



*Active stewardship: Theology students participate in rice planting in Indonesia. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

## Theology seminar features learning from exposure to new contexts

When fifty theology students from around the world spend four weeks studying and living together, the learning process quickly becomes intensive and all-involving. The head of the theology office for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) knows this from first-hand experience.

Douwe Visser directed the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) in Indonesia in June that gathered students and faculty from twenty-two countries for an intensive programme of theological study and field visits at Duca Wacana University in Jogjakarta, Java.

In reflecting on the experience, Visser says: “The most important highlight is sim-

ply being together with such an international community and the exposure that creates.”

Core classes focussed on spirituality and worship; Reformed theology and identity; ethics and action-reflection. Elective courses included poverty and wealth; theologies of creation and disaster; Reformed-Interreligious dialogue; and mission.

“As we shared meals and classes, took bus trips together, and had free time to mingle, someone from Germany would hear about daily life in Sri Lanka. Someone from Kenya would have a deep

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discussion about spiritual life with someone from Canada,” says Visser. “Poverty and wealth were seen in new ways!”

2012 marked the third time WCRC has offered the GIT programme, which targets theology students and recent seminary graduates. Previously, GITs have been held in Ghana (2004) and the United States (2010). Plans are to hold the next programme in South America in 2014. A venue will be selected by the end of this year in consultation with WCRC’s Latin American region, AIPRAL.

GIT’s principal objective is to offer theological training in global ecumenism in order to develop future Reformed ecumenical leadership. Students are selected from WCRC member churches and endorsed by their church. The second GIT objective is to allow students to participate in and learn about mission activities in the context of the host community.

This year, two days per week were designated for cultural exposure visits and activities. Students learned traditional Batik painting and helped with rice planting. Visits included time in a village that has suffered the effects of a volcanic eruption and a visit to a Muslim transgender institution. On Sundays, students and GIT faculty worshipped in local churches.



*GIT participants were selected from 22 countries. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

During class time students shared their responses to what they were seeing in dramatic presentations. The focus was on signs of hope amid all they were hearing about injustice in the division of poverty and wealth locally and worldwide.

Selected student essays are to be published in a future issue of WCRC’s theological journal, *Reformed World*.

“Spending four weeks together in such a community is costly and requires a great deal of organisation,” Visser notes. “We are thankful to the many donors who made this GIT possible. We are very grateful to Duta Wacana and its staff for hosting us so well.”

## *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:*

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# Best to learn Christian theology through direct encounter, say students

In these days when social media play such an important role in campus life, direct contact with other students remains the most important way to learn Christian theology and develop spiritual life, say students at the conclusion of an intensive theology programme held in Indonesia.

“Relationships with others is the most important thing,” says Nelson Kalay of his experience at the Global Institute of Theology (GIT), which concluded on 1 July.

Kalay was one of ten Indonesians selected to study with 40 international students and newly-ordained pastors in the biennial training programme offered by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This year the programme was hosted by Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta.



*Learning through direct encounter: Nelson Kalay (Indonesia) and Marianne Emig Munro (Canada) (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

The second-year theology student who plans to be ordained in his home church in eastern Indonesia – the Protestant Church of Moluccas – says he applied for the programme in order to learn from people from other countries about their approaches to theology and the problems of their local context.

“Group discussion helped me learn,” says Kalay. “Before, I had never heard about other ways of worshiping and of thinking about God. Now I know more about Christian spirituality. It is not only about worship on Sunday, it is about how to struggle for justice and peace in communities.”

Kalay says participants from other countries asked him about the relationship between Christians and Muslims and how that will affect his ministry in a local parish.

“It is a crucial problem,” Kalay admits. “We have to face it together as Reformed church Christians. We have to travel together.”

The opportunity to study with students from around the world in a context where Christianity is not the majority faith was a “fantastic opportunity” says Marianne Emig Munro, a Canadian theology student, when asked why she applied for GIT. Like Kalay, Munro found direct contact with other students to be a key element of the learning experience.

“It was moving to hear the commitment and

passion of students from around the world, to feel their faith. They are so full of hope,” says Munro, who is in her final year of study at John Knox College in Toronto, Canada.

Munro began her theological studies after leaving a position as a lawyer with General Motors. Following her ordination in December, she plans to serve the Presbyterian Church in Canada in the Toronto area where her two children are in secondary school. Her focus is on social justice and church outreach.

“Indonesia is multi-cultural like Toronto,” says Munro. “What I learned about ethics and spirituality, mission and inter-religious dialogue will be all useful in that multi-cultural city where there are people from so many faiths.”

Learning from Indonesian Christians about what it is like to be in a minority will be important to her ministry, Munro adds.

“The church is now on the margins of Canadian society because of secularization and materialism,” says Munro. “It is ideally placed to speak for those who can’t speak for themselves.”

WCRC convenes GIT every two years as part of its commitment to the formation of new generations of Reformed leaders who are fully aware of the faith dimension of contemporary challenges such as economic injustice and environmental destruction and who are committed to interfaith solidarity, spiritual renewal, church inclusiveness, and Christian unity.

*With files from Aiko Sumichan*

# Study environmental impact of Israeli occupation, says Palestinian church official

The head of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) service for refugees is calling for a fact-finding mission to assess the environmental impact of the Israeli occupation on communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Gaza.

“I am issuing a plea for a fact-finding group to come see the high cost of the occupation,” says Ramzi Zananiri, Executive Director of the Department of Refugee Services of the MECC. “Bring your environmental lens.”

Zananiri made his call this August during an interview in Ottawa, Canada, while attending the meeting of the General Council of The United Church of Canada.

“Most of Gaza is floating over a sea of gray water,” says Zananiri. “We want the fact-finding mission to see the dumping of sewage



*Ramzi Zananiri issues plea for study of the environmental impact of the the occupation of Palestine. (Photo: United Church of Canada)*

from Israeli settlements into Palestinian wadis (valleys). The sewage filtering into water basins is causing serious pollution.”

The pollution in turn is leading to chronic illness – including an increase in cancer rates – in the populations of the Occupied Palestine Territories and Gaza, explains Zananiri, who is a member of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) addresses issues of environmental concern through OIKOTREE, a global network of individuals and groups focussed on concerns about environmental destruction and economic inequity. WCRC’s Office of Justice and Partnership is following up on the call in consultation with its ecumenical partners.

## Council for World Mission: partners for justice

The Council for World Mission (CWM) has taken steps to strengthen its partnership with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on justice initiatives by agreeing to sponsor WCRC’s Justice and Partnership Office for the coming five years. The decision was made during a meeting of CWM trustees in American Samoa in June.

WCRC’s general secretary, Setri Nyomi, celebrates this affirmation of the partnership, saying it is based on a shared understanding that mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century “necessarily includes being catalysts for bringing about a more just world.”

In his greetings to the trustees, Nyomi applauded CWM’s commitment to building mission-oriented churches focussed on justice.

“Your investment in our vision of carrying the torch of justice in God’s work of transformation is remarkable and will play a large role in stabilizing us to do what we are called to do effectively,” Nyomi told the group.

Earlier, the trustees voted to support an endowment fund created by WCRC’s Executive Committee to stabilise the organisation’s finances and to ensure its sustainability.

Also present at the assembly were WCRC President, Jerry Pillay, and leaders from WCRC member churches. Twenty-seven of CWM’s 31 member churches are members of the WCRC.

*“The whole world is now feeling the unprecedented impact of centuries of mistaken approaches to development.”*



*Contrasts between poverty and wealth in Brazil set context for conference on financial crisis. (Photo: TBA)*

# Conference on global economy will meet in Brazil

*By Dora Arce-Valentín*

An ecumenical conference to propose a new international financial and economic architecture will take place at the end of September amid growing concerns about the impact of the economic and financial crisis on humanity and the Earth.

The whole world is now feeling the unprecedented impact of centuries of mistaken approaches to development. As a result of predatory practices in the global South and the entire planet, disparities are deepening both within and between countries. The global crisis has taken on unimaginable dimensions over the past decades.

A key aspect of the problem is the financial architecture inherent in the vision of development proposed by the same industrialized nations and international financial institutions that have not been able to prevent recurring economic and financial crisis.

The ecumenical movement is profoundly sceptical about solutions proposed by the very institutions that created the crisis, proposals based – unquestioningly – on the same global order that is creating extreme poverty for millions of the world’s people, including people in industrialized countries.

In addition, as ecumenical leaders see it, the proposed solutions simply fail to respond to the interconnections among the economy, society and ecology that have generated climate change and global warming as an unprecedented challenge to the human race that, together with other aspects of the ecological crisis, now places the whole planet at risk.

## The conference and its objectives

Confronted with these realities, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the World Council

of Churches and the Council for World Mission have organized this conference to reflect together and propose a critical analysis and a fresh vision on which to build a new economic and financial architecture. The aim is to create a concept for a system, based on principles of economic, social, climate and ecological justice, that serves the true economy, responds to social and ecological concerns, and sets limits to greed.

Given that justice is a theological criterion and biblical mandate and as such is at the heart of the faith and mission of the church, the conference offers an opportunity for dialogue among member churches of the host organizations along with other interested parties and alliances. The aim is to have effective and substantial impact on the current system so that it is radically transformed into a system that produces “abundant life” for millions of the Earth’s inhabitants and to preserve life in abundance as a gift to future generations by safeguarding our common home, God’s *oikos*.

The conference is built on four central themes that will be explored through “immersion visits”, Bible study, presentations by panels of experts, and group and plenary reflection.

The themes are: Theologies of Economic Justice and Transformation; Towards an Economy of Life for People and Earth; Just Finance; Towards Alternative Structures of Power and Relations.

The conference is scheduled for Guarulhos, Brazil, from 29 September to 5 October 2012, and over 70 participants are expected to attend. Delegates and speakers include economists, social scientists, development experts, theologians, social justice advocates, and representatives of organizations working on alternatives to the current financial and economic system.

Detailed information is available at [www.wcrc.ch](http://www.wcrc.ch)

# Reflections on a year in Geneva

It seems impossible that it has been a year since Christopher Dorn and Aiko Sumichan arrived in Geneva to serve as interns with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Yet now they are packing their bags and preparing to return to the United States and Indonesia respectively where they will complete the final six months of the 18-month internship programme with their home church. We asked them for their comments as they look back on their time in Calvin's city. Their comments are as fresh and insightful as their presence with us has been.

## Aiko Sumichan: Reflections on time ...

Time is a strange thing. On the one hand, it goes by so quickly, on the other, something that happened yesterday could seem like it's been an eternity ago. Such is the way I feel about the year of interning with WCRC.

It's been a roller coaster ride, not just because of the ups and downs, but even more so because at the end of it I feel like saying: "That was awesome, can we do that again?"

I have learned a lot of things during this period of time; I experienced things I would never have thought I would; I have met a whole lot of great people; and

I know I have done quite a bit of work for WCRC despite the fact that I still am unable to say exactly what I do when someone asks me that question.

To begin with, my internship was a combination between the office of Communications and the Justice and Partnership program. Add to that the two events we had in Indonesia (Executive Committee meeting and Global Institute of Theology) with me being the only person at the WCRC office who speaks Indonesian and I think it's safe to say that I had a well-rounded experience of working with all the elements of WCRC.

The absolute highlight of the year (although I didn't quite like it at the time) was going to Yogyakarta for the Global Institute of Theology and to Berastagi for the Executive Committee meeting. Both of these events pushed me past my personal limit, enlightened me of new talents and gave me the opportunity to meet wonderful groups of people I can now call my friends. Speaking of friends, another highlight of the internship is definitely getting to know people from around the world, at work, at play, at church and even during travels. All that aside though, I think even a day where I just sat in front of my computer typing was a good day.

I know I will miss working at the WCRC office dearly and I will be forever grateful to God and to WCRC for this opportunity of a lifetime that has been given to me.



*Aiko Sumichan's favourite photo memory: Time with colleagues and interns at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva (Photo: Hayley Ramsay-Jones)*

## Christopher Dorn: Reflections on encounters

It is impossible to describe all that I have experienced and done this past year within a brief paragraph or two. Suffice it to say that the internship programme has surpassed my expectations. I suppose if I were to single out what has been most meaningful to me, it would

be the many opportunities for meeting and coming to know people here. Working and living in Geneva has afforded me almost daily an occasion to interact with others from a part of the world different from my own.

From the first few months as a guest at the John Knox International Center, where I lived with bright young people interning at the various United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, until very recently, when I sat down with a bishop from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa for a fascinating discussion about the state of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his country, I've enjoyed a steady stream of rich encounters. Needless to say, these have broadened my horizons. I leave here with a greater awareness of the issues that peoples face elsewhere, as well as with a deeper appreciation of the many cultures and places they represent.

I leave Geneva also grateful for the privilege of serving WCRC with its small but competent staff. Its members, especially Douwe Visser (Theology, Mission and Ecumenism) and Kristine Greenaway (Communications), have sought to guide us interns into experiences intended to prepare us for ecumenical leadership. They have given me tasks suited to my gifts and skills. In allowing me wide scope for their use, they have helped me refine them further. Douwe, for whom I worked directly, was intentional from the



*Chris Dorn's favourite photo memory: Douwe Visser's presentation at Dorn's Geneva farewell (Photo: WCRC/Martin Gnanadason)*

beginning about introducing me to programmes and persons, keeping me informed about developments in WCRC and other ecumenical organizations. As a result, I have gained valuable knowledge about WCRC and the wider ecumenical movement.

I will carry fond memories home with me, looking at the same time for ways that I might assist in advancing the ecumenical movement in the future.

## Ecumenism: 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 "ecumenism".**

### Ecumenism

*By Christopher Dorn*

The term "ecumenism" comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, which means "one inhabited world." The word points to the reality of the

church: that it is one, extending in time and space throughout this entire world. Painful divisions in the church, however, obscure this reality.

Ecumenism is necessary because division undermines the credibility of the church's witness to the reconciling work of God in Christ for peace. Divided churches contradict this good news.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) wants to see its member churches transformed into interdependent communities engaged in mission and outreach that support and challenge each other as partners in their work. But ecumenism among churches in the Reformed tradition is not an end in itself. In the recent past, WCRC has organized dialogues with Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, and others in effort to overcome obstacles to unity among all Christians.

*“... dialogue [is] rooted not in mere tolerance but in recognition of the other as a believer equal before God.”*



*Mosaic in chapel of Our Lady of the Well, Lebanon (Photo: Robert Mager)*

### *Partnership Fund*

# In Lebanon can two walk together if they do not agree?

*By Páraic Reamonn*

Lebanon has provided a timely case study for an international congress of French-speaking practical theologians on the theme of living together – a challenge for many societies today and also for theology.

The eighth congress of the *Société internationale de théologie pratique* met in May 2012 in Our Lady of the Well, a retreat centre run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Cross of Lebanon in the hills above east Beirut, Lebanon.

A grant from the Reformed Churches Partnership Fund supported African Reformed participation in the congress and also in an African consultation on reconciliation in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in October 2011.

Estimates are that 150,000 people were killed and another 200,000 wounded during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Israel invaded the country in 1982 and again in 2006, causing massive damage. Syria occupied large parts of Lebanon until 2005. For a time, the “green line” dividing Beirut marked one of the most dangerous places in the world.

Lebanese speakers at the conference drew out the complex dynamics of a local situation with more than local significance. Three approaches were possible to the common difficulties faced by Christians and Muslims: resignation (through withdrawal or the quest of merely personal success), communitarian activism, or the search for a third way, yet to be found, of citizenship, living together, and cultural renaissance.

Lebanese philosopher Salim Dacacche argued that dialogue was rooted not in mere tolerance but in recognition of the other as a believer equal before God.

Leading Shia scholar Saoud El-Mawla said that Lebanese Muslims were active in dialogue – and as more than guests – but without, as yet, reflecting deeply on what we are doing in interreligious dialogue and what that means for our faith.

In other contributions, Gilles Routhier of Canada explored the development of the practice and spirituality of the monks of Tibhirine in Algeria whose story is celebrated in the film *Of Gods and Men*. Gabriel Monnet of the Faculty of Adventist Theology in Collonges-sur-Salève, France, proposed an “eco-spiritual Christian ethics centred on God”. And Canadian Pierrette Daviau spoke of the “green sisters” of North America – nuns who have chosen to redefine their calling in the framework of eco-feminist communities.

The SITP plans to publish the congress proceedings and to follow up the Yaoundé meeting with another in Kinshasa. The next SITP congress will meet in Belgium in June 2014, with the theme “Power, authority figures, and church leadership”.

*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.*

## Working for peace in Africa's Christian and Muslim communities

Johnson Mbillah works in what he calls the “turbulent” areas of Africa where relations between Muslims and Christians can be tense.

In his role as the head of the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), Mbillah travels from his base in Nairobi, Kenya to interreligious hot spots such as Nigeria, Sudan and Egypt to provide education to Christian and Muslim religious leaders in “constructive engagement.”

“The idea of constructive engagement is to build community,” he explains. “We want to work towards living with our differences in peace, not in pieces.”

Mbillah, who holds a doctorate in Islamic studies from the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, says PROCMURA's core business is helping Christians in Africa to work with Muslims for peace and development. The intent is to develop positive interfaith relations at the community level that can serve as a basis for dialogue if trouble arises.

PROCMURA is active in 20 countries throughout Africa with a particular focus on countries in the sub-Saharan region and on North Africa. Its role is to offer faithful and responsible Christian witness in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims. The witness can take the form of joint initiatives in response to HIV and AIDS or in peace-brokering missions in some of the region's violence-torn communities.

Mbillah's work keeps him on the road, travelling from meetings with Christian and Muslim leaders in South

Sudan, who gathered on the eve of the first anniversary of the country's independence to discuss issues of mutual concern, to discussions in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia involving the African Union and religious leaders from seven countries focused on peace and development.



*Johnson Mbillah works for peace among Christians and Muslims in Africa. (Photo: The United Church of Canada)*

Ghanaian-born Mbillah studied theology at Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana and is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, a member church of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Responsibility for WCRC's interfaith dialogue programme is located in the Office of Theology, Mission and Communion.

## Churches and the rule of law: a timely discussion

*By Douwe Visser*

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, claims that the key to preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity



*The John Knox Centre in Geneva is host to a conference on the church and the rule of law in civil society. (Photo: WCRC/Sumichan)*

lies within each society. Political figures cannot incite mass violence for their own ends where the rights of minorities and the rule of law are respected, Ban says.

Recognizing that religion plays a role in creating a robust civil society, the John Knox Programme Commission is hosting a conference on churches and the rule of law at the John Knox International Reformed Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, 28–31 October 2012.

The objective of the *Churches and the Role of Law* conference is to work out insights into developing the rule of law and to guide churches and church movements in participating in this process. Secular organisations involved in development are aware of the role churches can play. With this conference we seek to contribute to that awareness and understanding.

Conference papers and recommendations will be published by the John Knox Centre.

*Visser is head of the Office of Theology and Communion for the World Communion of Churches and president of the John Knox Programme Commission.*

# Pieter Holtrop: Dutch theologian mourned

By *Setri Nyomi*

It is with a sense of sadness that we learned in August of the death of our colleague and friend, Pieter Holtrop.

Holtrop was an outstanding professor who gave freely of his tremendous gifts to the Reformed family worldwide. From 1989 he served as a member of the Executive Committee of the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). In 1997, he became one of two WARC vice-presidents. Following his term in 2004, he remained a reliable key adviser. In all, more than two decades of faithful leadership that we appreciate highly.

Holtrop was an outstanding leader whose contributions to the study of mission and ecumenical leadership greatly benefitted the worldwide Reformed family. I knew him as a transparent leader who was not afraid to speak out and to say what was on his mind. He did not hide behind empty words when the truth as he saw it needed to be told.

A few examples of his contributions to the global Reformed family and to society at large are worth noting.



*Dutch theologian, Pieter Holtrop, mourned*

He was a strong voice for justice. In relation to WARC's actions on apartheid in South Africa, Pieter always had a well-reasoned position that helped to shape WARC's actions in the dying years of apartheid and beyond.

In WARC's 2004 General Council, his role in the commemorative events following the visit to the Elmina slave dungeons in Ghana was very meaningful and contributed greatly to much-needed healing. He was also an important figure in shaping WARC's actions vis-à-vis the independence of East Timor. Thus it was fitting that Holtrop represented WARC at celebrations of East Timor's independence. He had a heart for Asia and Africa. This reflected in his opinions whenever issues impacting Africa and Asia were under discussion.

WCRC's president, Jerry Pillay, Officers and Executive Committee members and my colleagues in Geneva share my sense of loss. Together we offer our condolences to Holtrop's widow, Gunilla Gunner, who herself served WARC faithfully as an Executive Committee member for 13 years.

## Neal Presa and Gradye Parsons affirmed as leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Neal Presa, a parish minister with a doctorate in liturgical studies and liturgical theology, has been elected moderator of the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA).

Presa, who said he "brings a pastor's listening heart and a non-anxious presence" to his new role as moderator, called for the whole church to be



*Neal Presa elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Photo: Michael Whitman/Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.))*

mission-centred, "meeting people eye-to-eye and face-to-face and to see Jesus Christ alive in them."

The American ecumenist has had long involvement with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), including serving as convener of the organization's North American and Caribbean regional council, CANAAC, and on WCRC's Executive Committee.

In a message of congratulations to Presa, WCRC's general secretary Setri Nyomi writes: "We are grateful that once again you are putting your gifts of leadership at the disposal of the whole church." Presa replied that he was "eager to amplify the work of the WCRC" through his term of service.

In other business, the General Assembly re-elected Gradye Parsons as Stated Clerk, the church's senior executive position. In his message to Parsons following the election, Nyomi notes: "You have been called to lead the PCUSA at a time such as this filled with challenges and yet holding out hope. The WCRC is committed to going through that journey with you."

*With files from Jerry L. Van Marter*

# Omega Bula, an architect of the Accra Confession, retires

Omega Bula is one of the architects of the Accra Confession. The declaration that condemns systems of economic exploitation of the poor as “sin” is at the heart of the justice and theology programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). It is also at the heart of Bula’s work in global ecumenical partnerships with The United Church of Canada.

Bula, a Zambian, has served WCRC in a number of capacities since the early 1990’s. As she prepares to retire from her position as the head of overseas partnerships and ecumenical relations with the United Church, *Reformed Communiqué* asked her to look back at her career and to talk about what’s next for her.

**Reformed Communiqué (RC):** What are the most memorable moments of your ecumenical work?

**Omega Bula (OB):** I was invited by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to serve on a committee looking at gender issues in relation to economic concerns following WARC’s General Council in Debrecen (1997). While working with the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi, Kenya, I had been looking at economic literacy issues with women in churches and seeing those issues as a matter of faith. I brought that with me to the work with WARC which focussed on the process of education and learning that led WARC member churches to go to Accra and confess. It was exciting to go from local to global.

**RC:** What is God calling WCRC to do?

**OB:** I chaired the Strategic Planning Group coming out of the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids in 2010. [Ed. Note: UGC marked the merger of WARC with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form WCRC.] I believe WCRC is called to be committed

to transforming unjust systems in the world. To do that, we must be theologically grounded. God calls us to do justice because God is about brokenness.

**RC:** What are your hopes and fears for WCRC in the future?

**OB:** I am anxious about how WCRC will live into the strategic plan.

Implementing the plan happens at the same time as there is a struggle about finances and resources. When preparing that plan, we were keenly aware of the lack of financial resources. But we can’t raise money without a plan and without concrete programmes. My concern is about how to keep the fires going with limited financial and staff resources.

**RC:** What’s next for you?

**OB:** I’m moving home to Zambia where I am developing a project called “Women at the Well” – circles of women that will reflect, analyze and act on life issues that have to do with economic justice for women in Zambia. We will be seeking life-giving economies at home, in the community and at the national level. The project is built on the concept of Jesus’ meeting with the woman at the well. During their conversation, much is revealed. The woman becomes aware of something different and witnesses to her community.

**RC:** Any final words?

**OB:** WCRC and the World Council of Churches have really been a gift to my life. I am who I am today because of that gift of people, friends and knowledge. It humbles me. I am going home to contribute to my community for all I have experienced. My church, the United Church of Zambia, is part of WCRC. You may see me in the future!



*Omega Bula plans an active retirement in Zambia. (Photo: The United Church of Canada)*



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

**FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6: 12)*

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. (Matthew 26: 41)*

“Come, let us pray!” This is an invitation that I wish Reformed Christians would give one another more often. Unfortunately, in this twenty-first century it is more common to receive an invitation to enjoy a meal together or a game or some other fun activity than to enjoy praying together.

In this *Reformed Communiqué*, I am issuing an invitation – “Come, let us pray”. Prayer is at the heart of Christian life and action. Prayer was very important in the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus stepping aside to spend some time in prayer. He also constantly instructed his followers to watch and pray.

For some, the one hour of praying in church together with others on Sunday morning is enough. It feels as if we have paid our dues and we can afford to wait until next Sunday before we pray again. For others, praying is that activity you engage in only when you are in need or in some kind of danger and it is time to give God a shopping list of what to do. For others, prayer means having the right formula of faith so that you can command God to do your will.

In issuing this invitation to pray, I would like us to reflect on what prayer meant for our Lord Jesus. The times of prayer were not dictated by needs nor characterized by the display of the right formulas to command God. It was an opportunity to communicate with God. And therefore it came naturally and often. Constant communication with God is also an important sign of willingness to live in accordance with God’s will. Therefore, temptations have less power. No wonder Jesus instructed his followers to watch and pray.

In God’s love for us, God has invited us to be a part of a great family of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the head. It is time for us to renew our commitment to praying constantly, on our own, in our families, among friends, and wherever we may be. Belonging to God’s family leads us to desire to talk with God.

Let us pray and, while praying, give thanks for the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the privilege God has given us to work for Christian unity and for transformation in our broken world. Pray for sisters and brothers in Syria and other places who are suffering from different challenges. Pray that those who are victims of injustice may find God’s liberation. Pray that we may be faithful to God in the mission to which we have been called.

As we pray, let us remember that prayer is a two-way communication. We need to pause to listen to God. God may, in fact, call you into action to do something in response to what you are praying about. Come, let us pray!

*Prayer is at the heart of Christian life and action*

**Prayers online**

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

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

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

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**World  
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committed to  
justice