



Address by General Secretary Chris Ferguson to Pope Francis

The World Communion of Reformed Churches comes to you today with joy and urgency. Even as we meet we understand that God's creation is groaning in bondage and awaiting its liberation (Romans 8:22). This scandalous reality of ecological, economic, social and gender injustices and spiralling militarized violence requires of us to pray and act in the unity of the Spirit (Micah 6:8, Ephesian 4:3). We do this in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ our Lord who comes so that all have life in abundance (John 10:10, *Laudato Si*, *Confession of Accra*).

Our joy comes from knowing that through repentance and dialogue we are growing closer to the unity that is Christ's gift to the church, so that all may believe (John 17:20-21). The *Confession of Belhar* affirms that unity and justice are inseparable: "Unity is...both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ" as we reject in God's name all racism, exclusion and inequality in church and society.

Within and beyond our denominational family (of 80 million Christians from Congregational, Hussite, Presbyterian, Reformed, United and Uniting and Waldensian traditions) we are committed to unity and called to justice as central to our faith and mission.

We celebrate that our ongoing Reformed–Roman Catholic dialogues continue to bear fruit. We are pleased that you together with our Lutheran sisters and brothers have urged us to associate with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a process which we have warmly embraced as testimony of our conviction that justification and justice are integrally linked. Together we celebrate your reaching out to the Waldensian Church and all other signs on both our parts to overcome divisions through repentance and respectful dialogue. We come today to whole-heartedly reconfirm that ecumenical vision and our commitment to visible unity and Christian witness.

And now comes the urgency! Sent in the Spirit of God's love, mercy and compassion we cannot hesitate but must move decisively forward together in the face of the perils and suffering confronting this world and all her people (Luke 4:16 ff).

The *Accra Confession* resonates with *Laudato Si*—economic, social, gender and ecological injustices are born of the same structural and systemic sin. "We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation" (*Accra*). Our unity is therefore urgently required to respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth (*Laudato Si*).

In 2017 in Leipzig, Germany, we will celebrate our 26th General Council meeting under the theme: "Living God, renew and transform us." Even as we note the common celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we will not look backward but move forward. We will bring the global church together in a spirit of unity and a pledge to justice. We will seek not to be conformed to this present age but together as individuals and the church to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may discern the will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

We warmly invite you to come and be with us next year in Leipzig. But more importantly we trust that here and now, together, we can find the common response in faith that the Living God requires of us all.