

Report of the Drafting Team

COLLEGIAL GENERAL SECRETARIAT REPORT

1. What are your thoughts on the WCRC advocacy programme, GRAPE?
2. If remaining funds can be raised, do you agree that a female Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy should be appointed?

Comments from the three discernment groups:

- There was great consistency in affirmation for the GRAPE programme among the groups, in particular the creation of the position of a female Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy.
- Some comments were raised:
 - Appreciation to the PC(USA) for providing funds for the position of a female executive secretary for mission and advocacy;
 - What will be the relationship between this new position/person and those of the already existing executive secretaries? Will it be a position of equal weight?
 - A carefully selected search committee is needed, with substantial female participation, and should include people beyond the Officers' Group;
 - This is an important opportunity for regional engagement, and the pilot project nature of the initiative was commended;
 - The appointment of a female to an executive position for mission and advocacy reflects the Communion's values of fair and just participation and gender justice.

Recommended Action:

The Executive Committee:

- *Endorses the GRAPE programme;*
- *Approves the creation of an Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy, upon completion of fundraising;*
- *Authorizes the CGS in conjunction with the Officers' Committee and the Peace and Reconciliation Working Group to form a search committee for the Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy to present a candidate to the Executive Committee for appointment in May 2022.*

DECADE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

3. What are your thoughts and/or ideas about the WCRC declaring a decade to combat climate change?

The discernment groups wholeheartedly affirmed the proposal to declare a decade to combat climate change. However, it was widely thought that this might better be termed a "Decade for Climate Justice."

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Climate change is affecting all of the regions of the WCRC: CANAAC, Asia, Europe, Africa, the Pacific. This is an opportunity for the Communion to listen to voices from across the Communion and to address what is already present in our Strategic Plan;
- This should not be just another piece to add to the work of the CGS and the Hannover staff; rather it should involve voices from around the world, including regional councils, the voices of youth, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and others;
- This is an opportunity to engage and collaborate with other ecumenical bodies, such as the WCC;
- We should engage the outcomes of COP26 and determine what would be most helpful for the Communion.

Recommended Action:

The WCRC declares a “Decade for Climate Justice” beginning in 2022 and shall seek to collaborate with regional councils, other ecumenical bodies, and additional appropriate partners to gain greater awareness and impact.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Do you agree that the mandate of the Sustainability Task Group should be extended until the next General Council?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Although most participants agreed to extend the mandate because sustainability (particularly financial) has not been reached, it was not unanimous;
- It is difficult to plan for long-term realities in the middle of a pandemic; we do not know what will occur before 2025 (presuming that will be the date for the next General Council).

Recommended Action:

The Executive Committee extends the work of the Sustainability Task Group to the next General Council, to develop a longer-term sustainability plan, with regular reports to be made at each Executive Committee meeting and the General Council.

2. Do you agree with the proposal that regional councils should be developed in Asia, the Middle East, and Pacific to strengthen communion?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- In general it was agreed that some regions, such as Asia, are so large and diverse that separate regional councils would be advantageous to their working together;

- Having additional regional councils allows for “twinning” or cooperation between regions for greater impact in programming and relationship building;
- It was suggested that in some cases “sub-regional” bodies might achieve some of the goals with less financial and administration impact;
- There is a concern for capacity: the already small and stretched staff of the WCRC may be overtaxed in needing to relate to additional regional councils;
- There is a further concern that adding additional councils at the same time (particularly in this uncertain moment) might be too onerous; it was suggested to explore the opportunities singly as they develop naturally.

Recommended Action, Revised:

To strengthen the participation of member churches in the life of the Communion, the Executive Committee:

- *Authorizes the creation of a process to explore the development of regional councils in Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific, with the understanding that the next General Council could formally constitute any new councils.*

3. What are your reflections on the definition of sustainability by the Task Group?

Sustainability should not be defined narrowly in financial terms. We are sustained in all things by the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings our communion into being and nurtures it according to God’s will. While organizational sustainability, including financial stability, is one important part of the faithful living out of our communion, we also recognize and celebrate that we have much to share that sustains us in time and space. We take seriously the sharing of prayer, time, friendship, goodwill, and all the gifts of the Spirit as we carry out our ministry. All this is integral to the sustainability of the WCRC.

Comments from the discernment groups:

- These varied widely: some groups focused heavily on the financial implications of sustainability, while others emphasized the Communion-building that comprises the center of the work of the Communion;
- It was felt that structure is important even in the non-financial aspects of sustainability;
- Trust, relationships and unity across the Communion are foundational to who we are;
- It was felt that although financial sustainability is crucial, it should not necessarily come first. We need a reframing of the script of sustainability beyond finances. It was suggested that the first sentence of the definition of sustainability be stricken. In this way it would read, “We are sustained in all things by the Lord Jesus Christ...” as of first importance, with financial stability following in the next sentence, along with the “faithful living out of our Communion...”
- This would render the following:

Recommended Action:

The Executive Committee affirms this definition of sustainability to guide our work:

We are sustained in all things by the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings our communion into being and nurtures it according to God's will. While organizational sustainability, including financial stability, is one important part of the faithful living out of our Communion, we also recognize and celebrate that we have much to share that sustains us in time and space. We take seriously the sharing of prayer, time, friendship, goodwill, and all the gifts of the Spirit as we carry out our ministry. All this is integral to the sustainability of the WCRC.

3. What are your reactions to the recommendation of the task group to put the activation of the Communion into the center of the long-term sustainability initiative of the WCRC? *[Note: this is revised because of redundancy in the original question.]*

Comments from the discernment groups:

- In general, the groups acknowledged that although financial viability is important (to what degree is in question), it is the Communion-building and justice work that we do that is preeminent.

4. What are some ways your church could be motivated to become more actively involved in the life and work of the Communion? How could WCRC support these ways?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Each member church has a different character. For several, theological engagement is a passion that can be tapped and shared more widely among churches who are less engaged at present; similarly, justice is a passion for others.

5. What are some ways you, as an Executive Committee member, or others from your church might become ambassadors to promote WCRC and encourage support of its work and long-term sustainability?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Share skill sets;
- Reach out within the regions to encourage contributions and submitting dues;
- Tell the stories of the Communion: unless member churches know who we are and what we do, they will not contribute or engage in the work of the Communion;
- Encourage a WCRC Giving Sunday (perhaps on World Communion Sunday?);
- Reach out to the youth, particularly regarding climate justice;
- Given the changing ecumenical landscape in general, we need to relight the fire and reimagine ecumenical engagement (within the Reformed community and beyond).

GENERAL COUNCIL

1. What is your reaction to the proposal to place the next General Council in Asia?

This was widely affirmed by the groups.

Recommended action:

The Executive Committee affirms the proposal of the General Council Planning Task Group to hold the next General Council in Asia, with Chiang Mai, Thailand, being the preferred option.

2. Do you agree that the next General Council should be planned to be held in 2025?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Although the proposal for a delay in the date was understood because of Covid realities, two of the groups desired verification that this is allowed within our constitution. With that caveat met, the following is recommended:

Recommended action:

The Executive Committee affirms that the General Council be planned to be held in 2025.

3. With appreciation to the Asian consortium for their financial support of the next General Council, do you have any suggestions for other sources of funding?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- Funding from private donors may be possible and should be sought;
- Reducing the size of the General Council (taking into account the mandates of the constitution and bylaws) will reduce the cost of the assembly;
- In light of our current COVID reality, and not knowing what will be our world situation in 2025, a more modest assembly will likely be indicated;
- It was suggested that regional celebrations may be held as extensions of the global General Council.

4. What is your reaction to the hiring of two General Council staff members, one in Asia and the other in Hannover? Do you have any suggestions as to how sufficient support be obtained?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- This was widely supported, but it was noted that it is extremely important to engage the local churches to help;
- Again, the issue of capacity for the CGS and the Hannover staff must be taken into account.

5. What are your reactions to the draft theme, “Endure and you will gain life” (Luke 21:19)?

Comments from the discernment groups:

- After discussion, one of the groups felt that the theme proposal was good and appropriate for our times, with enough latitude and breadth for a good theme, especially with other supporting texts to flesh it out;
- Other groups felt that the proposed theme was uninviting, too scary, not suitable for a global gathering;
- For some, the language of “enduring” or “endurance” carries too much baggage, and it would be difficult for them to engage this theme;
- The question was raised: how do you balance needing to “stand firm” (endure) with living hopefully?
- It was suggested that the theme of standing firm has potential, but perhaps a different text might be chosen as the theme text, eg., 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, unmovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.”;
- It was noted that a theme should invite a dialogical space in which to discuss what it means to stand firm in the lives of those who have suffered loss, the reality of injustice, disabilities, poverty, and the like;
- Conversely, it was stated that if we link the theme too much to what is “bothering us now”, it might be too narrow for what may be our reality in 2025.

Recommended action:

The Executive Committee asks the General Council Planning Task Group to consider other texts and themes for the General Council in 2025.

6. Remembering that the WCRC is committed to full and just participation, what are your recommendations for composition principles of the General Council Planning Committee?

Values that were affirmed by the discernment groups:

- Gender diversity;
- Inclusion of people with disabilities, or their advocates;
- Minorities reflected in our world;
- Given the need for in-person meetings, a requirement to be vaccinated;
- Persons who understand that this is a large and full commitment of time and energy;
- Sensitivity to the capacity of the CGS and the Hannover staff.

It was also noted that we must hold in tension the possible need to reduce the size and breadth of the General Council and the perception of this decision, how it will be heard within the Communion. We must make sure people understand the reasons and not just indicate that it must be small because of Covid, etc.