

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is Born



History is made! Representatives from 108 countries sign the constitution of the World Communion of Reformed Churches to mark its creation on 18 June 2010 in Grand Rapids, USA. (Photo: Doug Goodwin)

*By Jerry L. Van Marter
and Chris Meehan*

More than 80 million Reformed Christians in 108 countries around the world have formally united to create the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) took place June 18 at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids in the Midwest United States.

The birth of the organization was signaled when delegates representing all regions of the globe gathered on stage in the Spoelhof Fieldhouse Complex on Calvin College campus to sign the new organization's constitution.

REC was represented by 79 delegates from 28 of its member churches. WARC had 301 delegates from 132 member churches present.

Peter Borgdorff, president of REC, called the day's events a "construction zone," proof that God is using all

Reformed Christians to "build a new spiritual house for God."

Kirkpatrick said, "I do believe it is God's intention that we live together in unity and I thank God for this momentous day ... in which we are not just called to be more cooperative, but to be one in Jesus Christ."

By the end of the nine-day meeting on 26 June, delegates had addressed a

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number of priorities on which the new organization will focus, especially how to best deal with the Accra Confession and its faith-based critique of the free-market economic system in an age of globalization.

WCRC delegates accepted the recommendation that the new body continue to use the Accra Confession as a teaching tool on how Christians can view the economy and that it be considered as an important document to help guide WCRC as it addresses issues related to the world economy. In addition, after long debate, the delegates decided to ask the WCRC's executive committee to seek out ways to bring other voices and organizations into the discussion involving the confession.

But debate and disagreement was by no means the theme of the Uniting General Council. Much celebration and ceremony, including a multi-faceted Sunday worship service, marked the merger.

The UGC theme of reconciliation and new beginnings was illustrated by symbolic gestures of unification, friendship and identification with Native Americans in the United States and Aboriginal people in Canada, making it clear that a focus of WCRC will be on people who have often been marginalized and ignored in their native lands.

A major statement was issued, asking that the WCRC join in "prophetic solidarity" with Indigenous peoples around the world and "rely on God's grace and join hands together for all in a world in need of healing."

"This is a serious step and churches... will need address and accept this," said Clifton Kirkpatrick, former president of WARC who was moderating the discussion on Saturday morning.

Church in Southern Africa, was elected as the first president of WCRC.

"We have started a new chapter in the history of Reformed and Presbyterian churches," Pillay said.



Indigenous leaders welcomed Uniting General Council delegates to Grand Rapids. Reformed church leaders presented them with a U.S. Marine sword fashioned into a plowshare. Moved by the gesture, local Ojibwa minister Mike Peters gave leaders his family's peace medal, signifying an 1850 tribal treaty with the American government. The medal has since been adopted as a symbol of the office of the president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and will be held by each president during his or her term. (Photo: Erick Coll)

Emphasis was placed on children and youth and including them in the life of WCRC, as they are the hope of the future for the ecumenical body.

While there was debate over how to best balance the new executive committee of WCRC with women, men and younger persons, elections of the officers of the new organization went smoothly and Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian

"I hope we will be able to journey together joyfully and that the Spirit will direct us to where God wants us to go. We must discern together what God wants of us."

Looking ahead, Pillay noted the WCRC will have challenges raising funds to be able to pay for all of its programmes as well as the priorities adopted by the UGC.

Want to know more?

Visit the website for the Uniting General Council www.reformed-churches.org

The website is your source for a wide range of resources.

Photos and video footage are available at no cost. Please credit

Erick Coll for the photos and Edwin de Jong for the video footage.

You can download free copies of the Bible study book *This is our family* and of the programme report *From Accra and Utrecht to Grand Rapids: Moving towards unity*.

All final Uniting General Council documents are available on the site including the UGC messages to adults and children.

If you wish any of these resources sent to you by post, please contact: wrcrc@wrcrc.ch

Children are at heart of new union

By *Jerry Van Marter*

The Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) ended as it began: with a special message to children welcoming them to the new “family” of 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide that was created in Grand Rapids, United States on 18 June.

In story-telling style, the concluding “Message to the Children” described the June 18-28 Uniting General Council (UGC) as a family reunion, with all the joys and sor-

rows, celebrations and disappointments, laughter and tears that go with them. “It was a shame that 71 family members couldn’t come to the party,” the message read, referring to UGC registrants who were denied visas to enter the United States.

The message incorporating children into the life of the fledgling WCRC echoed the previous Sunday’s (June 20) worship service in which children engaged in liturgical dialogue with WCRC leaders, who explained the significance of the

merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper that sealed the union.

At the dialogue’s conclusion, WCRC leaders presented a copy of the new organization’s logo to the children, welcoming them into the family.

In reference to the participation of Native American and Canadian First Nations peoples at the UGC, the message to children referred to a keynote presentation by the American Indian educator, Richard Twiss.

“One of our wise uncles welcomed us with a smile and told us stories about the first peoples who lived here”, the message says. “He said ‘some things have gone terribly wrong in the past because you didn’t know how to listen and how to share. But now I will reach out to you and I hope you to me, and let’s do better in the future.’”

“Before we said good-bye we made promises to each other, saying ‘I will not forget you. I will listen to you. You will be my friend,’” the concluding message read. “I will be fair to you, care about what happens to you, and if you need me I will be there for you. We will work together for everyone in our church family and for all other families too!”



The next generation: Children receive the logo of the World Communion of Reformed Churches at celebration service to mark the launch of new global church organization. (Photo: Erick Coll)

Message for children from the Uniting General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, United States

We were invited by God for a meeting with new friends in Michigan, USA, for a church family party.

God knows your name and our names and that’s what makes us a family. That’s why God invited us to a big family meeting in Grand Rapids to get to know each other better. The family members came from all over the world!

It was a shame that 71 family members couldn’t come to the party.

They were not allowed to cross the borders into the United States. It made us sad and mad so we thought about them a lot while we were together and we prayed for them.

As in every family there have been problems between sisters and brothers, and aunties and uncles, and parents and children, and cousins too. But one of our wise uncles welcomed us with a smile and told us stories about the first peoples who lived here

and about our family history and he said “some things have gone terribly wrong in the past because you didn’t know how to listen and how to share. But now I will reach out to you and I hope you to me, and let’s do better in the future.” You should have seen his face when he said this to us. It made us believe that we really can!

We had meals together, and lots of good food. We sang songs and danced together, the young ones and

the old ones in our family. We even ate at Jesus' table. And God said "Oh, I LOVE this family!!"

The family members laughed and cried and sang and prayed together early and late every day. It was really cool!

Some people told us about bad things that have happened in their neighbourhoods, so we prayed for them and for the earth, and the air, and the water, and the animals, and everything that God has created.

It was so wonderful that we would have liked to stay at the party

ALL the time. But we had to say good-bye and return to our own homes. Some of the family members will go home to fancy places. Others will go home to places where there is war and hunger. It's so unfair!

Even though we know that God will go with us to all places, there is a need for something more - that's what this family is for!

Before we said good-bye we made promises to each other, saying "I will not forget you. I will listen to you. You will be my friend. I will be fair to you, care about what happens to

you, and if you need me I will be there for you. We will work together for everyone in our church family and for all other families too!"

And when it was really time to say good-bye we hugged each other. In all of the hugs we felt the touch of our loving God who invited us to this party and reminded us that we are family. This is the story I want to tell you.

Can you imagine what this was like? This is our family, the family we are called to be.

Message from the Uniting General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, United States

Called to communion, committed to justice



Communion cup of fellowship, unity, togetherness

God gathered us

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, we gathered in hope, from the worldwide family of Reformed Churches, representing 230 denominations and 80 million believers, bound to God and to one another through our baptism and called into unity as disciples of Jesus Christ. We united in praise of God.

Yet we lamented the absence of 71 sisters and brothers from around the world who should have been with us but were prevented from sharing our fellowship because they were denied visas to enter the USA.

Confessing our past divisions, and rejoicing that, by the grace and forgiveness of God, we are not bound by our past, we par-

ticipated in the birth of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, a testimony to our thirst for unity.

We, in all our diversity, acknowledged with thanksgiving our opportunity to meet in the traditional territory of the Odawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi Native American peoples. Despite a history of devastation and loss, in which the Church was complicit, they extended a gracious welcome to us and gave honour to those visiting their land. Through the drum, dance, and song of their culture, we listened to their confession of Christ. There were those among us who heard echoes of their own stories. Their witness called us to confess how we too are broken and in need of healing. Our understanding of mission was challenged to accept different ways of expressing our faith. And we were inspired and filled with hope by their longing to share their distinctive insights into the faith we share as we seek reconciliation as peoples of God, the Creator.

We sought the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as we continue our journey together.



Confessional Identity

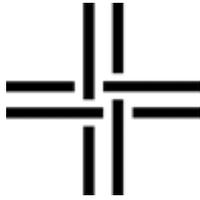
God's word addresses us

We were moved by the Word of God which came to us in many ways as we explored our theme: "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4:3) It came through our worship in music, dance, drama and sermon; through dialogue and conversation as we found connections across cultures; through reading and studying the Scriptures together.

We heard and were touched by how the overflowing communal nature of God draws us into communion with God, with one another and with all creation. We celebrated this communion at the Lord's table. We recognised that this communion is for the sake of the world's transformation. We heard that our identity

as God's people commits us to the work of God's justice.

In the face of the global divide between rich and poor, and the suffering of the earth, we heard the Gospel of reconciling love and prepared ourselves to respond in joyful hope.



Woven together for greater strength

We respond to God's Word

Called to communion and committed to justice:

- We pray for those living in divided communities who long for reconciliation; for those whose voices go unheard, whose gifts are not valued, whose humanity is not respected; those subjected to humiliation and violence; those under oppression and persecution:
- We pray for the earth, the water and the air as they suffer from human exploitation of natural resources, and for all those who suffer from the devastating effects of climate change. (Rom 8.21-22)

Called to communion and committed to justice:

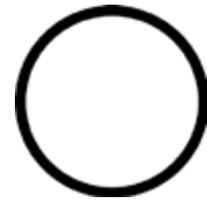
- We give thanks to God for the rich experience of being in communion in the World Communion of Reformed Churches and of being drawn together as partners in God's mission to the world.

Called to communion and committed to justice:

- We have come to recognise in the youth among us a new fire for ecumenism and we commit ourselves to work together in this new communion as equals, remembering that God values and welcomes people of every age:
- We promise our children that we will listen to them, honour their questions and celebrate their voices, understanding that they are part of the church of today with gifts that enrich the family of God.
- We will strive to care and be fair to every generation and to all of God's creation, listening to God's instruction like children, so that we might all be partners in God's plan for unity in the world and the kingdom to come.

We, in all our diversity, will seek to equip one another to participate in the mission of the triune God in ways:

- that strengthen our spirituality and worship as the means by which our communion is nourished, refreshed and renewed
- that strengthen our sense of being united in one church family, including a commitment to gender equality and to respect for the environment,
- that strengthen our passion for justice, including in the global economy and in the creation of reconciled communities



A circle of unity with justice for all

We are sent into the world by God

We are sent out in peace, ordained and non-ordained alike, equals in the priesthood of Christ and in the unity of the Spirit, to love and serve the Lord, called to communion and committed to justice.

Officers of new Communion named

By Jerry Van Marter

Delegates to the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) elected four regional vice-presidents, a general treasurer and 16 members to its Executive Committee. The vote followed immediately on the election of the organisation's new president, Jerry Pillay of the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

Over 300 delegates from 108 countries were meeting in Grand

Rapids, United States, from June 18-26 to launch the new organization.

The president is joined on the WCRC presidium by vice-presidents Lu Yueh Wen of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Yvette Noble Bloomfield of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, Bas Plaisier of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and Helis Barraza Diaz of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, and General Treasurer Gottfried

Locher of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches.

Of the 22 Executive Committee members elected, 14 are ordained clergy, 13 are men and two are under 30. Eighteen are previous WARC members and four were also members of REC. They come from 18 countries in all eight designated regions of the world.

The executive committee also includes the two presidents of the organisation's predecessor bodies

– Clifton Kirkpatrick of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and Peter Borgdorff of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) – and the moderators of WARC’s five regional councils to form a 29-member governing body.

“We have struggled to fulfill all the requirements in our rules within the framework of 22 elected positions,” said Nominations Committee co-moderator Judi Fisher. “The task has been both sizable and difficult, but we believe we have done all that is possible.”

No counter-nominations were proposed, but delegates to the UGC approved revised procedures to ensure that future slates proposed by regional groups to the Nominating Committee will be more flexible and balanced.

Strengthening communion – deepening dialogue

by Frank Worbs

In an interview following his election as general treasurer of the first Executive Committee the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Gottfried Locher spoke about the significance of the Uniting General Council (UGC) where he was elected and the tasks facing the WCRC. Just two weeks prior to his WCRC appointment, the Swiss pastor was elected as the new President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches which has two million members.

Gottfried Locher, since the last General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Accra, Ghana, in 2004, you have served as a vice-president of WARC’s Executive Committee. What has changed between the meetings in Accra and Grand Rapids?

The feeling of unity and belonging has become stronger. In Accra social issues were to the fore and created a lot of controversial discussion. In Grand Rapids you can feel the communion of churches much more strongly, our belonging together as a Reformed family, and there’s been more in-depth theological work which may also be a result

of the union with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

What is the significance of this General Council for individual churches and congregations?

First of all the Council enriches all those who take part in it. They experience how Reformed churches in other countries live and work. They become

upon how well delegates, observers and visitors communicate this wider perspective in their own churches and congregations.

Putting to one side the recommendations and programmes which the General Council has decided upon, what do you think are the most urgent tasks for the WCRC?

I see two key theological tasks. On the one hand, to go forward with inter-Christian dialogue in particular with the Lutheran World Federation and with the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, to strengthen the communion of faith among our own member churches, for example through work on our confessional texts.

What are your tasks and goals as the newly-elected general treasurer of the WCRC?

My overall goal is to improve the financial situation of the WCRC and ensure that there are enough financial and human resources available. On the one hand, we’ll be speaking with the richer member churches about appropriate contributions to the WCRC. On the other hand, we want to work with existing networks, for example in North America, to strengthen our fundraising.



Swiss church leader Gottfried Locher is the new treasurer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. (Photo: Erick Coll)

aware of the worldwide context of their faith and can see, for example, how baptism, the Lord’s Supper or ordination are understood in other churches. So the impact of the Council depends

South African Church Leader Elected President of WCRC

By Chris Meehan

Jerry Pillay came to the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from South Africa as simply one of hundreds of delegates.

The pastor and church leader travelled to the Upper Midwest of the United States in June to help conduct business that led to the creation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

But on 24 June, Pillay became more than a delegate – and it happened the day after his 45th birthday – when he was overwhelmingly elected as the first president of the WCRC.

“I came here as a mere delegate, with no intentions or aspirations, and I walk away as president,” said Pillay, who is general secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in South Africa.

He credited his election to Jesus Christ who in recent years has surprised him in many ways.

“In all humility, I thank you for your trust,” he told delegates meeting in Van Noord Arena on the campus of Calvin College. “With God’s grace, I will do this job, realizing I am unequal to the task of those who served as presidents of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). I will learn from them, but my only desire is to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ, led by his Spirit.”

He has been moderator of the Africa Region of WARC; serves as chair of strategic planning for the Council for World Mission, and has served as a mediator with his church in helping to resolve disputes among churches in other countries in his region of Africa.

In an interview after his election, Pillay said that he had felt the calling from God to be a minister from the age of ten. Occasionally, he fought

it, but he always moved forward and into the ministry.

He studied theology in graduate school and earned a Ph.D in missiology from the University of Cape Town. His dissertation was on “The Church and development in the new South Africa.” Outreach in the course of creating unity has always been important to him.



“Our voice together will be a voice that is strong,” says Jerry Pillay, first general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. (Photo: Erick Coll)

In 1987, he began his service as a minister, serving a few churches and spending time preaching and visiting congregations in the United States.

Married with three children, he never imagined that he would ever be president of an organization that served more than 80 million Reformed and Presbyterian Christians worldwide.

At the same time, though, he said in the interview, he has long “felt God calling me to bigger things... I’ve been deeply involved in the ecumenical movement ... I’ve always seen God at work in my life.”

As president of the WCRC, he plans to continue his ecumenical

work, striving for unity and fellowship between the churches in the newly formed organization. “Our voice together will be a voice that is strong,” he said.

The WCRC, he said, will continue the social justice legacy of WARC and the deeply pietistic and theologically-based legacy of REC. In fact, he sees the two as part of a whole.

He said he reads the Bible to demand that the followers of Christ engage in prayer and community and also in actions of social justice. “The church has to be involved in serious mission worldwide,” he said.

Pillay has been a pastor and church leader in South Africa during a time of sweeping historical change as the country, largely at the prodding of Reformed churches, dismantled its policy of apartheid, the official separation of the races.

He has since spoken out vigorously for human rights in countries such as Zimbabwe and Madagascar.

As president of the WCRC, he said, he will push for a greater dialogue with other Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church that sent a papal representative as an observer to this week’s merger meeting.

He also foresees interfaith dialogue with persons of other faiths, such as Jews and Muslims. “The work of the church doesn’t exclude people of other faiths,” he said.

Overall, he said, he sees the merger of WARC and REC as creating “a new chapter in the history of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We hope to take what we have and see how we can use it to help shape the future and to have an impact on the world for Jesus Christ.”

Worship and spiritual renewal study launched

Faith as expressed through both worship and actions is at the heart of the programme for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Yet today when there are many conflicting perspectives on faith, it is not easy to tell what wise action is and how to create a worship experience which will lead to such insight. Clearly, the times call for new ways of worshiping and discerning the Christian call to faithful action.

“The need for renewal is great,” says WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi. “Worship needs to be alive and life-giving, renewing our connection with God and stimulating our commitment to transformation in the world.”

In preparing for the Uniting General Council (UGC) in June where the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) merged to form WCRC, the international worship committee for the UGC and the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship based at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, prepared a statement of worship renewal under the leadership of the

director of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, John Witvliet, and Emily Brink, a worship consultant associated with the institute.

“The mandate,” says Witvliet, “was to develop a statement which expressed a vision for faithful and vital worship in light of contemporary challenges world-wide, and to do so in ways that would genuinely help congregations on a local level.”

And so a document dubbed “the proverbs statement” was drafted. The 15 page booklet in English, French, German and Spanish is a collection of proverbs about the practice of Christian worship, based on the tradition of Christian wisdom literature as found in the Bible and on the accumulated wisdom of churches around the world over the centuries.

“The sharing of wisdom is a practice suited to a worldwide communion of believers,” Witvliet says. “We receive and share across cultures, recognizing each other as part of Christ’s body.”

Prior to merging, both founding organizations of WCRC had commissioned work on the question of worship and spiritual renewal. The

24th General Council of WARC held in Accra (2004) and REC in Utrecht (2005) each passed resolutions asking for work to be done on a statement expressing a vision of worship in light of contemporary challenges: a statement of use to local congregations.

Formally called *Worshiping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Wisdom across Continents and Centuries*, the draft presented to the UGC was developed with input from readers from 12 countries on four continents. Feedback will now be solicited from WCRC member churches and a subsequent edition is to be approved at the next general council meeting in seven years.

Says Emily Brink: “This sharing could take the form of testimonies—spoken, written, and perhaps even with audio and video resources that could be developed and shared on the web. An international tapestry of testimonies would provide a rich way to celebrate both the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ.”

“Small portions of it could even, on occasion, be read in worship to invite worshipers into deeper participation,” Witvliet adds.

Grand Rapids and beyond... the view from Europe

By Jan-Gerd Heetderks

“It was wonderful to experience the great diversity in forms of worship in Grand Rapids”, commented Bishop Bölcskei, former president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Europe, when asked to describe what he had brought back home from the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids. He is also very satisfied with respect to future developments.

“The merger of WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council has created a new, more balanced structure. Alongside social questions which are justifiably important, theology and the issue of Reformed theology have a more prominent place in our deliberations,” says Bölcskei.

The central themes of the UGC – unity and justice – defined the agenda. In recent years a great deal of work has been done on all

continents on the topic of “justice” in follow-up to WARC’s general council in Accra, Ghana, in 2004 where it was a major topic of discussion and resulted in a statement on economic injustice called the “Accra Confession”. Therefore, the report of the “Section” (policy recommendation group) on “Justice in the economy, on earth and in all creation” was much anticipated at the UGC.

The report led to a lively discussion and some controversy, particularly as it was not unanimously supported by members of the Section. In the end, however, delegates confirmed the central significance of the Accra Declaration on the “alliance for justice with respect to the economy and the environment” as one of the two core principles of the WCRC alongside Communion.

Tasks were allocated for future work.

Many participants will also cherish fond memories of the warmth and hospitality of representatives of local American Indian tribes, the original inhabitants of the country. The invitation to a Pow Wow and the speech given by Richard Twiss of the Lakota tribe of the Rosebud Sioux were most certainly among the

high spots of UGC. The suppression of cultural identity often promoted by Reformed theology denies the diversity of God’s gifts, and can lead to the marginalisation of peoples and cultures. If WCRC wishes to retain unity and justice as the two core elements of its work, it will also have to remember that we are focussing on “unity in diversity” and that there is no unity without justice.

“Rescue Christianity from the cowboys,” Native American tells churches

By Dafne Sabanes Plou

“We have to rescue the Christian faith from the cowboys,” says Native American educator Richard Twiss, a member of the Lakota Sioux Rosebud Tribe.

The Indigenous leader made his remarks in an address to participants at the Uniting General Council of Reformed churches in the Midwestern American city of Grand Rapids in June.

Twiss converted to Christianity as an adult after protesting the system of discrimination against North American native peoples for which he was imprisoned. He also acknowledged a period of radical criticism and rejection of the church for its complicity in discrimination and its silencing of information about serious injustices committed against the Indigenous peoples of the United States and Canada.

Twiss is still critical of the educational measures applied at the end of the 19th century and which resulted in the forced separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities

and their enrollment in boarding schools, many of them managed by the churches themselves. In these schools children were forbidden to speak their own language and were stripped of all cultural and communal identity. There were also cases of physical punishment and abuse.

can help the new generations feel proud of their race and overcome the stereotypes and prejudices that make the North American First Nations peoples look like second-class citizens. The objective is to help them value their traditions, their own language and their native culture.

The Lakota Sioux educator maintains that it is not necessary to deny one’s own Indigenous identity or cultural values for one to be a good Christian. In his theological reflection, he proposes a new type of mission which restores relationships among God’s people.

Twiss says people must take into account that cultural diversity is not a “deviation” from God’s original plans.

“God expresses Himself in the singularity of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” says Twiss. “Unity is only possible in the midst of diversity. Where there is no diversity, we only find conformity, uniformity, monotony. God calls humanity and the creation to the abundant life of communion.”

Contact Twiss at www.wiconi.com



Richard Twiss proposes a new model of Christian mission in keynote address.

Twiss now works primarily with Native American teachers and pastors so that through education they

Uniting General Council: Echoes from Latin America

by *Eduardo Hernández*

[Ed. note: Eduardo Hernández was a Steward (youth volunteer) in the news room of the Uniting General Council.]

Delegates and Stewards may no longer be meeting on the paths that cross Calvin College to talk about their experiences or give directions to the location of the next meeting but their voices still reverberate on the campus and throughout the world, echoes of the historic general council which created the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June.

Respect for each person was a highlight of the general council: participants could express their opinions and propose changes, plan together, see multiple points of view and decide the way forward thanks to a simple process of using coloured

cards to express their level of comfort with a proposal and move the discussion forward.

There were some interesting moments of debate, some controversial, such as when it came to deciding if it is necessary to be able to speak fluent English in order to be a member of WCRC's Executive Committee or such as when it came to the question of gender and age balance in church delegations.

As would be expected of an organization which represents more than 80 million Christians worldwide, the values of respect for diversity, mutual understanding and faith dominated and led to decisions based on Christian love.

Reflecting on what might be the Latin American vision for the WCRC, it is clear that this moment marks the birth of a renewed and renewing institution that is engaged

with the social problems that affect our countries and the whole world.

We believe that the power of God will overcome all differences. We hope that we will form a communion of churches united in response to the pain of our brothers and sisters who suffer from hunger, injustice, abuse, persecution and discrimination.

We are thirsty for peace with equity and want to see the WCRC as a reference point for our faith. This can only happen if we are living testimonies and part of the transformation process ourselves.

Guided by the light of faith, we can attain those desires and also assume responsibility for motivating our churches to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Diversity enriches and allows multiple gifts in the service of God.

*Translated from Spanish by
Kristine Greenaway*

Do you have Calvin on the brain?

By *Jerry Van Marter*

As a lifelong Presbyterian, I approached the Calvin Neuron Factor test with fear and trembling. Would I be exposed as a pagan? A heretic? A Baptist?

As part of the celebration of 16th century Reformer John Calvin's 500th birthday last year, two Swiss journalists have developed the online test as a way to "detect traces of Calvin in your brain," says journalist and theologian Michel Kocher.

The two-stage, 12-question test playfully determines whether the test-taker is an "avowed Calvinist," a "pseudo-Calvinist," a "Calvinist oblivious of it" or a "Calvinist in disguise."

"Our premise is that if Calvin had not lived, everyone's life would

be different somehow," Kocher says, "so everyone is a Calvinist to an extent, even if they don't know it."

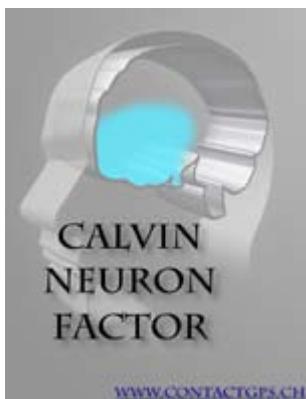
The first stage of the test calculates whether Calvin's personal influence is "secular" or "religious." In stage two, those deemed secularly influenced are divided into those for whom the influence results in community-orientation or individualism. Those deemed religiously influenced are divided into those for whom the Bible "is the only true standard" of faith and life and those who follow the Law and commandments "as a spiritual key."

"In our scheme there is a place for everyone," Kocher says, "and no place is better than any other."

More than 1,000 Genevans took the Calvin Neuron Factor test when it was introduced in two public settings in Geneva last year. Fifty-four percent were identified as having a greater religious inheritance than secular one. And fully two-thirds of respondents exhibited a "let's do it together" attitude rather than an "I do not do it like you" relationship to others.

Kocher says nearly everyone who has taken the test has reacted positively to it. "They take the test, get a specific answer and say, 'Oh, that's interesting!'" he said.

So, how did I fare? Religiously influenced in the "Zone of Pleasure," which means I'm "not crushed by the Law: the commandments of God are a figure of Christ. I follow them like Jesus did ... with a free spirit." That makes me a "Calvinist in disguise." No surprise there.



Journalist covers the unexpected

By Jackie Macadam

Chipmunks scampered around my feet. Squirrels darted across the path in front of me and rabbits nibbled grass at the edges of the immaculately trimmed gardens by the clean, modern buildings. I half expected a speaking fawn to walk cautiously out from behind the beautiful trees that gave welcome shade from the incredibly hot sun. It was hard not to imagine I was in a Disney film – but I was really in the United States at Calvin Campus in Grand Rapids to work with the news team covering the unification of two wings of the Reformed Church family – the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) – into the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). We Reformists surely love our acronyms.

Fifteen years ago, no one would have thought unification between these two groups of Reformed churches could happen. The two umbrella organisations were split for years by strong feelings and differences in tradition, but many Reformed churches were members of both, appreciating the diversity the organisations offered – WARC with its emphasis on social justice, and REC with its concentration on communion and confessional heritage. Gradually, over the last ten years, trust was built through meetings, seminars and other ecumenical gatherings. By June 2010, that process bore fruit and so I found myself in Grand Rapids, surrounded by people from Reformed churches from all over the world singing, laughing and helping each other form a greater community of Reformed believers.

My regular job is to work as a writer with *Life and Work*, the magazine of the Church of Scotland, and I had been invited to join a team of journalists appointed by UGC organizers to cover the event. The

team of eight editors and journalists wrote stories to be distributed in four languages – German, Spanish, French and English – to church and secular journalists around the world.

My assignment was to interview people with interesting stories for the daily newsletter. And there were lots of fascinating characters about.



Journalists from four continents covered the Uniting General Council. (Photo: Doug Goodwin)

On my first day on the job, I spoke to Darrell Guder, head of the Language Services Team of nearly 30 people that was responsible for translation and interpretation in German, English, French and Spanish. Now 70, Guder was about to leave the role as volunteer language coordinator for WARC general councils, a role he played for 46 years while at the same time pursuing an academic career that included serving as Dean of Academic Affairs for Princeton Theological Seminary.

Then there was the encounter with Native Americans. I met Mike Peters, a member of the Odawa tribe and a Christian who is trying to show his fellow Native Americans that the Bible is compatible with their own beliefs.

“The Bible is my plumb-line,” Peters told me. “I believe Jesus came

to impact my culture, not destroy it. God made me a Native American because He wanted me to see things through the eyes of a Native American – and that’s how He wants to work through me.”

And there was Judith Rempel Smucker, a Mennonite from Akron, Pennsylvania who designed the new

WCRC logo, as well as the striking display of banners that show the evolution of the understanding of “mission” over the past 100 years since the first World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.

Some things stand out in my memory – times of high emotion; speeches that rocked delegates back in their seats and forced them to confront truths about modern Christianity in some of its more unpalatable forms; tears, laughter and thoughtful workshop sessions.

And people, all shapes, all colours, all sizes, working together to bring to life a new organisation to unite Christians across the globe. Friendships were formed, respect was earned, and optimism was truly all around.

Dedicated ecumenical communicator from Australia sees new opportunities

Judi Fisher, an American Lutheran now living in Australia where she is active in the Uniting Church of Australia, played a key role in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches following her election to the Executive Committee as vice-president for the Pacific during the General Council in Accra, Ghana in 2004. At the time, Fisher was named Moderator of the Communication Network that oversaw the work of the WARC Office for Communication.

Following the creation of the World Communion of World Churches in June, Fisher spoke about her work with WARC and her hopes for the future of the Reformed church movement.

Reformed Communiqué (RC): Please give us a brief overview of your background in communication and of what you did as moderator of the Communication Network for WARC.

Judi Fisher (JF): I served WARC as moderator of this network from the formation in 2005 of support networks at the Executive Committee meeting in Evian, France. I came to this position from studies in education, theology and professional writing and editing which included years working in church management, publishing and community services.

The WARC Communication Network had three other Executive Committee members and several skilled church journalists who advised the Communications office as they were able. This contribution varied from developing policy drafts and recommendations; to providing an official representative for the Ecumenical News International annual meeting;

to gaining technical assistance to build the new World Communion of World Churches website; to initiating efforts to archive WARC documents for academic research and theological studies.



Judi Fisher served the World Alliance of Reformed Churches as Pacific Vice-President and Moderator of the Communication Network. (Photo: Erick Coll)

RC: What is new about the WCRC?

JF: I observed a new level of synergy at this Uniting General Council. The obvious good will of the delegates and other participants who brought the WCRC into being energised each other and focused efforts to give the best of both Reformed traditions to the creation of a new whole. This excitement was shared by ecumenical guests who attended this historic event.

Many spoke of the ‘Spirit walking among us’. Others spoke of a witness to unity, mission and justice. In a smaller way, our Pacific regional meetings gathered strangers into community, as we listened to each other’s perspective. These encounters

came home with us as stories of faith and life to share. We ‘saw’ anew.

RC: What does this mean for how the Reformed Communion should communicate its identity?

JF: We need to capture that synergy and excitement in constructive messages. I believe that the WCRC logo is an excellent vehicle for conveying our identity and unpacking the central content of our message of unity, mission and justice over the next couple of years.

RC: With whom should the WCRC be communicating?

JF: WCRC has new opportunities to communicate with defined communities. The four obvious ones are its wider membership, the communities within which these member churches reside, other Christian traditions and other faiths. But I also believe that we might construct a positive message for many who browse our website, drawn by our concrete efforts at reconciliation, peace and justice, born out of our faith conviction.

RC: Why?

JF: Many people are searching for ethical leadership and spiritual direction in a world that electronically shrinks in size and realistically grows in complexity.

WCRC can provide some of this leadership from our knowledge of the love and grace of God and the imperatives given us through that knowledge to overcome bigotry and oppression, suffering and superficiality. We can offer a solid message of hope, justice, reconciliation and practical action for the future of a world we share and an earth we inhabit.

The Partnership Fund

Supporting Women's Rights in the Congo

by Douwe Visser

The Partnership Fund of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is mandated to help member churches in the Global South carry out projects that are important for the life of a church and its surrounding community.

The Fund deals with concrete situations which in some cases involve matters of life and death. A project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) proposed by the Reformed Community of Presbyterians (Church of Christ in Congo) is an example.

By 2007, more and more stories about Congolese women being intimidated, raped and denied their rights were emerging. Women had no access to basic legal advice and support. It became clear that the best response would be to create a "legal clinic", a place where women could go and get advice from lawyers working within local non-governmental organisations.

There were legal advisers prepared to work for a minimal fee that could be paid from a small budget of local donations and start-up support from an outside donor. Therefore, the church applied for help from the Partnership Fund. The application was approved

and the project of the legal clinic was given a grant of USD 16,485.

The project has proven successful. The legal rights clinic for women is firmly established and supported by local donations. Many women come for advice and help. This gives them a basis of support in situations where before it looked as if they had no legal rights at all—a small but important example of justice being done.

This is but one story of how the Partnership Fund helps churches respond to local situations. The fund

has potential to help more churches because of WCRC's far-reaching network of member churches. This is recognized by donors and money available for projects has increased in 2010. WCRC member churches are invited to submit project proposals.

Contact the Partnership Fund coordinator, Douwe Visser at partnership@wrc.ch



Verronica Kanane, 75, displaced by fighting in Congo between rebels and government forces. (Photo: Paul Jeffrey/ACT International)

Contributing to WCRC

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) created June 18, 2010 carries the hopes and expectations of 230 member churches in 108 countries, most of them in the Global South. In order to fulfill its mandate, WCRC needs your help through support of two key funds.

- The WCRC Endowment Fund is designed to ensure

the long-term future of the Communion. The Barnabas Foundation in the United States hosts the fund and accepts contributions from individuals, congregations and denominations.

- The WCRC Birthday Gift Fund is an opportunity to celebrate the birth of the new organization by offering a birthday gift.

For information about how to make a financial contribution, you can visit the WCRC website at www.wrc.ch, contact wrc@wrc.ch, or write to:

World Communion
of Reformed Churches
150 rte de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2,
Switzerland
Phone: +41 (0) 22 791 6243;
Fax: +41 (0) 22 791 6505

Church musician killed following Uniting General Council

Indonesian church musician, Christina Mandang, died from injuries sustained when hit by a car on the closing day of the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, United States.

Mandang (38) was returning to Calvin College, the site of the UGC, shortly after 10:00 p.m. following dinner in a local restaurant when she stepped into the street to avoid a water sprinkler and was hit by a passing car. She was taken to Spectrum-Butterworth hospital where she died in the early hours of Sunday morning, 27 June.

Mandang had been in Grand Rapids as a member of the team that led daily worship services for the UGC.

The organist and pianist was a lecturer in church music and worship in Jakarta, Indonesia.

World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) general secretary, Setri Nyomi, and theology executive secretary, Douwe Visser, joined several Indonesians at the hospital who had been with Mandang at the time of the accident. Another member of the group, John FoEH, sustained a non-life threatening injury to his shoulder and arm.



Indonesian musician Christina Mandang, shown here with Joel Navarro, was a member of the worship committee for the Uniting General Council. (Photo: Doug Goodwin)

“We feel deep sadness at this loss,” Nyomi said in a statement. “Christina Mandang’s gifts touched us all. She played organ at all the services. The joy with which she did that touched each of us.”

Newly-elected WCRC president, Jerry Pillay, heard the news from Nyomi as he was leaving for the airport to return to his home in South Africa.

“I am shocked and deeply saddened by this news,” he said. “We send our condolences to Christina

Mandang’s family and wish to assure them that we are holding them in our prayers at this time.”

Emily Brink, who headed the team which planned UGC worship services, was at the hospital when Mandang died. Brink had worked closely with Mandang for two and a half years to prepare the worship life for the global gathering of church representatives from Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches.

Brink, who is associated with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, paid tribute to Mandang’s skills as a musician.

“Christina was very gifted, one of the finest Christian liturgical musicians in her country. The final hymn she played at the closing UGC worship service was ‘Oh God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.’”

The day following Mandang’s death, UGC delegates gathered at the chapel on Calvin College campus today at 11:30 for a memorial service planned by members of the UGC Worship Committee with John Witvliet of Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Rev. Kardarmanto, a past president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

Reformed Ecumenical Council leader steps down as unity dream realized

By Charles Honey

In a sense, Richard van Houten retired just as his work for Christian unity came to full fruition. General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) since 1989, van Houten stepped down from that post following the Uniting General Council (UGC) in June. He did so grateful to see the creation of a global Christian body he and other

ecumenical leaders first discussed at Calvin College in 2006.

For van Houten, REC’s merger with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) is a joy to behold.

“This is wonderful,” van Houten said as delegates arrived. “Now we see the folks coming together. For the first time, the leaders of our denominations are going to see the

results of what they agreed to” in that earlier meeting at Calvin.

Van Houten’s pivotal role in bringing about the World Communion of Reformed Churches was recognized during the UGC when WARC and REC leaders presented him with a book published in his honor, “A Man for All Seasons.”

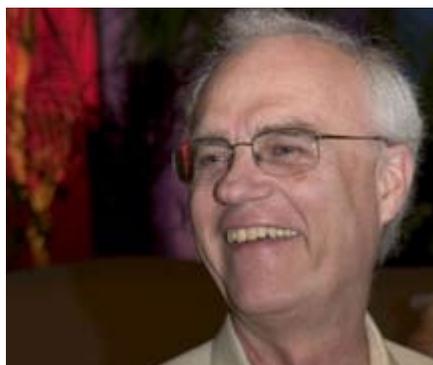
The volume features essays of tribute from leading ecumen-

ists including Margriet Gosker of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the book's editor.

"You are a faithful servant leader, like (Apostle Paul's friend and disciple) Tychicus," Gosker told him as she presented the book.

Van Houten, 63, said he has loved traveling to remote regions to help churches and knit them together.

"The most valuable thing in my REC experience has been our



Praised for his contributions to church unity: Richard van Houten, General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council

mutual recognition – our hope that we can listen to each other. By being part of this, those in suffering and isolation get the realization that 'somebody knows my name.'"

He has cherished making friends in faith around the world, he added.

"We need to be global Christians, and my job has given me a marvelous opportunity to do that," he said. "I know that's the big piece I'll miss."

News in new packages!

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is launching two new communications initiatives to mark the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

Newsletter

This issue of *Reformed Communiqué* is the first edition of the organization's new quarterly newsletter. Published in French and English, the newsletter is distributed in both print and electronic versions. It is available free of cost to members and to partner organizations.

In order to receive your free subscription, let us know which version of the newsletter you prefer and give us your contact information.

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E-mail: info@reformierter-bund.de

Website

The new website www.wcrc.ch goes live in the first week of September.

We invite you to visit the site and send us your comments.

Theology Journal

WCRC is continuing publication of *Reformed World*, the theology journal formerly produced by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The quarterly journal published in English is available by subscription. For information, contact the *Reformed World* editor by e-mail or post.

To subscribe to *Reformed Communiqué* by e-mail, send the following information to wcrc@wcrc.ch. To subscribe by fax, complete and fax the following form to +41 (0)22 791 6505

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FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



Setri Nyomi, General Secretary

Reformed Communiqué

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World Communion of Reformed Churches
Called to communion, committed to justice

What a great time we had at the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids! Yes, there were challenges and moments of difficult debate. We were shocked by the death of a dear sister, Christina Mandang, just after we closed and found ourselves united in grief. But, all in all, we can affirm that we had a great time in Grand Rapids.

In this first issue of *Reformed Communiqué*, the newsletter of the “baby” WCRC, I have chosen to focus on children.

“The worship of celebration on June 20 at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids was wonderful – especially the way children were involved.”

“Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19:14)

“We really liked how the Message Committee also wrote a special message to children.” These are just a couple of the comments that were echoed over and over again by many participants. I am greatly encouraged to hear such comments because they constitute a refreshing affirmation that for many today, it is important to give a high place of honour to children and to issues of children. It is my prayer that in their national synods and general assemblies, WCRC member churches be committed to children in this same way.

When the disciples were lost in disputes and disagreements on the basis of positions and political standings, Jesus redirected their attention to the importance of children. A general council, like many of our church general assemblies and synods, is filled with difficult decisions and even disagreements, conflicts

and election processes which often leave residues of pain from political jockeying. It is in these times that we need to hear the voice of Jesus redirecting us to think of the importance of children in the reign of God.

It is for this reason that I am thankful that the UGC took time to write a message to children. The WCRC is for those who are leaders and members of our churches today. However, it doubly belongs to the children who are both the church today and the church of the future. I hope we follow Jesus in keeping our thoughts on the children.

The theological reflections we engage in, the struggles we have to

overcome division in our churches, and our unflinching stand for justice in the economy and the earth, as well as for justice in all other spheres, should be motivated by our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the desire to leave a better church and a better world for our children.

As the WCRC begins its life, let us do everything we are called to do as God’s obedient children and as people conscious of the fact that the WCRC belongs to children and young people. All of us are called to a new level of relationship as a communion of churches which can serve as an example of unity and stand for justice for our children and serve too as God’s instrument of transformation in a world in which our children are crying for signs of hope for something better than what the world is offering them.

Let us build the WCRC for the sake of our children.