



*Youth choir from Swansil Presbyterian Church in eastern Taiwan sings at Easter Sunday outdoor service.
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Church offers models of ministry with Indigenous peoples

By Kristine Greenaway

This issue features articles written during a trip to Taiwan in April at the invitation of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). My assignment was to focus on the church's work with the country's Indigenous peoples (also called aboriginal peoples).

The stories I gathered are the first in a proposed series about WCRC member churches working with their country's Indigenous peoples. The

initiative is tied to the programme for healing and reconciliation with the world's aboriginal peoples that was launched at the Uniting General Council in June 2010.

I was accompanied in Taiwan by Hong-Chi Hu, PCT's ecumenical officer and director of research and development. Hu's guidance, cultural and linguistic interpretation, and introductions to Indigenous church leaders offered invaluable insights

into how PCT's commitment to justice for aboriginal peoples is lived out in local parishes.

Hu, a member of Taiwan's Han majority population, arranged for us to travel in eastern Taiwan – home to many of the country's Indigenous groups – with Nanamg Tadaw, a pastor serving in the Hualien region. A member of the Truku people, Tadaw brings deep faith and practical skills to his role as head of the local presbytery.

Visit to China Christian Council offers opportunity for exchange of views

A pastoral visit to the China Christian Council by the president and the general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has offered an opportunity to share in the life, challenges and concerns of the church in the world's most populous country.

During their visit to China over Easter weekend, Jerry Pillay, WCRC President, and Setri Nyomi, the organization's general secretary, held meetings with representatives of the China Christian Council (CCC). They were accompanied by Bas Plaisier, a Dutch theologian and WCRC vice-president, who is currently a visiting professor at a theological seminary in Hong Kong.

The meeting with CCC president, Gao Feng, and staff in the port city of Shanghai on April 25 offered the WCRC leaders an opportunity to learn how the church in China is structured to train its members for ministry and response to societal needs.

"We know that both the China Christian Council and the World

Communion of Reformed Churches respect each other," Gao Feng said in welcoming the WCRC president and delegation. "We hope, on the basis of mutual understanding, to have more and better cooperation."



Paper cutting from Nanjing, China

"We appreciate the ways in which the church in China is growing and pray that we may be able to journey together in a manner that strengthens your ministry," Pillay replied.

Before seeing itself as a post-denominational church, many of the congregations that now form a large part of the CCC were Presbyterian and Reformed. While the CCC has not been able to confirm full participation as a WCRC member, WCRC acknowledges the CCC as part of the WCRC family.

The meeting with the CCC concluded with mutual agreement of the importance of the relationship between Chinese Christians and WCRC and of the need to strengthen contact between the two organizations.

Nyomi says, "We will continue to increase our communication with the CCC."

The focus of discussions with faculty members of the Nanjing Theological Seminary on April 22 at their new campus in the city of Nanjing was to learn of the impact of the seminary on Christians in China and of the seminary's challenges. The WCRC leaders heard enrollment is increasing and that there is a need to train more faculty members.

Aboriginal youth forced to leave home for work and study

It is Saturday night and the place is rocking. Singers jump in time to the music of drums, guitar and keyboard. A crowd of young people leap about waving their hands high above their head and singing along, their faces aglow. This is Saturday night... at the local church!

The 25 young people are members of the youth group at Subus (Red Leaf) church, a parish in the Central Mountain region of eastern Taiwan serving the Truku Aboriginal

(Indigenous) community. Their pastor, Rev. Lin, is one of four ordained Indigenous women working with congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) in this predominantly aboriginal area.

Soon most of this group of young people will leave their home community for the city to complete their high school studies or look for work as there are few senior high schools in Taiwan's rural areas and little chance for employment.

Many young Aboriginals find work as labourers in industry or construction. They are underpaid, marginalized and poorly housed. Alone in the city, some succumb to alcoholism or prostitution to survive.

PCT, aware of these dangers and hardships, supports church-based initiatives designed to help Indigenous young people when they leave home.

The most important thing, says Sing 'Olam, PCT Associate General Secretary, is to reassure Indigenous

young people about their identity when faced with discrimination by members of the non-aboriginal Han majority.

“They judge Indigenous people by their language, income and level of education,” says Sing who is a member of the Amis aboriginal people.

Sing believes the church’s message to young people must be: “You were created by God. Some people will look down on you but don’t ask why you were born in an Indigenous village. Rather thank God you were born there.”

The church has a long history of helping young aboriginal people when they leave their home communities for the city. Some church-supported centres offer after-school programmes; others provide advice on where to get jobs. Dialogue groups connect aboriginal people who know the city with newcomers.

As a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the PCT is active in WCRC’s human rights and advocacy programmes that are based on an interpretation of the Bible which says

Christians must work for social and economic justice in society.

PCT recognizes that the cause of the exodus of young people from the countryside lies in government policy about land ownership and development priorities. For over twenty years, the church has been putting pressure on the Taiwanese government to respect land claims by Indigenous people so that young people can return to their home communities and earn a living.

It is important, says Sing, for the government to honour its election promise to grant autonomy and self-determination to aboriginal groups in their home regions.

For now, the young people in Rev. Lin’s church dance and sing in their Saturday night Praise Group. The next day, Easter Sunday, they will sing in front of a crowd of wor-



Praise group from Red Leaf Presbyterian Church sings at outdoor Easter service. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

shippers from five neighbouring aboriginal congregations and know they are at home. But for how long?

“Pristine” area may become nuclear dump

Buka Margagarawan – an hereditary leader of Taiwan’s Paiwan and Baynan peoples – fears that a proposed nuclear waste disposal site



Aboriginal church leader, Buka Margagarawan, says “no” to a nuclear waste dump at a coastal site prone to earthquakes (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

on the shoreline of Taitung in the east-central region of the country will contaminate the area’s pristine coast. Boats laden with toxic waste will have to navigate the rocky shoreline of an area prone to earthquakes. Though the government has yet to announce its choice among several sites under consideration, Margagarawan is nervous.

While some in the community welcome the money the devel-

opment would bring to the struggling local economy, Margagarawan warns them: “You are sacrificing your future. This land could be contaminated by a spill and ruined for generations to come.”

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan is fighting plans for the development as part of its ongoing campaign to make Taiwan a nuclear-free country. With heightened fears of nuclear facilities following the nuclear disaster in Japan, public opinion is starting to turn against proposals such as the one planned for Taitung.

Will the anti-dump protestors win the battle? Margagarawan, a pastor who serves as the general secretary of the local PCT presbytery, says: “It’s difficult but we must try.”

Taiwanese Aboriginal Christians create model project for post-disaster recovery

Aboriginal members of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) are survivors. Their communities have been hit by natural disasters and eroded by economic and social pressures. Yet in the eastern region of the country that is home to most of the country's 15 Aboriginal groups, there are signs of reconstruction and recovery.

At the Morakot Taitung Reconstruction and Caring Centre in the coastal city of Taitung, survivors of Typhoon Morakot that struck the region in August 2009 are being offered trauma counselling and job re-training with the support of PCT. The majority of the population served by the centre belongs to aboriginal groups including the Paiwan, Amis, Bunun and Puyuma. With financial support from PCT, local business people and the government, the centre's team of social workers and educators offers assistance to the whole community – Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Christian.

In the wake of the earthquake and nuclear disaster in Japan, PCT is reaching out to Japanese churches with an invitation to study the Morakot Centre as a model for their

role in the reconstruction of devastated villages. In Japan, as in Taiwan, Christians are a small minority of the population. PCT general secretary, Andrew Chang, has invited clergy from Japanese congregations affected by the disasters to visit the centre. During his two trips to Japan immediately following the earthquake, Chang learned that pastors were looking for ideas of how churches could help rebuild their communities.

"I invited them to visit the Morakot Centre," Chang says. "This could be a model for them."

PCT's senior executive responsible for Church and Society programmes, Rev. Lyim Hong-Tiong, is handling plans for the visit on behalf of Chang. A group of five to 10 pastors from PCT's partner churches is expected to arrive in Taiwan within the next month.

The centre's reconstruction and recovery programme was designed by Lyim to meet the community's social service needs and provide job skills training and marketing support to small businesses. The objective is for people in the community to become self-sufficient.

The centre's director, Iling Ruvaniyaw, a Christian and heredi-

tary Paiwan leader, says the centre helps rebuild shattered lives through job skills training and to assist in reconstructing the community's infrastructure. This is particularly challenging in Taitung, she explains, as many of the area's aboriginal people were already struggling for economic and social survival. The typhoon further marginalized them and compounded their challenges.



Iling Ruvaniyaw, a Christian and hereditary Paiwan leader, heads a reconstruction centre in eastern Taiwan. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

The social welfare programme run at the centre offers support to the elderly who lost their families in the disaster, trauma counselling for students, homework assistance and free meals for children. Job training includes certification in the food and beverage industry, making driftwood furniture and traditional crafts, and professional marketing advice for local artisans. Interest in the reconstruction work is so high that the centre also coordinates tour groups and provides bed and breakfast services.

The project will receive church and government funding for two more years. Plans are for the centre to be self-funding by then.

"Our goal," says Ruvaniyaw, "is for our people to become self-sufficient so that if the centre closes, they will still have a future."



Hong-Tiong Lyim (L) and Andrew Chang (R) are creating models for aboriginal leadership in post-disaster situations. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Japan's churches urged to work together after "triple disaster"

By Hisashi Yukimoto

Japan's churches and Christian councils should establish a consortium to respond to the devastating 11 March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant accident, an ecumenical meeting said.

In addition, the National Christian Council in Japan should "convene a forum of all the Japanese partners to facilitate the exchange of information and activities and explore avenues of cooperation," according to a statement released at the end of the Japan Earthquake/Tsunami Relief Ecumenical Solidarity Meeting held here from 6-7 May.

About 40 representatives of Christian partner organizations and churches from the West and Asia attended the meeting, which was coordinated by the North East Asia Churches Forum of the Christian Conference of Asia. About 14,700 people were killed by the 11 March disaster, with about 10,700 listed as missing. The disaster also crippled the Daiichi Fukushima nuclear power plant.

The participants also recommended that all churches and ecumenical institutions strengthen the capacity of the council, build up church and ecumenical response programs and provide technical

assistance both at local and national levels, continue psychological trauma counseling and recovery program, ensure advocacy for adequate social services and reliance on alternative source of energy.



Churches in Japan suffered severe damage as a result of the earthquake and tsunami in March.

In a message to Japanese member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches immediately following the disaster, the organization's general secretary, Setri Nyomi, wrote:

"It is with a sense of dismay and shock that we keep seeing images of devastation in the earthquake and tsunamis that rocked Japan last

Friday. In the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we are thinking about you and holding the churches and people of Japan in our prayers.

Our president, the Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay joins me in expressing con-

lences to the bereaved families and as we reassure of affected Japanese communities of our prayers and accompaniment."

The General Secretary addressed his message to the Church of Christ in Japan, Korean Christian Church in Japan and the Reformed Church in Japan.

ENInews with files from WCRC

Take ecumenism to the pews, says WCRC president

In a speech delivered to the annual assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan in April, the president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Jerry Pillay declares, "I personally believe that for ecumenism to have a future, we have to take its vision and mission to people sitting in the pews."

In his address to delegates gathered from throughout Taiwan and a contingent of 40 international guests, Pillay called on PCT to work with WCRC on strengthening regional, ecumenical work.

"We invite PCT to help build regional leadership and capacity in the WCRC as you have done with medical missions and mission educa-

tion. We'd love you to bring that to the WCRC," Pillay said.

Pillay was accompanied by WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi. The Ghanaian theologian praised PCT's involvement in justice initiatives, including its work with the country's Indigenous peoples, and thanked the church for its commitment to WCRC.

Protest in support of agricultural workers marks church justice meeting

Participants in a global church consultation this April participated in a peaceful protest outside a Publix Supermarket near the small town of Immokalee in the southern state of Florida in the United States.

The group joined Romeo Ramirez, a peace and justice advocate and migrant worker, and other members of a workers' rights group who are seeking a penny-per-pound increase on the price of tomatoes.

In the last few years, the coalition called the Coalition of Immokalee Workers has convinced fast-food restaurants and food wholesalers to agree to the increase, but grocery chains have refused to pay the price.

The 30 World Communion of Churches (WCRC) representatives

made the onsite visit to the Florida town and participated in the grocery-store protest as part of a justice consultation in nearby Fort Myers, Florida in early April.

"I hope our presence here will have an effect on pressuring Publix to give farm workers the penny a pound," said Yueh-Wen Lu, a WCRC representative from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. "It's a sign of solidarity to stand with those that suffer due to the global economic system and see that poverty really exists, even in the US."

"Consciousness and commitment to equal change: being in Immokalee today, we have seen some of that vision," said Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of WCRC.

Nyomi pointed out that participants were in Florida as the result of a justice document, accepted at WCRC's founding general council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the United States, last summer, that describes the stance WCRC takes and the actions it wants governments and churches to undertake on issues involving immigrants and their rights.

In part, this document states: "We deplore the ill-treatment of migrants, attacks by individuals, and criminalization by governments ..."

During their Florida meeting, WCRC representatives also looked at how to encourage churches to help their members better understand the biblical importance of addressing justice issues.

It is time for new models of mission with Indigenous peoples, says Canadian Cree pastor

The way the church has done mission with Indigenous peoples in the past has to change says Mary Fontaine, a Presbyterian pastor and member of the Cree nation in Canada.

"To do this, churches need to step out of the box in unique ways," says Fontaine.

The first Indigenous person elected to a senior post in a global organization of Reformed churches, Fontaine serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

In recent years, churches in North America have been involved in legal cases brought by Indigenous people who attended church-run residential schools where they suffered sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Some former students

have qualified as "cultural genocide" efforts by teachers to impose rules that forbid them the right to speak their language and cut them off from their cultural traditions and religious practices.

Churches in other regions of the world are grappling with similar negative legacies of abuse of Indigenous peoples by early Christian mission practices.

At its founding meeting in the United States in June 2010, WCRC announced plans to work towards reconciliation and healing with Indigenous peoples.

"I welcome WCRC's commitment to enter into dialogue with the world's Indigenous Christians on how to create new models for mission," Fontaine said during an interview while in Geneva, Switzerland for WCRC Executive Committee meetings in May.



Mary Fontaine heads innovative ministry. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

The Cree leader says new models of mission are emerging on which WCRC can draw. In ministries with Indigenous peoples that seek to incorporate traditional music, dance, ceremony and art, leaders are gathering intergenerational and intercultural groups for positive experiences in churches.

As founder and director of Hummingbird Ministries on the Pacific west coast of Canada, Fontaine has initiated events held in churches that incorporate ceremonies such as the ritualistic entry of tribal leaders carrying the cross, accompanied by Pow Wow (traditional) dancers.

"Some people say this is the first time they have been in a church since they left residential school," Fontaine reports. "They are amazed to see such ceremonies as part of a church gathering."

Hummingbird Ministries is supported by grants from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, a WCRC member church.

WCRC Executive Committee approves new way forward

The Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has approved a strategic plan for 2011-2017 that focuses on youth leadership development, increased collaboration with regional church groups, and a call to make visible the connection between Reformed theology and justice concerns. The decision came during meetings of the Executive Committee in Geneva, Switzerland this May.

the Reformed Ecumenical Council in Grand Rapids, United States.

Omega Bula of the United Church of Canada coordinated the Strategic Planning Team whose members were appointed from Malaysia, Uruguay, Northern Ireland, and the United States, South Africa and Canada.

The plan points to the importance of communicating what it means to be a member of the Reformed church tradition and to

given the small staff team in Geneva. One of the two programme positions will be vacant until later in the year when a new Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership will be named to replace Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth who left the post at the end of May.

In his report on finances, the General Treasurer, Gottfried Locher, told the Executive Committee that funding for programmes such as theological education, gender justice and mission is strong. Locher noted, however, that financing for the core budget of the organization remains a concern. Core budget costs include salaries, office space, travel, and communication.

“The problem is not with expenses,” Locher says. “It is with income. The rising value of the Swiss franc against other currencies means WCRC realizes less income from donations made in US dollars, for example.”

WCRC’s Finance Officer, Yueh Cho reported that 60 member churches have not paid their annual contribution in over three years. In response, the Executive Committee voted to enforce a constitutional provision that calls for church membership to be suspended when a church fails to respond to correspondence about arrears in contributions. The churches in arrears will first be given time to make up the amount due.

The Executive Committee approved a balanced budget for 2011 while work continues on fundraising initiatives. These include development of the WCRC Endowment Fund in North America. Fundraising opportunities in other regions of the world are under discussion.

Committee members issued statements decrying human rights violations in Colombia and calling for arms reduction worldwide.



WCRC’s Executive Committee at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland led in worship by Cheryl Meban (Presbyterian Church in Ireland). (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

“The spirit of change is moving through the global family of Reformed churches,” WCRC President, Jerry Pillay says. “This is the time for us to focus our efforts in responding to the needs of a hurting and broken world. We can’t do it all. Now is the time to choose what to do and to prepare ourselves to do it well.”

Executive Committee discussions focused on a strategic plan for 2011-2017, the year of the organization’s next global agenda-setting gathering. The plan was developed following the launch of WCRC in June 2010, following the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and

working with regional church groups to address gender, economic and environmental concerns. Mission and the study of Reformed theology in today’s world, along with renewed worship models, will be key to the work of the organization in coming years.

In welcoming the adoption of the plan, WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi, says, “This helps the staff team discern how best to meet the priority needs named by member churches and key partners in response to the Strategic Planning Team’s request for input.”

This process of prioritizing is particularly important, Nyomi says,

Reformed and Catholic theologians begin new round of dialogue

by Douwe Visser

Theologians from the World Communion of Reformed Churches have entered a new round of dialogue with counterparts from the Roman Catholic Church. The theme is *Justification and Sacramentality, the Christian Community as an agent for justice*.

The concepts of “sacramentality” and “justification” were chosen for the dialogue because of historic differences between Reformed and Catholic theologians in the understanding of these terms. “Sacramentality” is used to describe the sacraments of baptism, communion and confirmation of faith. “Justification” is used by Reformed theologians to say that God declares people righteous based on their faith in Christ.

During the first dialogue held in Rome, 4-9 April, discussion focused on “justification”. Two approaches were used in the discussions. The first – an historic overview of primarily 16th century theological divisions

– focused on how, in many respects, the differences between Reformed and Catholic theology on the doctrine of justification differ less than often thought. The second approach looked for the relevance of the doctrine of justification to Christian life today.

In this way, the discussion was very much about the relation between justification and justice: given that God has justified us and we are precious in God’s eyes, we can only obey the call to do justice in the world. On the other hand, the call for justice will only have a deep foundation when we see this anchored in God’s work.

In the meeting there was discussion about a possible affiliation of WCRC to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, a document Catholics and Lutherans signed in 1999. The declaration presents a joint understanding of “justification.” WCRC has so far not signed the declaration in order to seek a unified voice from among member churches.

At its founding General Council in 2010, WCRC agreed to consult the member churches about such an affiliation. Now that Reformed churches are united as a Communion, it is possible to test how far we have the binding authority to speak with one voice.

As the Methodists have affiliated recently by attaching a document on the importance of “sanctification”, it is felt that WCRC can affiliate with an attached document on “justice” in relation to “justification”.

Participants from the Reformed tradition in this round of dialogue include Reinerio Arce-Valentin (Cuba); George Hunsinger (USA); Benebo Fubara-Manuel (Nigeria); Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (India); George Sabra (Lebanon), Martha Moore-Keith (co-chair), Lindsay Schlüter (Scotland) and Douwe Visser (co-secretary of the dialogue sessions).

The next meeting, scheduled for April 2012, is tentatively set to be held in the United States.

Educator believes churches in Middle East can foster dialogue for peace

Christians in Lebanon and Syria are concerned about social unrest in the Middle East and its impact on inter-faith relations in the region, says a Lebanese Presbyterian educator.

“Stories from Egypt about violence between Christians and Muslims scare us that a focus on religious issues will create enmity between peoples,” says Najla Kassab who works with a church-based education programme serving parishes in Lebanon and Syria.

“We are at a time of questioning how change can happen in our diverse countries in a healthy way,” Kassab says. “Churches can help create opportunities for change through dialogue rather than violence.”

Kassab, who is an educator and licensed preacher with the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, was speaking in an interview in Geneva, Switzerland while attending meetings of the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in May.

The mother of three children is in Syria frequently in her role as Director of the Christian Education Department of her church and knows churches are in a position to present a positive image of inter-religious groups.



Najla Kassab says churches can model peace. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

“Our church in Lebanon runs schools where most of the students are Muslims. Christians and Muslims study together. It is a dialogue of life,” she notes.

Now though, the church is afraid of chaos and the possibility that radical groups will take control in the new political structures that will emerge.

“Sometimes we turn things upside down but don’t know how to put them together again,” says Kassab who holds a Masters Degree in Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States.

Church advocacy group urges European governments to help Libya refugees

By Jonathan Luxmoore

An ecumenical aid organisation has urged European governments to do more to help refugees from the war in Libya and warned that continued inaction could damage relations with the Arab world.

“The European Union should be helping with resettlement facilities – instead, all we’re seeing is the reinforcement of border controls to prevent new arrivals,” said Geneviève Jacques, who works with La Cimade, an aid group belonging to France’s Protestant Federation.

“The governments and peoples of Europe rejoiced at the democratic movement now flourishing in the Arab world. So it’s hypocritical and absolutely unacceptable that we’re now rejecting the migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe as a result,” she said in an interview with ENInews.

Jacques spoke after visiting transit camps recently on Tunisia’s western border that currently house over 200,000 people, mostly former migrant workers displaced by the fighting in Libya between dictator Moammar Gadhafi’s troops and opposition forces.

Tunisians showed “extraordinary solidarity” when refugees began arriving in late February, she said, adding that 150,000 migrants have since been repatriated, mostly to Asia and Africa.

However, she added that up to 3,000 have been unable to return



Geneviève Jacques reports on trip to Libyan refugee camps in Tunisia. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Instead of putting up new barriers and security fences, we should be offering resettlement space.

home because of war and instability in countries such as Somalia, Sudan and Ivory Coast, and were currently stranded with insufficient food, water and shelter in an isolated desert area of Tunisia.

“The Tunisians told us they’d extended protection and hospitality because they’d just recovered their own dignity in a revolution. But the flow has been so great they can’t cope,” said Jacques, whose organiza-

tion was founded by Protestant students to help refugees at the start of the Second World War.

“This is why we’re appealing to European countries to help these people, who have nowhere to go. Instead of putting up new barriers and security fences, we should be offering resettlement space. This is a highly volatile area and we don’t know what will happen otherwise.”

Over 400,000 people are estimated to have fled Libya since mid-February. Around 22,000 people arriving by boat on the Italian island of Lampedusa have been threatened with forced repatriation by the government of premier Silvio Berlusconi, while many others are reported to have arrived in Malta and other Mediterranean countries.

“If [Europe is] seen as hypocritical and lacking in credibility at this crucial moment, it won’t offer sound prospects for a new relationship with our southern neighbours. Nor will it send a good message if Europe responds to these revolutions by just playing the policeman and protecting its borders,” she said.

Jacques said the Libyan economy had depended on 1.5 million migrant workers before the fighting, but added that around a tenth of camp inhabitants had already been refugees in the country.

ENInews

Historic choice of venue for Latin American church assembly announced

For the first time a general assembly of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America (AIPRAL) is scheduled to be held in Central America.

With the theme “The fruit of justice is sown in communion and peace,” the XI General Assembly of AIPRAL will take place in Guatemala, from August 12-14, 2011. This marks

the first time that a general assembly of Reformed churches will gather in Central America. The general assembly will be hosted by the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

WCRC Europe endorses a mandate for cooperation and study

by *Jan-Gerd Heetderks*

Representatives of European Reformed Churches met in the Czech Republic city of Prague in March as guests of the Protestant Church of the Czech Brethren for the first meeting following the creation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010.

The group welcomed WCRC's global president, Jerry Pillay; General Secretary, Setri Nyomi; and theological secretary, Douwe Visser.

In speaking with the European church representatives, Pillay presented the vision, mission and strategic objectives that have emerged through a process of strategic planning for the future of WCRC.

The South African theologian reported that a Strategic Planning Team appointed by WCRC Officers in 2010 was preparing recommendations for programme priorities that would be submitted to WCRC's Executive Committee during its

meetings in Geneva in May. (See story on page 7.)

WCRC-Europe delegates responded positively to Pillay's presentation. It was agreed that the two major programmatic themes of "community" and "justice" have to be addressed. But the prevailing feeling expressed by delegates was the need for concentration on a few aspects of those themes. Delegates noted too that it is necessary to consider how WCRC may develop into a "network-organization" in which members use each other's gifts.

In business arising from the creation of WCRC, it was agreed that the former WARC-Europe would now be known as WCRC-Europe.

The new constitution presented by the Steering Committee of the former WARC-Europe was approved. It focuses on four priority areas: strengthening cooperation and fellowship amongst WCRC member churches in Europe; involvement of European member churches within WCRC; par-

ticipation of member churches in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE); and fostering studies in Reformed theology.

Guy Liagre, a pastor of the United Protestant Church of Belgium, challenged participants to strengthen joint theological work in the years to come. To that end, the commemoration of 450 years Heidelberg Catechism in 2013 and the commemoration of 500 years Reformation in 2017 can form a good start, he said.

The slate of officers for WCRC-Europe includes: Jan-Gerd Heetderks, President. Pastor with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands: Balasz Odor, Vice-President. Pastor with the Reformed Church of Hungary; Martina Wasserloos-Strunk, Vice-President. Member of the board of the Reformed League in Germany; Alexander Horsburgh, Secretary. Pastor with the Church of Scotland; Kerstin Koch, Treasurer. Member of the Reformed Church in Lippe.

Nurse from rural Zambia awarded Swiss leadership prize

Her actions speak louder than words. A soft-spoken Zambian nurse is spending her retirement years quietly making a difference in the lives of women in her rural community through a project combining income generation, leadership training and health care. In March though, Agnes Lisulo Mulemwa was the centre of attention at a ceremony in Switzerland when she was awarded the Sylvia Michel Prize in recognition of her exceptional contribution to women's leadership.

"I am humbled," Mulemwa said looking out over a large crowd gathered in the Reformed Church in Murten, north-east of Geneva, for a celebratory service. "It is too much."



Agnes Lisulo Mulemwa receives leadership award in Switzerland. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

The prize – offered jointly by the World Communion of Reformed Churches and women presidents of regional Swiss Reformed churches – is named for the first woman to be elected as a church president and comes with a cash award of USD \$5000.

The former head nurse was honoured for having created the Liyoyelo Batik Centre in Senanga, a community in south-west Zambia. The project provides training in income generating skills such as making batik and candles as well as raising fruit and vegetables.

Mulemwa works with a network of church women called the Anamoyo who are known for their active involvement in community service in the name of the church.

Hedwig Schneider, a retired Swiss church leader, nominated Mulemwa for the prize. The women met when Schneider was in Zambia to deliver church aid. The material she was carrying included equipment for batik making. Mulemwa learned the skills and taught others in her community.

Later the project expanded to include raising fruit and vegetables for people living with HIV and AIDS.

Women walk long distances to care for the sick in the surrounding region, carrying fruit and vegetables with them. "Often we arrive with swollen legs," Mulemwa says.

Wearing a brightly-coloured traditional dress based on the style worn by early missionary women to her country, Mulemwa received greetings brought in her own language by linguist and former Swiss missionary, Nicole Fischer.

Indonesian churches seek unity

Question: Which country has the highest number of member churches in the World Communion of Reformed Churches? Answer: Indonesia. Surprised? Read on!

Indonesia is predominantly Muslim (86 per cent) with Christians making up 9 per cent of the estimated 35 million population: 6 per cent Protestants and 6 per cent Catholics. Yet with 28 member churches, Indonesia far exceeds the number in any of the 108 countries in which WCRC is present.

Reformed Communiqué asked the Chair of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Andreas Yewangoe, about the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) which groups all of the 28 WCRC member churches. The pastor and theologian replied with English text provided by his colleague, Novel Matindas.

Reformed Communiqué: What is the main activity of the CCI?

Yewangoe: The Communion of Churches in Indonesia is an ecumenical, national council of Protestant churches. Its membership includes 88 church synods. The aim and objective of CCI is to realize a united Christian church in Indonesia. Its scope of services includes a focus on accomplishing its objective of church unity through promoting awareness of Communion among the churches, in the unity of the Spirit through fellowship and Holy Communion; promoting togetherness and witness; and promoting brotherhood, mutual help and support. CCI also works to develop churches' ability to be self reliant.

RC: Which programmes organized by the PGI relate to WCRC programmes?

Yewangoe: Most of the programmes deal with the issue of unity of the church and ecumenical issues. Some programmes focus on promoting interfaith dialogue and on how to witness to the Gospel and maintain relationship with non-Christians. CCI also deals with programs that involve political matters: democratization, advocating human rights and justice and promoting religious freedom and environmental issues.

Reformed Communiqué: What interfaith projects does the PGI have that are led by young people?

Yewangoe: CCI runs a Youth and Teenage interfaith work camp. Our young people also involved in many interfaith programs run by organizations such as ICRP, Wahid Institute, Ma'arif Institute and by the government.

Pacific Conference of Churches to mark 50-year anniversary

By Hisashi Yukimoto

The largest ecumenical church grouping in the Pacific region is planning to celebrate its 50-year anniversary from 30 August to 4 September in Samoa.

"The 50th anniversary is a celebration of the achievements of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) over the last five decades," the conference said in a statement released to ENInews.

"The occasion will also give the opportunity for the PCC to look at

what's in store for it in the immediate and long term future."

The PCC was established in Samoa in 1961, noted general secretary, Fe'iloakitau Tevi. The celebration will look back at highlights of the PCC's contribution to the formation of the Pacific region, its independent countries and the issues that Pacific island countries and its people have had to address.

Key speakers, former staff members and other experts will look too at how the church is responding to today's issues, Tevi said.

The General Secretary said participants will also look at the challenges of the future. "This is an opportunity for the Pacific Conference of Churches to lay out and present the concept of 'Rethinking Oceania,'" he says.

The PCC has 27 member churches and nine member councils of churches in 17 island states and territories. The offices are in Suva, Fiji.

ENInews

Indonesian church youth: Serving our communities in so many ways!

by Yael Eka Hadiputeri

A young Indonesian theology graduate who serves on the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Churches shares the story of the varied community work projects done by youth from her church, often with young people from other faiths.

ects in the province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam following damage done by the tsunami in 2004. Approximately 350,000 people in Aceh died and thousands of homes were destroyed when hit by the tsunami. It was the biggest disaster in Indonesia in the 21st century.

At the time, young people came together to clean the city and build

other faiths. We work in the public kitchens and give assistance to patients and doctors. We learn how to evacuate flood victims, especially in areas submerged in floods up to two-three meters high.

I myself have been involved in flood relief work and on a project helping to deal with a fever that hits our country during the rainy season. Dengue fever causes tremendous loss of life in some areas. To help prevent the spread of the fever, we cooperate with local governments to conduct spraying to combat mosquitoes and have been trained to counsel people in how to prevent the spread of the epidemic.

Church youth programmes also include a camp leadership project. Together we are trained to become competent leaders for living with tolerance in camps run in conjunction with NU (Nahdatul Ulama) and Paramadinah, a group of traditional Sunni Islam. The most recent was held in March 2011 in the west of the main island of Java.

However, we don't have many church mission projects. This is because speaking about mission is a very sensitive issue in Indonesia. Churches have been burned and attacked for reasons connected to attempts to Christianize the neighbouring population. In some areas where there is a high level of sensitivity about evangelization, priests have been murdered. So in my church, mission means to reach children and introduce Christianity to those who are attending a Christian school.



Young Christians in Indonesia are trained to assist in disaster relief (Photo: Yusak Ismanto)

“We participated in recovering bodies of people who had been crushed ...”

Indonesian Christian churches offer a variety of interfaith programmes for young people. My own church, the Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church), has been empowering young people to become volunteers with youth from other faiths. The programme called Gerakan Kemanusiaan Indonesia is like a humanitarian movement in Indonesia, powered by the Gereja Kristen Indonesia church.

One of our biggest projects was to help in reconstruction proj-

hundreds of houses which were then destroyed once again because of earthquake aftershocks. We walked the city and participated in recovering bodies of people who had been crushed by wood piles, vehicles and so forth.

Youth groups continue to work together in order to help cope with natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and the landslides that are common in Indonesia. Christian youth are trained to serve in tent camps along with youth from

Caribbean Bible study book receives enthusiastic response

by Paulette Brown

Righting Her-Story: Caribbean Women Encounter the Bible was launched at a public event in May at the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) in Kingston, Jamaica. Hosted by the UTCWI and chaired by its president, Marjorie Lewis, the launch was an occasion for celebration and expressions of solidarity for the gender-based work which *Righting-Her Story* epitomizes. A crowd estimated at 150 gathered to celebrate the book.

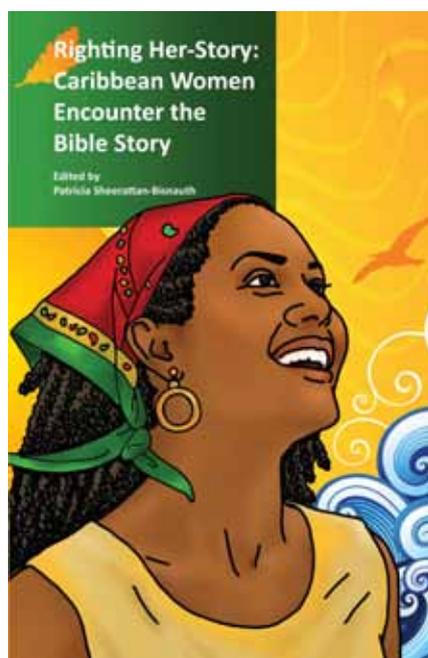
Faith Webster, a Jamaican government official, told the crowd that the book is “poised to contribute much to the consciousness of critical reality, given the patriarchal context that exists in the religious world”.

Webster, who is Executive Director of the Bureau of Women’s Affairs, hailed the book as the “first ecumenical book of Caribbean feminist and ‘womanist’ post-colonial Bible studies.”

The book of Bible studies and biographies of pioneering Caribbean women theologians is published by the World Communion of Reformed

Churches (WCRC). The head of WCRC’s Justice and Partnership Programme, Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, was the editor.

“...blown away by the variety and richness of the contributors...”



Righting Her-Story includes a Bible study training guide, outlines for worship services, 20 Bible studies with accompanying stories and poems from Caribbean women, as well as resources for a campaign on violence against women.

Hermione McKenzie of Jamaica Women’s Political Caucus said she was “simply blown away by the variety and richness of the many contributors”.

The highlight of the night was a provocative and stirring keynote delivered by Sarojini Nadar of the School of Religion and Theology at South Africa’s University of KwaZulu-Natal. Pointedly, Nadar endorsed the book’s diverse representations of Caribbean women.

“It is not all about sisters or sisterhood,” Nadar told the gathering, “for beyond sisterhood, there is racism, colonialism and imperialism.”

The South African academic drew links between the writing of Caribbean women and that of groups of women in other parts of the world such as the Circle of Concerned Theologians in Ghana.

Churches told not to invest funds in speculation

Churches should invest their funds in ways that support the poor, a Swiss economist says.

“The church must use its wealth to relieve distress,” says Edward Dommen. “Speculation in shares and investment in derivatives do not contribute to the working economy.”

Dommen told participants at a Reformed church-sponsored consultation in Geneva on economic and social justice that the church must use its wealth to produce goods and services that support self-reliance. The Quaker and former professor of economics, was addressing the question of how churches can invest their funds in ways consistent with

the social and economic values of the Reformed church tradition.

Dommen’s presentation was part of a three-day programme held in March for young theologians, justice advocates and pastors. The event was co-sponsored by the John Knox Centre and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

While urging the church to invest in the economy, Dommen said that investing should be based on principles in line with biblical teachings such as ensuring that their money supports companies that ensure a fair return of profits to labourers; take “honest” care of the environment and workers rather than doing

whatever the law lets them get away with; and do not make excessive profit.

Twenty participants came from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Pacific and the Caribbean to address issues of concern to parishes in their regions: the impact of migrants on local populations, climate change, and economic injustice.

Douwe Visser, chair of the John Knox Programme Committee and responsible for WCRC’s theology office, says the objective of the consultation was to “motivate for action”.

“We are asking participants to consider how their church can speak to these issues in their local context,” Visser says.

Well-known justice advocate leaves Geneva for Guyana

Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, well-known in global ecumenical circles for her work on justice issues, is leaving her staff position with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) following 11 years working on gender, economic and environmental issues. Sheerattan-Bisnauth is leaving her position as Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership to return to her native Guyana.

In addressing Sheerattan-Bisnauth during a farewell event in Geneva, Switzerland, WCRC's General Secretary said: "Your commitment to justice is remarkable and has made a difference in the lives of women and men in our churches all over the world. On the staff team your ability to make possible what others say is impossible is a great gift to the World Communion of Reformed Churches."

Nyomi was speaking during a celebration of Sheerattan-Bisnauth at the conclusion of meetings of WCRC's Executive Committee on 12 May.

Representatives from the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, and the Conference for European Churches praised Sheerattan-Bisnauth for her collaboration in ecumenical programmes focused on gender rights, environmental concerns, and economic justice.

The Guyanese pastor said her years with WCRC had offered wonderful opportunities to meet and work with gifted people from around the world. These experiences have convinced her, she says, that church people can make a difference, even if organizations like WCRC have limited financial resources.

"Small ways are big ways," Sheerattan-Bisnauth told the group. "WCRC is like the biblical parable of the feeding of the 5000 with five loaves and two fishes. God will never

leave us without what we need to do our work," she says.



Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth addresses guests at farewell in Geneva, Switzerland. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

"My focus was on justice for the people we study and write about."

Sheerattan-Bisnauth is a pioneer in women's leadership in the church as the first woman ordained in the Ministry of Word and Sacrament with the Guyana Presbyterian Church.

But it was her experience in the non-governmental organizations sector of the Caribbean where she was known as gender and development specialist that brought the Guyanese pastor to the attention of the global ecumenical movement. Her work as a consultant to the UNDP in preparation for the UN's conference for women in Beijing in the mid 1990's led to her appointment as the first director of the Women's Leadership Institute

in Guyana, a post she left to move to Geneva to work with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, one of WCRC's two founding organizations.

Sheerattan-Bisnauth says the highlight of her years in global ecumenism has been the opportunity to connect with people at the local level. While acknowledging the certain need for academic theology and global theological reflection, Sheerattan-Bisnauth acknowledges her own passion is to make it possible for ordinary people to speak and write about their understanding of theology.

"My focus was on justice for the people we study and write about," the Guyanese pastor says. "WARC, and now WCRC, offered a real opportunity to develop popular methodology."

Sheerattan-Bisnauth is particularly proud of the manuals which have been published following workshops on social justice and Biblical study around the world.

"Ordinary people can develop content," she says. "They have the knowledge. They just need the space."

As she prepares to leave WCRC, Sheerattan-Bisnauth hopes dialogue and action groups will continue to meet, especially around difficult issues such as the understanding of the dynamics of the global economy.

"The church offers this possibility for dialogue built on our common faith basis. This is a God-given opportunity to be a model for the world of how to use dialogue rather than violence to resolve differences."

What's next for her? Sheerattan-Bisnauth laughs and replies with a Guyanese expression: "I tell people I'm taking it step by step, one day at a time, sweet Jesus."

Calvin smiling in Havana

by Douwe Visser

In 2009 the Partnership Fund of the World Communion of Reformed Churches was approached for an unusual project. It was the Calvin Jubilee year and the Presbyterian Church in Cuba was planning a series of events in Cuba to mark the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Key to the celebrations was the church's idea of placing a bust of Calvin in a public park in Havana.

The organising committee had a model of the bust. It looked nice – Calvin even showed a bit of a smile! I remarked on Calvin's smile, saying it looked unusual. Carlos Ham, a Cuban staffer with the World Council of Churches who was showing me the model explained that Calvin, having finally reached Cuba, could only smile! Ham joked that Calvin must also be smiling because he is in a public park with Pope John Paul II, then added with a laugh that Calvin certainly smiles too because his bust is larger than that of the Pope.

It was an interesting proposal. But should the Partnership Fund not deal with more serious business than with works of art? That frank question was on the table. However, during serious conversation, members of the Partnership Fund committee became convinced of the importance of the role the Calvin anniversary

event could play within the Cuban church and society context. It was an opportunity for the Presbyterian Church in Cuba to witness to the relevance of Reformed theology and identity in the Cuban situation (See Dora Arce, "Calvin in Havana," *Reformed World* 59/2). This aspect of witnessing is one of the criteria for supporting projects submitted by WCRC member churches for financial support from the Partnership Fund.

When we are convinced that our message, based on scripture and our theological identity, is important to be heard – and we rediscovered that in the Calvin Jubilee year – it is clear that Reformed churches should receive support for that witness from their own Communion of churches.

Calvin can smile in Havana. The events around Reformation Sunday in 2009 had a great impact attracting large crowds.

...a witness to Reformed theology and identity in Cuba ...



François Bonnot (on right) has sculpted a bust of Calvin now displayed in a park in Cuba. With him are Carlos Ham (WCC) and Isabelle Graesslé (Geneva Protestant Church) (Photo courtesy of Carlos Ham)

Erratum

This is information to correct the caption under the photo of Caroline and Ben Masilo, on p.8 of *Reformed Communiqué* March 2011.

Ben Masilo and his wife Caroline did not "flee Lesotho in 1981 under death threat for opposing apartheid".

If they had to flee it is because the police of the dictatorial regime of Leabua Jonathan had been ordered to kill Ben to silence him as a staunch opponent to this regime. Ben, as a delegate to the AACC meeting in Nairobi in 1981, had

informed the delegates of the dramatic political situation in Lesotho under such a regime.

*Georges Richard
Lausanne, Switzerland
10 April 2011*

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



Setri Nyomi,
General Secretary

Reformed communiqué

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World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

Called to
communion,
committed to
justice

*“...Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”
(Hebrews 12: 1b and 2a)*

One year ago! Yes, it was a year ago when representatives of Reformed churches all over the world gathered in Grand Rapids to bring to birth the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). It was a time of celebration and of deliberation about the world in which we have been called to serve.

Since then what has happened? For some, this was an event that came and passed and they moved on to other things. For others, this was an opportunity to renew our calling as Reformed Christians to life as a Communion and to God’s mission. We experienced a call in June 2010 to run the race that was set before us. And we have been doing so ever since. The question is, “How are we running this race?”

For WCRC leaders and staff, a good part of the year was spent “unpacking” the message from Grand Rapids and shaping it into a strategic plan that will guide us to be effective witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ. It marked a time to clarify our vision and mission and to develop key directions that will help us be God’s instruments of transformation for our times. This time of discerning the will of God was crowned by the adoption of the strategic plan in the first meeting of WCRC’s Executive Committee in May 2011.

The Executive Committee affirmed the vision of the WCRC: “To live out the Communion of Reformed churches, participating in God’s mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.” By choosing a vision identified with the coming of our Lord to mediate fullness of life (John 10.10) we are indeed affirming our commitment to look to Jesus for how we run the race.

The strategic plan affirms a commitment to strengthen our engagement in God’s mission, building the Communion, commitment to justice, theological reflection and ecumenical engagement. We do all these looking to Jesus. It has implications for how we proclaim the Good News as well as how we commit ourselves to God’s transformation of evil and injustice.

A recent experience in the south-eastern corner of the United States has taught me that there is much more work to be done in exposing evil and injustice in our communities. I was shocked to find that in this twenty-first century there are immigrant farm workers whose living and working conditions as well as their wages for long hours of work are signs that slavery is still alive – long after Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech. I asked myself, “How can we stay silent when such conditions are going on in our very times?” Our commitment to justice is not just a social fad – it is a faith commitment.

For WCRC’s leadership, the vision is clear. The strategic plan has been approved. I hope that now the whole WCRC constituency will run the race set before us when we became WCRC.

Setri Nyomi, General Secretary

*The question is,
“How are we
running this race?”*

Let us pray
together

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

www.wcrc.ch