report with regard to discussion of a possible affiliation. The outcome of this discussion is expected to be on the agenda for a decision at the next executive committee meeting. Any additional steps including input from member churches ought to start as soon as possible.

Martin Junge, secretary LWF, writes:

Recent discussions between the WCRC and the LWF have resulted in a renewed interest to revisit the question of whether the WCRC might be considering signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of the Justification (JDDJ) signed between the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, and joined by the Methodists in 2006. I understand that this is an internal discussion process at this point of time, which the LWF both welcomes and respects. When you find yourself ready for it, the LWF will be ready and willing to offer accompaniment on your reflections on this important decision.

Let me express from the LWF's perspective how I see the importance of your process towards a possible joining of the JDDJ. It relates precisely to the aspect that I highlighted earlier: your particular commitment to justice. You would bring this very gift into the JDDJ! Because indeed, if the WCRC was to join, it would bring much more to the table than the pencil to sign the

document. It would bring the identity of the WCRC and its own particular profile into it. It would hence bring, among others, precisely the special vocation for justice, which in fact is currently explored between the WCRC and the Roman Catholics in your bilateral dialogue. A JDDJ joined by the WCRC wouldn't be anymore the JDDJ that was signed 1999. And this is good so.

Without knowing the outcome of your internal process, let me therefore express already at this stage how much we would welcome such contribution and how nicely it would actually speak of the journey towards unity that Lutherans and Reformed have been able to walk together during the last decades, as recently affirmed again by the bilateral document *Communion: On being the Church*.

European Refugee Crisis

At its meeting in Zagreb, having received an request to do so from the Reformierter Bund, the Steering Committee wrote to Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament and to Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission.

As the Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe, we are writing to you ask you to take action to defend the human rights of those who are seeking refuge in Europe at this time.

For years, we have been concerned about refugee, migration and asylum issues and have taken action to support member churches which are particularly active in this field. We have all been deeply moved by the plight of those who have come to our continent in recent years and months, especially those who are fleeing the war in Syria. Our hearts have been grieved by the stories and images of dead people washed up on

beaches in Turkey, Greece, Italy and other countries around the Mediterranean. We have been humbled and inspired by the practical actions taken by many churches, including Reformed churches, both by church leaders and by church members, to offer a welcome and provide essential care for those who have arrived in Europe.

We have been disappointed by the lack of effort made over recent years by member states properly to work together, instead treating this as a problem just for the countries on the Mediterranean. We have also been distressed by the attitude shown very recently towards the refugees by some political leaders, who have acted in ways which have not spoken of welcome and used language which has not spoken of humanity.

We are writing to you, therefore, as President of the European Parliament/ Commission, to ask you to bring your influence to bear to ensure that the refugees who have come to us are treated with humanity, compassion and dignity, and that, in this time of crisis, political ideology and national self interest be put aside. We ask you to urge all European Union member states to work together, both to meet the needs of those who have recently arrived, and to formulate a common, humane policy on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers. We note with gratitude that the European Parliament has already encouraged member states to do all they can to care for refugees, both here in Europe and in partnership with other countries outwith our continent who are rising to the challenge of so many people seeking sanctuary within their borders.

Please be assured that the Reformed churches in Europe stand ready to serve those who have come to our continent. Many, such as in Greece, Italy and Hungary, have been at the forefront of welcoming and caring for new arrivals. Others further north and west have also done much to make refugees welcome, as well as having been generous in sending money and supplies to the countries

where refugees first enter Europe, and many have made strong statements to their own national governments.

We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss our concerns further and to look together at how the Reformed churches of Europe could work more closely with the political institutions of our continent. In the meantime, please be assured of our prayers for you as you discharge the duties of your office.

Consultation on Human Trafficking

About twenty delegates and experts from European churches and social organizations met from October 22nd to October 24th in Hanover to discuss the difficult topic of human trafficking. The invitation of this consultation came from the European Area of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Reformierter Bund in Germany.



Last year the WCRC launched a campaign on Human Trafficking; in this consultation, the situation in Europe was further reviewed. This was done using reports from delegates from the Netherlands, Belgium, Slovakia, Scotland, Hungary, Italy and Spain. There were also delegates from the Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche in Germany, the Lippe Church, from the Vereinigte Evangelische Mission (UEM) and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).

Human trafficking is the third largest sector of organized crime,

right after arms and drugs trafficking. It takes place everywhere and is a complex, constantly changing system, in which, by the cooperation of different actors, women, men and children are deprived of their rights, tortured and murdered, for example as child soldiers or slaves for work or sex.

Poverty, lack of prospects and risks related to war and violence are causally at the beginning of the ordeal of people who respond to seemingly tempting job offers, but are then kidnapped or sold. Exploitation and imprisonment, extortion and debt bondage, abuse and rape are part of the ordeal that follows. Very few victims manage to escape. Even if they succeed with the help of a human rights organizations, the question is asked: What alternative is there for the victims?

What can the churches do? This question was intensively discussed. It quickly became clear that it initially becomes simply about perceiving facts: People are turned into a commodity and traded as such, anywhere. Nevertheless, the difficult and unpleasant topic is often ignored, even by the churches. But the churches have the chance to be active where there often is no other adequate social infrastructure left.



Educating the public and supporting victims are genuinely ecclesial tasks, and in youth work in a special way: educating young people about their rights, providing them with education and helping them to convey confidence. Churches must take their hopes and ideas about life seriously. These together are important steps to empower young people and to protect them from possible hazards.

Finally, the situation shows how necessary it is to rethink the theological thinking in the different countries with their own theological traditions and influences: do the victims dare to seek support in the Church or do they meet more mistrust and rejection there? Which understanding of "dignity" and "value" determine everyday ecclesiastical speech and action? How can the church help the victims to overcome their trauma and regain a sense of their own inviolable dignity? How is reconciliation lived in view of destroyed personal stories?

Among the recommendations at the end of the consultation was also the proposal for collaboration between churches in the countries where labour or sex slaves come and those from where people are brought for forced labour.

Conference on “Tolerating Strangeness – Migration and Aggression in Europe” (*Fremde(s) aushalten – Migration und Aggression in Europa*)

Because of the importance of the topic of Asylum and Migration for people in Europe, and for a common vision of our life and community in Europe, we are planning a conference about this issue in Emden (Germany) from February 17 to 20, 2016.

The conference will hear voices from European countries about difficulties and opportunities in terms of integration and think about the question of how we live with the stranger in the midst of our societies on the way to communion. It is intended

that participants will learn more about and help develop a reformed “Theology of migration” which will assist member churches to gain recognition for the work they are already doing and also to build and strengthen our engagement in Europe. The conference will be organized in coordination with the Reformierter Bund from Germany. A flyer of this conference is attached.

Social media

Follow WCRC Europe on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/wcrcurope> and on Twitter at @wrcceurope

Angesichts historischer und gegenwärtiger Entwicklungen von Flucht, Migration und Asyl widmet die Tagung sich der Erfahrung des „Fremdseins“, der Integration und fragt, inwieweit die Theologie Johannes Calvins eine „Migranten-theologie“ ist, die reformierten Kirchen ein bestimmtes Erbe hinterlässt.

Unter the impression of historical and present situations of flight, migration and asylum the conference addresses experiences of strangeness and integration raising the question, whether John Calvin's theology is a "migrants' theology" that leaves a legacy for Reformed Churches.

Konferenz-Sprache: Deutsch und Englisch
 Teilnahmegebühr: 35 €
 ermäßigt für Studierende: 20 €

Anmeldung
 bitte bis zum 01.12.2015 in der
Geschäftsstelle des Reformierten Bundes
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Fremde(s) aushalten – Migration und Aggression in Europa
Tolerating Strangeness – Migration and Aggression in Europe

17. - 20. Februar 2016
 Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden

Eine Tagung des Europäischen Gebietes der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen und des Reformierten Bundes, in Kooperation mit der Ev.-reformierten Kirche und der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden

Mittwoch, 17.02.

18.00 Uhr **Eröffnung und Grußworte**
 Jan-Georg Nerdink, Präsident WCRC Europa
 Thomas Fiedler, Pastor für Ökumene, Ev.-ref. Kirche St. Pauli/Bismarck, Oberbürgermeister Stadt Emden
 Quo vadis - Flucht und Vertreibung in und nach Europa von 1946 bis heute – Perspektiven einer menschenwürdigen Migrationspolitik
 Vortrag von Andreas Zureich, Genf
 ansicht, Empfang

Donnerstag, 18.02.

9.00 Uhr Liturgische Tageseröffnung Sabine Dreßler
 9.30 Uhr Einführung in die Tagung Achim Detmers / Martina Wasserloos-Shunk
 9.45 Uhr **Wie haben Erfahrungen von einseitiger Migration, von Exil und Asyl Reformierte Theologie geprägt?**
 1. Calvin's Fluchtintheologie in seinem Emden Kommentar von 1563 Achim Detmers, Hannover
 10.30 Uhr Kaffeepause
 10.45 Uhr **2. Exil, Asyl und die Auszuwählten – Evangelisch-Reformierte Theologie und jugendliche Identität im Refugium**
 Susanne Locherich, Birmstuf
 11.45 Uhr **3. The looking glass of the stranger: On Calvin, 'the refugee reality' and the gift of recognition**
 Robert Vosko, Südafrika
 12.30 Uhr Pause

15.00 Uhr **Migration und Integration: „...weilt Gott ihr Trost gegeben...“ – Emden als Zufluchtsort**
 Einführungsvortrag und historischer Stadtsparengang Klaus Dieter Wolf, Emden
 18.30 Uhr Abendessen
 20.00 Uhr **Kinote im Exil / Arts in exile**
 Ein Abend in der Kunsthalle Emden
 Andreas Mertin, Hagen

Freitag, 19.02.

9.00 Uhr **Fremdheitsverfahren in den Palmen**
 Bibelarbeit Gerdin Böcker, Detmold
 9.30 Uhr **Between Multiculturalism and Ethnocentrism: European experiences of immigration and integration**
 1. "The foreigner in your midst" – Biblical, historical and legal perspectives until today Herman Selbheus, Apeldoorn
 10.30 Uhr Kaffeepause
 11.00 Uhr **2. Immigration and Integration: Old and new dynamics**
 Paolo Nass, Rom
 12.00 Uhr Pause

15.00 Uhr **Aufbruch ohne Wiederkehr – Fremdheit in der Moderne**
 Martina Wasserloos-Shunk, Rheinf
 16.15 Uhr Kaffeepause
 16.30 Uhr **Migration trifft auf Protestantismus – Gibt Einwanderung auch für die Kirche? Podiumsdiskussion mit**
 Martin Outmann, Bevollmächtigter des Rates der EKD
 Doris Peschke, The Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe
 Günter Krings, Mitglied des Bundestages
 Paolo Nass, Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy
 Robert Vosko, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University
 18.00 Uhr Abendessen
 19.30 Uhr **„Ein Europa, das ich mir wünsche...“ Öffentlicher Abendvortrag**
 N.N.

Samstag, 20.02.

10.00 - 13.00 Uhr Exkursion zur Osterburg, Grootvuren