

“The WCRC will come alive and touch the lives of people in parishes when programmes are rooted at the local level.” WCRC president, Jerry Pillay



(Photo: ACT Alliance)

WCRC drafts programme for 2011-2017

The Officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) have agreed to a draft statement of key programmatic objectives for the coming seven-year period based on input from member churches, partner organizations, regional councils of churches, and the WCRC Executive Committee.

WCRC general secretary, Setri Nyomi, is pleased with the recommendations saying that the key programmatic objectives set the framework within which to develop plans for the

period leading up to the next meeting of the General Council in 2017.

“We have received a clear message from our member churches with their vision for the WCRC,” says Nyomi. “Development of a comprehensive strategic plan is well underway thanks to input from member churches and WCRC regional councils.”

The key programmatic objectives are: mission, theology, justice, ecumenical engagement and Communion (close unity among member churches).

The objectives were formulated by a group meeting in Geneva in November charged with drafting a strategic plan for the organization following its founding meeting in the United States in June. The team, whose members come from WCRC member churches in Africa, Asia, North America, South America, and Europe, based their proposals on responses to a questionnaire sent to just under 300 respondents. Approximately 20% replied.

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In presenting a draft report to the Officers, the facilitator of the strategic planning process, Omega Bula, underlined that recommendations

“We have received a clear message from our member churches.”



WCRC priorities for 2010-2017 were set by Uniting General Council. (Photo: Cindy de Jong)

drew on the policy report adopted at the WCRC founding general council. These include the recommendation that: “Regional councils should be the locus of much of WCRC’s work, and thus the Executive

Committee and staff should develop methods for empowering Regional Councils.”

WCRC president, Jerry Pillay, welcomes the report’s recommendations.

“The WCRC will come alive and touch the lives of people in parishes when programmes are rooted at the local level,” says the South African church leader.

The strategic plan will be presented for approval to the organization’s executive committee during meetings in Geneva in May 2011. Meanwhile, the recommendations received by the Officers will form the basis of WCRC programmes planned for the first half of 2011. These include dialogue between Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, solidarity and relationship-building visits to member churches by the General Secretary and the President, production of a book of Caribbean women’s Bible studies, and disbursement of funds from the Partnership Fund for church-initiated development projects.

Congolese churches seek understanding

A pastoral visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in December by the general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is expected to yield results in enhanced understanding and cooperation among WCRC member churches in the country.

WCRC general secretary, Setri Nyomi, and a team of ecumenical leaders from the African region met with church leaders and cross-sections of the church community: women and men, lay and clergy, young and old. Discussions focused on how the WCRC’s programmes in communion (church unity) and justice affects their ministries and what the programmes mean for communities in the DRC.

Pastoral team members accompanying Nyomi on the eight-day visit included: WCRC Executive Committee members Veronica

Muchiri, and Elisée Musemakweli; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) liaison in Central Africa, Jeff Boyd; All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) representative, Vivi Akakpo.

The team was able to visit six of the seven WCRC member churches in DRC. Members were unable to visit the seventh member church, with its head office in Lubumbashi.

The CPK has agreed to listen to all sides of the debate about the women’s congress.

“We would have needed to add three days of travel for a one day visit,” Nyomi notes.

In January, Nyomi told *Reformed Communiqué* that WCRC member churches headquartered in the south-central city of Mbuji May are now in “serious discussion” about creating closer working relationships and

building a Reformed Centre together. The team joined a congregation of the Communauté Presbytérienne au Congo in worship on Sunday, December 12, 2010.

In the country’s capital, Kinshasa, the team investigated a controversy in the Communauté presbytérienne de Kinshasa (CPK) about a congress for women that took place in

November-December 2009. Through the intervention of the team, the CPK has agreed to listen to all sides of the debate about the women’s congress and to foster justice and healing for all in the church. Nyomi reports the church is committed to “building on the good work done through the women’s department.”

Wrong reading of Bible story ‘legitimises’ earth’s exploitation

By Maurice Malanes

Asian Christian leaders have challenged what they describe as a distorted interpretation of the Bible’s Genesis story about God telling Adam and Eve to “subdue” the earth and to “have dominion” over other living species and non-living resources on the planet.

“The misinterpretation, which has been blamed on Christians, has helped legitimise the wanton profit-oriented exploitation of the planet and its resources,” said Hrangthan Chhungi of the Presbyterian Church of India.

She said that the more appropriate translation from Hebrew, the language in which Genesis is written, is “to over-see and take care, rather than to subdue and have dominion”.

Chhungi, who is also the executive secretary of the Commission on Tribals and Adivasi, a programme of the National Council of Churches in India, is a theologian who was presenting a biblical and theological perspective at a consulta-



“Water, like land, is meant to be shared.” Ecumenical Water Network
(Photo: Diane Greenaway)

tion at the end of November 2010 on “communities’ rights to water and sanitation in Asia” held in Manila.

“We are, therefore, overseers and caretakers of God’s creation,” said Chhungi. “As such, we don’t have

the license or, the freedom to abuse our planet and its vital resources. God gave us freedom to use the earth’s resources but this comes with great responsibility.”

More than 40 delegates from Christian groups and church-based organizations from 12 countries in Asia participated in the consultation organized by the Ecumenical Water Network, a faith-based water rights advocacy group. It was hosted by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

Chhungi’s reflections, reinforced by other participants, were aimed at helping build a “theological framework” on taking care of and responsibly managing the earth’s resources, such as water.

“Water, like land, is meant to be shared. But corporate greed is making this resource less and less accessible to people,” National Council of Churches in the Philippines general secretary, the Rev. Rex Reyes told participants in a closing message.

ENInews

Swiss journalist named ENI president

Swiss journalist and Reformed church pastor, Michel Kocher, is the new president of the ecumenical news service, Ecumenical News International (ENInews), following elections at an extraordinary general assembly in January. The meeting was called as plans for restructuring the news agency were being put in place.

Changes in the organisation of ENInews became necessary due to reduced funding. A special group, mandated by the executive of Ecumenical News International, is

working on plans for the long-term continuation of the service. In the interim, daily news service is being provided by an editor based in New York who is working with a global network of freelance writers, most based in the Global South.

In May, an action plan for the organisation will be presented to the governing body of ENInews. The organization is expected to adopt a structure built on a network model that will include editorial offices in several regions of the Global South and North.

ENInews recently signed an agreement with the French-language news service of the Reformed churches in the French-language region of Switzerland. The agency, Protestinfo (www.protestinfo.ch) will provide translations of ENInews stories.

In a statement release to the media, Kocher writes: “The partner organisations of ENInews are convinced of the importance of maintaining ENInews and are doing all in their power to ensure the service continues.”

Travel to Cuba eased

By Solange De Santis

The general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA (NCCCUSA) has welcomed a decision by the government of the United States that will lift travel restrictions with Cuba to make it easier for religious groups in both countries to engage with one another.

"I was delighted to hear the news," said Michael Kinnamon. "We had been asking President Obama to take these steps since the beginning of his administration – most notably in a face-to-face meeting with the president and heads of NCC member communions in the White House last November."

Kinnamon, a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) clergyman, participated in a White House conference call in January during which the changes were announced. Kinnamon said the call for more open relations with Cuba "has been pressed by a united front of our member communions, our sister agency, Church World Service, as well as by our interfaith partners and other persons of good will."

The White House move "is an important first step toward more just and open relations between the U.S. and Cuba," Kinnamon said. "We look forward to the day when the

U.S. embargo of Cuba will be lifted completely."

The White House said that the change in policy is intended to "enhance contact with the Cuban people and support civil society through purposeful travel, including religious, cultural and educational travel." Under the new policy, religious organizations will be allowed to sponsor religious travel to Cuba under a general license.

In addition, accredited institutions of higher education will be allowed to "sponsor travel to Cuba for course work for academic credit

under a general license; allowing students to participate through academic institutions other than their own; and facilitating instructor support from adjunct and part-time staff."

The order also creates a general license for U.S. individuals and groups to send money to religious institutions in Cuba in support of religious activities.

All U.S. international airports may now apply to provide services to licensed charters to and from Cuba under the conditions of the order.

ENInews



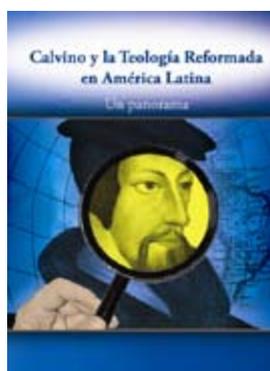
Meetings of faith leaders with American president have led to easing of travel restrictions with Cuba. (Photo: White House)

New book offers Latin American views of Calvin

A publication about the impact on Latin America of the 16th century Reformer, John Calvin, has been released in Colombia.

Calvino y la teología reformada en América Latina: un panorama (Calvin and Reformed theology in Latin America: a panorama) was launched in November by the Latin

American regional group, the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL) and the Corporación Reformada University.



The anthology, edited by Leopoldo Cervantes Ortiz, offers a range of points of view on the social and theological thoughts of the church reformer who was born in France and spent most of his career in Geneva. Articles include contributions from Spanish, Dutch and French authors with those from Latin American writers.

"The emphasis on Latin America is intentional", Ortiz writes in AIPRAL's quarterly magazine, *La*

Voz. "The objective is to show that it is not only in countries where Calvin had a direct contact that his contribution to Christian thought is studied and appreciated."

AIPRAL's general secretary, Germán Zijlstra, says the book is "one of the fruits for the Reformed family of churches from the celebration in 2009 of the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth."

The book is published in Spanish by Combatientes de Malvinas based in Entre Ríos, Argentina.

Agencia Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Comunicación (ALC)

Zambian congregation listens to the voiceless

Armed with commitment and common sense, two women from a suburban congregation in Lusaka, Zambia have launched a project that engages their church in dialogue with people living in poverty on the edges of the community. In forums during Sunday services since 2004, parishioners have been hearing from stone cutters and widows about their struggles to eke out a living under increasingly difficult economic conditions.

Josephine Muchelemba, a retired government economist, and Gladys Mubanga Maipambe Kabwe, a former public administrator, have organized a highly-successful series of Globalization Sundays at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Once a quarter, the Sunday service is built on a theme related to economic and social justice. The programme features "talk show" style dialogue with local subsistence workers and drama in place of the sermon.

They have heard from people such as a woman market vendor who has difficulty selling her vegetables now that there is a big supermarket across the street. They have seen the impact of land speculation which drives prices up to the point that flood victims cannot afford to relocate and start over again.



African market sellers are often pushed to the edge of society but congregation in Lusaka, Zambia is inviting them into their church.

(Photo: ACT Alliance)

The increased awareness of what happens to people marginalized by the combined effects of natural disaster and the unbridled global market economy prompted the congregation to donate to relief efforts for the victims of the tsunami in 2004. "We saw the images," Muchelemba recalls, "and felt we had to respond."

Now Muchelemba and Kabwe are looking to the ecumenical global platform on social justice, Oikotree, for ideas of what to do with what they are hearing.

"We've analyzed the causes of the economic difficulties people are experiencing here," says Muchelemba. "We need to move on to practical things. We want to anchor the project in something tangible."

The St. Andrews initiative serves as a model for the synod and other congregations. But Kabwe stresses, "We are not experts. We have no training. We want to learn from what is being done by similar groups in South Africa, India and elsewhere."

Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, the staff person with responsibility for economic and social justice issues for the World Communion of Reformed Churches, says that Oikotree is turning its attention to this challenge.

"People are now ready to put their Christian faith together with their understanding of the damage done to the lives of their neighbours by the global market economy. Oikotree is working with its network members to develop ideas and guidelines for such initiatives," the Guyanese pastor notes.

Dutch synod heals old rifts

By Andreas Havinga

A gathering to improve relations among the many Protestant denominations in the Netherlands has taken place on the site of an earlier historic synod though any idea of complete church unity is said to be "an unrealistic utopia."

About 700 Christians from 50 Protestant churches attended what was billed as a "national synod" in early December in the main church in the town of Dordrecht.

The gathering's name echoed that of the Synod of Dordt, a six-month-long historic assembly held in the same building from November 1618 to May 1619, and called to settle a dispute between Calvinists and Arminians. Calvinists believe that God preordains only some people for salvation; Arminians say that all can be saved. Calvinism won. Today, Protestant Christians, mainly Calvinist, make up about one-third of the country's 16.3 million population.

In commenting on the synod, Douwe Visser, the head of the office of theology for the World Communion of Reformed Churches, says: "An event like this inspires the Reformed Communion to go along the path to work for unity and reconciliation."

Gerrit de Fijter, a former president of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, said that the next step was to involve denominations that had refused to attend the December meeting.

ENInews

Inspired by faith

Egyptian Presbyterian wins UN award

His faith inspires him, his training equips him, and his vision sustains him. Ehab El Kharrat, an Egyptian Presbyterian and psychiatrist, is a leader in transforming the attitudes of religious leaders in the Arab region towards people living with HIV and AIDS.

El Kharrat's ground-breaking work since 2004 with Muslim and Christian leaders in the Religious Leaders Initiative sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was recognized at an awards ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland during the South-South Cooperation Forum prior to Christmas.

Ali Abdussalam Treki, President of the United Nations General Assembly, presented the South-South Leadership award to El Kharrat and Khadija Moalla, a lawyer and human rights activist who heads the project.

The focus of El Kharrat and Moalla's work is to change the attitudes of senior clergy in the Arab region towards people who are living with HIV and AIDS. Their message to Imams, heads of Protestant denominations, and senior Catholic clerics is simple: "HIV is not a punishment of God. People living with it are our brothers and sisters."

The end objective of the training for clergy is to lift the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS so that people will go for volunteer testing and counseling. Studies have shown that people are reluctant to be tested when they fear being excluded from their faith community based on the results.

Asked in a telephone interview with *Reformed Communiqué* how his faith has shaped his career, El Kharrat's reply comes quickly.

"My most cherished Reformed doctrine is about the Spirit of God at work in the world. God works profoundly to counter injustice. Most of our Lord's time was spent with the marginalized and stigmatized. The

emphasis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches on promoting a Christian understanding of justice is at the heart of the Christian message."

El Kharrat reports that initiatives such as promoting a kit for religious leaders about HIV and AIDS and leading workshops throughout the region where senior religious leaders meet people living with HIV are prompting radical changes in clergy attitudes.

"I have seen an Imam go from preaching blood and thunder condemnation of people with AIDS on the first day of a workshop to dissolving into tears two days later after hearing from a woman who became infected when she had no choice but to become a sex worker after her husband died. Society offered her, as a woman, no other way of supporting herself," says El Kharrat.

"After listening to her story the Imam told her, 'My lady, I want to ask you to forgive us for letting society do this to you.'"

public discourse about those living with HIV and AIDS and are directly linked to a significant increase in the numbers of people seeking testing and counseling. In Morocco the numbers have increased eightfold; in Yemen the increase is 18 fold.

El Kharrat began his pioneering work in a project he initiated in his home church, Kasr El Doubarah Evangelical Church (Presbyterian) in Cairo where he has been an Elder since 1983. The parish is the largest Protestant congregation in the Arab region with 6000 worshippers.

The programme, "Freedom Drugs and HIV Programme", is based on El Kharrat's experiences with drug users while serving as the congregation's youth worker in the late 1980's – an approach he describes as a combination of psycho-therapy and Christian discipleship practices.

The model attracted the attention of Egyptian officials and the church was encouraged to expand its work



"HIV is not a punishment of God. People living with it are our brothers and sisters," Egyptian Presbyterian and psychiatrist, Ehab El Kharrat, tells faith leaders in the Middle East. (Photo source: El Kharrat)

These changes in perception due to the Religious Leaders Initiative have led to dramatic changes in

with drug users. It is now the largest drug outreach programme in the Middle East.

Partnership Fund

Rwandans learn to live with HIV

By Douwe Visser

Today, seventeen years after genocide tore apart the social fabric of their country, Rwandans continue to grapple with its legacy of disease and lack of education.

Estimates of the number of women and girls raped during the two-month genocide in Rwanda in 1994 vary from 250,000 to 500,000.

Eighty-seven per cent of women raped were infected with HIV.

Through its Partnership Fund, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is supporting efforts by Rwandans to rebuild their lives.

The Mbwira Ndumva Initiative – “Speak, I am listening” in Kinyarwanda – was recommended

by the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda for a grant of USD \$16,297 in 2007 to support its work with women and girls affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Support from the Partnership Fund allowed Mbwira Ndumva to offer job skills training to young, uneducated girls who are at risk of being drawn into prostitution because they have no other way of supporting themselves and their families. Four trainers were recruited to train 40 orphan girls in tailoring, card making, embroidery, dance and drama, and baking bread and bagels.

At the same time, women infected with HIV or who have AIDS were invited to participate in a five-day seminar on living with the virus. The seminar focused on reconciliation and social integration, family cohesion and how to become part of the campaign against the spread of HIV. One hundred women benefited from this “sensitization training.”

The Mbwira Ndumva Initiative is to receive another grant from the Partnership Fund in 2011.



Rwandan women are learning to support themselves following the 1994 genocide. (Photo: LWF)

Zambian nurse wins Swiss prize

A nurse who used her retirement benefits to launch a project to support people living with HIV and AIDS has been named the 2011 winner of an international prize awarded by women of the Swiss Reformed Churches to a woman who shows exceptional leadership.

Agnes Lisulo Mulemwa from the United Church of Zambia was chosen to receive the Sylvia Michel Prize granted by the women presidents of the Reformed Churches in Switzerland in cooperation with the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The prize, created to recognize women who initiate projects that train church women for leadership, is named for the first woman president of a European church executive.

The award honours Mulemwa’s work as founder-coordinator of the Liyoyelo Batik Centre, a training centre in western Zambia where women learn the leadership functions of a traditional leader or “anamoio” in order to support people living with HIV and AIDS.

In a telephone interview with *Reformed Communiqué*, Mulemwa explained the Liyoyelo project founded in 1995 focuses on offering psycho-social counseling and skills training for people living with HIV and AIDS. “We are teaching them to understand HIV so that they can



Agnes Lisulo Mulemwa, a retired Zambian nurse, has been awarded the 2011 Sylvia Michel Prize (Photo: Kristine Greenaway)

bear with it,” Mulemwa says.

Participants are offered life skills courses and training in income-generation activities such as making batiks (cloth painting with wax) and sewing.

A healthy diet is essential if anti-retroviral (ARV) medication is to be effective, Mulemwa says, so an important aspect of the project is to

raise fruit and vegetables. Produce is distributed to people who are taking ARV’s and also sold to support the programme.

Mulemwa will travel to Fribourg, Switzerland to receive her award on 20 March 2011.

Ben Masilo mourned

A human rights advocate from Lesotho who served time in prison during the apartheid era in southern Africa and went on to become his country's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom has died at the age of 79. Ben Masilo, a layperson with the Lesotho Evangelical Church, served as vice-president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) from 1989 to 1997. Masilo died 01 December in Lesotho after suffering heart problems.

Masilo studied journalism at the African Literature Centre in Kitwe, Zambia and began his career as a sub-editor for the *Leselinyana la Lesotho* newspaper before becoming its editor in 1961. He served on the Hansard Editorial Staff for the Lesotho National Assembly in 1966-67. In 1971 he was arrested and detained for 20 months without trial.

Tragedy struck in 1981 when Masilo's grandson was killed during a night-time attack. Masilo escaped with his family to Nairobi, Kenya where they stayed until amnesty was granted in 1986 to political refugees from Lesotho.

Masilo's career in ecumenical service to African region churches and the global church included serving the All Africa Conference of Churches as Secretary for



Ben Masilo and wife Caroline fled Lesotho in 1981 under death threat for opposing apartheid. Ben later served as vice-president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. (Photo: Margaret Owen)

International Affairs and Refugees (1982-1990), a role which involved active monitoring of human rights abuses in Africa.

In 1982 Masilo was elected as a member of WARC's Executive Committee at the General Council in Ottawa, Canada and became a vice-president of WARC from 1989 to 1997. He was Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly in Lesotho from 1993 to 1996 and served as the High Commissioner for the Kingdom of

Lesotho in London, United Kingdom from 1996 to 2000.

In a tribute to him, Setri Nyomi, the General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, wrote: "He was a wise and active member of the Executive Committee and Vice President. His wisdom was instrumental in helping WARC at the time to steer through some very challenging issues. We thank God for the life of Ben Masilo and all the impact he made in his lifetime."

First woman named to head Latin American church



Sonia Skupch is the first woman appointed General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate in Argentina.

A woman has been appointed General Secretary and Ecumenical Officer of the Evangelical Church

of the River Plate (Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata). Sonia Skupch, an ordained pastor, assumed the position in January succeeding Juan Abelardo Schvindt. Skupch is the first woman to serve as General Secretary for the church and the first in the role of Ecumenical Officer. At 35, she is also one of the youngest ever to hold the position. She will serve for the period 2011-2017.

Skupch holds a Masters in Theology from IU- ISEDET, Buenos Aires, Argentina and was ordained in December 2006. After

serving in the Evangelical Methodist Churches of the Valley of Chubut in southern Argentina, she moved to the Parana congregation in Entre Rios, Argentina, where she was serving at the time of her appointment. She has been a member of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the River Plate church since 2004 and served as a member of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation until July 2010.

The Evangelical Church of the River Plate is a union of Lutheran and Reformed Churches.

Mission coordinator says farewell

“Mission is at the heart of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.”

Mission is at the heart of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This has been Jet den Hollander’s mantra for the ten years that she has been responsible for mission projects for the global Reformed church movement.

“When we talk of mission,” says den Hollander, “it is not one of the areas in which WCRC is engaged. But rather, it is the church’s calling. Projects may be focused on specific actions but must always be attentive to the overall mission of the church.”

The Dutch laywoman has brought creativity, commitment, passion and deep faith to her work. From 1999–2005, den Hollander worked on the Mission in Unity programme at John Knox Centre in Geneva, Switzerland before taking on the role of coordinator of the Mission Project for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, one of the WCRC founding organizations. Now den Hollander is moving on to new career opportunities at the conclusion of her contract with the Communion.



Jet den Hollander prepares for life after ten years in mission portfolios with global Reformed church movement.

In reflecting on the people who have most influenced her thinking over the past decade, den Hollander points to the late Swiss theologian, Lukas Vischer who believed a focus on Reformed identity can overcome church divisions and free energy for joint mission initiatives.

Den Hollander’s commitment to joint action guided the Mission Project and tested new ways of working together that she hopes will influence church action in the future. Through shared action and reflection on projects such as literacy programmes for women in Belgium, South Africa and Rwanda, mission coordinators came to see the value of learning new approaches to literacy from each other.

Projects like this show, says den Hollander, that if churches want to be involved in mission, it is best done with other churches. She admits it is more demanding to work with partners in several countries but adds: “It is the most effective way of grappling with mission priorities.”

Asked what the legacy of her work will be, den Hollander says it will take time before the results are visible. For now part of her legacy is visible in the interactive learning experience she created for the Edinburgh 2010 mission conference and then brought to the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids. In what has been dubbed the “Edinburgh Pilgrimage”, participants are invited to walk among a maze of banners that portray moments of mission history. Visitors are guided by the banners and by a booklet to reflect on their own family and church history in mission and on what they feel called to do in today’s context.

For more information, visit www.wcrc.ch The Mission pages there offer valuable resources for WCRC member churches and staff as they continue to hold mission at the centre of the Communion.



Roger Gaikwad has been installed as the new general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India. (Photo: NCCK)

Presbyterian is new head of Indian church council

By Anto Akkara

A Presbyterian theologian, Roger Gaikwad, has been installed as the new general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India which groups 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches.

“My aim is to strengthen ecumenical relations at the grass roots. This will bring out greater unity among the churches,” Gaikwad told ENInews in December.

Fifty-seven-year old Gaikwad had been principal of the Aizwal Theological College of the Presbyterian Church of India and was chosen unanimously for the post in August.

Gaikwad will be responsible for convening the assembly of the Indian church council in 2012 and for guiding the church grouping through its centenary year in 2014.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Change in theology leadership

Long-time ecumenist and well-known theologian, Joe Small, has retired from his position as Director, Theology, Worship and Education Ministries with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Charles Wiley, former Coordinator of Theology and Worship for the PCUSA, assumed the role in January.



Joe Small retires. (Photo: Presbyterian News Service)

In an interview with *Reformed Communiqué* following his retirement, Small reflected on the highlights of his experience in global ecumenism and offered his hopes for the new World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Small began his career as a parish minister and later worked as Director of Church Studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, United States. His involvement with the global Reformed church movement began when he served as a consultant for the 23rd general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Debrecen, Hungary in 1997. In the late 1990's he co-chaired the Reformed – Pentecostal Dialogue, an experience he calls “transformative.”

“I haven't read the Bible the same way since then. I am more aware of the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments,” says Small. “Before, I was grindingly Christological, not fully Trinitarian. I didn't take account of the role of Spirit in God's salvation.”

Small admits to being concerned that what he has learned from his international, ecumenical experience has proven difficult to share broadly. “The impact on PCUSA has not been as wide and deep as could be wished,” he says.

The educator and theologian believes that the PCUSA needs

WCRC for the contact it offers with other member churches. “We are all bound by our cultures,” Small declares. “When Africans and North Americans do theological work together, it produces something more faithful. We are not trapped in our little box.”

Small leaves WCRC with a challenge and a vision for the future: “The Reformed Communion needs to touch on congregational worship, faith and theology. That is what our church needs the most, something that touches worshippers through sermons and in study groups.”

Small's successor, Charles Wiley, laughs in response to the question from *Reformed Communiqué* about what he brings to his new role.

“Like most Presbyterians, I was born to Pilgrim Holiness missionaries serving in Surinam,” he jokes. “My mother traveled 20 miles by dug-out canoe to give birth.”

Wiley explains that he is a Presbyterian today because of the Reformed doctrine of God – “the notion of the grace of God” – and because of a discussion with a Catholic student while at college about how Protestants choose their denominations. Wiley went on to earn a Ph.D. in Reformed doctrine of the church at Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States.

The new director brings a wide range of global and ecumenical experience with him to his new position. This includes participation in the work of the Lutheran – Reformed Standing Committee on Theology in the United States and involvement with WARC on liturgical expressions of ecumenism.

Like his predecessor, Wiley believes that contact with the global church offers an opportunity to have “a deeper and richer conversation about things that matter.”

“The PCUSA is in danger of becoming internally focused on theological disputes. Encounters with Reformed Christians from around the world are vital to our spiritual health,” he says.

This conviction led Wiley to initiate a programme several years ago to enable each of his staff to have what he calls a “global experience” – travel to another country

for theological conversations with partner churches and contact with local congregations. The intent is for the Americans to bring global perspectives into their work on theology and worship.

Noting the tendency towards an increased sense of congregationalism – isolation from the broader world – Wiley believes the PCUSA must have ongoing relations with the Reformed world.

“We need to enable the next generation to engage in ecumenical work with renewed energy,” Wiley states.

It has been quite an ecumenical journey for Wiley – from missionary origins to a post in global ecumenism.



Charles Wiley assumes new portfolio. (Photo: Presbyterian News Service)

Online and postal donations invited

Residents of the United States and Canada will soon be able to make tax-deductible gifts to the World Communion of Reformed Churches Endowment Fund online at www.wcrc.ch. Donors will be able to simply click on the Donations box on the home page for directions for making their donation. Meanwhile, contributions can be made by sending a cheque to WCRC's North

American office at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49560, USA.

Financial support from other regions of the world is welcome. Directions for making contributions online can be found in the Donations box on the WCRC home page.

Information about WCRC's activities in church unity, mission,

theological education, and gender, economic and environmental justice is available on the website and in WCRC's quarterly newsletter *Reformed Communiqué*.

Together, we can equip the World Communion of Reformed Churches for mission in the 21st century. The action starts with your contribution today!

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This issue of *Reformed Communiqué* is the third 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.

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Website

Visit the website for news from member churches, weekly prayers in the Ecumenical Prayer cycle and information about WCRC activities and publications.

Theology Journal

WCRC publishes a quarterly theological journal, *Reformed World*, in English. For subscription information, contact the *Reformed World* editor by e-mail or post.

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FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



Setri Nyomi,
General Secretary

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World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

Called to
communion,
committed to
justice

Praying for Unity

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17: 20-21)

My messages in *Reformed Communiqué* are written six weeks before the publication date. This means that for the March 2011 edition, I am writing during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25).

Since this is the first Week of Prayer for Christian Unity after the birth of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010, our first action in prayer is to offer thanks to God for making it possible for Reformed churches worldwide to find this new space for unity that deepens our relationships and contributes to unity in the wider church. Pray that WCRC will be God's instrument effectively uniting member churches in common witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray too for unity within our member churches. Some churches have been contending with division or conflicts. It is our prayer that all factions in these conflicts will pause and pray for the spirit of unity and hear anew the urgency of the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ when He had already begun his journey towards Jerusalem and the cross – "I pray that they may be one ... that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Our lack of oneness can be a hindrance to our call to proclaim the Gospel. Our divisions and conflicts make it more difficult for the world to believe in the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. So as we continue to pray for Christian unity throughout the year, let us respond to the deep yearning in the heart and prayer of the Lord of the church that we may be one. It will be a wonderful thing for each WCRC member church not only to pray for Christian unity but also to take steps to heal whatever divisions there are in its life.

Christian unity also means caring for one another and addressing injustice wherever it exists. So we pray that we may be united to expose injustice based in gender, race, economy and climate change.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity may be over a hundred years old but we need to remember that the first to pray for Christian unity was our Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore our response to our Lord and not merely to any human institution that prompts us to take the call to pray for Christian unity seriously.

By the time this edition of *Reformed Communiqué* is published, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be long gone – but the opportunity to pray and act for Christian unity will still be with us. Let us do so with passion. Let it be said of everyone connected with WCRC that we are passionate about our unity in Christ and that we are committed to praying and acting for it.

Our divisions and conflicts make it more difficult for the world to believe...

Let us pray together

Watch the WCRC website for urgent prayer requests from member churches worldwide.

www.wcrc.ch