



*Encounters
with
Indonesian
Christians
promise to be
memorable*



(Photo: Telma Bawanda)

Indonesia hosts global church events

This could be called the “Year of Indonesia” in the life of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Three major events are scheduled for May and June in this Asian country that is home to 28 WCRC member churches.

In May, the Executive Committee meets in the Sumatran city of Berastagi, hosted by the Batak Karo Protestant Church. Prior to the Executive Committee meeting, a mission conference is scheduled for the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. In June, the Global Institute of Theology opens at the

Duta Wacana Christian University in the Javanese city, Yogyakarta.

The events offer welcome opportunities for representatives of WCRC member churches from around the world to meet Indonesian Christians and learn about the work of their churches in a country whose population is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and interfaith.

Executive Committee members are exploring the theme: God of life, our communion prays for Justice and Peace. Indonesian theologian, Septemmy Lakawa, will address the topic in her presentation on

communion, community and just peace. Andreas Yewangoe, president of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), will reflect on the subject from the Indonesian context.

The theme is linked to that of the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly to be held in Korea in 2013: God of Grace, lead us to Justice and Peace.

This issue of *Reformed Communiqué* offers an introduction to the contexts and objectives of the WCRC gatherings.

WCRC focuses on the future

by *Aiko Sumichan and Kristine Greenaway*

Justice and theology programmes for the coming year, partnership with regional groups of member churches, and financial stability are key words on the agenda of the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at meetings scheduled for May 10-17 in Indonesia.

Two years after WCRC's founding meeting in Grand Rapids, United States, elected officials will be reviewing progress to date and approving plans for the future. The strategic plan adopted at the 2011 meeting of the executive is the framework for the planning process.

include a consultation in Geneva, Switzerland in September to address the current structure of the world's economy and in what way a Christian approach to economics would differ from this model.

The executive secretary for Theology, Mission and Communion, Douwe Visser, will bring a proposal to focus theological work on ecumenical formation and on the development of Reformed identity in the coming years.

Visser will also report on grants offered by the Partnership Fund in support of church-endorsed mission and development projects.

General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, and WCRC President, Jerry Pillay,

currencies in which the majority of donations and membership fees are received. A report on efforts to address the situation at the initiative of the organization's officers will be tabled.

Discovering Berastagi

Encounters with the Christian community promise to be a memorable element of the committee's time in North Sumatra. The host church, Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP), is arranging for committee members to experience Sumatran culture. This includes plans for delegates to worship with local congregations.

Berastagi is located in an area known locally as "Tanah Karo" or Karoland. The region is named for the Karo people, one of the six ethnic groups native to North Sumatra, referred to collectively as the Batak people.

Christianity came to the Karo in 1890 when the Dutch Plantation Company commissioned the Dutch Missionary Society (Nederlandsche Zending Genoothchac) to attempt to calm the people who were constantly attacking the Dutch plantations. As a result, Christianity was not warmly received. However, the missionaries learned the local languages and customs, started schools and gave medical attention to the people. In 1893, six Karo people were baptized and in 1896, the first Karo church was established. It is this church that is now called the Batak Karo Protestant Church or GBKP.

In their 2010-2015 vision and mission statement, the GBKP mentions that it would like to increase its involvement in ecumenical movements. Hosting this event is a major symbol of this commitment.

Aiko Sumichan is a WCRC intern from Jakarta, Indonesia. Kristine Greenaway is Executive Secretary for Communications.



Members of the GKI Pondok Indah church celebrate "Culture Month" each year in August by spicing-up worship with traditional clothing, songs and decor. (Photo: KASUT/Purwy)

The 29 member executive committee, three advisors and a consultant will meet in Berastagi, a small city on the island of Sumatra, about 70 km from Medan, the capital of North Sumatra.

Programme highlights

The newly-appointed consultant responsible for WCRC's Office of Justice and Partnership, Dora Arce-Valentín, will present an outline of plans for the coming year. These

will report on the state of the organization's member churches based on the leaders' contacts and travel over the past 12-month period. Nigeria, Egypt, Mexico, DRC Congo and the United States are expected to feature in their reports as will regional relations.

Committee members will be briefed on the financial challenges facing the organization. Concern centres on the impact of the high value of the Swiss franc in relation to the American dollar and the Euro, the

Indonesian churches discuss future of mission work

The 28 member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Indonesia are engaged in a process of discussion and reflection that is designed to lead to a statement on mission in their country.

The principal objective is to prepare a statement on Indonesian Reformed church mission. A second objective is for WCRC member churches to reflect on how they can work together more closely. One option under consideration is the formation of a WCRC Indonesian council.

WCRC is co-hosting the inter-church event with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). Indonesian

of an inter-church consultation to be held 6-9 May in Jakarta. Questions centre on the biblical and theological grounding of mission and on the socio-economic and interfaith contexts

Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance and the Vatican in 2011. Each member church will select three representatives from these gatherings to attend the Jakarta consultation.



Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, teems with people from the country's many faith and cultural groups. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)

Questions centre on Indonesian mission contexts

theologian, Zakaria Ngelow, heads the consultation process.

Each member church has been invited to hold its own national consultation in advance

in which mission is carried out.

Participants also are to discuss partnership with overseas mission agencies and respond to WCRC's mission thrust for 2011 onwards. Reference will be made to the document on mission and proselytism launched by the World

Speakers at the consultation will include Ngelow as well as Henrietta Hutabarat Lebang, CCA general secretary, Dora Arce-Valentín, head of WCRC's justice programme and WCRC general secretary, Setri Nyomi.



Indonesia in brief

Indonesia – an archipelago of more than 17,500 islands – has the world's fourth largest population with 237.6 million people. Most Christians are concentrated in East Nusa Tenggara, North Sumatra, North Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Papua, Maluku, and Java. The majority of the country's population is Muslim (86 percent) with Christians forming nine percent. The majority of Protestants are from the Reformed or Lutheran traditions.

Photo: WCRC/Sumichan

Global Institute of Theology ready

The dean of the faculty of theology of Indonesia's Duta Wacana Christian University knows what it means to study the context in which he is doing theology. Yahya Wijaya lives and works in Yogyakarta, a city known for its rich history and the contemporary mix of Christian, Muslim and Hindu faith traditions.

With his Masters degree in Christian Ethics from Princeton in the United States and a doctorate in economic theology from Leeds in the United Kingdom, Wijaya is a close observer of the context of contemporary youth culture and of the business world.

Wijaya's ability to set the study of theology in local, regional and global contexts makes him the ideal host for the third biennial Global Institute of Theology (GIT) to be held in Duta Wacana Christian University from 8 June to 1 July 2012, under the academic auspices of the university.

Reformed Communiqué spoke with Wijaya in January when he was in Geneva, Switzerland to participate in the selection of participants for the programme.

Wijaya told *Reformed Communiqué* that participants will be offered a programme that includes both classroom learning and encounter experiences with members of the diverse community with which the university has connections.

Students are offered their choice of two-day exposure visits to a Muslim pesantren (residential school), Buddhist mendut (centre) near the world famous Prambanan temple or a rural Christian church community. The list of options includes spending time with people working on post-disaster recovery in an area hit by an earthquake in 2006 and a volcanic eruption in 2010.

These direct encounters can challenge, transform and enrich students' theology and worldview, Wijaya says.

"The students' intellectual experience of theology will be enriched

by the international community of GIT participants and faculty. They will see real life in different religious and cultural contexts," Wijaya notes. "The interaction will change their approach to mission, pastoral care, spirituality and methodology."

People in the region who have survived natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and an earthquake will surprise GIT participants with what Wijaya calls their "disaster theology".

Survivors who are now rebuilding in the wake of these disasters have sensitivity to the environment, Wijaya believes.

.. a theology of creation and disaster based on real life disaster experiences...

"They have a way of coping. They treat a volcanic explosion as a natural part of life. They don't consider nature as an enemy. They consider it as part of our circle of life just as our neighbours and our family are. We should understand nature as we understand our neighbours and family."

Wijaya recalls how that attitude of acceptance so surprised an American volunteer who came to help after an earthquake hit the area in 2006. The young man had been a volunteer in Florida following Hurricane Katrina. There he saw people reacting angrily to what nature had done. But in Indonesia he saw people smiling as they offered him drinks even though they had little themselves and were living in temporary shelters.

"These experiences stimulate theologians to build a disaster



Yahya Wijaya is theology dean at Duta Wacana Christian University (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

theology," Wijaya muses. "It is a theology of creation and disaster based on real life disaster experiences."

Encounters with Christians and peoples of other faiths in a region prone to disasters offer fertile opportunities for people from other countries to reflect on how their theology affects how people react when disaster strikes them. Can GIT students leave better equipped to serve their

people following their encounters in Indonesia? That is what the organizers of the GIT expect.

Organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), GIT offers an intensive three-week immersion in inter-contextual and ecumenical study for young theologians and new ordinands from around the world. The specially-selected GIT faculty of senior ecumenical theologians creates a programme to situate the study of theology in local, regional and world contexts.

Douwe Visser, WCRC's Executive Secretary for Theology, Aruna Gnanadason, an Indian feminist theologian serving as Dean of Students for the GIT, and Wijaya have selected 43 participants from a total of 100 applicants. Ten young Indonesian theologians form the rest of the student group.

In addition to Wijaya, Gnanadason and Visser, the GIT faculty includes Bas Plaisier of the Netherlands who serves as GIT president and Peter Wyatt of Canada who is the GIT dean. Joan Wyatt, also from Canada, is the Institute's chaplain. Duta Wacana faculty will be included in the teaching team.

Justice: What does it mean for WCRC?

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is mandated by its member churches to develop programmes based on five key directions: Mission, Communion, Justice, Theology, and Ecumenical Engagement.

Reformed Communiqué is exploring these concepts in a five-part series. Think of it as a shorthand guide to the plans for our global family in the years ahead.

The word for this edition is “justice”.

by Dora Arce-Valentín

From the very moment in which churches from the Reformed family agreed to be part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we committed to a focus on action for justice. At the same time, we agreed to build an authentic “communion” of diverse

expressions of what it means to be faith communities. In making that connection, we demonstrated that there is a basic link between justice and our commitment to work together as a family of Reformed churches wherever we are located.

As Christians, we take the Bible and the movement of Jesus

as a paradigm for our journey towards justice. Justice, as the biblical prophets showed us; justice, as Jesus showed us; justice, as the common roots of the Reformed tradition show us.

Justice is the only way to build a world in which every human being will have a decent and fulfilled life, in which love overcomes greed and in which diversity is seen as a gift from God.

We dream and we are committed to the platform Jesus proposed in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled.”

For information about WCRC’s justice work visit www.wcrc.ch/justice or contact darce@enet.cu

Cuban theologian heads Justice Office

A Cuban theologian and pastor has been appointed to head the Justice and Partnership programme of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Dora Arce-Valentín took up her appointment in January 2012.

“Dora Arce-Valentín is moving into a key role,” says WCRC general secretary, Setri Nyomi. “Her experience of grassroots ecumenism and her involvement in social justice initiatives give her strong connections to the local contexts of member churches.”

Arce-Valentín’s appointment was approved by WCRC’s officers at a meeting in Geneva, 20-21 November. She will serve for two years as a consultant based in Cuba and spend up to eight weeks per year at the WCRC office in Geneva, Switzerland. She is expected to travel widely to connect with WCRC member churches. Funds are being sought for her eventual relocation to Geneva.

Arce-Valentín will be working closely with the Justice Network co-moderated by Yueh-



Dora Arce-Valentín is new justice secretary. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)

Wen Lu of Taiwan and Helis Barraza Díaz of Colombia.

“With a spirit of cooperation and respect, we will accomplish much that is good and necessary,” Arce-Valentín says in a written response to news of her appointment.

Arce-Valentín was ordained by the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba following studies at the

Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas. She has a Masters degree in Theology from Matanzas and is completing work on a Masters degree in Gender Studies at the University of Havana.

Arce-Valentín began her career as a civil engineer before switching to theology. She has served as a parish pastor and as a teacher at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas.

“We must continue to involve ourselves in efforts to put a brake on the destruction of our planet – both ecological and economic. It will be important as well to make gender issues visible as key components of economic and social justice,” says the Cuban theologian.

As a pastor, Arce-Valentín brings parish-level perspective to global ecumenism: “We can’t think of global justice if our own local churches are not a witness to the love which we proclaim and which engenders justice from a biblical perspective,” she says.

Change is coming, say church environmentalists

by *Allan Buckingham*

There's a new world in the making, says a global group of church-based environmental and economic justice advocates in a statement by that name issued at the conclusion of a consultation on the economy and the environment held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada in November.

The Poverty, Wealth and Ecology consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) was part of the AGAPE process (Alternative to Economic Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth) that is seeking options to the current system of economic globalization.

The statement issued at the end of the consultation calls for action including launching a decade of action on eco-justice that would encompass both ecological and economic justice.

Participants included representatives of World Communion of Churches (WCRC) member churches and global partners: United Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Christian Reformed Church in North America, United Church of Christ, All Africa

Council of Churches, Pacific Council of Churches, CLAI and the Christian Council of Asia.

Discussions were lively and theologically grounded with presentations from North Americans including John Dillon, a Canadian justice advocate working with the



"There's a new world in the making," justice advocates proclaim at global event in Canada. (Photo: Ken Grey)

church-supported coalition KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

Dillon told consultation participants that there is poverty in Canada despite the wealth generated by the petroleum and finance industries.

"A booming petroleum extraction industry, centred on the Alberta tar sands, generates wealth for corporations but has harmful social consequences," Dillon says in a paper commissioned

for the consultation. "Tax reform is needed to redistribute wealth and deter ecological destruction."

Dillon believes that churches have a "prophetic vision to witness to the profound transformation needed if we are to avoid catastrophic ecological disaster." This will involve a

conversion from lifestyles based on excessive consumption of the earth's resources, he states.

"We must take seriously Jesus' teaching that 'one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions' (Luke 12:15)," Dillon writes.

A strong theology can also be seen in the final document which contains a confession section as well as references to scripture such as "[w]e are compelled and inspired by

this [Revelation 22:1-2] vision of hope with respect to poverty, wealth and ecology, a new vision of Earth and the people who are dependent upon its abundance", to which the world can look for alternative economic systems.

Participants committed themselves to "lives of integrity and justice" while seeking "right relationship in our economic transactions and called on governments and business to commit to principals of integrity including the highest standards of human rights and environmental protection."

The statement included a call to churches and partner organizations to "take action in making a transition from carbon-based to renewable energy" and "to narrow the gap between those of us who are rich and those who are poor."

The full text of the statement is available at <http://bit.ly/WCCPWENA> Allan Buckingham is a member of the United Church of Canada and serves on the WCRC Executive Committee and Communication Network.

Limits to greed: How much is enough?

Canadian social justice advocate John Dillon believes in "distributive justice"— setting limits to minimum and maximum income levels.

The minimum income level, according to Dillon, must be sufficient not just for food and shelter but also for access to civic, cultural and artistic life. He then asks how maximum incomes might be defined.

How much inequality is acceptable in order to reward differences in contributions rather than simply multiply privilege?

Dillon suggests that one measure could be in terms of a multiple of the minimum established for all citizens. He cites the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, who suggested that the wealthiest should be no more than four times as rich as the poorest.

Ecological economist, Herman Daly, points out there is no "God-given definition of what the limits to inequality should be" and states that exact limits are less important than that limits be set.

Prayers for peace requested in Nigeria

The General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) says there is a need for ongoing prayer in the face of violence affecting Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

“As people of faith wrestle with the Boko Haram phenomenon, let us keep our sisters and brothers in our prayers,” Setri Nyomi says in a message to WCRC member churches issued early this year. In his letter, Nyomi asks that those prayers include both Muslims and Christians.

WCRC is one of a number of Christian world groups calling for calm over the past months following attacks on Christian and Muslim places of worship that have resulted in death, injury and extensive damage to churches and mosques.

Nyomi is in contact with WCRC’s six member churches in Nigeria and is receiving expressions of safety concerns and mounting fear in the face of attacks by the extremist Muslim group Boko Haram.

“We join our churches in Nigeria in condemning the actions of Boko Haram and all forces of evil and destruction,” says Nyomi. “We understand that many Muslim communities in Nigeria have also condemned the actions of the Boko Haram.”

In recent months, the group has increased attacks in the north of the country, raising fears of a broader religious war in Africa’s most populous nation. The sect’s name which translates to “western education is forbidden” in the Hausa language of northern Nigeria has been responsible for the deaths of nearly 1,000 people since 2009, according to Washington-based Human Rights Watch.

The group was founded around 2002 in the city of Maiduguri by

Muslim cleric Muhammad Yusuf. One of its stated objectives is to implement Sharia (Islamic law) in the predominantly Muslim north. Southern Nigeria is largely Christian.

However, commentators have said that there is also a political dimension to the conflict, reflecting “concerns by the Northern elite that [President Goodluck] Jonathan’s decision to end an informal agreement to alternate presidential power between the Muslim North and Christian South before the 2011 presidential elections will exclude the North from any possibility of future control of the state,” according to former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell, writing in the *New York Times*.

tool by the complainants to attract attention, said Professor Jesse Mugambi, a scholar in theology, philosophy of religion and applied ethics at the University of Nairobi in an interview with ENInews.

“Other opportunistic groups take advantage of such chaos, making it difficult to tell who is aggrieved and who is not. Religion is blamed in general, although the majority of the citizens remain law abiding,” Mugambi said.

Recently Boko Haram said attacks on churches were in revenge for “wrongs” committed on Muslims by Christians in the north. “This is not the first time such reactions (attacks) have happened. When



The cycle of violence between Nigerian Christians and Muslims is fuelled, some say, by economic stress. (Photo: EPD)

In addition, “the root cause of violence and anger in both the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness,” which Jonathan’s government has done little to ease, wrote history professor Jean Herskovits, of the State University of New York at Purchase, also in the *New York Times*.

Such serious grievances mean that religion may be exploited as a

religion is abused anywhere, it becomes a ‘cancer’ that is very difficult to cure,” said Mugambi.

Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian scholar who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, has warned that the country is slowly disintegrating and has called for national dialogue.

With files from ENInews

Worshiping the Triune God: Proclamation

This article is the third in a series introducing *Worshiping the Triune God*, a working document published after the inaugural meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010.

The document is a series of “proverbs” designed to provoke ongoing discussion about the nature and function of Christian worship. This article focuses on proclamation.

by Paul Detterman

If you could alter human lives for ultimate good, would you do it? If you could bring hope to people who are desperate, healing to people who are suffering, release to people who are captive to addictions and joy to people who are despondent, would that interest you? You can be complicit in doing these very things every time your congregation worships—if you pay close attention to the proclamation of God’s word.

God’s Word: nothing else has its power. God spoke creation and an ordered universe emerged out of chaos. God’s word is the centre of our existence. Proclamation of God’s word is the core of our worship. It can change the course of human lives, bringing hope, healing, release and joy.

The psalmist called God’s word “a light for our path.” The apostle Paul, arrested for proclaiming God’s word, rejoiced that because of his imprisonment the guards were being converted. Protestant Reformers named the preaching of God’s word as the first mark of the “true church”.

In an age marked by ten-second commercial spots, expectation of high-energy, high-tech presentations, texting, tweeting, and multitasking, is it still possible that the reading of ancient texts followed by a mix of theology, philosophy, and sociology can be central

to the identity of God’s people, individually and in community? The answer is simple—nothing else has the power of God’s word.



Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, preaches in Geneva, Switzerland. (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Proclamation of God’s word is the core of our worship.

Here is a proverb to consider: *Blessed is the congregation in which the word of God is proclaimed with conviction and joy surrounded by expectant prayers and profound gratitude for the Holy Spirit’s work to illuminate the hearts and minds of God’s people.*

Preaching is so strongly associated with Protestant worship that even a secular visitor would be surprised not to encounter some form of sermon, homily or teaching in a service of worship.

The blessing of proclaiming God’s word does not come from the winsome articulation of a few situation-appropriate thoughts nor from a droll reading of a theological treatise. Proclamation is personal witness—a bold, risky statement of biblically-informed conviction enmeshed in Spirit-issued joy. It is the product of study and spiritual discernment, biblical interpretation and on knowledge of the people gathered.

John Calvin named both the proclamation and the receiving of God’s word as the mark of the true church. The preacher may be the one on whom the burden of presentation rests but members of the congregation have responsibility for preparing their hearts and minds to receive and apply the word proclaimed.

Those who find their home in the Reformed tradition know that we are part of a confessional heritage—joined with countless numbers of Jesus’ followers who have proclaimed God’s word in their time and watched the fruit it bears. The act of uniting ourselves with believers from other times and places can give us courage, vision, wisdom and determination to minister boldly in our current community.

Paul Detterman is a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastor serving as executive director of Presbyterians for Renewal in the United States. Excerpted from Reformed Worship (102). Faith Alive Christian Resources. Used with permission.

From the Partnership Fund: a gift for learning in Madagascar

by *Páraic Réamonn*

The news came just in time for Christmas. As the Malagasy congregation saw it, the grant was a gift.

The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) encourages its congregations to take seriously the contribution they can make to the

Today, the World Bank estimates per capita income as less than \$400 a year, with over three-quarters of families living in poverty. The UNDP human development index ranks Madagascar at 151 out of 187 countries and territories. Factor in inequality of life expectancy, education and income, and its HDI

score drops by almost a third. One of its big challenges is what economists call human capital and the rest of us call education.

The FJKM congregation in Soamanandrany has responded, with plans to celebrate its 150th anniversary by building a community school – a primary school to begin with, with a high school to be added later.

In designing this anniversary project, the congregation canvassed the opinions of the community it aims to serve. Much of the work will be done by volunteer labour. The project is supported by local government and the Malagasy Department of Education.

Over 40 per cent of Soamanandrany's population is

under 20. The aim is to provide them not just with education but also with a community hall where extra-curricular and recreational activities can promote their all-round development. The hall will also be used for income generating activities.

A quarter of the cost will be met by the congregation and other local contributions. But like many congregations in the WCRC family, it needed help to help its community; and help was forthcoming in the form of a CHF30,000 grant to the FJKM from WCRC's Partnership Fund.

Announcing this good news to the parishioners on Christmas Day was very moving says Manitra Andriamasinoro, who chairs the local construction committee. "FJKM Soamanandrany will do its utmost to deserve the WCRC's trust."



A congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar has received support for a community school. (Photo: Courtesy of Manitra Andriamasinoro)

human development of the country.

Madagascar is one of the world's poorer countries. By the turn of the century, decades of economic mismanagement and political crisis lost it the favourable position it had in the 1960s, when it had strong institutions, good infrastructure, an educated elite, and a per capita income above average for a developing country.

The Partnership Fund makes grants to help WCRC member churches carry out projects in mission or service that otherwise they could not afford.

If your congregation belongs to a member church in the global south that has never applied to the fund, why not think of developing a project that could attract a grant?

For information about how to apply, visit www.wcrc.ch or send a message to partnership@wrc.ch. All applications need to be endorsed by the WCRC member church.

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Newsletter

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Church news agency ENI seeks funding

by *Frank Worbs*

Ecumenical News International (ENInews) is a news agency with a mandate to report on ecumenical developments and events in the life of churches and other religions. In the present world situation this entails reporting on tensions between religions and communities, for instance in the case of the revolution in Arabic countries, but also stories on reconciliation and mutual support. Church and secular media outlets in Europe and North America (such as BBC World) that report on ecclesial or religious developments use ENI reports.

The agency is supported by three of its four founding members: the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (the successor of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches). The Council of European

Churches (CEC) has withdrawn due to financial constraints.

It came as a surprise when in December 2011 the two largest sponsors (WCC and LWF) massively cut their annual contribution: WCC from CHF 150,000 to 50,000 and LWF from CHF 80,000 to 25,000. CEC (with a contribution of CHF 25,000 per year) is no longer able to continue its sponsorship. Only WCRC, which is already the most faithful supporter of the news service, will continue to pay its annual share of CHF 30,000.

For the year 2012, ENI can only count on pledges of CHF 110,000 for an overall budget of CHF 320,000. If this scenario continues unchanged ENI would have to cease operations by the end of April 2012. This important voice for international church life and cooperation of religious communities would thus be silenced and the

network of correspondents would break away within a short delay.

It is essential to find new partners and sponsors by the end of April 2012. Current negotiations give some hope. The new partnerships and pledges will only become effective in 2013, however. Therefore the budget year 2012 has to be bridged by extraordinary, unique contributions.

ENI welcomes news that the Church Council of the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Aargau in Switzerland has decided to make a unique grant of CHF 20,000 in favour of ENI for 2012. A representative of the Reformed Church of Aargau is one of the two WCRC delegates in the general assembly of ENI. David Harris of the Presbyterian Church in Canada is the other delegate and serves as ENI president.

Frank Worbs is a WCRC appointee to the ENI General Assembly

Egyptian congregation's action is a model for country's future

As Egyptians gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square in January to mark the first anniversary of the revolution that toppled the government of Hosni Mubarak, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) held up the example of a Christian congregation that transformed its church near the square into a field hospital at the time to treat wounded Muslim and Christian protestors.

"People with medical expertise made themselves available and the church gave 'hospital' space and refuge to Christians and Muslims alike," says the General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Setri Nyomi.

The Jasr El Dobarra church, located one block from Tahrir

Square, became a gathering place in January 2011 for protestors who were wounded and tired, earning the congregation the nickname "Church of the Revolution".

"This is a model of the supportive and united community protestors were hoping to create in their country. Today, one year on, it still stands as an example of cooperation between communities of faith," Nyomi states.

"Those serving at the make-shift clinic and refuge made the words of Jesus 'Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest' come alive," Nyomi adds.

During talks with the Evangelical Church of Egypt, Nyomi heard of concerns about tension between

some Muslim and Christian groups that has led to violence, including destruction of worship spaces.

"Members of the church continue to pray for a nation which values all its citizens no matter what their religion," Nyomi reports.

In praising efforts of the Evangelical Church to participate in rebuilding the country, Nyomi says: "It is my hope that the emerging political leaders will value freedom of religion and will work hard at creating space for all Egyptians to participate fully in building a new Egypt in which the welfare of all is paramount."

Indigenous Canadian Youth Ambassadors seek UN support

Indigenous Youth Ambassadors from Canada are asking the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to look into inequities between the quality of education, health and child welfare available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in Canada.

“We were promised rights by the Canadian government, yet we got so little,” says Youth Ambassador Collin Starblanket.



Collin Starblanket: “Children should not be crying for help.”
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. This obliges the Canadian government to report on measures adopted to ensure those rights are available to all children and youth without discrimination.

On 6 February the committee on the Rights of the Child meeting in Geneva, Switzerland received Canada’s official report along with submissions made by child and youth advocates from across the country.

Starblanket was one of six young people from First Nations (aboriginal) communities across Canada to testify before the committee. Three of the

ambassadors also met privately with the committee chairperson, Jean Zermatten of Switzerland.

Inadequate funding for education means that students living on “reserves” (areas that are reserved for Indigenous communities) often have to leave home to continue their studies because there are no schools offering higher education in their communities.

Inadequate funding for education means leaving home to study ...

“Children should not be crying for help,” he declares.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) focuses on Indigenous rights through its Justice and Partnership programme. In 2010 at WCRC’s Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, United States, the organization pledged to encourage initiatives for healing and reconciliation between churches



Kendall White: “I don’t want others to go through what I did.”
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

“I had to leave home at 13 to go to school off-reserve,” Youth Ambassador Kendall White says. “I was bullied, got into drugs and became suicidal.”

A member of the Temagami First Nation, White notes that she didn’t know about her rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Now she says she wants youth around the world – aboriginal and non-aboriginal – to know they have rights and to be proud of who they are.

“I don’t want others to go through what I did,” White says.

Starblanket believes all young people should be able to live to their full expectations.

and Indigenous communities worldwide in situations where there is a legacy of abuse or neglect of Indigenous peoples by the church or church-supported institutions.

The Indigenous Youth Ambassadors were supported by a coalition of rights advocates including KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Advocates and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCFS). The two organizations submitted an alternate report *Honouring the Children* which documents inequities between support offered on reserves and for Indigenous families living off-reserve.

European council names Belgian

Guy Liagre, President of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, will be the new General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) starting in June 2012. He succeeds the Orthodox theologian, Viorel Ionita, who retired as Interim General Secretary of CEC in October 2011. The Belgian theologian was elected by the CEC Central Committee at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland on 24 and 25 January.

Liagre was a delegate at the Uniting General Council



Guy Liagre is to be new general secretary for the Conference of European Churches. (Photo: UNIPROBEL - United Protestant Churches in Belgium)

of the World Communion of Churches in 2010 in Grand Rapids, United States. He is ordained and has a doctorate in Modern Church History from the Protestant Faculty of Theology in Brussels, Belgium. He speaks Dutch, English, French, German and Afrikaans.

Dialogue between Reformed and Catholic theologians continues into 2012

by *Christopher Dorn*

The fourth phase of international Reformed-Roman Catholic bilateral dialogue is under way. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) are organizing this most recent phase of discussion sessions which is scheduled to conclude in 2017. The dialogue centres on the theme: “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice”.

Under the leadership of Martha Moore-Keish of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia in the United States and Kevin Rhoades, bishop of the diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in Indiana, United States, the two dialogue teams met in Rome, Italy in April 2011. Moore-Keish was appointed by WCRC to co-lead with Rhoades, the PCPCU representative.

The topic of the first meeting was “Justification: Reformed and Roman Catholic Perspectives (historically and currently)”.

Justification can be defined as the act whereby God accepts sinful human beings by grace alone

through their faith in Christ’s saving work. Historically, the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation concerned the nature of this act. Broadly speaking, the question is whether “justification” is a process that culminates in God’s acceptance or is it rather the basis for this acceptance?

Dialogue members devoted their sessions to reviewing the first three phases of the dialogue process as well as to hearing papers on the doctrine of justification delivered by Douwe Visser, head of WCRC’s Office of Theology, Mission and Communion, Peter Casarella (United States), Annemarie Mayer (Germany) for PCPCU and George Hunsinger of Princeton Seminary in the United States.

The teams will convene for a second meeting in Decatur from 27 April to 2 May 2012 to explore the topic “Justification and Sacramentality: the Rites of the Church”. Here the subjects of baptism, Eucharist/Lord’s Supper, marriage, confirmation, penance, and related issues, including

the ordering of the sacraments and rites, will be studied.

With this new phase of dialogue, the two communions hope to build on what the previous three phases have already achieved, including the convergence between the notions of the church as “creation of the word of God” (emphasised by the Reformed) and of the church as sacrament of grace (emphasised by the Roman Catholics).

An important aim is to determine whether WCRC should “affiliate” with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The JDDJ, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the PCPCU on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, was the outcome of thirty years of bilateral dialogue on a doctrine regarded by theologians as the crux of all the disputes of the Reformation era. In 2006 the World Methodist Council affiliated itself with the JDDJ. The question mandated by the Uniting General Council in 2010 is whether or not WCRC will do the same.

Better action needed in Haiti, urges French religious group

by A.D. McKenzie

French religious and non-governmental groups were among the first to organize aid for Haiti in the wake of the January 2010 earthquake. But two years later, with some 500,000 people still living in temporary shelters, these groups are struggling to find ways to make a fundamental difference in the former French colony.

“We must stop seeing everything in light of the earthquake,” says Pastor Philippe Verseils of the Protestant Federation of France (FPF). “The real issue is long-term, deep-rooted underdevelopment with all the national and international policies that are responsible. That’s what we need to talk about.”

In a telephone interview from the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, Verseils told ENInews that although the earthquake had exacerbated the country’s poverty, the international community needed to look at the whole question of development and world

markets, such as the hardships faced by coffee producers.

“We’re hiding behind the catastrophe, as if in some way this will allow us to build a new Haiti,” he said. “But we cannot build without stopping the real causes of underdevelopment not only in Haiti but in other Third World countries. We can only create something new

when the rules of the game have been changed, but they haven’t been.”

Verseils was sent as a special envoy to Haiti by the FPF in September 2010 and has been overseeing projects that include the building of dormitories for

We cannot build without stopping the real causes of underdevelopment ...

rebuilding of Haitian society,” the FPF said in a recent statement.

It announced early this year that it would set up a Haitian chaplaincy by the end of 2012 with the aim of first helping those in prison and eventually patients in hospital as well.

“We already have a programme to put in place chaplaincy in the prisons. That’s the first step, and we are working with the Protestant Federation of Haiti to have a national chaplaincy,” Verseils told ENInews. “Up to now the work has been to provide social aid and



Looking to the future means addressing underlying causes of poverty in Haiti. (Photo: Paul Jeffrey)

orphans, providing scholarships to young people and supplying food to schoolchildren.

“At a time when many NGOs and international organizations are leaving the country and when the state’s political reconstruction is still shaky, churches have a continuing responsibility to contribute significantly to the

to supply food and medicine. Now we want to provide accompaniment and a listening-place.”

There are 19 prisons that would benefit from such a service, and the federation says it is working to obtain authorization and financing for the chaplaincy service.

ENInews

Swiss theologian Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel honoured

A Swiss theologian with a life-long commitment to Indonesia has been awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Basel in Switzerland. Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel, 84, is known for her work with women's groups in Indonesia, her dedication to teaching and her academic publications in Indonesian. Barth-Frommel received the doctorate of theology *honoris causa* last 25 November during a ceremony at the university.

In recognition of the honour, Barth-Frommel gave a public lecture in Basel in December attended by representatives from Indonesia's Embassy in Switzerland. Approximately 100 guests were present for the event hosted by the Swiss mission agency, Mission 21.

Barth-Frommel's theme was "What are the theological issues the churches in Indonesia are facing today?" In reflecting on the challenges and opportunities confronting Indonesian churches, Barth-Frommel points in her paper to interfaith relations with Islam and with traditional religions, the emergence of women in leadership roles in church and society, and the impact of environmental change.

Following her presentation, Barth-Frommel spoke with *Reformed Communiqué*.

Asked about changes in society affecting the church, the feminist theologian pointed to the increasing number of women in influential positions in church and society. Barth-Frommel, who has mentored women's groups in Indonesia and written extensively on feminist

theology, told WCRC that growing numbers of both Christian and Muslim women are active in civil society with Christian women now serving in important positions in the church such as Synod Presidents.



Swiss feminist theologian Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel has close connections with Indonesia. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)

Barth-Frommel reports however that there is now a backlash to women in leadership roles with some people dismissing the idea as a

Growing numbers of Christian and Muslim women active in society

concept imported from the West. In response to this and other pressures on civil society, Catholic, Protestant and liberal Muslims are working together to protect civil rights.

The Swiss theologian's

connection to Indonesia spans 55 years. She met her husband, Christoph Barth, son of the renowned Swiss theologian Karl Barth, in 1956 when they were both working in Indonesia. The couple stayed on for 10 years to teach at the Theological Seminary in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. In 1967 they moved to Mainz, Germany where Barth took up an academic appointment. Following her husband's death, Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel began a pattern of spending three to four months a year teaching in Indonesia that continued from 1987-2007. Her work was supported by a predecessor of Mission 21 and she remains closely connected to Mission 21 today.

Asked why she has returned so often to Indonesia, Barth replies: "My heart is in Indonesia and I love to teach."

Despite being retired, Barth maintains her links with the local Indonesian community. On the day

of her presentation, she welcomed Aiko Sumichan, a theology graduate from Indonesia currently working as an intern with the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Sumichan travelled to Basel to meet the eminent theologian whose works she had studied as a theology student in Indonesia.

Pia Grossholz-Fahrni: Involved because of the Bible

Pia Grossholz-Fahrni has a passion for interfaith dialogue and the wide field of human migration. It's an unlikely vocation for someone who grew up in a small homogenous community in central Switzerland and met her first non-Protestant—a Catholic—when she was eleven years old.

As a child, Grossholz-Fahrni was active in the local parish of the Reformed Church of Switzerland and it was there that she heard mission stories about people in other countries and helped raise funds for international projects. She carried that interest in the wider world with her into her adult years.

Today she encourages parishes of the Bern-Jura-Solothurn church, the largest member church (643,000 members) of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches to participate in the theology and justice programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). As a vice-president of her church, Grossholz-Fahrni is responsible for overseeing the work of the church's office of ecumenism, mission, development and migration.

It seems natural to her that this role would include encouraging links between the church and civil society on issues of mutual concern such as the rights of migrants. But she believes that, unlike secular groups, the church's involvement in this and other social justice and ecology issues is rooted in theology.

"We are involved in these issues not from a political point of view but because of the Bible. We are pushed by our faith. We do what we do because we are Christian," Grossholz-Fahrni said in an interview with *Reformed Communiqué* at the church offices in Bern this January.

The former secondary school teacher was elected as a synod

council member of her church in 2002. Since 2006, she has also served as vice-president. During this time, the church in Bern-Jura-Solothurn has been promoting responsible stewardship of water, study of the impact of the global market system on local farming practices, and migrants' rights.



"We do what we do because we are Christian," says Swiss global justice advocate, Pia Grossholz-Fahrni. (Photo: Courtesy Pia Grossholz-Fahrni)

Church-produced study materials and advocacy campaigns are careful to link local issues to those in the Global South. Grossholz-Fahrni believes that if Swiss parishes are to understand and get involved in global issues, their members must

... unlike secular groups, church involvement in justice issues is rooted in theology ...

recognise that they too are affected by those issues. It is an example of what Grossholz-Fahrni believes is the strength of the church.

"We cannot be Christian alone," she says. "It is important to be a church together with others—people of all colours and points of view around the world."

Grossholz-Fahrni attended the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids in 2010 when WCRC was created from a merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Reformed Ecumenical Council. She admits to having had initial concerns about how much support there would be for work on justice concerns in the new organization. But she says that WCRC has found a new way of linking theology and justice as a result of the merger.

"That experience was a source of inspiration for me," she says. "It showed the churches how to avoid some pitfalls."

Her belief in the interconnectedness of Christians and their concerns leads Grossholz-Fahrni to wonder why all WCRC member churches do not support the organization to the extent hers does.

If she has a concern for the global communion, it is the restricted role of women in some churches in Mexico, Australia, the United States and Kenya. She notes with amazement that some members of the congregation in a community near Grand Rapids stayed away from the Sunday service on the day WCRC delegates from the Uniting General Council attended the worship because the preacher was a woman.

"My hope for WCRC is that it can find ways of talking about issues such as this without banging into walls and instead walk together for a few steps," says the Swiss justice advocate.

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



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

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**World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches**

Called to
communion,
committed to
justice

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and was buried, and was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain. (Selections from 1 Corinthians:15)

Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. (Revelations 21:6)

For those of us who grew up in the tropics, the only "spring" we knew was the source of fresh water. Fresh water springs evoked in us an image of refreshing and life-giving newness.

Until my late teenage years, I could only read about the four seasons that countries outside the tropics in both the Global South and North experience. Since I now live in a context where I experience the four seasons – winter is certainly not one of my favourites – I appreciate the refreshing life-giving newness associated with the season of spring.

For a year now, we have been hearing about the "Arab Spring", a term used to describe what is happening in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa where ordinary people are seeking change. Our member churches in several of these countries have been echoing the cries for change and for just and democratic processes. They have also expressed concern about the aftermath of these movements, indicating that without due vigilance, the Arab Spring could produce a new era in which just and democratic processes are not available to all. This has characterised my correspondence and visits to the region in the past months.

There is another spring which is a source of refreshing and life-giving renewal. Its effect is the breaking forth of life in the place of death. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is that spring which overcomes the gloomy season of death. The Alpha and Omega is the source of the water of life.

Building our communion on this knowledge, we can be steadfast even in the face of tremendous challenges. We can continue to be faithful to God in a world in which people in many communities are thirsting for life.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is thirsting for answers in a difficult financial season, a season in which we are poised as a communion with a new refreshing vision. Our member churches in many parts of the world, including Greece, are thirsting for life-giving answers as the global financial crisis strangles them. Those in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar have faced grave crises creating a thirst for a new season of life.

The resurrection spells a refreshing life-giving season. We can celebrate life because Jesus lives.

*... there is thirst for
a new season of life
... the Spring of
Life*

Prayers online

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

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

Visit www.wcrc.ch regularly for inspiration for prayer.