



*Reformers' Wall in the heart of Geneva calls attention to the heritage of the Reformation that marks the city.  
(Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

## Goodbye Geneva. Hello Hannover.

The Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has voted to relocate its offices from Geneva, Switzerland to Hannover, Germany.

“We welcome the move to Hannover which allows WCRC to continue to live out its mission as a Communion of churches. We will remain focused on our mandate of seeking church unity and justice in society and the economy and respect for the environment,” WCRC president, Jerry Pillay said on 5 November in announcing the decision.

The move comes in response to concerns about the cost of running an organization in Switzerland. These include staff salaries and the high value of the Swiss franc. Most WCRC membership fees and donations are made in Euros or American dollars that have dropped in value in the past several years against the strong Swiss franc.

The move to Hannover is scheduled for the end of December 2013. The new offices will be located at

*Continued on page 2*

*Continued from page 1*

the Calvin Centre owned by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany where the Reformed Alliance has its offices. WCRC has a seven-member staff.

WCRC general secretary, Setri Nyomi, says: "I am grateful for the dedicated staff team of the WCRC



*John Calvin's chair in Geneva's Saint-Pierre cathedral signals the heritage of the Reformation that marks the city.  
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

who have faithfully given themselves and their professional gifts to the Reformed family of churches worldwide and have been at the forefront of making a difference in the world. They are the ones called upon to make new sacrifices at this time of relocation."

The Reformed church movement has had its offices in Geneva since 1948 when the World Presbyterian Alliance (a WCRC predecessor organisation) moved from Edinburgh, Scotland. At the time the World Council of Churches was in formation and Reformed church leaders felt it important to be close to colleagues in the global ecumenical movement.

In responding to the decision, WCRC Vice-President Yvette Noble-Bloomfield says: "The World Communion of Reformed Churches in making the decision to relocate from Geneva to Hannover, has demonstrated the desire to place itself in a position to deepen its core calling and interpretation of character that can further its response to the history, life and purpose of member churches. There must be a desire and a hope for a future that is redemptive and passionate even in the face of the challenges of change and the costly risk of relationships."

According Nyomi, the move to Hannover is expected to save WCRC CHF200,000 per annum.

## Farewell ENI?

Ecumenical News International announced on 1 October that its ENInews service was suspending operations with immediate effect as it sought emergency funding in order to operate for the remainder of 2012.

"We regret taking this step, but despite a massive reorganization, ENInews is feeling the effect of the deep cuts from its historic supporters as well as from non-payment by quite a number of subscribers," said David Harris, president of ENI and publisher of the Presbyterian Record, based in Toronto, Canada.

"Subscribers and readers have said how much they value authoritative, unbiased news of ecumenical and inter-faith developments around the world," said Harris. "We hope the suspension will be temporary and ENInews will secure a firm funding base.

"Subscriptions will be extended to compensate for the period of time ENInews operations are suspended."

Founded in 1994, ENInews is supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), all based at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. It is also supported by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), based in Toronto, Canada. This year, ENInews also received a grant from the Reformed Church of Argovia, based in Switzerland.

At the beginning of 2012, WCC and LWF, citing financial difficulties, reduced their funding to ENInews, the latest in a series of cuts over the past several years.

*Readers value authoritative, unbiased news of ecumenical and inter-faith developments around the world.*

The service has about 500 subscribers and maintains co-publishing agreements with Religion News Service, the Latin American and Caribbean Communication Agency and Episcopal News Service. Its stories are published by church and secular media around the world. In 2011, ENInews transmitted 721 stories.

ENInews stories are translated into French by Protestinfo, based in Lausanne, Switzerland. ENInews is produced by New York-based editor Solange De Santis and a worldwide corps of journalists.

Since the announcement of the temporary suspension, WCC and LWF have indicated that they will provide no further funding to ENI.

*With files from ENI*

# Why Geneva of all places?

By Douwe Visser

In this article I want to focus on the question of why the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has its offices in Geneva. It starts with the decision taken in 1937 to form the World Council of Churches (WCC) and establish its offices in Geneva. In 1938, the Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, Willem Visser 't Hooft, a Reformed theologian from the Netherlands, was appointed as WCC's General Secretary although the organisation, because of the war, only came into full existence at its founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948.

Against the backdrop of the emerging ecumenical movement, the World Presbyterian Alliance held its General Council meeting in August 1948 in Geneva. With a strong desire as a Reformed / Presbyterian organisation to be an active part of the ecumenical movement as represented by the WCC, this General Council decided to have an office in Geneva instead of staying on in Edinburgh. The Alliance declared the reason for the decision was: "the expansion of the ecumenical movement and the immediate call to the Alliance to play a worthy part in the activities of the World Council of Churches." For an ecumenical organisation, Geneva was the natural place to be.

There was some discussion of where the Alliance's office should be in Geneva. Some felt that Calvin's Auditorium was a good choice but the organisation's new executive secretary, the Swiss pastor Marcel Pradervand, felt there was no sense in moving the office to Geneva unless it was located in the same building as the WCC. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) already had offices there.

The decision to move to Geneva had a great impact on the Alliance's role in creating an 'ecumenical centre' where global church organisations and agencies were to be based. It should be clearly understood that the move was not made with the argument of going to Geneva as the City of Calvin. The ecumenical identity of the Alliance played the lead role, not Reformed identity!

Many examples could be given of the leading role the Alliance played in the modern ecumenical movement precisely because it was based at what came to be known as the Ecumenical Centre. In the first place the building became an *ecumenical* centre, instead of just the WCC headquarters because of the presence and the impact of the Alliance, LWF and later, the Conference of European

Churches. But the Alliance was especially upfront in playing its ecumenical role. In 1949 WARC's Executive Committee affirmed that: "the supreme purpose of the Alliance is not to promote world Presbyterianism as an end in itself, but to make the Reformed tradition the servant of God's redemptive purposes through the wider agency of the Church Universal."

In the Basel Statement of 1951, the Alliance declared itself "very much aware of and against the perils of 'ecumenical' denominationalism that can make or wreck the movement towards Christian unity today." The organisation also decided in 1954, unlike LWF, that worldwide diaconal and mission work should not be part of the Alliance as a global confessional organisation but should be done ecumenically by the WCC. And in 1958 the Alliance took the initiative for a regular coming together of secretaries of Christians World Communions, a meeting that takes place annually until today.



*The Ecumenical Center in Geneva is home to the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, ACT Alliance, World Student Christian Federation, and Conference of European Churches. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

It may be clear now what an important role the global Reformed Church movement has played in the modern ecumenical movement.

The Alliance later merged with a movement of Congregational churches and changed its name, becoming the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1970. In 2010, WARC became one of WCRC's two founding organisations when it merged with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

*Continued on page 4*

*Continued from page 3*

Over the years, WARC came to understand that ecumenical engagement without the strongest possible commitment to justice at its heart would endanger this engagement. Two moments in its history should be mentioned: the General Council in Ottawa, Canada in 1982 that declared the theological justification of apartheid a heresy and the adoption of the Accra Confession at



*Marcel Pradervand was head of the international Reformed church movement in 1948 when it moved from Edinburgh to Geneva to connect with global ecumenism. (Photo: Courtesy Pradervand family)*

the General Council in Accra, Ghana in 2004 with its strong condemnation of social-economic injustice.

Is there any connection between this growing commitment to justice and the location of the office in Geneva? This question is beyond the scope of this brief overview. But a connection in the opposite direction is very clear: The Alliance (now WCRC) has made it clear through its work within the Ecumenical Centre that its commitment to justice is essential to ecumenical involvement. This strong conviction has had an impact on WCC and other ecumenical organisations in the building complex.

It should also be mentioned that the Reformed Ecumenical Council, which had its offices in Grand Rapids, United States, increasingly felt isolated from the wider, Protestant, ecumenical world. This played a role in its merger with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) since that organisation had its office in Geneva, physically close to the centre of ecumenism.

WCRC has now decided to move out of Geneva. It is good to be aware of the great gifts the organisation and its predecessors received over the years by being located in this centre of the ecumenical world and in the city where many international organisations have their offices. For financial reasons, WCRC feels compelled to leave the place wherein it has fulfilled its ecumenical commitment. That commitment should continue wherever WCRC's offices will be based.

*Douwe Visser was global president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council at the time it merged with WARC to form WCRC. He serves today as Executive Secretary for WCRC's Office of Theology, Mission and Communion.*

## *Position posting*

# General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

*The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is seeking a General Secretary to be the Chief Executive Officer of WCRC who will be responsible to the General Council and the Executive Committee to direct and coordinate the work of the Communion. Applicants must:*

- *be an ordained clergy of a member church*
- *be able to provide spiritual leadership*
- *have a firm commitment to the Reformed faith*
- *have appropriate theological training*
- *have demonstrated skills in team-work, management and communication*
- *have experience in, and a commitment to, the ecumenical movement*
- *have familiarity with current international issues*
- *have sensitivity to cultural and theological diversity, gender issues and youth concerns*
- *have fluency in English; knowledge of French, German and/or Spanish would be an advantage.*

*The recommended application date is not later than December 31, 2012. The appointment will be made in May 2013, and the successful candidate will assume the position in early 2014.*

*Information about WCRC can be found at [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch)*

*If you are interested in applying for this position and wish to receive an application form, please contact:*

*The Very Reverend Dr. Sheilagh M. Kesting  
Church of Scotland Offices  
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Edinburgh EH2 4YN  
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Participants at the Rule of Law Conference engaged in debate about the role of churches in situations where human rights are at risk. (L to R) Michael Mutzner, Veronica Muchiri, Theodore Gill. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

# Has security become the new religion?

Participants at a church-sponsored conference in Geneva, Switzerland on the rule of law say it is time to rethink the escalation of state-supported security measures. The call comes in response to reports presented during the conference that point to the high cost of “securitization”, infringement of human rights in the name of security concerns, and the increasing invasion of individual privacy through surveillance via social media and travel controls.

“Society does not become more secure through installing security gates but through a feeling of trust, social cohesion and personal fulfillment” says Elizabeth van der Heide of the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Netherlands.

Van der Heide made her comments in an address delivered to the *Churches and the Rule of Law* conference at the John Knox International Center (28-30 October). The two-day event attracted forty participants from churches and non-governmental organizations in Africa, North America and Europe.

“Security measures are necessary for a well-functioning society,” says van der Heide. However, the Dutch academic warns against the tendency of governments to “terrorize their flock” with

exaggerated images of danger that are then used to justify high levels of electronic surveillance.

“Is security the new religion?” Dietrich Werner of the World Council of Churches asked during debate. “Are we idolizing security?”

The German academic and theologian calls this a key contemporary concern for churches and says it is time to issue a declaration against the “religious connotation of security”.

Conference organizer, Douwe Visser of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), says the theme of the event was chosen in response to growing recognition of the role played by churches in the development of legal safeguards against abuse of power and in active resistance to infringements of human rights in the name of security.

“The objective was to inform churches about the role they can play in their local contexts in ensuring the rule of law,” says Visser. “It was also intended to present an opportunity for global organizations such as the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches to

*Continued on page 6*

*Continued from page 5*

set their agendas in response to the question of rights and the rule of law in the coming years.”

Visser who heads WCRC’s office of theology, notes that the conference has attracted worldwide interest including messages from Islamic organizations interested in the Christian perspective on the rule of the law.

Discussion during the conference centred on the necessity for balance between the need to provide protection for members of society while at the same time protecting the right of people to fair and open judicial procedures and to personal privacy. Participants raised the question of what is the balance to be struck between individual rights and the state’s role of public protection.

Veronika Muchiri from Kenya highlighted the role of Kenyan churches in developing the country’s constitution and in later leading active opposition to the government’s refusal to adopt a multiparty democracy. Muchiri decried slow response today in applying legal penalties against perpetrators of violence in the name of religion. Recently, churches and the homes and businesses of Christians have been the target of attacks by Islamic extremists with Christians often retaliating against local Muslims.

Laurie Griffiths of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) noted the tendency in the United States towards “securitization”, an exaggerated sense of danger in society that allows imposition of measures that override normal guarantees of open trials and due process of law.

“As the state becomes more security-oriented, rights are overridden,” says Griffiths. This has led her church to make a series of public statements of concern about torture, privatization of detention centres and loss of respect of detainees’ rights.

Kobus Gerber of South Africa argues that in the face of gang violence and other forms of aggression in his country, robust measures of protection are needed. At the same time, the Dutch Reformed Church leader observes the complexity of the debate about the need to impose respect for the rule of law when the law itself is unjust. Such was the case for some churches, Gerber noted, who regarded South Africa’s apartheid law as inhumane and chose to support resistance to the law.

“Do the churches have the right to resist the law?” Gerber asks.

Martin Robra of the World Council of Churches (WCC) called on the ecumenical movement in general, and WCC in particular, to focus on the multiple and sometimes contradictory issues associated with the role churches can play in response to questions and concerns about how best to defend human rights at the same time as ensuring protection for the vulnerable in politically unstable countries.

Robra acknowledges this is a complex issue at a time when there is suspicion in some quarters that that human rights laws for example are observed by states when it serves their interests and ignored when they do not. However he says he “cannot imagine a WCC of the future without a much stronger emphasis on international affairs and peace with justice.”

Visser says that WCRC will initiate further work with ecumenical partners such as the WCC on the issues raised by the conference. The John Knox International Centre will be publishing a report on the conference early in 2013. Drafts of the conference presentations are available at [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch)

## Movement towards new mission models has momentum

A series of regional mission conferences initiated by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) over the past two years has named responding to multicultural and multifaith contexts as key challenges facing contemporary church mission. The conferences – held in Asia (Indonesia and India) and in Africa (Nigeria) – are to culminate in a global mission conference in 2013. Venue and dates are under discussion.

### *... need to balance bilateral and multilateral relations among churches ...*

In June a conference in the United States on global ecumenical mission was convened by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to consider recent studies of contemporary mission practice and opportunities.

These include statements prepared at the global mission conference in Edinburgh, Scotland (June 2010) and the *Capetown Commitment* prepared by the World Evangelical Alliance (October 2010). The conference also received two mission statements that are to be presented during the assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea (October 2013): *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Sept 2012) and the *Busan Communication Statement* (May 2012).

The General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Setri Nyomi, told the conference that the intentions of the church are good but old patterns persist. He noted the need to balance bilateral and multilateral relations among churches engaged in mission.

# Rob Witmer serves in Japan

When Rob Witmer accepted a three-year position in northern Japan, he had no idea that 43 years later he would still be there. Today, Rob and Keiko – his Japanese wife – live, have a garden and also work with Japan's Indigenous people, the Ainu. They speak Japanese with their daughter and two sons and grow their own rice. Rob's English is now slightly hesitant and lightly-accented – a verbal marker of his long-time immersion in the church, culture and concerns of the Hokkaido region.

The Witmers are both serving as overseas personnel of the United Church of Canada although Keiko is a member of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan). The two churches, like others in the World Communion of Churches (WCRC), are seeking to create new models of mission with Indigenous peoples for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that redress the wrongs done in the name of Christian mission in earlier centuries. In an interview with *Reformed Communiqué*, Rob tells about the Witmers' work with the Ainu.

process that led to a mass inflow of non-Ainu into the region. This resulted in forced relocation of the Ainu and loss of their land. "Dojin gakkō" (similar to residential schools) were established by the Japanese to carry out a policy of assimilation that led to loss of language and cultural traditions.

## **RC: How do you carry out your work?**

**RW:** I am based at the Dohoku Centre, a rural church centre focussing on programmes related to food, agriculture, and rural society. I also provide support for small churches in northern Hokkaido. Three Love Seminars, based on love for God, love for humanity, and love for the soil are held twice a year. As an associate staff person of the Ainu Peoples Resource Centre, my responsibilities also include helping to coordinate the annual field work programme for members of local congregations where non-Ainu Japanese meet with Ainu to hear about issues of concern and learn how to be supportive of resolution of those concerns.

Current challenges include court cases about human rights abuses such as desecration of Ainu graves through removing bones for scientific study, something that would be unthinkable for a Japanese grave. It is as if the Ainu are not considered fully human. Another issue of concern to the church people who support the Ainu Peoples Resource Centre is the absence in new school text books of any mention of the country's Indigenous peoples even though the Japanese government officially recognized them in 2008.

In 1997 when the Ainu Culture Promotion Law was passed, it became the channel through which to apply for funding to support projects that promote Ainu culture. These include producing concerts of traditional music, preparing an Ainu language dictionary and encouraging spirituality in

daily life. In Hokkaido today, 12,000 people openly identify themselves as Ainu and relate to the Ainu Association. There is an estimated 100,000 Indigenous people in Japan. However, many seek to hide their identity due to the low status afforded their people.



*Keiko and Rob Witmer (standing at left) with the Shiozaki family and friend, Rie (kneeling). Though not baptized Christians, the Shiozakis are active in projects with Witmer and Rie attends church as a "seeker" of faith. (Photo: Rob Witmer)*

## **Reformed Communiqué (RC): What is the focus of your work?**

**Rob Witmer (RW):** I work in solidarity with Ainu people as they seek to reclaim their rights and establish a new relationship with Japanese people. The problems they face today date to 1868 which marks the beginning of Japan's modernization

*Continued on page 8*

Continued from page 7

**RC: What are the connections between the Ainu peoples and other aboriginal people worldwide?**

**RW:** Sami people from Norway, Maori from New Zealand, Aborigines from Australia, and First Nations peoples from Canada have visited Hokkaido,

supported by the World Council of Churches. On several occasions, the United Church of Canada has covered the costs of visits by representatives of aboriginal peoples between Canada and Japan. Through these encounters, international aboriginal visitors have the opportunity to meet with local congregations and exchange stories about common concerns.

## New financial system needed

Theologians, anti-poverty advocates and economists have issued a statement naming overconsumption and greed as key factors to be addressed in seeking a more just distribution of the world's resources. Social inclusion, gender justice, care for the environment, and concrete actions to overcome greed are named as criteria for a new economic and financial architecture.

The statement was issued 5 October at the conclusion of the *Global Ecumenical Conference on a New Economic and Financial Architecture* in Guarulhos, a suburb of São Paulo, Brazil. Sixty delegates met from 29 September to 5 October for the conference that was organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in partnership with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM).

says the importance of the statement is that it offers clear alternatives to current models.

"It is critical to have something to work with", she said. "Often we are challenged when we just criticize something and we are asked what we think should be done. So this meeting is critical in providing these alternatives."

The document titled the *São Paulo Statement: International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life* says governments and international institutions should replace gross domestic product (GDP) growth as the primary indicator of economic progress. Other indicators, including growth of decent work, quality of health and education, and environmental sustainability are named as better measures of economic strength.

The affirmation of communication rights to advance the empowerment of communities in developing alternatives to the current financial and economic structures was among the proposed list of actions.

"The most striking proposals that need to be followed up by an ecumenical panel include ... replacing the International Monetary Fund with a new democratic International Monetary Organization (IMO) and an alternative international reserve currency", says Rogate Mshana, the head of WCC's programme on Poverty Wealth and Ecology.

CWM General Secretary, Colin Cowan, stresses the diversity of disciplines present at the conference and the consensus reached. "The outcomes of this conference suggest

that there is enough goodwill and courage among us to participate in a process to right the wrongs of a society gone mad with injustice in the economy and the earth."

"I want you to see this day as a beginning of a new era of action", WCRC's General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, declared at the close of the conference. "I hope that the commitment that we did come up with will be the beginning step towards an economy that serves life rather than what the world has used so far," he added.



Conference on global economy was co-hosted by ecumenical partners. (Photo: WCC/Schneider)

Conference participants recommended a series of actions including the formation of an ecumenical school of governance, economics, and management and setting up a global commission initiated by the ecumenical movement to forward the work of the Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz.

Omega Bula of the United Church of Canada, who moderated the statement drafting group,

# Peasant leader urges populist push for change

A revival of mass movements for social change is needed so that the voices of ordinary people will be heard in discussions about reform of the global financial system, says a Latin American leader of a landless peasant movement.

João Pedro Stédile of Brazil's National Movement of Landless Rural Workers told a conference in Brazil on reforming the global economy that populist movements are attempting to rearrange the economies of the countries of the world. Their intent, he says, is to push for changes to solve the main problems of the people – the search for food, land, jobs, housing and education.

Stédile was one of the speakers at the *Global Ecumenical Conference on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture* initiated by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) held September 29 to October 5 in São Paulo, Brazil.

“The problem is the lack of a wider mass basis. Social movements are being criminalized everywhere in the world,” Stédile said in an interview during the conference. “Our hope is that soon we will witness a revival of the

mass movements and that these movements, in turn, will put the real problems of people on the agenda.”

“Rather than limiting ourselves to converging documents and statements, we need to have a stronger impact in the current correlation of forces and that can only happen through popular mobilization,” the anti-poverty advocate adds.

*Based on files from Marcelo Schneider*



*Conference participants drafted a set of principles for just and respectful distribution of Earth's financial and natural resources. (Photo: WCC/Schneider)*

## Religious leaders decry Pakistan blasphemy law

Christian, Muslim and Hindu leaders attending an international hearing on Pakistan's blasphemy law in Geneva have concluded that the law is leading to “blatant violations of human rights”. A statement issued at the end of the hearing calls for the Government of Pakistan to establish a commission of inquiry into misuse of the law.

The International Hearing on Misuse of Blasphemy Law and Rights of Religious Minorities in Pakistan – hosted in Geneva this September by the World Council of Churches – was called to analyse the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism and to seek effective response to the mounting number of cases of abuse of religious minority rights in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Blasphemy Law allows charges to be brought against individuals accused of offenses to religion. In some cases, conviction carries a mandatory death sentence. Participants were told by Pakistani church and human rights advocates that although the death penalty has not yet been invoked, accused persons have been killed by mobs or forced into hiding, even if acquitted of the charges against them.

“Tinkering with procedural amendments has not delivered,” the statement reads. “Therefore, we urge

the Government to constitute a competent Inquiry Commission immediately to look into the tragic consequences of the Blasphemy Law and suggest a way out of this difficult and embarrassing situation.”

The statement also affirms the need for civil society to assist in the commission's deliberations, monitor its progress and keep communities informed.

Approximately 90 participants from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America – including representatives from religious groups and human rights groups in Pakistan – gathered from 17-19 September for the hearing at Geneva's Ecumenical Centre.

The hearing coincided with meetings in Geneva of the United Nations Human Rights Council and included time for participants to meet with ambassadors and country mission representatives to raise awareness of human rights abuses due to misuse of the law.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches has two member churches in Pakistan: the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan and the Church of Pakistan.



*Project participants distribute “coolboxes” with Peter Lloyd (right) local church treasurer and chair of Malta Microfinance. (Photo: St. Andrew’s Scots Church, Malta)*

## Out of Africa... into Malta

*“After we had reached safety, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us unusual kindness.” (Acts 28.1f)*

By Páraic Reamonn

Walter and Lillian Donmilic are Christians who fled Nigeria when Islamist militants burned churches and homes. A crowded truck journey across the Sahara took all their savings; several times, the drivers stopped and demanded more money to finish the journey. Early last year, they reached Libya – and found themselves in the middle of a full-blown war. With thousands of other Africans, they desperately sought escape to Europe.

A Maltese patrol vessel found their boat drifting, out of fuel, dangerously overloaded and leaking. They were escorted to Valletta and straight into detention.

War in Libya brought thousands of Africans like Walter and Lillian to Malta, but it merely deepened a trend. Between 2002 and 2010, over 14,000 refugees arrived, and many more died in the attempt. In 2011, the UNHCR estimates, 1,500 Africans drowned trying to reach the island. The UN refugee agency calculates that, relative to size of population, Malta has the highest number of refugees in the world, many of them living in tents and old converted shipping containers.

For some years, St Andrew’s Scots Church – an ecumenical partnership in Valletta between the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church of Great Britain – has reached out to these refugees, providing cool boxes, freezers and fans in summer, maternity support packs, English language teaching materials, and blankets, quilts, and snowsuits for babies and young children in winter. Maltese authorities assumed that refugees arriving from North Africa would be Muslim – and

most are – but there are significant numbers of Christians, for some of whom St Andrew’s has become a spiritual home.

The deeper need is to help the refugees – Christian or Muslim – to start a new life. The church is launching Malta Microfinance, modelled on the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, to help refugees create income-generating projects and take them out of the camps and refugee centres permanently.

In April this year, the Church of Scotland Guild adopted Out of Africa... into Malta as a three-year partnership project, 2012-2015. This should raise over CHF150,700 in capital for Malta Microfinance and allow it to be self-sustaining.

But Guild funding will not begin to flow until next year. To bridge the gap, the WCRC Partnership Fund agreed in May to provide start-up funding for Malta Microfinance of CHF30,000.

“These will be the crucial years,” says Doug McRoberts, minister of St Andrew’s, “remaking broken lives and families, healing hurt and perceived rejection, and doing this in the way of Jesus. So far, we can fairly say we have responded to his words, ‘I was hungry and thirsty, and you gave me something to eat and drink... I was sick, and in prison, and you visited me.’ We now need to respond to a further challenge: ‘I was a stranger, and you received me into your homes.’”

*To apply for a grant of up to CHF 30,000 from the Partnership Fund, visit [www.wcrc.ch/node/36](http://www.wcrc.ch/node/36) or email us at [partnershipfund@wcrc.ch](mailto:partnershipfund@wcrc.ch). Applications from member churches that have not previously applied are particularly welcome.*

*Ordination service confirms belief that both women and men are called to God's mission*



*Amparo Lerín Cruz (left) and Gloria González Esquivel (right) are the first ordained women in Mexico. (Photo: Carlos Mondragón)*

## New Mexican church group ordains first women pastors

*By Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz*

The first two women pastors in Mexico have been ordained to mark the launch of a new communion of churches in the country. The ordination took place 28 October during celebration of the creation of the Mexican Communion of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches (CMIRP).

Over 300 people attended the celebration in Mexico City, including seven pastors who were recently excommunicated from the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM) at a time when the ordination of women in the church was under debate. The pastors were accompanied by their congregations.

In a spirit of marking a starting point for a new church and ecumenical journey, the grouping of communities of Calvinist (Presbyterian tradition) churches ordained Gloria González Esquivel and Amparo Lerín Cruz as the first women pastors in Mexico.

González Esquivel, a theology graduate, originally from the state of Morelos, now resides in Chiapas where she pastors a community and heads a non-governmental organisation working with poor women.

Lerín Cruz, originally from Oaxaca, holds a Masters degree in Theology and is presently involved in pastoral work in El-Shadday Church. She was ordained

following a long process that led to conflict with the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM, Spanish acronym), where she was advocating for the ordination of women before the Theological Council in August, 2011 that ruled out any possibility of women's ordination in the INPM.

The agreement to ordain González and Lerín on such a significant date marks the beginning of the work of the CMIRP and affirms a theological position that stands side by side with the initiatives promoted by the regional reformed organisation, the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America (AIPRAL), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The name for the new communion of churches was inspired by that of WCRC.

A message from AIPRAL to mark the occasion says: "As you know, both WCRC and AIPRAL, after much study of the word of God, have come to the conclusion that both women and men are called to God's mission and the different ministries of the church. Therefore, we encourage our churches to meditate on this and become a part of a complete inclusion of women in all the pastoral ministries."

*Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz is the ALC Noticias correspondent in Mexico City, Mexico.*

*“KAWT has roots in initiatives for peace, reunification, and human rights on the Korean peninsula.”*



*Reformed church theologian Soon Kyung Park (89) founded KAWT in 1980. (Photo: Courtesy of Soon Kyung Park)*

## Korean Association of Women Theologians wins Swiss prize

An association of feminist Korean theologians has been selected to receive an international prize awarded by women of the Swiss Reformed Churches to organizations or individuals who promote the role of women as church leaders.

The Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) 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 is named after the first woman president of a European church executive and is awarded biennially.

The award for 2013 goes to KAWT in recognition of its support for the study of theology from a feminist perspective and its promotion of the full participation of women in churches in South Korea. The association has roots in initiatives for peace, reunification, and human rights on the Korean peninsula.

KAWT's 350 members and 150 associate members include ordained pastors, academics and church-based women who serve the practical needs of women. The association promotes the full participation of women in church structures and encourages the study and recognition of feminist theology in the church.

The association was founded in 1980 by pioneering Reformed church theologian Soon Kyung Park (89). Park served as a professor at Korea's Ewha Women's University for 22 years while overseeing the development of KAWT. Her work focuses on liberation theology – an approach to Christian doctrine that favours the needs and protection of the most vulnerable people in society – and its connection to Korean concepts of suffering (Minjung) and of national self-determination (Minjok). Park is known for her support of reunification of the Korean peninsula, a stance for which she was jailed for over three months in 1991.

KAWT will use the USD5000 prize money to publish an English-language version of the history of the organization in time for the publication to be launched at the assembly of the World Council of Churches scheduled to be held in Busan, South Korea from 30 October to 8 November, 2013.

Representatives of KAWT will travel to Geneva, Switzerland to receive the award on 10 March 2013.



*Preparations for awarding the Sylvia Michel Prize are handled by a team representing women presidents of Swiss Cantonal Churches and WCRC's gender programme. Here L to R: Dora Arce-Valentín, Irmelin Kradolfer and Claudia Bandexin. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

*The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in association with Lombard, Odier & Cie, Bankers of Geneva, Switzerland, offers a prize for a theological essay in memory of the late Georges Lombard, associate of the Bank and for many years General Treasurer of the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now part of WCRC).*

*The aim is to encourage theological work that brings the classical Reformed traditions to bear on a contemporary problem. Such work should seek to engage practical issues in the real world from the perspective of Reformed faith and theology, thereby promoting a distinctive Reformed witness.*

Paradise:  
a source of inspiration for the  
renewal of social and economic  
structures in global society

## LOMBARD PRIZE 2013

Paradise is a biblical concept developed in the first chapters of Genesis. This concept of a perfect origin in which all forms of life thrived in harmonious relationships has evoked throughout history a longing for a paradise regained. It has served especially in the Reformed tradition as a model for building social and economic structures of society. How can the concept of paradise be developed in a theologically relevant way as an inspirational model for a just society today?

**All theology students or pastors 35 years of age or younger are invited to submit essays no later than 23 December 2012.**

1. The prizes for the best essays will be awarded by an international jury of scholars. First prize USD 2,500; second prize USD 600; third prize USD 400.
2. The essay will offer biblical, theological and spiritual perspectives on the theme as well as a good understanding of its potential as a life-based issue to create opportunities for interreligious solidarity and dialogue.
3. The essay will illustrate a familiarity with Reformed tradition and demonstrate both theological imagination and a willingness to relate theology to the challenges to witness and mission in the church today.
4. The essay will be written in English, French, Spanish or German.
5. The length of the essay will be between 5,000 and 6,000 words.
6. The essay will be submitted electronically in Word format to Daphne Martin-Gnanadason, [dma@wrc.ch](mailto:dma@wrc.ch)
7. The essay will be accompanied by a statement from the author declaring that he/she is the author of the paper.
8. The essay will be accompanied by notes and a bibliography which clearly indicate sources quoted in the paper.



*Sunita Suna heads the Asia regional office of the World Student Christian Federation.  
(Photo: United Church of Canada)*

## Students protest destructive mining practices

In the Philippines, Christian students are campaigning against environmentally destructive mining practices by overseas companies. In India, students are protesting government decisions that allow a South Korean mining company to displace large numbers of Indigenous people.

The students are part of a global network of national organizations associated with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) – a federation that encourages Christian students to engage in actions calling for the transformation of practices that create social and economic injustice.

Sunita Suna, WSCF Executive Secretary for Asia-Pacific, explains: «WSCF creates awareness about ‘climate justice’ and helps students analyse what is happening. They take that analysis back with them to the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in their home countries and become very much involved in anti-mining issues.»

Suna – originally from India and now based in Hong Kong – made her comments this August during an interview with *Reformed Communiqué* in Ottawa, Canada. Suna was in the Canadian capital to attend the triennial meeting of the senior decision-making body of The United Church of Canada, the General Council.

In the Philippines, students are focusing on the impact of mining practices on the country’s environment and economy.

« Companies are aggressively pursuing profits. Resources are leaving the country without benefiting

Filipinos. SCM Philippines is promoting sustainable development to the benefit of local people, » Suna notes.

Students in India are protesting decisions by the government to allow the Korean mining company POSCO to exploit resources in the state of Orissa in an area where the population is predominantly Indigenous. More than 30 villages will be displaced.

Villagers have been protesting the displacement for the past three years. The government is promising compensation to those displaced by mining activities but Suna reports it remains unclear when, where or how much will be offered.

SCM India is claiming land rights for Indigenous people in the state: « Students are saying that people have the right to keep living where they are living, » says Suna.

Student concerns in the Asia-Pacific region mirror those that General Council delegates debated in motions related to mining practices of Canadian companies at home and abroad. Suna points to the Beaconsfield Initiative presented for approval as one such example. The initiative called on the church to condemn destructive large-scale mining by Canadian companies affecting Indigenous communities in the Cordillera region in the Philippines. Suna notes too that many shareholders of POSCO are from Canada.

The United Church of Canada is a strong supporter of the Justice and Partnership programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.



*Advent is a time for reaching out to others with gifts of support. (Photo: WCRC/Koopmans)*

## This Christmas, reach out to others!

*By Stephens Lytch*

In this time of Advent, we are reminded that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) bears witness to the fact that the unity we have in Jesus who became flesh and dwelled among us draws us together in service to the world.

WCRC brings our unique Reformed perspective to the rich diversity of ecumenical organizations that work together for the reign of God. Through

theological reflection, worship enrichment, education, mission and advocacy for justice, WCRC supports and strengthens the ministry of 80 million Christians in 229 churches spread across 108 countries.

**With your gift, you support the work of WCRC in reaching out to the world. Go to [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch) “Support Us”.**

*Stephens Lytch is WCRC's Director of Development [sglytch@gmail.com](mailto:sglytch@gmail.com)*

## Subscribe Now for *Reformed World* 2013!

*Reformed World* is the theological journal of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The journal presents in-depth articles related to contemporary studies in ecumenism and Reformed theology.

### Subscription rates

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N.B. *Reformed World* will not be published in December 2012. The next issue will appear in March 2013.

Financial contributions are welcome!

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**By bank transfer:** See website for bank details.



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

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**World  
Communion  
of Reformed  
Churches**

Called to  
communion,  
committed to  
justice

## FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be,...? ... The angel said to her, "... For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Excerpts from Luke 1: 26 – 38)*

The young lady, Mary, must have felt overwhelmed by this particular visit – a strange visitor with a strange message that announced she was to become the mother of a special baby – the Son of the Most High. I like the gift of young people to be straight forward. And so Mary dared to ask, "How can this be?" In return, she received a clear answer, "... nothing will be impossible with God". Mary's response was remarkable. It was not going to be easy but she committed herself to fulfil her task – knowing that with God nothing will be impossible.

Mary was soon to learn that, as a pregnant unwed woman, her relationship with her fiancée was in jeopardy and her reputation threatened with disgrace. She was soon to deal with the impossible situation of travelling away from her comfort zone while she was heavy with child and later have to flee because her child's life was in danger – targeted by the political powers of the day. Mary's words in response to her situation – "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word" – were not docile. They were simple, powerful words indicating her willingness to be useful to God in making a difference in the world.

As we enter Advent, the World Communion of Churches is faced with the impossible situation of venturing into something new. The Geneva office is to be relocated to Hanover. Asking "How can this be?" is appropriate. There may even be reasons for some to think this is impossible. But hearing the voice of the angel again saying "With God nothing shall be impossible" leads us to the courage of Mary in saying, we are God's servants, and we are prepared to embrace the future God is bringing our way. This year, we have also begun a journey to raise ten million Swiss francs. This could appear to be overwhelming, however, with Mary we are called to believe that "Nothing will be impossible".

I ask for two things from you, dear reader, in this Advent season:

1. Do your part in praying and in living out this vision so that, inspired by Mary's courageous action, you too can be God's instrument for change.
2. Invest in this vision. Contribute to the ten million Swiss franc capital campaign. Give a Christmas gift to the WCRC. Go to [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch), click on DONATION, and give your Christmas gift. You may also write us at [gs@wrc.ch](mailto:gs@wrc.ch) and ask how you can contribute.

Together, during Advent, let us respond to God's calling with the willingness to be where God wants us to be and to do what God wants us to do – to make a difference in the world.

*With God nothing  
shall be impossible*

## Prayers online

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

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