



*Integration  
of new  
arrivals is a  
key issue*

*As migrants take to the road, churches seek to respond. (Photo: ACT/Paul Jeffrey)*

## Who is my neighbour? – Churches seek faithful responses to migration

The United Nations estimates that 43.7 million people worldwide are now migrants due to war, civil unrest, natural disasters, human rights abuses and lack of economic opportunity.

Migrant peoples have been the focus of attention in 2011 for many member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). A delegation from French churches visiting the WCRC office in Geneva earlier this year named the integration of new arrivals into local parishes as a key issue to which they look to WCRC for guidance.

During this period of Advent when we remember the birth of Jesus, whose parents fled to Egypt under threat of persecution, it is appropriate to listen to these stories and reflect on Jesus' response to the question of who is our neighbour – asking what it means for church mission today. The following stories represent a sample of responses from Latin America, North America and the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific.

### Caribbean

Migrants from the Caribbean to North America often encounter dif-

ficulty crossing borders, receiving adequate compensation for their work and accessing decent housing. Churches in North America and the Caribbean are now forming partnerships to respond to these challenges.

Representatives of WCRC's Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) are taking up the challenge. In September, delegates met for their general assembly in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic under the theme "Who is my neighbour?"

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The focus was on collaborating on issues related to immigration and migration concerns in the region. Delegates encouraged joint advocacy initiatives on behalf of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic and in response to the embargo by the United States against Cuba.

## Australia

Churches in Australia lobbied hard against the Australian government's "Malaysian solution" to people-trafficking. In June, the government announced plans to trade 800 asylum seekers who arrived by boat from Malaysia for 4,000 confirmed refugees still in Malaysia.

At the end of August, Australia's highest court blocked the government decision saying that the immigration minister could not send asylum seekers to any country that was not "legally bound... to provide access for asylum seekers to effective procedures for assessing their need for protection". A victory for the churches and other human rights advocates.

## Colombia

Statistics show that three million people have been pushed off their land in Colombia due to armed conflict with revolutionary and drugs groups. Colombia's attorney general reports widespread cases of murder, rape, torture and forced evictions.

solution to the conflict, restore land to displaced people, defend human rights and build peace through dialogue. International ecumenical observers will be assigned for three-month periods to accompany Colombian rights and peace advocates.

## Switzerland

In Geneva there are some 70 "ethnic", linguistic and international Christian communities serving the city's international community. Most of the migrant Christian communities have little contact with organizations from the global ecumenical movement with offices at the Ecumenical Center, even though the organizations offer advocacy and justice programmes that address issues of concern to their communities.

In an effort to create connections between the global ecumenical community and local parishes, a two-day conference at the Ecumenical Center in October brought together 50 people from 20 local migrant and long-established parishes to meet with representatives from WCRC, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and ACT Alliance. Plans are to build on this first encounter, and engage in action on issues of mutual concern.

The conference was co-sponsored by the World Council of Churches and "Witnessing Together in Geneva", a programme of the John Knox International Reformed Centre that encourages connections between churches founded by immigrants to Switzerland and churches that have long histories in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. Douwe Visser, head of WCRC's Office of Theology and Communion, chairs the John Knox programme committee responsible for this networking initiative.

*With files from ENI and WCRC*



*Foreign workers have fled Libyan turmoil. (Photo: ACT/Paul Jeffrey)*

The Uniting Church, a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, wrote to all Federal Labour parliamentarians expressing its shock over the "cruel and punitive" plan and urged compassion.

Uniting Church President, Alistair Macrae, called the plan an abrogation of Australia's responsibilities under the 60-year-old United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Malaysia offers no legal domestic rights to asylum seekers.

A new accompaniment programme managed by the Latin American Council of Churches, in partnership with organizations including WCRC, KAIROS Canada and the World Council of Churches, has been established in response to the crisis. Chris Ferguson, a minister with the United Church of Canada, is the programme's international coordinator.

The purpose of the Programme of Ecumenical Accompaniment in Colombia (PEAC) is to support efforts to achieve a negotiated

# Communion: What does it mean for WCRC?

When churches agree to form a communion with each other – as they did when they launched the World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010 – it signals that they want to be more closely linked than the members of an association or network would be. By making this commitment to each other, they are evoking the unity of the faith expressed by sharing bread and wine at Christ's table. They are accepting both the validity of each others' traditions of celebrat-

ing holy communion and recognizing the legitimacy of ordained clergy from sister denominations.

When the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was launched in 2010, its 230 member churches affirmed that there can be no communion (unity) without justice and no justice without communion. At the same time they recognized there were important questions about the meaning of communion for member churches that would require further think-

ing. Will the communion of Reformed Churches decide what it is to be Reformed? Does being in communion imply a sharing of resources between wealthy and poor churches? Does the communion speak for its member churches? The most important question is whether churches can have great differences in doctrine and still be part of the same communion. These are all challenges that WCRC is exploring as the communion takes shape and life in 108 countries worldwide.

## Theology is crucial for earth's survival, says South African professor

The combined effects of globalization and networked communication are transforming the world in ways that can lead either to better life or disaster. How Christians understand what their faith is calling them to do in response to this challenge could make a significant difference according to a South African theologian.

"Theology now is crucial for the survival of the earth and its people," says Jurgens Hendriks. "God calls to us in a specific place at a particular time and we are at an altogether new time and place."

Hendriks who is Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Stellenbosch made his comments in an address to participants in the first global consultation of the Network of Theologians. The event, organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), brought 15 theologians from 12 countries to Mangalore, India from 21-26 October.

Douwe Visser, head of WCRC's Office of Theology and Communion, says the objective of the consultation was to create an opportunity for Reformed theologians to reflect on key issues affecting the contemporary

world, including the impact of the media on Christian beliefs and action.

"This is a group that will give guidance in a theologically changing landscape," says Visser.



*Network members include: Heleen Zorgdrager - The Netherlands, Jurgens Hendriks - South Africa, Paul Haidostian - Lebanon, Michael Weinrich - Germany (Photo: WCRC/Martin-Gnanadason)*

Plans include developing a theology of church unity ("communion") among the 230 WCRC member churches and a theology of justice. The two would be closely interconnected, says Visser.

Hendriks believes the need for new theological models is urgent in light

of the negative impact of the current global economic system. He points to increased polarization between rich and poor, noting that in the past 30 years the share of global income for the world's poorest people declined from 2.3 percent to 1.4 percent while the share for the richest people rose from 70 percent to 85 percent. In addition, the South African professor recognizes the impact of communication networking. Hendriks believes that these two forces have practical implications for the church.

"In a networked society, networked social movements are the key drivers of transformation. The church needs to learn to understand how it works in a digitalized world."

Visser says Hendriks' paper and other input, offered at the consultation, point to ways of developing and applying theology in WCRC. This includes working with related networks such as young theologians, justice advocates and regional groups of theologians. Recommendations from the consultation will be presented to WCRC's Executive Committee at its meeting in Indonesia in May 2012.

# WCRC readies for renewed dialogue with Pentecostals

By Christopher Dorn

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is currently preparing for a third round of dialogue encounters with representatives of the Pentecostal movement.

A series of planning meetings is scheduled for 5-9 December, 2011, in Chicago in the United States, under the direction of WCRC's Office of Theology and Communion. The purpose of these meetings with individuals active in the Pentecostal movement is to decide on themes on which to focus a new round of discussions.

At the time of writing this article, one can only speculate about the direction in which this round of dialogues will proceed, but issues such as worship practice and response to justice concerns are both likely to be part of the agenda.

Reformed churches are witnessing new, expressive or charismatic forms of worship in some parishes that resemble those in Pentecostal churches. At the same time, within the Pentecostal world there is increasing interest in social and economic issues. Both the Reformed and Pentecostal church movements are seeking to under-

stand and be faithful to what it means to live out their common calling as the body of Christ in

## *...clarifying Reformed and Pentecostal perspectives on Christian doctrines*

the power of the Holy Spirit.

Representatives from Pentecostal World Fellowship and other Pentecostal bodies, first met with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) at Torre Pellice, Italy in 1996. The event is regarded as historic because it was the first ecumenical exchange between a global family of Protestant churches and the Pentecostal movement. The meeting laid the groundwork for four productive years of conversation between the two partners.

At the conclusion of that first round of dialogues in 2000, significant progress in bringing the two groups of churches closer together had been achieved. The final report, "Word and Spirit, Church and World" (2000), succeeded in clarifying Reformed and Pentecostal perspectives on central Christian

doctrines that both can affirm. As a result, each is able to recognize in the other a full and authentic Christian faith and witness.

Encouraged by the outcome of this first round, participants felt confident that they could move beyond comparing positions on doctrines to engaging together under the theme of "Experience in Christian faith and life".

The team further proposed that aspects of this general theme constitute the focus in each session of that round of discussions. Thus the dialogue teams devoted the opening session to a discussion of "worship" at their meeting at Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 2002. In subsequent sessions, teams presented papers on "discipleship" (acting on Jesus' teachings), "discernment" (discovering God's will), "community" and "justice".

A final report on the second round of dialogues was not completed as WARC was preparing to merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) to form WCRC in June 2010. The proposed new round of dialogues this December will pick up on the earlier work.

## Reformed and Lutheran churches in France to unite

Two churches from the Reformed tradition in France have entered into an historic agreement to unite in 2013. At a joint synod meeting in January 2011 in Paris, the Église réformée de France and the Église évangélique luthérienne de la France took important steps in the process of moving to unification.

Participants at the meeting approved the recommendation to call the new church the Église

protestante unie de France (the United Protestant Church of France) and agreed to a process of approving pastors for ministry from the two traditions.

Parishes were invited to review the constitution and rules of the new church prior to the meetings of regional synods in November where the input will be reviewed. In spring 2012, a joint national synod meeting will adopt the

revised texts. Public education and a communication campaign will accompany the process.

The new church will become a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The founding synod of the Église protestante unie de France will be held in Lyon, France in May 2013.

# Worshiping the Triune God: Sharing wisdom about gathering for worship

This article is the second in a series introducing “Worshiping the Triune God,” a working document published following the inaugural meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010 (see part one in *Reformed Communiqué* September 2011).

The first article introduced the WCRC document and explained the process by which it was created. From here on in the series, we’ll examine five components of worship: gathering, proclamation, response, sacraments, and mission. In this article, we focus on gathering.

Whenever we gather for worship, we bring our experiences with us: our traumas (natural disasters, political upheaval, unemployment) and our triumphs (births, graduations, new jobs). These make us who we are on any given day. Even the most static congregation will be “different” each time it gathers for worship because our world is constantly changing and so are we.

*works through both reason and emotion, through both spiritual disciplines and surprising events, through both services that are prayerfully planned and through moments of spontaneous discovery.*

*Wise is the worshiping community that recognizes that the lasting value or spiritual power of worship does not depend on our own creativity, imagination, intellect, or emotions, but comes from the Holy Spirit, who may choose to use any or all of these things. For truly worship is a gift to receive, not an accomplishment to achieve.*

The triune God is waiting to meet us in our worship, prompting, perfecting, and receiving our prayers and praise and welcoming us to active participation.

Authentic Christian worship – like the Word of God on which it is centered – is living, changing, vibrant, and transformative. The blessing of worship – the life-changing experience of encountering and adoring the living God – is available to Jesus’ followers around the globe every time we gather. This blessing is not dependent on our resources or on the beauty of our location or on the approval and endorsement of our culture. Such a blessing is a gift from God as freely given as salvation itself. Yet many of God’s people settle for worship that is ritualized and devoid of energy, imagination, passion, surprise—even life. Why?

The answer to that question is as varied as the people who respond to it. There is no single solution, no universal formula to guarantee deep and vibrant worship. The process of identifying the obstacles, real or imagined, that any given worshiping community has erected between itself and God is complex. For this reason alone, prov-

erbs about the reality of God’s blessing and the reward of applied wisdom are a helpful starting point. Bringing our local context into an ongoing global conversation about worship is worth our time and attention.

As you read the following “proverbs about worship”, we invite you to observe your congregation’s process of gathering for worship as if you were a newcomer. What do you see? What do you hear?

Listen for the voice of the triune God in the words of these proverbs from the document *Worshiping the Triune God*. (Full version available online at [www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/Worshiping\\_the\\_Triune\\_God.pdf](http://www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/Worshiping_the_Triune_God.pdf))

*Wise is the worshiping community that recognizes how the Holy Spirit*



*“As we gather for worship we open ourselves to God”*  
(Photo: WCC/Williams)

These proverbs offer wise insight into why we come together to worship. How well does your congregation’s process and liturgy of gathering for worship each week reflect this wisdom?

*Paul Detterman is a Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor and musician serving as executive director of Presbyterians for Renewal.*

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# Fight poverty. Promote peace. Give a concert.

by *Páraic Reamonn*

The Chief Minister of the Mizoram Government, Shri Lal Thanhawla, was guest of honour at a concert for peace in Aizawl in September. Some of the best singers from Aizawl and Shillong performed in front of an audience of more than a thousand.

The concert, organized by the Presbyterian Church of India (PCI), was one of the first events in a programme to promote peace, fight poverty, and give a voice to the downtrodden in northeast India.

This vast region, shaped like an elephant's ear, is joined to the rest of India by the narrow Siliguri corridor. It is bounded by five other countries: Nepal, China, Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar) and Bangladesh.

Over 25 million people live in the eight states of the region, including more than 400 indigenous groups. Two-thirds, most of them landless, engage in traditional and marginal farming. Their villages lack basic infrastructure – roads, health facilities, and clean water. Economic insecurity is compounded by lack of education and social instability. The low level of development often leads

to militancy. Ethnic clashes, rooted in questions of identity, survival, land and livelihood, take a heavy toll.

The PCI programme, supported by the WCRC Partnership Fund, aims to break this vicious cycle. It will give concerts to promote peace



*The peace concert was "impressive." (Photo: ACT/Sean Hawkey)*

and highlight poverty. It will use a modern, fully equipped studio to produce audio and visual news, advertisements, public service announcements, documentaries and features and encourage better representation of poverty and conflict in the media. It will hold workshops to examine the causes and cures of poverty and encourage inter-tribe and inter-faith communication. The first of these workshops, directed at PCI workers,

and focused on the importance of media in the life and work of the church, also took place in September.

"The concert in Aizawl was so impressive and heart-touching for the participants," reports Rev. SS Majaw, an administrative secretary in the PCI and member of the WCRC executive committee. "It was so helpful to create a different atmosphere in the society."

A second concert for peace is planned for Haflong, in the Dimasao district of Assam.

The WCRC Partnership Fund is a solidarity fund that helps WCRC

member churches to carry out projects in mission or service that otherwise they could not afford. The grant to the PCI is just one of many the Fund will make this year.

To learn more about how to apply for a grant, visit [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch) or send an email to [partnership@wrc.ch](mailto:partnership@wrc.ch). Applications for funding from WCRC member churches, or endorsed by WCRC member churches, are welcome at any time.

## Churches in North America and the Caribbean plan increased cooperation

A joint assembly of two regional networks representing churches in the Caribbean and North America concluded with a promise to continue working together to meet the needs of the region. Representatives of WCRC's Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC)

met from 24-30 September in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

CANAAC elected its steering committee and officers for 2011-2014 by acclamation: Brenda Bullock of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago is the new CANAAC convenor (president). In her role,

she joins the WCRC Executive Committee and the WCRC Endowment Fund Board of Trustees.

Bullock, in her capacity as CANAAC Convener, joins the WCRC Executive Committee and the WCRC Endowment Fund Board of Trustees.

# Food Justice is a Moral Issue

“The earth can feed all who live on this planet. The problem is we are consciously, actively choosing not to feed one another,” says Randall Bush of East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, United States. Bush travelled to Geneva, Switzerland in October to preach as the winner of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance’s (EAA) Food for Life sermon competition.

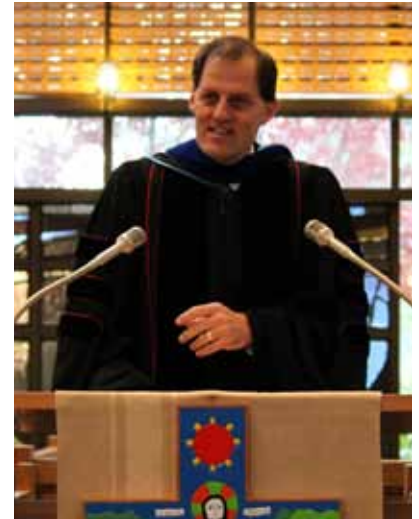
Bush – a minister of the World Communion of Churches (WCRC) member church, the Presbyterian

Church (USA) – delivered his sermon at a service in the Ecumenical Centre on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty at the conclusion of Churches Week of Action on Food.

The service was held following a weekend in which a rising tide of popular anger at economic injustice was expressed in demonstrations around the world. Food price volatility escalated by investor speculation in agricultural commodities has fuelled popular unrest in several countries.

“We can do better”, Bush declares in his sermon. “This is not just a practical issue or a political issue. It is a spiritual issue.”

Bush told WCRC following the service that he submitted a sermon to the competition at the urging of his congregation’s



*Randall Bush preached his award-winning sermon on food and faith at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva in October. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

mission committee. The committee’s concerns include a focus on poverty, neighbours, and justice.

Bush’s award-winning sermon is available on the WCRC website [www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/RandallBushSermon.pdf](http://www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/RandallBushSermon.pdf)



*(Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

## Ecumenical Cuban seminary celebrates 65th anniversary

The Evangelical Theological Seminary of Matanzas marked its 65th anniversary with a celebration from 3 to 4 October that focused on the theme “The Mission of the Church and Theological Education in Cuba today,” according to a news release from the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency (ALC).

“In the complex religious and ecumenical situation, but also the economic, political and social one that we are living through, God calls each one of us to respond to that call [and gives] a reason for hope,” said Reinerio Arce Valentin, dean of the seminary.

Ofelia Miriam Ortega, a former dean of the seminary, said it is like a house of ecumenical formation in addition to being part of Cuban civil society. She said the school recently added studies in gender perspective, feminist theology and the inclusion of handicapped persons, ALC reported.

The anniversary celebration was also the occasion for the presentation of two books; “Infinite sowing: Itineraries of the Protestant missionary work and evangelization in Cuba,” by Rafael Cepeda and Carlos R. Molina, and; “My stronger vocation has been the ecumenical one: Articles and essays in honour

of Adolfo Ham Reyes,” edited by Manuel Quintero Perez.

Arce Valentin spoke on theological education in times of survival, in which he insisted on the necessity of focusing theological work on mission, using biblical-theological and pastoral training as the main instrument, ALC reported.

Present for the closing of the anniversary celebration were Caridad Diego Bello, Head of the Office for Attention to Religious Matters of the Party Central Committee, and other officials of the Cuban Government and the Communist Party of the province.

# Harvesting fruits of contact among Reformed churches

A model programme promoting contact between local pastors in Korea and Reformed church parishes in Switzerland is enriching congregational life in both countries.

The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FEPS-SEK) has given the mandate to the church mission agency, Mission 21, based in Basel, Switzerland to coordinate biennial “encounter trips”. Every two years a group from Korea visits Switzerland and two years later a group from Switzerland is hosted in Korea.

This year, 12 pastors and laypersons from the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the Presbyterian Church of Korea travelled to Switzerland for a programme with local churches from 25 August to 7 September. Both churches are WCRC members.

Mission 21 programme officer for South East Asia, Doris Grohs, who accompanied the group, explains that the objectives of the encounter trips are to create links at the local level between parishes in the two countries and for local parish leaders to connect with global ecumenical organizations such as the World Communion of Churches (WCRC).

“Koreans get to know the country of the Reformation and what Protestant churches are doing here today. The Swiss learn from “young” (127 years old) Presbyterian churches in Korea,” Grohs explains.

During the group’s visit to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva on 2 September, *Reformed Communiqué* interviewed two of the participants. Heeyoung Lim, a pastor with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, and Eunyeoung Son, General Secretary of the Urban Industrial Mission, were asked what they would take home with them from their experience in Switzerland. Their answers were stimulating

and insightful – the hallmark of a successful ecumenical exchange.

## Eunyeoung Son: “becoming the Church outside the Gate”

Eunyeoung Son was a pastor in a local church in Seoul that serves socially and economically marginalized people before she took on the role in 2009 of General Secretary of the Urban Industrial Mission, based in the South Korean capital.



*Eunyeoung Son is General Secretary of the Urban Industrial Mission in Seoul, South Korea. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Son knew about WCRC through the resources produced by one of the founding organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. In books of prayers and testimonies, she read stories of women and workers from Korea: some she knew because they were members of her church. “I felt linked,” she said.

The time in Switzerland was an opportunity to remove herself from the daily routine and to reflect, Son told *Reformed Communiqué*.

Prior to visiting Swiss parishes, Son says her vision of European churches was negative – that they were shrinking and dying. But through her contact with congrega-

tions of the Swiss Protestant Church, she realized that, while there were indeed elderly people inside the churches, there were also many children and young people just outside.

Son sees this as an opportunity for the Swiss church; a conviction based on her experience with her former parish in Seoul called “The Church outside the Gate” (from the text in Hebrews 13 “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.”)

“We were called to minister in the local context, based on our unwavering commitment to the Gospel,” Son recalls.

In the openness to gay and lesbian people in a Swiss congregation on the border with Germany, Son sees similar signs of a willingness to integrate people of different orientations or ways of life.

The concept of “church” is evolving she says.

“The purpose of the church is not to exist for itself.

Its purpose is to invite people to God. Now we can see ‘church beyond church’. That’s where we see the dynamism of the church.”

“Our challenge is how to reconnect local reality to global solidarity so that the synergy can be a renewed source for working together,” Son says.

## Heeyoung Lim: “preaching about peace is a challenge”

Heeyoung Lim is pastor to a small parish in Hwacheon-gun county near the demilitarized zone. Its prox-



imity to the border between North and South Korea makes the issue of peace both important and controversial in the local church. For years the community benefited financially from being a military base from

which the United States staged its war in Vietnam. But it also experienced the pain of the fighting during the Korean War in the 1950's.

"People are saturated with the government logic of security," says Lim. "Preaching about peace is a challenge."

Lim believes his ecumenical encounter in Switzerland gives him the opportunity to bring the world perspective back to his home parish, Yuchon Church. He says parishioners will hear that they are not alone and that the world church

shares peace concerns and other challenges with them.

Lim cites several examples of where the concerns of the global ecumenical movement for life and justice touch those of Korea. He reports that rivers are being damaged and aquatic life destroyed by government projects of excavation and of building canals; there are plans to build a naval base on an island that is in the process of being designated a world cultural heritage site; and economic justice is under threat as workers are laid-off or become under-employed.

By travelling to Switzerland, Lim says he has been able to explore the birthplace of the Reformation and to see how the church in Switzerland continues to reform itself.

"This will inform our continuing Reformation in Korea," the pastor says.



*Heeyoung Lim serves a parish near the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

## WCRC "an inspiration" for German Reformed Alliance, says Moderator

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has received a strong endorsement from the moderator of the German Reformed Alliance, Peter Bukowski. In his moderatorial address to the general assembly of the Reformed Alliance meeting in Emden, Germany at the end of September, Bukowski focused on the Uniting General Council (UGC) that launched WCRC in 2010.

Calling the UGC "an inspiration" for the Reformed Alliance, Bukowski made WCRC's founding general council the key focus of his report in which he pointed to connections between priority issues for the Reformed Alliance in Germany and the recently approved strategic plan for WCRC.

When churches in German see dwindling congregations they can be discouraged, says Bukowski, but urged that they instead look for signs of hope such as the opportunities WCRC offers churches in

Germany to engage in important work relevant to regional concerns.

Bukowski listed several opportunities for the churches to consider. These include the challenge of understanding and addressing questions of ethics and peace deployment in places like Afghanistan; developing good theology which Bukowski defines as "a theology which searches for answers for today's challenges by listening to the witness of the scripture and studying the rich heritage of the Reformed tradition; and interreligious dialogue with Islam as well as the need to go further and think about "a theology of religions."

Bukowski concluded his remarks with a reference to the table where communion is shared in churches and asked delegates to imagine WCRC as a "table which is many miles long, because the Spirit which invites us connects us to many others: with more than 80 million people, whose representatives met in Grand Rapids, with the more than 600 million Protestants all over the world, with

2.3 billion people who believe in Jesus Christ. We are not as small and weak as we feel sometimes. The community at the table of the Lord is continued in the joint work for a more just world: community and justice."

Preaching on World Communion Day at the historic church in Barmen, Germany where in 1934 some German churches signed a declaration refusing to accept Hitler's control over church life, WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, echoed Bukowski's theme of the church community gathered at the table of the Lord.

Nyomi told the congregation: "Seventy-seven years ago in these historic grounds, faithful servants of God indicated clearly ... we cannot partake in this feast without standing up for justice even if it has dire consequences meted out by those who are in power... how can we eat together around the same table while the global economy and how we treat the environment deals death to so many in the world?"

# News briefs



(Photo: Cindy de Jong)

## Second earthquake fundraising campaign launched in Japan

Delegates to the 66th general assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) held 18-20 October approved a motion for a second fundraising campaign in response to damage to communities and churches in the earthquake and tsunami that rocked Japan on 11 March 2011.

The fundraising campaign is to focus on support for church-sponsored relief and recovery activities and the implementation of a restoration plan for Northeast Presbytery that was strongly affected by the twin natural disasters. Funds will be used for the restoration of church buildings and parish activities and on support of diaconal mission. The Diaconal Action Committee of the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) General Assembly is responsible for coordinating fundraising and relief efforts. The campaign will run from November 2011 through July 2012. The target is to raise USD320,000 in order to bring the relief fund to USD770,000.

## Political issues highlighted at Pacific church anniversary

Political issues affecting Tahiti were highlighted at the 30 August-4 September commemoration in Samoa of the 50th anniversary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). The anniversary celebrations were hosted by Malua Theological College in Samoa, where the first representatives of the PCC assembled in 1961.

During the meetings, Tahitian President Oscar Temaru appealed to the churches for help in his country's fight for independence from France. "My country used to be free... That changed in the 19th century after the European discoverers reached our shores," Temaru said. "This suppression... continues to the present day." Tahiti is part of French Polynesia, a protectorate of France.

The need for greater unity among Christians in the region was recognized, as well as for a common engagement in dialogue with representatives of other religions. Economic, social and environmental issues were discussed in a part of the world under threat by rising ocean waters that accompany global climate change.

During five decades of decolonization and the establishment of independent churches, the PCC has grown to include 28 Pacific island member churches and nine national councils of churches. An estimated 5.2 million people belong to the churches of the PCC out of a Pacific population totalling eight million. The World Communion of Churches has 15 member churches in the region including the Maohi Protestant Church in Tahiti.

*ENInews*

## Kenyan and Ugandan pastors take mission to eastern Africa

Two pastors from Kenya and Uganda have travelled to Rwanda and the DRC Congo on a mission to stage church revival and renewal fellowships. Both are associated with the Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa (CRCEA). David Masai Wabule is a national youth leader and pastor of Chebarus Local Church in Kenya. Martin M. Wanjala, serves as General Secretary of CRCEA and pastor to a Kampala, Uganda congregation.

The intent of meetings with churches in Rwanda and the DRC Congo was to enhance and promote Reformed church teachings and culture and to encourage ecumenism. In a report on the trip submitted to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Wanjala reported the trip had been a success.

"We left the churches in Rwanda and DRC Congo in a revived, transformed, renewed mood... The people in this area need such visits to be encouraged, so that they feel that they belong to a wider family of God's people." He concludes by asking WCRC member churches to "pray for these Christians who seem to be living outside this world."

# In Northern Ireland, reconciliation arises from flames

By Kristine Greenaway

Peace in Northern Ireland can sometimes be a fragile concept, as seen by riots in the capital, Belfast, earlier this year. But the people of Belfast's Whitehouse Presbyterian Church have found durable ways to conquer the hatred that destroyed their building nine years ago.

In the early hours of August 2, 2002, police woke Liz Hughes, to tell her the Victorian-era church where she serves as a pastor had been set ablaze by a petrol bomb tossed onto the roof. By morning, only the walls and baptismal font were left standing. No one was charged but community sources blamed youth from a nearby housing estate where the residents are predominantly Catholic and Republican.

"Following the fire, we had the option of closing," Hughes told ENInews. "But we asked ourselves what the church is about and what God was calling us to do. We felt our mission was to move beyond sectarianism." Today, in a rebuilt church, mixed groups of Catholic and Protestants meet at the church for activities ranging from worship and Bible study to afternoon dance sessions for retired adults and training for young people as peacemakers.

Northern Ireland has long been wracked by violence between Catholic Republicans demanding independence from Britain and Protestant Loyalists who oppose it. (Though often described as a battle between Catholics and Protestants, the causes of the conflict are complex and rooted in disputes over land, economic and political rights.)

Since a peace agreement was signed on Good Friday 1998, the region has been calmer though violence still flares. This week, East Belfast has been shaken by rioting

and gunfire. Local media reported that police say violence has been orchestrated by the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force), a Protestant paramilitary Loyalist group.

Hughes says she isn't sure why



*Liz Hughes worked with parishioners and the community to rebuild church destroyed by arson. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

the Whitehouse Presbyterian congregation chose to strengthen links with their Catholic neighbours rather than seek revenge following the fire at the church. Part of the answer may lie in her own theology.

"I told people that the church is not the building. It's the people. And that became our cry," says Hughes who arrived 18 months before the fire and still serves the parish.

Whitehouse Presbyterian Church stands on a piece of "no man's land" in an interface area between Catholic and Protestant working class neighbourhoods. In deciding to stay and rebuild, the congregation recognized that the location offers the opportunity to serve as a bridge between communities. And so the

congregation made plans for a bright, modern new facility that would be available to the whole community.

Within weeks of the fire, five priests from neighbouring Catholic parishes arrived with a cheque for 10000 British pounds (US\$16,000). A family in a nearby Catholic housing estate gathered contributions in a candy jar and anonymous gifts arrived at the church including one marked simply "Catholic pensioner." Protestant congregations contributed and Whitehouse members worked hard to design and develop the facility. By February 2005 the new church building was ready for use.

The parish is thriving. Prior to the fire, the congregation was aging. Some thought it might close within ten years. But following the fire, membership grew steadily. A recent survey revealed that 50 per cent of regular churchgoers are people who joined after the fire.

"People were drawn by the story of the church," says Hughes. "Some came back after having been away for a while. But they didn't come because of a spirit of vengeance." Instead, members today are involved in initiatives such as building housing for Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, an initiative that has expanded to include annual trips to Romania to build housing with Roma through Habitat for Humanity.

"People who burn churches are neither Protestant nor Catholic," Hughes said. "I feel a deep sadness that there are people out there who haven't a clue about what the church is meant to be about. It is about being good neighbours and breaking down barriers of distrust."

# WCRC welcomes two interns to Geneva staff team

## Aiko Sumichan

It was the evening of 1 March 2011 and I was working late on my thesis when I received an e-mail from Douwe Visser informing me about the internship opportunity at the WCRC and asking whether I would like to apply for it. I replied to the e-mail with a “yes, but...”

I had two main considerations. One was that once I graduate with my M.Div. I would have had to go (according to church regulations) through a series of ministerial trainings towards ordination and I did not know whether the synod would allow me to go on

an internship programme. The other was that 12 months of living on my own in a city I had never been to was a scary idea.

However, on that same night I read a devotional that I took as a “sign” from God (for more details see the WCRC blog), and as it turns out, everything worked out well. On 31 August 2011, I arrived in Geneva. For me it has been one blessing after another, and I’m sure there’s plenty more to come. I am certain that this whole experience is shaping me and moulding me on my journey to serve God.



*Aiko Sumichan – Indonesia  
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

## Chris Dorn

It is a privilege to introduce myself in *Reformed Communiqué*, of which I have been a faithful reader since first seeing it at the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids in 2010. I am a native of the Grand Rapids area and a graduate of Calvin College where the UGC was held. I went to Western Theological Seminary in nearby Holland, Michigan, expecting to become a parish pastor in the Reformed Church in America (RCA). However, my life took a detour through Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I completed a Ph.D. programme in Religious Studies at Marquette University, a Jesuit school. Living and working among Roman Catholics for



*Chris Dorn – United States  
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

several years left a deep impression on me. Through this experience, I discerned a vocation to serve the

cause of Christian unity, a vocation which I am exercising here in Geneva as a participant in WCRC’s internship programme. The focus of my 12 month stay is on theology and church unity. So far, I have drafted a report on the history of dialogue between WCRC and some Pentecostal churches in preparation for an upcoming round of discussions and am helping to promote the next Global Institute of Theology (GIT) to be held in Indonesia in June 2012.

*To learn more about Chris and Aiko’s experiences in Geneva, sign-up to receive postings from WCRC’s blog [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch)*

# Theological college seeks best models for aboriginal ministry

What are the best models for theological education for ministry with aboriginal peoples in the 21st century? The question concerns Reformed theological seminaries in a number of countries where the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has member churches.

In a recent interview, Chung-che Wu, Vice-Principal of Yu-Shan Theological Seminary in Taiwan, told *Reformed Communiqué* about the school's innovative approaches to theological education for ministry with the country's 15 tribal groups.

The Canadian-educated theologian is not aboriginal but has a deep commitment to preparing the seminary's students for ministry in Indigenous communities. (The terms "aboriginal" and "indigenous" are used here interchangeably.)

Ninety per cent of Yu-shan's 150 students are Indigenous. One-third of the 18 faculty members are Indigenous as is the seminary's principal, Pusin Tali. Sixty-five students are enrolled in the Masters of Divinity programme, the rest are enrolled in Bachelor of Arts programmes in Christian Education, social work and religious studies.

Classes are in Mandarin but students are also given training in their mother tongue. Many have lost their ability to speak their first language after leaving home for secondary school education in an urban centre. If they are to serve their own people, says Wu, they must recover their ability to speak their language.

Preparation for ministry in aboriginal communities includes learning traditional music, and exploration of how to use vestments

and art work in liturgy – educational approaches that are suited to Indigenous culture, beliefs and traditions. Wu wants to take this further.

"Culture is lifestyle too," says Wu. "But so many of our Indigenous students have lost touch with their home context. How can we help them recover and reconnect with their community's lifestyle?"

His vision is for students to spend three months living in a village as part of their theological training so that they become familiar with the lifestyle, make friends,

and can evangelize.

"Without this preparation, it can kill their ministry," says Wu.

In May of this year, Wu delivered a paper at a symposium at Yu-shan on theological education for aboriginal ministry. The event was co-sponsored by Taiwan's Presbyterian theology schools. The September issue of *Reformed World*, WCRC's quarterly theological journal carries the full address.

"It is time for theological reflection on where to go with theological education for aboriginal ministry," the academic says. "We at Yu-shan have a 65-year tradition. Now we must ask how we can prepare students to make a good contribution to their local communities today and in the future."



*Chung-Che Wu, Vice-Principal Yu-Shan Seminary, Taiwan (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*



*Yu-Shan Seminary in Taiwan offers programme for Indigenous students (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

# Latin American churches told “foreigners” too often blamed for social ills

The general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Setri Nyomi, believes immigrants and refugees are too often blamed when things go wrong in their host country.

“When things go bad in a community, often foreigners are blamed for it. Unemployment, crime, and immorality are often blamed on foreigners,” Nyomi says.

The Ghanaian theologian made his remarks in a sermon at the closing service for delegates attending meetings of WCRC’s Latin American regional association, AIPRAL. More than 100 representatives of churches from the region gathered in Guatemala City, Guatemala, in August for AIPRAL’s 11th general assembly.

In his sermon delivered in Central Presbyterian Church on Sunday, 14 August, Nyomi spoke on the theme: “Justice and strangers: Where is God?”

Referring to AIPRAL’s reputation as an organization that defends the rights of groups traditionally excluded in society, Nyomi

said this concern for “strangers” is based in Christian faith.

“God’s justice includes all. In fact foreigners are part of the people of action in God’s justice. All are welcome to God’s house.”

Earlier, assembly delegates elected Gabriella Mulder, a lay woman from the Reformed Church in Argentina, as

the new AIPRAL president. Mulder takes over from Clayton Leal da Silva of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil for a five-year term. Dario Barolin of the Waldensian Church in Uruguay becomes the new general secretary replacing Germán Zijlstra of Argentina who retires from AIPRAL later this year.



*Clayton Da Silva, Past-president of AIPRAL presents new AIPRAL Executive Committee: L to R: Gabriela Mulder, President; Agnaldo Pereira Gomez, Vice-president, Santos Espinosa, Treasurer, and Dario Barolin, Executive Secretary (Photo: AIPRAL)*

## Mission book launched to mark WCRC anniversary

*By Shirley J. Roels*

June 15 marked the one-year anniversary of the mission conference on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, United States, prior to the meeting of the Uniting General Council which launched the World Communion of Reformed Churches. 240 participants from 40 countries attending the mission conference explored the growing world Christian movements connected to the Reformed tradition.

On that anniversary date, I was pleased to announce the publica-

tion of a book based on the conference. *Reformed Mission in an Age of World Christianity: Ideas for the 21st Century*, published by Calvin Press, includes a foreword by Setri Nyomi (WCRC General Secretary) and an interview with Jerry Pillay (elected in June 2010 as President of the WCRC) along with articles covering input from conference presenters and participants.

There are two forms of publication: online and printed. The online version is available at

[www.calvin.edu/admin/cccs/rcc](http://www.calvin.edu/admin/cccs/rcc)

The online version is free of charge. The print edition can be ordered online. Prices information is available on the website. The contents are in English except for Richard Mouw’s plenary address that is available online in Indonesian, English, French, Korean and Spanish.

*Shirley J. Roels is Professor of Management and Director of the Van Lunen Centre at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, United States.*

# Latin American ecumenist prepares for busy retirement

German Zijlstra has devoted his working life to the church and ecumenism. From singing in an ecumenical choir as a boy through to his theological studies with students from nine Protestant denominations through to his connection with WCRC as a representative from Latin America, the Argentinean theologian has been active in many forms of ecumenism. At the end of the year he will retire from his position with AIPRAL, the Latin American network of Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

In an interview with *Reformed Communiqué*, Zijlstra reflected on his career.

## *Reformed Communiqué*: How did you first get involved in ecumenism?

I had my first contact with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (one of the WCRC founding organizations) when I went to Switzerland in 1986 for celebrations marking the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Geneva.

Most of my ecumenical work has focused on ecumenical formation through lay training centres. I am the Global Coordinator of OIKOSNET, a global network of 200 training centres, and will continue in that role until December 2013.

For the past nine years I have had the privilege of serving as the executive secretary of AIPRAL.

This has allowed me to work with national churches of the Reformed and Presbyterian family throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

women; the situation of churches in countries torn apart by severe social and political conflicts; and AIPRAL's financial challenges.



*German Zijlstra (3rd from left) plans to spend more time with family in retirement.*

## *RC*: What are you most proud of?

For me the Accra confession, signed at the WARC General Council in Accra, Ghana in 2004, was a milestone. It drew the line between what was before and what was new. It is a paradigm of a new perspective that fleshed out regional demands for social justice based on our faith.

## *RC*: What are AIPRAL's challenges and opportunities?

There are several key issues including concerns about efforts to rescind the ordination of

## *RC*: What are your plans for the future?

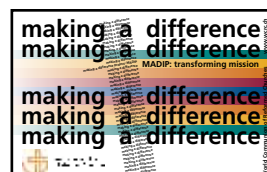
My wife and I will be moving to Uruguay to be closer to our daughters and grandchildren. In addition to continuing in my role with OIKOSNET, I will be WCRC's representative in support of the International Team of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme to the Colombian churches. (See "Colombia" page 2). The programme is sponsored by WCRC, the United Church of Canada, and the Latin American council of churches (CLAI) amongst others.

## Making a Difference – MADIP: Transforming Mission

A new publication by the World Communion of Churches offers highlights of mission work by churches in South Africa, Rwanda and Belgium through the Making a Difference Project (MADIP) sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, one of

WCRC's founding organizations.

The book tells the story of an experiment from which Reformed and United churches all over the world can learn as they seek to make a difference in their own communities.



Available free of charge at

[http://wrc.ch/sites/default/files/MADIP\\_letter72print.pdf](http://wrc.ch/sites/default/files/MADIP_letter72print.pdf)

## FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



Setri Nyomi, General Secretary  
(Photo: Helen Putsman-Penet)

## Reformed communiqué

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**World  
Communion  
of Reformed  
Churches**

Called to  
communion,  
committed to  
justice

*“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

*<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:4-6)*

Advent season is here again. In this time of joyous expectation for Christians, it is appropriate for us to thank God for coming in human form, invading history, coming to be with us. It is time to renew our anticipation of his coming again.

One of the accounts that will undoubtedly be read in many WCRC churches is how John, in understanding the mission of God, proclaims Isaiah’s prophecy, “Prepare the way of the Lord...” (Isaiah 40: 3ff). As this passage is preached in our churches this year, I hope we will take the time to ask ourselves how we are preparing the way of the Lord in this season.

The coming of the Lord ushers in transformation. It spells new life for all who believe. When the Lord touches the life of a person or a community, things are not the same – transformation follows. Terrains which are challenging to cross, because of mountains, hills and valleys, are transformed into plateaux which can be crossed with less effort. The crooked and the rough take on new shape that makes them straight and smooth.

John the Baptist drew on these images from Isaiah to urge his hearers to prepare the way of the Lord. He had a message that was relevant for everybody. Preparing meant transformation for the crowds as well as for those with financial power and military power. No one was left out.

Preparing the way of the Lord in this advent season has the same urgency to it. We are called to a renewed sense of faithfulness to God which reflects our spirit of sharing. In a world in which many people value rugged individualism and amassing possessions without thinking of others in the community, this is a radical message which calls us to share what we have and advocate for policies which provide social safety nets for all.

The message for those who are powerful is even more direct. For the powerful who control the finances of our times, the message is nothing less than to reverse injustice in society by adopting values which would move them away from amassing wealth at the expense of people.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, in its strategic plan, is calling us to a new level of spiritual renewal that bonds us strongly as a communion committed to the justice reflected in the message of John the Baptist.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, it is my prayer that we heed the voice that cries in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord. It is time to examine ourselves and yield to the transforming power of God in this season of Advent.

*The coming of the  
Lord ushers in  
transformation*

## Prayers online

Is your church in need of prayers?  
Is it concerned for the situation of  
churches in other parts of the world?  
The WCRC website has prayer  
resources for you.

WCRC member churches frequently  
submit requests for prayers that  
are posted to the website. Recent  
postings include prayers for Japan,  
the Republic of South Sudan and  
Tribal and Adivasi peoples in India.  
Each week as well you can connect  
with the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle of  
the World Council of Churches via  
WCRC’s home page.

Visit [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch) regularly for  
inspiration for prayer.