



Moving Forward towards 2022: *Living Faithfully, Building Relationships as a Communion*

Introduction

Arising from the 2018 General Assembly in Guyana and holding fast to the key elements within the Assembly's Message, CANAAC seeks to develop its overall strategic plan in alignment with the WCRC Strategic Plan: 2018 – 2024.

The work of CANAAC covers the period 2019 – 2022, leading up to its next General Assembly (being planned for 2022).

Given the central part the regions play in the success of the WCRC Strategic Plan, the CANAAC General Assembly devoted itself to understanding this plan and then set about to identify broad themes that its region could meaningfully engage with during the upcoming three-year period.

To identify these themes, it was felt that the work of CANAAC would be guided by the WCRC's new vision statement and its overarching goal as found in the Strategic Plan. This vision statement reads as follows:

WCRC Vision Statement

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to communion and is committed to justice.

Through robust engagement with the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is always being transformed as it strives for the full and just participation of all. In our diversity, we seek to be a living expression of "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

We work to renew and restore the economy and the earth, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 10:10).

Further, the overarching goal as stated in the WCRC Strategic Plan provides for an engaged Communion of all:

WCRC Overarching Goal

By 2024, the World Communion of Reformed Churches will strive to be significantly strengthened and increasingly effective in living out God's call to communion and commitment to justice. As a global *Koinonia*, we are marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed together.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, with all the partners God provides, serves its member churches and also works for the transformation of the whole world, which is so loved by God but still trapped by multiple injustices and death, having fallen among thieves (John 10:10).

As it strives to fulfil its vision, the World Communion of Reformed Churches works through two **strategic trajectories**:

- Strengthening and deepening the *koinonia*.
- Growing and expanding its work for a greater global impact.

To achieve this goal the WCRC would utilize two strategic approaches: Strengthening and deepening the *koinonia* and growing and expanding its work for a greater global impact. The plan outlines that this would be done through 5 distinct yet interlocking areas:

- Communion
- Justice
- Theology
- Mission
- Ecumenical Engagement and Interreligious Cooperation

CANAAC Overarching Goal

During the period 2019 – 2022 CANAAC will seek to move forward through efforts aimed at realizing deeper *koinonia* among its members. This deepening *koinonia* will develop as CANAAC addresses regional issues within the five areas of WCRC's Overarching Goal.

To approach this work, this Directions document will walk through sections of the WCRC Strategic Plan. The larger context of each of the five areas of the WCRC Strategic Plan will be followed by CANAAC's regional direction.

CANAAC has limited resources. A small budget limits our ability to travel and meet for consultations and project work. In addition, there is no dedicated staff within CANAAC, and members of the Steering Committee have primary commitments within their churches. Nevertheless, there is a commitment amongst the Steering Committee and the Assembly as a whole to make progress in some of these areas. CANAAC's ultimate goal is to aid the gospel witness of member churches by strengthening the CANAAC organization. The Steering Committee will prioritize its work in order to make substantive progress over this period.

CANAAC Contexts

The Caribbean and North America (USA & Canada) Area Council (CANAAC) of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is an incredibly diverse region reflected in its member churches. Members include Indigenous peoples, and those who can trace ancestry to every inhabited continent.

The Atlantic slave trade, indentured labour, the Doctrine of Discovery, and colonialism have affected each members' national histories, and often their ecclesial histories. Echoes of these histories continue to reverberate like aftershocks along deep and hidden fault lines.

Resource economies dominate the region often with one part of the region profiting at the expense of the other. Globalization and the shift towards meta national corporations and organizations too often leave marginalized peoples with weak political or judicial voice on matters affecting economies, environment, and human rights.

Economic migration and internal conflicts are constant pressures. These pressures negatively affect the human capital available within a nation. Temporary economic migration, while providing needed funds through remittances, too often negatively affects families and long-term societal development.

In these contexts, we seek resurrection and Christ's reconciling love.

1. CANAAC and Communion

WCRC Overarching Objective for the Communion

The work will be lived out through acts of justice refuting the logic of exclusion marking social and political institutions, the economic order, and sometimes even the church itself (General Council Actions 20, 21, 41).

The communion that the WCRC seeks to become will embody the radical hospitality of the gospel of Jesus, which demonstrates respect, trust, love and, willingness to listen to a variety of voices seeking fullness of life.

In the commitment to discerning God’s will together, the Communion therefore embraces the challenges of linguistic and cultural divergences, as well as differences in theological and hermeneutical perspectives as positive building blocks that set the atmosphere for dialogue, discernment and engagement on communion with justice.

CANAAC Expression

Foundational and strategic to CANAAC’s ability to “strengthen and deepen the *koinonia*” between members of its regional Communion is its ability to live out the theme of its General Assembly 2018—*Living Faithfully, Building Relationships as a Communion*—with a focus on long-term sustainability. Sustainable practices in building communion will allow CANAAC to meaningfully address the other four areas.

In developing its workplan for the three-year period, attention will be paid to the following:

- a. Ensure that CANAAC’s governance instruments and processes are fully aligned to support the realization of *koinonia* within its regional Communion.
- b. Develop a communications strategy addressing both external and internal audiences of CANAAC.
- c. Find ways to build grassroots supports for member churches to share resources and ministry approaches.
- d. Enable full participation of Assembly delegates in working groups, overcoming logistical and technological challenges in order to embrace the depth of cultural and linguistic diversity between assemblies.
- e. Lift up and live out the Accra Confession as a meaningful and helpful resource for churches. CANAAC will encourage member churches to engage with the Accra Confession in the present tense using the Confession as a lens to discern the call for prophetic action in their contexts.

Recommendation: The Steering Committee has oversight over all and tasked specifically with items a, d, and e.

Recommendation: The Communications Working Group be tasked with items b and c.

2. CANAAC and Justice

WCRC Overarching Objective for Justice

The WCRC will seek to engage the whole Communion to discern the signs of the times in order to effectively witness to transformative reformation in the areas of economic, social, gender and ecological justice so that member churches will be able to faithfully confess to the God of life in a world fallen among thieves (John 10:10).

The WCRC will seek to deepen and strengthen its existing commitments to justice while at the same time expanding and growing in accordance with the vision of the General Council 2017.

CANAAC Expression

Coming from the Assembly sub-theme *Moving from Despair to Hope*, we seek how we can let God use us rather than submit to despair and inaction.

A. Economic Justice

NIFEA: New International Financial and Economic Architecture

During our time at the General Assembly we became aware of the work on NIFEA. This is a critical piece of work which the WCRC, Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation have been engaged with for some time. A number of member churches are involved with this process. We await reception of the NIFEA Action Plan to discern ways that CANAAC can connect with the findings and recommendations making possible healthier expressions of life and living within our communities.

Recommendation: The Justice Working Group studies NIFEA and reports back to the Steering Committee on ways to engage this material to the benefit of our members.

Food Safety and Security

Food safety and security within the region varies between and within each member nation. The problem of the availability of a regular supply of nutritious food may seem larger than can be tackled by member churches, even those acting together. Nevertheless, CANAAC can showcase existing grassroots organizations and movements thereby encouraging members to find local concerns where they can act.

Examples of small-scale movements that can encourage congregations include:

- Red Thread in Guyana started as a women's food cooperative in a small community to secure nutritious food locally. There are many similar stories throughout the region.
- Rev. Jose Gonzalez (PC(USA)): congregational work on fighting rampant diabetes through local, culturally specific, healthy cooking.
- Rev. Jesus Rodriguez (Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba): example of Cuban churches stepping in where government has stepped away. They may only serve 50 when 1,000 need help, but the church is setting an example in order to change the narrative on what people and churches can do.

Recommendation: The Communications Working Group will gather stories of food safety and security work done by member churches and publish these on a semi-annual basis. Theological and biblical reflections on this work are critical to animate and further support member churches' continuing efforts.

B. Ecological Justice

Industry-Community dialogue

Realizing that governments are having little effect on environmental and economic justice issues, we can create and/or participate in spaces where dialogue and action between industry and community occur.

The sporting goods industry's shift from minimizing cost to the use of sustainable textiles and improved labour practices are prime examples of how this dialogue can be effective. The Fair Labour Association (fairlabor.org) might serve as an example for this advocacy work.

Recommendation: The Justice Working Group identifies resources, documents, stories, and Bible studies from member churches on ecological preservation and also the intersection between environment and poverty. This is intended to facilitate dialogue and local work within member communities.

C. Indigenous Justice

Indigenous people and communities throughout the region are often the most marginalized. The Doctrine of Discovery, while never an official doctrine of any member church, has permeated the structures of our societies, governments, economic systems, and often into our missiologies and ecclesiologies. The goal of CANAAC's work in this area is to accompany Indigenous peoples in our shared life in community. This accompanying involves education and advocacy.

CANAAC can facilitate the education of people within our own communities about historic marginalization of Indigenous peoples, and of ongoing systemic exclusion. Member churches may share existing resources and stories of "Truth and Reconciliation" work within their own nations and churches. The end goal of education is to raise awareness of local Indigenous issues, to build authentic relationships with local Indigenous communities, and to stir us to advocacy work.

CANAAC member churches can become involved in local advocacy work by partnering with Indigenous communities. Shared voices provide a greater voice to address human rights violations, and to attain more equitable participation in government decisions affecting land rights.

Recommendation: The Justice Working Group gathers resources from member churches on their history of engagement with Indigenous peoples, and their own stories of healing and reconciliation. These would be made available on the CANAAC website in order to encourage an increased engagement by member churches with local Indigenous relations concerns.

Recommendation: The Justice Working Group engages with WCRC staff on WCRC's work in this area.

D. Gender Justice

Gender justice has been a priority of Reformed communities since its early beginnings and continues in the WCRC. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches led the way in the ecumenical movement towards the ordination of women and their full participation in all aspects of the life of the church. WCRC member churches in the Caribbean and North America are still struggling towards full inclusion of women, men, and persons of diverse sexualities and gender identities. This work is important to our call to be a Communion committed to justice, serving as a witness to the affirmation that all persons are created in God's image, and have the right to live with dignity and respect.

Member churches that gathered at the WCRC's General Council declared: *"This declaration testifies to our belief, that women and men were created equally in the image of God and that they therefore should be treated with equal respect and dignity"* (A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination, Leipzig, 2017).

We are all members of Christ's body in our diversity of gender, orientation, race, class, geographic location, ability, and age. We understand gender justice as relating to pain and brokenness in church and society which excludes individuals and categories of persons based on their differences from cultural norms and prescriptions. Often these cultural norms and prescriptions have been uncritically accepted as norms for the church with little biblical or theological reflection being made. These accepted cultural norms often enforce injustices within church and communities and provide a rationale for ongoing injustice within the larger society.

CANAAC has prioritized gender justice issues based on the current WCRC Strategic Plan and Gender Justice Policy.

Recommendation: Promote the "Thursdays in Black" campaign against gender-based violence through various media channels.

Recommendation: Create links to policies on protecting vulnerable people, sexual abuse and harassment, and racial abuse and harassment on member church websites.

E. Racial Justice

The social and historical context of the CANAAC region is laden with a history of race-based discrimination and violence, systemic racism, and colonized theology and biblical interpretation. This history continues into our current reality. The rise of demagoguery and authoritarianism globally mark a rise in powers that oppose the gospel.

Recommendation: CANAAC identifies with and engages with the conversation on Racism, Authoritarianism and Nationalism (RAN) facilitated by the WCRC.

Recommendation: The Justice Working Group gathers resources created by member churches and other organizations in relation to the UN International Decade for People of African Descent and other related initiatives.

3. CANAAC and Theology

WCRC Overarching Objective for Theology

Hearing the cries of wounded communities and engaging with them (General Council Action 21) the theological work of the WCRC shall lead the whole Communion in theologically-rooted processes of confessing the faith, drawing on the Reformed tradition and contextual theologies to address the present reality.

CANAAC Expression

Availability of theological education for people preparing for or currently serving in different forms of ministry varies within the region. In some cases, contextual Reformed theological education is very limited. While internet access is not universally available, non-video internet-based courses are a viable option in most cases. Several theological colleges within the region offer online education streams for M.Div. and other degree programs. In addition, several colleges offer lay education certificate programs online in areas of biblical studies, theology, and pastoral studies.

A goal of CANAAC's work in this area should be to enable development of contextualized courses within the region. For example, while initial course offerings will be from existing programs, the online technology framework can be used to deliver courses developed locally. While there are issues regarding the accreditation of degree programs delivered across national boundaries, this should not limit the delivery of programs even if not for degree credit.

Recommendation: The Theology Working Group investigates availability of theology, biblical studies, and pastoral theology online courses from WCRC member churches and their theological colleges in order to support the initial and ongoing training of people in various ministries. In addition, attention must be paid to the ongoing development of

congregational leadership and management skills. All courses and programs of study are to be considered.

Recommendation: Identify online resources from other organizations to build out the worship planning and Bible study section of the CANAAC website; these could include biblegateway.com, netbible.org, workingpreacher.org and many others, with efforts made to find Spanish and French language resources.

4. CANAAC and Mission

WCRC Overarching Objective for Mission

In witnessing its call to communion and its commitment to justice, the WCRC will articulate afresh a vision of liberating discipleship that rejoices in God's renewing presence in individual conversion and in social transformation and embraces the call to live out God's mission in the face of idolatries of power and privilege.

CANAAC Expression

All the work of CANAAC is infused with the power of the gospel of Christ that sets us free from the powers of death and sin. Yet how do we ensure that this liberating and life-giving gospel is proclaimed to the peoples in the CANAAC region when so many competing and contradictory "gospels" are winning people over? Is there a mission equivalent to the Accra Confession highlighting the colonial and death-dealing systems within "gospels" and ecclesial systems that oppress rather than liberate, repress rather than give life?

Recommendation: Efforts are made to ensure that all communications, programs, and other work of CANAAC use accessible language and contextualized story-telling to proclaim the life-giving and liberating gospel of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit within lives and community.

Recommendation: In concert, CANAAC working groups will identify ways to name and speak out against idolatries of power and privilege disguised as mission and gospel.

5. CANAAC and Ecumenical Engagement and Interreligious Cooperation

WCRC Overarching Objective for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

The interreligious work of the WCRC strives for interreligious cooperation based on trust, respect and the commitment to life, engages with the question of Christian witness in a multi-religious world and accompanies churches in conflict situations (General Council Actions 20 and 63).

CANAAC Expression

Member churches within CANAAC are engaged in interreligious dialogue and cooperation in different forms. CANAAC's role in this engagement should be to encourage this ongoing work and other new partnerships. This can be achieved by promotion of events across the Communion, and in the publication of brief summaries of interreligious activities of member churches. Particular attention may be paid to interreligious work in conflict situations.

WCRC Overarching Objective for Participation in Ecumenical Forums

The WCRC understands itself as an integral part of the ecumenical movement. Taking up the constitutional mandate to "contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world" (Art. IV. C.) the WCRC will promote economic and ecological justice, global peace and reconciliation and provide Reformed perspectives on church unity.

WCRC Overarching Objective for Ecumenical Dialogues and Cooperation

The ecumenical engagement of the WCRC with other Christian communions aims to promote the visible unity of the larger church in its common witness to the world. In dialogues and other programs, the WCRC will emphasize the interconnectedness of theology, communion, mission and justice and will foreground voices and perspectives of Christians in the Global South.

CANAAC Expression

Both WCRC overarching ecumenical goals belong to the global level; however, when CANAAC becomes aware of Reformed churches in its region that are not a part of WCRC it should reach out to encourage their participation.

Within its region CANAAC would encourage members to embrace appropriate opportunities for partnerships within civil society and with other ecumenical bodies (ex. CANACOM/CWM/WCC, NGOs and governments etc.) as these may support the focus areas of our Communion.

Recommendation: Ensure that information about interreligious and ecumenical events and forums are distributed to members through CANAAC communications channels. Particular attention is to be paid on reconciliation work during interreligious and ecumenical conflict within society and religious organizations, and on collaborative work on justice issues.

Recommendation: Where non-member churches are identified, the Steering Committee will reach out to encourage their participation in WCRC and CANAAC as its regional expression.

Recommendation: Ensure WCRC is provided up-to-date contact information for all CANAAC members.

Implementation

Along with the specific responsibilities named above, the Steering Committee will also be the main point of coordination, monitoring, and communication for the work of the region. The Steering Committee (or a designated subcommittee) will turn the work outlined in this document into an action plan.

Along with the Steering Committee, the action plan will be driven by three Working Groups, as named above:

- Communications
- Justice
- Theology

These Working Groups will reflect the diversity of the region, ensure gender balance and include youth. The delegates to the 2018 General Assembly will be invited to form the core membership of the Working Groups. However, membership will be open to all interested individuals from CANAAC member churches.

Find more information about CANAAC online:

<https://canaac.wcrc.ch>

<https://www.facebook.com/canaac/>