



Members of WCRC's Executive Committee share a symbolic gesture of healing and hope during prayer at Elmina Castle – a former slave trade site in Ghana. (Photo: William Koopmans)

"Go where God calls" says WCRC leader

The Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) concluded its annual meeting in May with a call to follow where God is leading. WCRC's general secretary Setri Nyomi reminded the 30 member committee of the importance of following the will of God even if it takes them to places that are not "comfortable zones".

"We are called to go where God calls," Nyomi declared. "Are we ready to go even when it is not comfortable?"

Nyomi, who is from Ghana, delivered the message during a sermon preached 16 May at the

committee's closing worship service held in Adenta Evangelical Presbyterian church in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. In a liturgy marked by singing, dancing and drumming, approximately 200 people from local congregations joined members of the executive committee for a service of praise.

The executive committee met in Dodowa near the country's capital Accra from 7-16 May, hosted by WCRC's two Ghanaian member churches, the

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Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG) and the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG).

The meeting's theme – "Our ecumenical vision: Quo imus? (Where are we going?)" – addressed questions raised among some member churches and global church organizations about the nature of WCRC's future relations with the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations based in Geneva-Switzerland following relocation of the Reformed Communion's international office from Geneva to Hannover, Germany in January 2014.

In discussion of the theme, WCRC affirmed its ongoing commitment to global ecumenism and noted the programmatic and constitutional need to keep

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office space at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. In 2014, the Geneva office will be staffed by the Deputy Director of the Partnership Fund, Páraic Reamonn. WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, will divide his time between Geneva and Hannover until his successor takes up the appointment.

The next General Secretary was to have been named by the Executive Committee during this meeting. However, the first round of recruitment selection failed to identify a candidate for the position. Following a revised process of recruitment developed in Dodowa, the committee voted to call WCRC President, Jerry Pillay, to the position. Pillay has asked for a period of discernment with his church and family and is expected to respond to the call at the end of July.

In other business, the committee reviewed plans for the relocation of WCRC's global office from Geneva-Switzerland to Hannover, Germany. The relocation, approved by the committee in 2012, is intended to save the organization money. Savings will be realized through decreased staff costs due to the lower cost of living in Hannover and through elimination of currency conversion between the Euro and Swiss franc. Savings are also expected

through reduced currency conversion losses between the American dollar and the Euro in comparison to the conversion rate between dollars and francs.

General Treasurer Johann Weusmann told the committee that in 2014 there would be a slight increase in staff costs due to overlaps in Geneva and Hannover-based staff. However in 2015, the savings are estimated at USD 185,000.

Assessment of the impact on income due to reduced losses in currency conversion rates is less easy to calculate as the difference in rates varies, Nyomi says. However, he notes that in 2014 WCRC will receive the full value of donations and membership fees made in Euros as the organization will be operating in the Euro zone.

At its meeting in 2012, the Executive Committee heard that the organization's reserve funds had been almost entirely depleted. At the 2013 meeting, figures showed projected reserves of USD 1,200,000 by the end of the year. This amount includes a contribution of USD 400,000 from the Union Evangelischer Kirchen (Union of Evangelical Churches) in Germany.

The Executive Committee approved a tentative budget for the relocation for an estimated USD 217,000.

Plans for 2014 presented to the committee by the Justice and Partnership office include a focus on church response to human trafficking; promotion of respectful, non-violent relations between men and women; and continuing work on proposals for changes to the global financial system. An "expert panel" of economists, sociologists and theologians has been established to develop principles for a fairer, more equitable system. Their proposals are to be presented to financial institutions and governments.

A report from the Theology, Communion and Mission office outlined plans for the next session of the biennial Global Institute of Theology (GIT) to be held in Costa Rica in 2014. GIT offers an intensive short-term programme focused on themes related to global ecumenism for young theologians and newly ordained clergy. Work plans for the office in the coming year include a meeting of an international network of theologians during which young theologians will be encouraged to participate in the discussions.

In remarks at the end of the closing service, Pillay thanked the local committee for hosting the executive committee meeting and singled out the Ecumenical Officers of the two churches who were present throughout to provide ongoing support and programmatic input: Seth Agidi (EPCG) and Solomon Sule Saa (PCG).

Pillay paid tribute to Nyomi who concludes a 14-year term as general secretary in 2014. In his remarks, Pillay celebrated the Ghanaian theologian's commitment to social justice concerns in Africa and throughout the world and his contributions to the worldwide church.



Setri Nyomi and Jerry Pillay led a delegation to meet Ghana's president, John Dramani Mahama in Accra. (Photo: Office of the President of Ghana)

WCRC can be a “worthy partner” in efforts to address the poverty and interfaith relations, says Ghana’s president

A delegation from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) met 16 May with the President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, in a private meeting at the presidential offices in the country’s capital, Accra.

In welcoming the 13-member delegation, Mahama noted that churches can “spark hope and a positive attitude” so that people will help in the efforts to turn things around in the country and in Africa.

“Here in Ghana the social security net needs to be expanded to support the poor and needy. There is also concern for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Ghana. We are hoping it won’t spread,” the President said. “In all these efforts, WCRC can be a partner and a worthy one.”

The meeting with the President came at the conclusion of meetings of WCRC’s executive committee that wrapped up 16 May in Dodowa, in the Greater Accra Region.

WCRC President, Jerry Pillay, from South Africa, presented Mahama with copies of WCRC’s Accra Confession and São Paulo Declaration. Both documents present church concerns for a just economic system, respect for women’s rights, and care for the environment. In his presentation, Pillay spoke about leading with justice and righteousness and giving special attention to the needs of the poor.

The church leader told the President that the Accra Confession got its name when it was adopted at a global assembly of a WCRC predecessor organization in the city in 2004. Since then the statement has been

widely discussed in ecumenical circles and, because of its name, has “trademarked” Accra as the birthplace of a seminal reflection on social justice, Pillay said.

WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, presented WCRC’s delegation to the president. The delegation included senior representatives from both WCRC’s Ghanaian member churches: Seth Agidi of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG) and Solomon Sule Saa and Kofi Amfo-Akonnor of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG) as well two Ghanaian members of WCRC’s executive committee, Lydia Adajawah and Salome Twum. Others in the group were WCRC Vice-President Yvette Noble-Bloomfield (Jamaica and the Cayman Islands) and Peter Borgdorff of the Christian Reformed Church, North America (United States). Nyomi’s brother, Selete Nyomi, CEO of Coastal Television, was invited to join the delegation to represent the family.

In his remarks to the President, Pillay noted that WCRC’s General Secretary is Ghanaian and called Nyomi “a gift to global ecumenical leadership” and “a worthy son of Ghana.”

Noble-Bloomfield of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands gathered the group in a circle for prayer at the conclusion of the meeting. “We pray that under the President’s leadership, Ghana will continue to be free and peaceful and a great nation,” Noble-Bloomfield said in prayer.



*There is a growing acceptance of the African worldview, says church's ecumenical officer
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Ghanaian Presbyterians are open to African expressions of Christian faith

Ghana's Presbyterian churches today are expressing their spirituality in ways that are more African in origin and expression, say Ghanaian church representatives. There is a growing acceptance of the African worldview. At the same time they are addressing issues related to spirits, witchcraft and ancestor worship in the light of the Christian gospel. The shift comes at a time when membership growth in churches established by European missionaries in the 19th century does not match the rapid expansion in Pentecostal and other independent churches in the country.

"We have been too slow to recognize Ghanaians are different from the missionaries who came from Switzerland and Germany," says Seth Agidi of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG). "We were slow to open up to the worldview of our people. The church kept insisting on the worldview of missionaries."

Agidi, who is responsible for inter-church relations for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG) made his comments in a presentation to the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at its meeting in Dodowa, Ghana in May.

The Director for Church Life and Nurture of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG), Kofi Amfo-

Akonnor, shared in the presentation designed to provide information about WCRC's two Ghanaian member churches for the 30-person executive committee.

"African spiritualists believe in another world, just like Christians," Amfo-Akonnor told the group. "Christians can believe there are witches but that Jesus has conquered them."

"The traditional African worldview is still there but Jesus becomes part of that worldview and transforms it," PCG's inter-church relations officer, Solomon Sule Saa, explains.

Discussion with the Ghanaian church representatives included questions about the challenges that both denominations face in reaching out to new members. Statistics presented by Amfo-Akonnor compare the rate of growth in PCG and EPCG congregations in contrast to that of Pentecostal churches. In the period 1991 – 2007, the number of PCG congregations increased from 164 to 214; the EPCG saw its number grow from 136 to 301.

In the same period, the number of Pentecostal congregations grew from 87 to 1088.

In response to questions about the reason for the rapid growth in Pentecostal membership, Agidi said that people have been leaving "mainline churches"

such as the EPCG and PCG in part due to the Pentecostalism's spirituality. The Ghanaian minister noted too that when Pentecostals first appeared in the country 60 years ago, they were quick to integrate drums, dancing and local music into their services. In contrast, it was the 1970's before the EPCG allowed drums to be included in Sunday worship services.

Agidi acknowledges that another reason Presbyterians have been joining Pentecostal congregations is the healing ceremonies they offer for people troubled by evil spirits. In response, EPCG now runs its own "deliverance and healing" centres that double as spiritual retreat centres.

Today, church growth focuses on developing new congregations in the country's northern region which has the lowest percentage of Christians in Ghana. Mainline church growth has stalled creating what the PCG terms an "evangelism emergency". But, in order to respond to the emergency, money is needed for church buildings, for housing and for ministers' salaries, says Amfo-Akonnor.



Ghana's mainline churches seek to address needs of Christians attracted by Pentecostalism (Photo: William Koopmans)

In a bold and innovative move to increase church membership, EPCG has put a programme in place for candidates for ordained ministry. Before being ordained, Agidi says, a would-be minister must first create two new congregations.

Emanuel Tettey: from economics student to interfaith and peace trainer

Emanuel Tettey studied economics at university but now finds himself working for a church-run interfaith centre and a peace programme for youth. Both are initiatives of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG) one of two Ghanaian member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Tettey's transition from student to church worker began when he accepted an offer in 2010 to serve for six months as an ecumenical youth volunteer in Baden, Germany in a programme organized by Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). When he returned to Ghana from Germany, it was time for him to do the year of compulsory national service that all Ghanaian youth are required to complete.

He chose an assignment working with Solomon Sule Saa who heads PCG's Interfaith Centre and its Youth Peace Programme. His year of service that began in October 2010 has stretched to nearly three years.



Emanuel Tettey : « Impressive » (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Along the way Tettey served as a steward at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation of the World Council of Churches held in 2011 in Jamaica. It was that experience that brought him to WCRC's attention. Recently, he served as the lead steward for the meeting of WCRC's executive committee in Dodowa, Ghana. His role was to work with WCRC's senior administrative assistant, Ida Milli, to train seven stewards and manage their schedules throughout the 12-day meeting from May 5-16. Tettey impressed WCRC's leadership with his ability to remain calm and focused while finding solutions to the changing and complex needs of a group of 60 people from more than 20 countries.

The years with the PCG have been full. At the Interfaith Centre, Emmanuel plans and organizes seminars and conferences for dialogues that are designed to meet the needs of a

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range of target groups within Muslim and Christian communities. Discussion is now beginning about whether to develop such programmes for Christians and members of Ghana's traditional (or spiritualist) faith.

Christian-Muslim marriages are the focus of a PCG study that is currently underway. Mixed faith marriages are common in the north. The church is doing research into how people in the region perceive them. The objective is to document experiences of mixed faith marriages on which to base a manual for clergy who must counsel young couples who are considering mixed faith marriage as well as those who are already married and encountering difficulties.

Training young people to be peacemakers is the other key component of Tettey's work. He cites the example of a project supported by EMS to train youth in the north in peaceful conflict resolution in the period prior to Ghana's December 2012 elections. There is also a growing network of Peace Clubs in

parishes and church-run schools. Club members are trained to promote a "culture of peace" in their schools and neighbourhoods. The programme is set to expand into the state-funded school system. Junior and senior secondary school students who join Peace Clubs are offered lectures and essays on the theme of peace and the opportunity of learning through role-playing. A professor from the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon has been asked to help prepare dramas for the programme.

Emmanuel's director, Saa, sees young people as "the foot soldiers who are trying to prevent efforts to mobilize for violence." Saa believes they are the ones to convince their peers that there is a better way to resolve conflict than through violence. If young people in Ghana's north do not take that message to heart, he says: "Young people will be the biggest losers. They have their whole future before them. If they destroy their future, they won't find jobs. So it is in their interest to have a stable country. When the country is peaceful there will be development and jobs."



Young people from WCRC's Ghanaian member churches served as Stewards to the Executive Committee. L to R: Jonas Bensah, Gifty Lebenam Amekudi, William Acquah, Bertha Asamoah, Emmanuel Tettey, Sheritta Obema Nartey and Nana Esi Acquah (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Caribbean church appoints second woman as Moderator

The new Moderator of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands is a counsellor committed to supporting her church's pastors and their families. She is also a leader of the global Reformed church movement. Since her installation as Moderator on 16 April at a service in St. Mary, Jamaica, Yvette Noble-Bloomfield can add to her list of accomplishments the fact that she is the first Caymanian status holder elected to the position and only the second woman.

Noble-Bloomfield currently serves as WCRC's vice-president for North America and the Caribbean and is the Moderator of the Communication Core Group of the Executive Committee. She holds a D. Min. from Colombia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia in the United States and was ordained to ministry in July 1984 following theological studies at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

In an interview with *Reformed Communiqué* in June from her home in the Cayman Islands, Noble-Bloomfield laid out her priorities for her term in office. Her two-year mandate can be renewed once.

It is not surprising that the counsellor-pastor's first priority is to provide pastoral care to clergy and their families, increase ministers' awareness of their vocation, and provide "retooling" or relocation for those who find their vocation or skills do not fit the context in which they are doing ministry.

Noble-Bloomfield also names the quality of worship in parishes as a key concern saying she wants her church to ensure there is "life-giving worship in all of our congregations every Sunday."

Referring to her commitment to global ecumenism and her current position as WCRC vice-president, Noble-Bloomfield says that as Moderator of her church, she wants to raise the visibility of the Reformed Communion in the denomination.

"I want to ensure the church is aware of what it means to be Reformed and part of the global church movement and to keep faith with the WCRC agenda," she says.

Noble-Bloomfield stresses that a key part of the awareness-building process involves giving opportunities

to youth and young seminarians to participate in ecumenical events at the regional and global level. As she is offered increasingly high-profile positions and becomes more visible in global ecumenical circles,

Noble-Bloomfield is aware of the importance of drawing on her experience to prepare the next generation of leaders.

"We, the established ecumenical leaders, must intentionally groom young ministers to replace us at the global level," she says. "This means including them in national councils of churches, the Caribbean Council of Churches, the Council for World Mission and WCRC."

Noble-Bloomfield is committed to bringing her church's theme of L.I.F.E. (Liberty, Integrity, Faith, and Environmental Stewardship) into the public forum. She points with pride to the "tremendous response" the church received

during recent national elections in the Cayman Islands when it offered prayers and invitations to worship services to candidates from all parties. Forty of the 56 candidates for election attended a pre-election service in George Town, the country's capital, on 19 May.

"I want to ensure the church is aware of what it means to be Reformed and part of the global church movement."

"The church is regaining its prophetic voice of authority in the Cayman Islands," she says.

This combination of concern for the wellbeing of individuals, church and state is likely to be the hallmark of Noble-Bloomfield's terms of office with WCRC and with her denomination. She brings to the task her deep faith, ecumenical experience and willingness to invest time and effort in meeting the needs of those with whom she works and those they serve.



Yvette Noble-Bloomfield : newly elected Moderator of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands faces the media at Ghana's Elmina slave castle (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Rwandan church leader helped by scholarship for women to study theology

Thérèse Mukamakuza was ordained by the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (PCR) with only a diploma in theology because of a scarcity of clergy after the genocide. It was 1998 and there was an urgent need to rebuild the church.

Thanks to the support of the Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women in the South, managed by WCRC's Justice and Partnership Office, Mukamakuza enrolled at St. Paul's University Limuru, Kenya in 2002 after first learning to speak English! She graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity in 2005. This equipped her to prepare a Masters degree at KwaZulu Natal University in South Africa in Theology and Development where she focused on gender and development.

Today Mukamakuza holds senior positions in her church. She is the first woman to be named President of the Presbyterian Church

in Rwanda Kigali Region, centred in the country's capital, Kigali. At the same time she is President of the Executive Committee of the national church.

Without a solid basis in theology, Mukamakuza

says she wouldn't have been able to "stand on her own feet" and know what she was doing. "I could not have taken on the duties I now have. I am happy to remember what the scholarship has done for me."

The Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women in the South was established in 2001 to increase the number of women in ordained ministry and enable women from Reformed churches in the Global South to build their capacity for effective partnership in God's mission. The fund provides for first degree or diploma studies which are done at a seminary or college in the home country or region of scholarship awardees.



Thérèse Mukamakuza : "happy to remember" what scholarship did for her (Photo: Courtesy of Mukamakuza)

Churches support justice movements in economy and ecology

By the World Council of Churches

Church representatives at an Oikotree Global Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa in March stressed the need to support peoples' movements promoting justice in the economy and ecology, a concern, they say, that lies at the heart of the faith.

The forum was organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), World Council of Churches (WCC), and Council for World Mission (CWM) from 3 to 8 March, and was attended by more than fifty representatives of churches, ecumenical organizations and people's movements.

The Oikotree movement was initiated by WCRC, WCC, and CWM as an ecumenical space where people can seek solidarity in faith while living in the midst of threats based on oppression, economic injustice and ecological destruction.

At the forum, the need to support people's struggles against companies like Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) in India was emphasized. POSCO, a United States-South Korean company, is conducting a multibillion dollar steel and port project in Odisha, India.

According to media reports, the project will displace at least 22,000 farmers, affecting the livelihoods of 20,000 fisher-folk, generating a water crisis and harming livestock in the area. The project is said to deplete forests where *Adivasis* or tribal people live.

The Oikotree Global Forum identified land as an overarching theme for theological reflections, education and awareness-building, networking, research and advocacy for the next two years.

"The formation of the Oikotree movement is a good way of bringing together ecumenical voices addressing injustice today," says Rogate Mshana, the WCC programme executive for Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. "The forum in Johannesburg affirms Oikotree as a 'movement of movements'. This affirmation is an inspiration for those who are addressing exploitation of the people and earth by global capitalism," he said.

WCRC's Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, Dora Arce-Valentín says: "Oikotree is an important forum for WCRC's Justice Program. It is a space for networking, a gathering of ecumenical institutions and people within them, committed to justice and theologically convinced that justice is the heart of the Christian faith."



L to R: Hee Soo Kang and Nan Hee Lee received Sylvia Michel Prize at celebration in Geneva (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

South Korean feminist theologians receive prize from Swiss women church leaders

An association of South Korean feminist theologians has received an award from women leaders in the Swiss Protestant Church for its groundbreaking theological work in support of the role of women as leaders in Korean churches.

At a ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland, 10 March, representatives of the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) were awarded the Sylvia Michel Prize. The award honours organizations and individuals that promote women as church leaders. Hee Soo Kang, a KAWT member, and the association's executive director, Nan Hee Lee, represented the association at the ceremony. The association's founder, theologian Soon Kyung Park (89), was too frail to make the trip from Seoul, Korea.

Kang who is a parish pastor and Ph.D. candidate says the award offers much-needed affirmation: "In Korea, Christian women think they can't make it and be equal to men. By receiving this award, Korean women get much encouragement from Swiss women."

Past and present women presidents of Swiss Cantonal churches choose the winner of the biennial award in collaboration with the Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Dora Arce-Valentín.

The award ceremony held in the historic La Fusterie church was hosted by the Geneva Protestant Church. Charlotte Küffer, president of the Geneva church, presented the prize which is accompanied by USD5000.

Lee says the prize money will be used to publish a book of the history of KAWT which is also known for its promotion of the reunification of North and South Korea.

"It is important for us to remember our history in order to achieve more in the future," says Lee who has a doctorate from Hanshin Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. "If we forget our history or 'herstory' it will be hard work to begin again."

The book is to be launched at WCC's world assembly in Busan in November. The themes in the book relate to the assembly's theme calling for support for life, justice and peace.

The prize is named after Switzerland's Sylvia Michel who became the first woman in Europe to serve as a church president when she was elected in 1980 by the Swiss Cantonal (state) church of Argovie. Two weeks later, Nicole Fischer became president of the Protestant Church of Geneva. Both Michel and Fischer were present at the ceremony yesterday.

Fischer told the approximately 100 guests that the award is intended to draw the attention of Swiss women to the fact that elsewhere in the world the situation of women is much more difficult than here. "This is our chance to show our concern and support," Fischer said.

The Swiss Cantonal Church of Argovie coordinated the selection process for the 2013 winner, the third time the award has been granted. Claudia Bandixen, past president of the church who now heads Mission 21 and Irmelin Kradolfer who is responsible for the church's women's programme, attended the ceremony.

A service of worship presided by local pastor Vanessa Lagier preceded the award ceremony. Music was provided by the choir and musicians from the local Korean Presbyterian church.

Make theology real: bring it to the kitchen table and informal conversation

Take theology out of books and bring it into daily life, says a Congolese feminist theologian.

“We must make theology accessible to our parish members. It should not stay on paper. We need ‘kitchen theology for the grassroots,’” says Liz Vibila Vuadi who is currently on the faculty of the Theological College of Lanka in Sri Lanka.

Vuadi was in Switzerland to attend meetings of the Theologians Network of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) March 3-8.

Twenty-two theologians from 15 countries gathered in Rüdlingen in northeast Switzerland to prepare recommendations for priorities for the programme of WCRC’s Office of Theology and Communion in 2013-2014. The recommendations were presented to WCRC’s Executive Committee for approval at meetings in Dodowa, Ghana, this May.

Discussion at the consultation focussed on how theologians can help WCRC member churches understand and engage in social, economic and ecclesiological issues facing WCRC member churches.

A paper presented by the American academic, Christopher Dorn, of the Reformed Church of America, asked how Christians today can interpret these “signs of the times” and respond faithfully to the challenges they pose.

Vuadi who has a Ph.D. in Mission and Systematic Theology from Hamburg University in Germany notes that when she returns to Sri Lanka, she will be leading a seminar with theology students on “Theology as Living Dialogue”.

For the Congolese theologian who has witnessed the brutality of war in her home country and the legacy of violence in Sri Lanka, it is important to translate theological concepts to local congregations in their context.

“I will have the discussions from this week fresh in my mind. It will be important to bring them down

to earth,” Vuadi says. “Theology must not stay on paper. It has to be a living theology for congregations in Congo (DRC) and Sri Lanka. My question is how I can be a bridge to bring the ideas from the consultation to my local Presbyterian church?”

Rathnakara Sadananda of Mangalore, India shares Vuadi’s belief that theology can and must be rooted in daily life and conversation.

In the opening meditation for the consultation, Sadananda encouraged participants to engage in “small talk” among themselves outside of the formal sessions where learned papers were to be presented.

“Small talk contributes a great deal to help us exchange views, learn or gain new theological insights, ideas and methods and also to share how we live as Christians in our own contexts with others,” Rathnakara explains.

In an email interview conducted at the conclusion of the consultation, Rathnakara writes that small talk offered the gathering of theologians “a forum to network and critically evaluate our theological thought processes.”

The professor of New Testament at Karnataka Theological College notes that through informal exchange

there was “time to learn how Reformed churches continue their mission and ministry in very pressing and difficult situations such as in Lebanon, Syria, South Africa, Cuba, Sri Lanka and elsewhere.”

The consultation was organized by WCRC’s Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, Douwe Visser. The moderator of the Communion’s Executive Committee theology advisory group, Bas Plaisier, participated in the consultation. Plaisier will chair the advisory group meeting that receives the consultation report. Papers presented in Rüdlingen will be published in a future edition of WCRC’s theological journal *Reformed World*.



“We must make theology accessible to our parish members,” says Liz Vibila Vuadi. (Photo: WCRC/Owen)

Award of Lombard Prize for theological essay on “paradise” marks World Environment Day

A Nigerian theology student has won the top honour for the 2013 Lombard Prize for his paper on how the biblical concept of “paradise” affects contemporary attitudes towards the earth’s human and natural resources.

Victor Audu, a student at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, was awarded USD600 for his essay examining how ideas of paradise might serve as a source of inspiration for the renewal of social and economic structures in global society.

Results of the essay competition were announced 05 June by the General Secretariat of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to mark World Environment Day.

Audu, a member of the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria, writes that the concept of paradise enshrined in the first chapters of Genesis can be conceptualized as “the key for building economic and social structures that could be a rousing model for a just society.”

An award of USD400 went to Maria Elisabeth Voorwinden, a Dutch student at the Institut Protestant de Théologie, in Montpellier, France. Voorwinden, who is a member of the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland and the Église Protestante Unie de France, submitted an essay entitled “L’homme économe, le créateur créé et décentré” (Economic man: the creator created and sidelined)

In addition to cash prizes, both winners will be awarded scholarships to WCRC’s Global Institute of Theology scheduled to be held in Costa Rica in July 2014.

The competition is open to theology students or pastors 35 years of age or younger. Essays were received from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Cameroun, and the Netherlands.

WCRC’s Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, Douwe Visser, says, “It is significant that these awards are announced in connection with World Environment Day because of the theme of paradise, a biblical concept of the deep roots of our natural environment.”

Applicants were asked to reflect on the biblical concept of “paradise” as it is developed in the first chapters of the book of Genesis. The concept of paradise as a time and place where all forms of life thrived in harmonious relationships has served churches in the Reformed tradition as a model for building social and economic structures of society.

Submissions were judged for their presentation of issues related to the theme and for their theological reflection on those questions. Jury members for the English essays were Jason Goroncy (New Zealand), Christopher Dorn (USA), Viktoria Koczian (Hungary), and Douwe Visser (the Netherlands). Liz Vuadi Vibila (Congo)

and Visser reviewed the French-language submissions.

The prize is named after the Genevan banker, Georges Lombard, who served from 1948 to 1970 as

General Treasurer to one of WCRC’s predecessor organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. WCRC coordinates the competition on behalf of the Lombard Prize Committee. The prize was last awarded in 2009.

Visser, whose office administers the competition on behalf of the General Secretary, says, “We congratulate the winners and are grateful to the Lombard Darier Hentsch Bank for making the award possible.”



Victor Audu, studies at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (Photo: Courtesy of Audu)



Maria Elisabeth Voorwinden, a Dutch student is enrolled at the Institut Protestant de Théologie in Montpellier, France (Photo: Courtesy of Voorwinden)

Op. Ed.

How to talk about justice?

There is ongoing discussion within the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) about statements critical of the current global economic system. The debate intensified in 2004 when the General Council of one of WCRC's predecessor organizations – the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – meeting in Accra, Ghana, adopted a statement dubbed the “Accra Confession.”

The document declares as “sinful” any institution that impoverishes and marginalizes the world's vulnerable people and that exploits the earth's natural resources for commercial gain. Language in the document, including the use of the word “empire” to describe wealthy countries – primarily in the Global North – and their



*Jan-Gerd Heetderks, President of WCRC Europe region
(Photo: William Koopmans)*

military and economic establishments, has provoked strong reaction from some WCRC member churches.

The recent meeting on a new financial architecture in Brazil renewed the discussion. In March 2013 WCRC's Europe region engaged in debate with WCRC's Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, Dora Arce-Valentín. In this op-ed, Jan-Gerd Heetderks, president of WCRC Europe, explains the European perspective.

Justice work is important for our Communion

Sometimes it looks like the churches of the North are not much interested in questions of justice. In the discussions about the Accra Confession or for example now the discussion about the Sao Paolo Statement, European churches have sometimes been hesitant about the great words and impressive statements.

Is this because they wish to keep the status quo of the economic structures? I don't think so.

It is more a fear of big words and a concern that these words can't be translated into the complicated economic and political structures. The churches in Eastern Europe, in particular, have experienced what it means if ideology sets the agenda for the state and economics.

For financial reasons in 2012 it wasn't possible for WCRC to have a fulltime Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership. In that situation, the Council of WCRC Europe stressed the importance of the justice work for our Communion. The Council ordered the Steering Committee to look for funds to make it possible to have a fulltime person in that role. Fortunately we were able to find some funds and together with the

big support of the Council for World Mission it was possible this year for WCRC to once again have a fulltime Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership. We are happy that Dora Arce-Valentín is in that role.

The aim of justice and partnership work in WCRC isn't primarily to propose solutions and programmes but rather to keep the question of justice on the agenda of our churches. And to challenge the churches to ask the right questions: to question the status quo, to do what is in their power, and to warn us about indifference – to warn us not to sleep quietly when brothers and sisters are suffering.

The Nobel-Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, said: “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death but indifference between life and death.”

Jan-Gerd Heetderks
President, WCRC Europe



Plans are to launch an awareness-raising campaign during Lent 2014 (Photo: We Will Speak Out)

Human trafficking to be focus of 2014 Lent campaign

A consultation in Cuba on the international trade in human beings for profit has concluded with a call for a campaign to make churches aware of the scale, causes and impact of what is commonly referred to as “human trafficking.” Plans are to launch an awareness-raising campaign during Lent 2014 to draw attention to the issue.

“There is no region that can say this issue doesn’t concern them,” says the consultation organizer, Dora Arce-Valentín. “During the consultation we even realized that we might be unknowingly complicit in the illegal trade ourselves. For example, our domestic helper might have been trafficked: a transplant organ donor might have been trafficked to harvest his or her organs.”

Twenty-five participants from 17 countries convened for a three-day consultation at the Matanzas Theological Seminary, 18-20 March. Most are members of WCRC’s two justice networks: one with a focus on gender rights, the other focused on economic and environmental concerns. The consultation in Cuba was called in order for WCRC to plan a strategy of response to an issue which Arce-Valentín says is deeply interconnected with economic, ecological and gender concerns.

Arce-Valentín heads the Office for Justice and Partnership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Geneva, Switzerland. The organization is known for its stance on gender rights, environmental protection and the need for economic reforms. WCRC’s justice programming is supported by the Council for World Mission and by WCRC’s European region.

The programme featured input by Ryan Smith of the United Nations Office in New York supported by WCRC and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who

provided participants with an overview of the global scope of the problem and what has been done in some countries to provide a legislative framework to curtail illegal activity. Aiesha John, a lawyer working with the Grenada Council of Churches on human trafficking concerns, explained the regional challenges and responses to the problem. Participants completed the picture with input about the situation in their respective regions.

In response, WCRC’s two justice networks agreed to cooperate on a joint action strategy. Proposals include a campaign during Lent 2014 to raise awareness of the issue among WCRC member churches, encourage solidarity with anti-trafficking activities already underway at the local, regional and global levels, and provide a solid theological basis for action.

“We are people of faith and we want to create the theological tools that will help us understand why we should stand against the practice of human trafficking,” says Arce-Valentín. “WCRC’s declaration of economic, human and environmental rights called the ‘Accra Confession’ provides a solid base for this theological reflection.”

Plans are for WCRC’s social justice networks to work closely with the organization’s theology office to create a website of resources for Lent 2014 including liturgies, Bible study, and videos as well as links to existing resources.

“We’d like to start it off with a competition inviting youth in our member churches to create a logo for the anti-trafficking campaign,” says Arce-Valentín.

The networks’ proposals were presented to WCRC’s Executive Committee at its meetings in May in Dodowa, Ghana.



Thomas Šernas has been re-elected as General Superintendent of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Lithuania. (Photo: Balázs Ódor)

Synod in Lithuania elects massacre survivor to key post

On 23 March the Synod of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Lithuania (ERCL) elected Thomas Šernas as General Superintendent for a second three-year term.

Šernas is a former Lithuanian customs officer and the only survivor of the Medininkai Massacre on 31 July 1991. The attack was one of a series of assaults in 1991 on Lithuanian border posts by the Soviet Union following Lithuania's declaration of independence in March 1990. Šernas survived a point-blank shot to his head but became disabled. After extensive medical treatment and rehabilitation, he graduated from theological studies at Klaipėda University and joined the Reformed Church as a minister serving the Vilnius parish. In 2010, he was elected to his first three-year term as the General Superintendent of the ERCL.

A number of ecumenical guests and state officials, including Deputy Ministry of Justice Paulinus Gričinas,

attended the meeting in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. The World Communion of Reformed Churches' (WCRC) General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, and the organization's European area president, Jan-Gerd Heetderks, were among those from the global community of churches who sent expressions of support and prayer.

WCRC Europe was represented at the Synod by its vice-president, Balázs Ódor, who in his greeting words emphasized that beyond solidarity his presence was also a testimony of the Reformed family, as WCRC sees the Synod as the rightful representation of the ERCL and the historic Reformed community in Lithuania.

The ERCL was established in Lithuania in the 16th century. The church has 7000 members in 14 parishes.

Based on a report prepared by Balázs Ódor of the Reformed Church in Hungary

New church in France created by Reformed-Lutheran merger

Two French churches from Reformed and Lutheran traditions have united to become the United Protestant Church of France. The merger of the Reformed Church of France and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France was celebrated at a joint national synod from May 8-12 in Lyon, France.

ProtestInfo, the news service of the Swiss Protestant Church, reports that over one thousand people attended the inaugural service of the new church held on 11 May in the Grand Temple in Lyon.

In one of its first actions, the synod elected Laurent Schlumberger to head the new church.

Schlumberger previously served as president of the former Reformed Church of France.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches was represented by Antoine Schluchter, former president of the French Protestant Federation and now pastor in Switzerland. Schluchter served as an adviser to the executive committee of one of WCRC's predecessor organizations, the Reformed Ecumenical Council until 2010.

WCRC congratulates the two churches for their move towards the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace.

Kirk questions (mis)use of scripture

By *Páraic Réamonn*

The general assembly of the Church of Scotland, which met in Edinburgh at the end of May, generally flies under the radar of the secular media, but not this year. Before it were two controversial reports.

Can the Kirk ordain to the ministry of word and sacrament gay and lesbian Christians in committed sexual relationships ("civil partnerships" in Scottish law)? Yes, it can.

The report on same-sex relationships and the ministry spoke with two voices. Lucidly, one set out a traditional view that such relationships are condemned by scripture and contrary to God's will. Lucidly, another argued for revising this view, allowing gay and lesbian ordination and sanctioning the blessing of civil partnerships.

The assembly deliberated for hours – and endorsed both voices. It reaffirmed the traditional view, but "nonetheless" permitted congregations that are so-minded to call gay and lesbian ministers.

Unstable and arguably incoherent, the result reflects where the Kirk is – still divided in conviction –, but allows it nonetheless to move forward without disruption.

The Inheritance of Abraham? A report on the 'promised land' questioned the Christian use of scripture to license the continuing dispossession of the Arabs of Palestine. "How can Christians support the violation of human rights in the name of alleged divinely conferred exclusive rights to a specific area of land?" A response to *Kairos Palestine* – a 2009 statement by an ecumenical group of church leaders from the Middle East about what is happening in the region – and to other Christian Palestinian voices, it was intended for use in congregations and presbyteries.

But in a connected world, no debate is purely internal and the report created a firestorm

of Jewish criticism. Israel's ambassador to the UK, Daniel Taub, called it "truly hurtful".

In a hastily convened meeting with the small Jewish community in Scotland, Kirk representatives made some dubious political concessions, but stuck to the theological view. The report, lightly revised, was accepted overwhelmingly by the assembly and will probably receive more attention in the pews than had the Jewish critics kept silent.



Lorna Hood, moderator of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland meets the media (Photo: Church of Scotland)

The assembly was one moment in a journey as the Kirk struggles to place itself under the authority of scripture by reading it not as "texts of terror" (as per theologian Phyllis Trible) that deny the humanity or rights of some, but rather as the truth that sets us free.



Emily Brink, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin College (Photo:)



Paul Detterman, Presbyterian pastor and musician in the United States (Photo: Rebecca Detterman)

Wise Church encourages rethinking parish worship

The two authors of *Wise Church* are enthusiastic as they describe the process which led to the creation of this resource for parish worship planners and leaders.

It all started when Emily Brink, a senior worship fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in the United States, was appointed to the international committee preparing for the Uniting General Council (UGC) of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010.

“Worshiping the Triune God”, a document about worship renewal produced by the committee for the Council generated considerable excitement when it was presented at the UGC. It seemed important to provide a study resource to pick up on that energy and contribute to on-going discussion about parish liturgies. *Wise Church* is the result.

The book is intended to prompt discussion in parishes of how to move out of what Brink’s co-author, Paul Detterman, calls “limited and pedantic conversation about worship styles” and into an exploration of “the next chapter God has for them for worship.”

Detterman, an American Presbyterian pastor and musician, was approached to work with Brink following the publication of his series of articles about “Worshiping the Triune God” for *Reformed Worship*. He was delighted at the offer. In writing the articles, he had discovered what he describes as the “quality and depth of the original text” and felt its collection of proverbs about worship called for deeper study. (The articles were excerpted for publication in *Reformed Communiqué* and are now available at www.wcrc.ch/Worship.)

Wise Church was published in time for the January 2013 Symposium on Worship organized by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and held annually at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Brink reports initial response was very heartening.

Detterman hopes the book will be a catalyst to regional and international discussion about what worship is and can be. He acknowledges that it will be challenging to find ways of making that dialogue possible but hopes that *Wise Church* might ignite a global conversation.

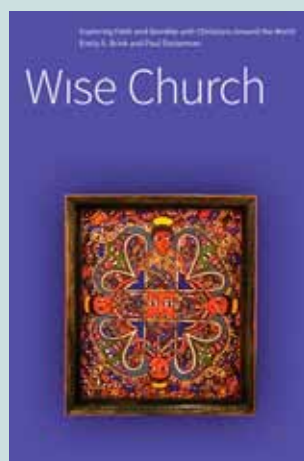
Brink reports that the first steps in that direction are underway. In January 2014, the book will be the focus of a daylong workshop prior to the Symposium on Worship: a day of talking about worship issues in 18 countries. In preparation for the event, country convenors are being asked to organize discussion of *Wise Church* in their local contexts. Input is expected from Eastern Europe, Africa,

the Arabic world and beyond, says Brink. Participants include worship teachers, students, and “passionate parish worship leaders.” WCRC’s president, Jerry Pillay, will be leading the process in southern Africa.

“It is my prayerful hope that God will use this as we live together as the global body of Christ,” Detterman says.

Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World

Emily R. Brink and Paul Detterman



The church of Jesus Christ is a global church. In Wise Church you are invited to enter a conversation about worship that draws on the wisdom and experience of Christians around the world.

Based on the document “Worshiping the Triune God,” a collection of proverbs on worship adopted by the World Communion of Reformed Churches at the Uniting General Council in 2010, this book and study guide offers a global perspective on how and why we worship.

With pictures, testimonies, hymn texts, and reflections on the meaning of communal worship, this study will help any local congregation celebrate the larger body of Christ with whom they are joined every time they gather together. Each session includes an exploration of a section of “Worshiping the Triune God” and questions for reflection. Use this study with your worship team, church staff or council, or small group.

Emily R. Brink is a senior research fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. For 20 years she served as founding editor of *Reformed Worship* and worship and music editor for the *Christian Reformed Church*.

Paul Detterman is a teaching elder (pastor) and church musician in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and executive director of *Presbyterians for Renewal* and the *Fellowship of Presbyterians*. He is a former associate for worship and editor of worship resources for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Available from Faith Alive Christian Resources

www.faithaliveresources.org

USD7.99/copy

Worshiping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Christian Wisdom Across Continents and Centuries

The statement “Worshiping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Christian Wisdom Across Continents and Centuries” was adopted in 2010 by the Uniting General Council of World Communion of Reformed Churches. The document is designed to present a vision for worship and spiritual renewal in which we invite each other to deeper and more vital expression. It is not designed to impose a set of practices on member churches or to imply that worship in member churches already embodies the fullness of this wisdom.

Available online at www.wcrc.ch

Click on “Worship” in left column

- “Worshiping the Triune God” in English, Spanish, French, German, Indonesian, Urdu, Dutch and Chinese.
- A series of four articles by Paul Detterman about the document published in *Reformed Communiqué*

Hong-tiong Lyim: training people for mission and social transformation

On a warm evening in early April, Hong-tiong Lyim sat on a terrace in the shadow of the sacred mountain of the Paiwanese people in Taiwan's Ping-Tung county and spoke of his plans for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) when he takes on the role of General Secretary in July. In a wide-ranging interview in his home region, Lyim outlined his key priorities.

Training for mission will be a central feature of Lyim's tenure as General Secretary. He is keenly aware that Christians form a minority in Taiwan and says his role will be to help the church create programmes that show that "Jesus loves all Taiwanese as he loves all the world's peoples." The question, he notes, is how to be "a creative minority in the Reformed church tradition and transform the expression of our faith".

As the 7th General Secretary, Lyim will assume leadership for a church whose prophetic stance on human and ecological justice issues has earned it the wrath of successive Taiwanese governments and the respect of the World Communion of Reformed Churches to which PCT belongs. He takes over from Te-Chien (Andrew) Chang with whom he served as Associate General Secretary from 2005.

Lyim plans to continue his support for training programmes that began during his term as Associate General Secretary and focus on how to be disciples in a country where Buddhists and Taoists form the largest faith groups. The ordained pastor has received extensive training in identifying and organizing response to social needs. He has certification in urban-rural mission, creative programme design, and conflict resolution from ecumenical leadership formation courses in Germany, Canada and the United States.

As General Secretary, Lyim's first priority is the church's plan to increase membership through the "One-leads-One, New Doubling Movement". The church growth programme is based on a four-step

process aimed at attracting new members who are not Christian. A comprehensive curriculum has been published to help reach the country's Chinese-culture population. It is unique in Asia and already Chinese-speaking churches in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong are asking for it. Next Lyim wants to develop material appropriate for reaching Taiwan's 14 Indigenous tribal peoples. Lyim hopes that programme will continue until the year 2020. Along the way PCT will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2015.

The General Secretary-elect's second priority is to resolve internal tensions in the church. Ironically, much of the tension is based in PCT's success in establishing profitable hospitals, schools and other social services. As these traditional church missions become more and more like businesses, power issues lead to conflict. Lyim plans to resolve these tensions by drawing on programmes he initiated when serving as an associate general secretary. Programmes like "Open Space Technology" and "Third Party Neutral" are designed to encourage creative thinking and facilitate conflict resolution.

Lyim's third priority will come as no surprise to those who know his commitment to his country and to human rights: he is determined to keep speaking out for the right of Taiwan to self-determination. Lyim wants his country's people to recognize, respect and claim their identity. It is only in that way he says that they can be assured of their human rights. The ardent justice campaigner knows his country's history of being colonized by the Dutch, Chinese and Japanese, and believes strongly that it is time for Taiwan to have the right to decide its own future.

Lyim was formally installed as GS during PCT's General Assembly Annual Convention held 9-12 April in Taiwan's capital, Taipei. At the time, Lyim told Presbyterian Church News that becoming the General Secretary of the PCT is a calling and a new chapter in his life and that he is aware there will be plenty of challenges in the future. He urged parishioners to work together so that they may accomplish the work God has entrusted them: "doing what is right, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God."



*Hongtiong Lyim brings commitment to training and church growth to his new role
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Te-Chien Chang, a church leader attuned to contemporary expressions of faith

Te-Chien (Andrew) Chang is preparing to retire in July as general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) following 20 years of service in the General Assembly office in the country's capital, Taipei.

Chang's service to the church has been marked by his deep commitment to Christian formation, protection of his country's natural environment, and advocacy for the economic and human rights of the country's Indigenous peoples. Under his leadership, PCT has remained true to its profile as a church that dares to speak out on public issues including the right to self-determination in the country's relations with China.

Chang is known too for his active involvement in global ecumenism. At his invitation, representatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, and Council for World Mission are regularly invited to participate in PCT's annual general assembly and to visit mission sites throughout the country.

Ordained in 1977 following studies towards an M. Div. in Old Testament studies at Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Chang became PCT's Christian Education Secretary in 1990. His background also includes mission training with the Council for World Mission. Chang describes this combination of mission and Christian education as "two wings of a bird with the Holy Spirit giving lift to the wings." In 2005 he assumed the role of PCT's General Secretary.

An accomplished photographer and regular blogger, Chang recognizes the importance of developing contemporary Taiwanese artistic expressions of Christian faith.

"The gospel hasn't changed in 2000 years but society has, so the church has to adapt," Chang says.

The General Secretary cites the example of his support for Christian street dancing in an area of Taipei that attracts up to 10000 young street dancers.

A guitar-playing PCT pastor and his wife, who does street dancing, are regulars. PCT now organizes an annual street dancing competition among presbyteries that features teams from local parishes.

One of the objectives of the General Secretary's focus on contemporary arts is to overcome the image of Christianity as a "western faith."

"We need to use Taiwanese thinking for incarnational Bible stories," Chang says.

Chang sees the Yu-Shan theological seminary programme of inviting artists to stay at the college to create "theological art" as one example of this approach. The seminary's arts initiative includes plans to display its collection of traditional aboriginal art in a new museum on the campus.

Chang is proud too of the formation of a Christian artists' fellowship in Taipei. For five years, artists have met monthly for theological reflection. The price of membership is to give one piece of art to the church's General Assembly offices.

As Chang moves into his retirement years, his active involvement in Taiwan's life and challenges will continue. His plans include developing model programs with Indigenous peoples that will help them create and manage income-generating programs in local communities. The objective is to create jobs in the agricultural and arts sectors that will bring young people home from the country's urban centres where they are often exploited and led into addiction or prostitution.

This committed ecologist, human rights activist, and Christian arts promoter plants dreams, rooted in his deep Christian faith. The harvest will continue in the years to come.



Te-Chien (Andrew) Chang retires as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)



Chang: supports concept of "theological art" including photography (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)



*Tainan Theological College and Seminary in southern Taiwan
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Tainan Seminary prepares students for contextual ministry

It is perhaps symbolic that the first Christian seminary in Taiwan stands next to the first Buddhist temple in the country. Tainan Theological College and Seminary draws its inspiration from the context in which its students prepare for ministry.

Courses in comparative religions are an important part of the curriculum. Christians are a minority in this country that is dominantly Buddhist. As in many other countries, Christians face the additional challenge of living in a society that is becoming increasingly secular. Developing good relations with neighbours who are Buddhist or who have no faith life, is a vital skill for the seminary's 198 students.

The seminary's president, Wong Chong-giau, believes that students must know the minds and worries of people of other faiths in order to work with a parish.

"Most people who their parishioners know will be non-Christians. The pastor must be able to empathize," he notes.

The seminary in the southern city of Tainan is one of three run by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). The others are Taiwan Theological College and Seminary in the country's capital, Taipei, and Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary in Hualien.

In conversation with Wong and several faculty members during a recent trip to Taiwan, *Reformed Communiqué* learned how the inspiration of the seminary's founder Shoki Coe continues to influence the curriculum today.

Coe, a Presbyterian minister and theologian, was one of the leaders of the movement demanding respect from the Chinese for Taiwanese language and culture

in the early 20th century. PCT continues to be a leading force in the movement for the recognition of the right of Taiwanese people to decide their own political future, to speak their own languages (including aboriginal languages) and to protect the country's natural resources from exploitation by off-shore companies.

Today the seminary in Tainan emphasises the study and use of the Taiwanese language. Lim and others believe that language is the key to preserving local identity and history. One faculty member teaches PCT history at a secular university to "shore up" efforts to prevent the loss of language and identity.

Seminary students are preparing for either traditional parish appointments or for work in mission. Some, who are coming to ministry as their second or third career, can undertake special ministries in schools, banks or hospitals. Tainan Seminary also prepares students for frontier mission with labourers, farmers, Indigenous communities and industrial workers.

The seminary offers theology classes in English for international students supported by Council for World Mission scholarships. The international scholars include students from the Pacific region, Africa, and South-East Asia.

The seminary's extension programme includes a Master of Arts in Mission offered to more than 50 lay people working as nurses, workers, and doctors at Chang Hua Christian Hospital.

The seminary's motto from John 15:16 "I choose you to bear fruit" is an apt description of its approach to education.



*Shang-Jen Chen, President of Tainan Theological College and Seminary
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Tainan seminarians taught to be “pastor-scholars”

Prayer, study and mission are at the heart of Taiwan Theological College and Seminary. Its president, Shang-Jen Chen, believes that prayer must be part of the daily life of seminary faculty and students. From Tuesday through Friday students meet at 06:30 for 45 minutes of prayer.

“Through prayer we seek to understand God’s word. It is the source of our commitment,” says Chen.

Chen and the seminary’s 18 faculty members want their graduates to achieve academically so that they are well-equipped to serve as what John Calvin described as “pastor-scholars”.

“I want our students to be known for their piety and for their hard work,” Chen says. “It’s better to burn out than to rust out.”

The seminary is located in Taiwan’s capital, Taipei. There are 30 students in each year of its M.Div. programme. Most are preparing for parish ministry, though some focus on music and others on counselling. This year the seminary’s first Ph. D. student will graduate.

Chen, who has a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States of America, is aware of the impact of western theology on Taiwan’s theologians. He believes it is time now for the seminary’s faculty to reflect critically on the theology they have learned in the west. This reflection is particularly important, Chen notes, given the decline of mainline western denominations.

“We don’t have to copy everything. We have to ask what is practical and what is Biblical in what we have been taught,” says Chen.

Chen is deeply committed to cross-cultural mission work. In recent years the seminary has focused on mission in Myanmar. The hope is that when students have a direct experience of mission in the field it will affect their approach to ministry.

“We want them to move beyond the local ministry model and learn about missiology in context,” Chen explains. “We want our students to develop a passion for inter-cultural ministry and for working with very poor people.”

Chen himself has twice taught short-term courses in Christian ethics in Myanmar. His plan is to spend a week in the country every year. He is fascinated he says by the ethical issues the country faces. He cites the example of the impact of the opium trade on the budget of a parish. What do pastors do, he asks, if they are told by parishioners: “All we have for Sunday offering are the proceeds from opium sales”?

In the three years since Chen accepted the post of President and Associate Professor of Ethics at the seminary, he has been encouraging students to “do social justice work but to not lose sight of a biblical focus, spiritual nurturing and evangelism.” Calvin is once again his reference. The Reformer’s concepts of piety and knowledge, spirit and heart are what Chen expects of his students – nothing more and nothing less.



*Pastor Gilgiwau, Timur Presbyterian Church, plays traditional nose flute
(Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)*

Paiwan Presbytery is committed to mission

By Kristine Greenaway

In early April, as a guest of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT), I traveled to Paiwan Presbytery in Pingtung County in southern Taiwan. In one-and-a-half days of visits, I caught glimpses into the riches and challenges of the region that is home to several of the country's Indigenous peoples: wonderful historic Paiwanese motifs painted on ultra-modern houses; people wearing hand-embroidered shirts while driving SUV's; and a pastor playing a nose flute in a sanctuary featuring a cross made of railway ties rimmed with designer lighting.

I was traveling with Hong-Tiong Lyim who was installed as PCT's General Secretary later in the month. At each meeting, we were greeted warmly and offered insight into the faith and work of PCT. Everywhere we visited, we received generous hospitality including beautiful gifts produced in the area.

The spirit of giving extends to the support church members give their church. Each congregation in the presbytery tithes to support the work of the presbytery office. As a result, there is a full-time staff of five. Consider the fact that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has a staff of eight. I can only wish that WCRC's member churches were as financially supportive as the congregations in Paiwan Presbytery.

Elong Tanu Bak, who at the time of my visit was Presbytery General Secretary, told us of plans for church growth and of campaigns to raise money for scholarships for theology students to study abroad

and to support an overseas missionary. Rii, the youth worker, told of ecumenical exchange programmes and of a project for young people to write the Bible by hand as a way of truly becoming familiar with it. Bak has since become Associate General Secretary and moved to Taiwan's capital city, Taipei, to serve in PCT's National Assembly offices.

Ljenljenman, who heads the women's programme, told us of the work of women in the area. The women engage in Bible study, fundraising and prayer meetings and have contact with women from India to France to Ethiopia. It is an interesting example of what being connected to global organizations such as WCRC and its partner, the Council for World Mission, can mean for local parishes.

The trip through Paiwan county included a stop to see the innovative art work and architecture of Timur Presbyterian Church. A well-known Paiwan artist, Sakuliw, did the design. Walking down the centre aisle of the sanctuary over mosaics depicting biblical stories is like walking through the bible.

In Chang Yuan, a new village built to house people displaced by typhoon Morakot in 2009, Lyim and I saw three chapels that are under construction and 106 homes built with money contributed by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Red Cross, World Vision and PCT. The four year building campaign wraps up in August. It has been a process of rebuilding lives, livelihoods and homes in the wake of the trauma of the typhoon and the massive flooding it provoked.



Modern mission: Yu-Chang Lin, surrounded by staff of Joyce's Dumplings, the social entrepreneurship business she founded in Taiwan (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

21st century mission in Taiwan

Over breakfast with the husband and wife pastoral team at Ju Dang Presbyterian Church in the village of Tek-Tung, talk turned to the people whose lives have set the model for 21st century mission in the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

Hau-Sheng Chng and his wife, Shin-Hui Chen, told me of past and present ecumenical and mission personnel whose ideas and support have nurtured their ministry in the rural community to which they were called 25 years ago. As they talked, I could see how they have taken those ideas and used them as seeds for what has become a truly contextual and contemporary approach to mission in their community where Christians represent only 0.1 per cent of the population.

The chain of inspiration begins with 19th century missionaries from Europe and North America such as the Landsborough father and son team of medical doctors who brought western medicine and machines with them from Scotland and founded a hospital in the Taichung area that has grown into the Changhua hospital complex; the Canadian, George Leslie MacKay, who is considered a spiritual father of Taiwan Theological Seminary; and the American nurse, Joyce McMillan, whose legacy includes the Erhlin Happy Christian Home for severely physically and mentally challenged children and adults.

The early European and North American missionaries raised funds for their work among their families and friends and through church appeals. Today it seems more and more Taiwanese mission workers combine their commitment to Christian service with business skills. Chng supports models for mission work “missionaries” that are self-

supporting by running ethical and socially responsible businesses using effective management practices.

People like Yu-Chang Lin represent the new generation of Taiwanese doing mission in their own country. Lin, who is a member of Ju Dang Presbyterian Church and a polio survivor, was raised from age six in the home founded by McMillan. Today, she is the superintendant of that home and a successful social entrepreneur running a restaurant and online food sales business to provide employment for its young adults.

Ju Dang church is accessible to people in wheelchairs or who walk with crutches like Lin: call it an “architectural welcome mat.” It is this level of social awareness that makes Ju Dang parish and Chng and his wife Chen such sources of inspiration for a new wave of social entrepreneurs – these modern-day missionaries with business know-how and deep faith in God.



L to R: Hau-Sheng Chng and Shin-Hui Chen, co-pastors at Ju Dang Presbyterian Church (Photo: WCRC/Greenaway)

Radio for Protestants in Rwanda

By *Michel Kocher*

After a long wait and with the support of broadcasters in the French-speaking region of Switzerland, Rwandan Protestants have launched their own radio station. Despite a modest beginning with limited finances and a six-hour daily broadcast window, the objective is to grow in strength and reach the country's large radio public.

On 27 December 2012, the leaders of the Protestant Council of Rwanda heaved a sigh of relief. The station was finally on air.

"The government had been quite clear with us. If we were broadcasting by the end of the year, we couldn't ask for any more concessions."

Tharcisse Gatwa knows what he is talking about. For months the General Secretary worked to mobilize the country's Protestant leaders to find the funds needed to purchase the last pieces of equipment.

Over the past ten years, almost all the rest of the equipment had been contributed by the Swiss Protestant radio service, Médias-Pro, with the support of the Swiss mission agency, DM-Echange et Mission. Even the Swiss public broadcaster Swisscom had contributed to the effort by offering transmitters. And for over ten years, plans for the radio station were thwarted by inertia and bureaucracy. The project was further delayed by the attitude of the country's Protestants who are caught in a dependency complex, still expecting foreign donors to meet their needs.

Yet in the country's capital, Kigali, there is no lack of money. The city is growing rapidly, the churches too, particularly the evangelical and pentecostal movements. With 7,000,000 members, evangelical and pentecostal churches are the strongest group among the country's estimated 2.5 million Protestants.

But it is easier to raise funds for a church building than for a radio station. In the end, it was the promise of radio's power to gather people and provide a distribution service for sermons and a wide range of messages that won the day. Currently churches have to pay for time on private radio stations to reach the public.

Gatwa explains the station's broadcast objectives saying: "We want to work on three principal themes: development, evangelisation, and church unity."

Protestants are well equipped to address these issues with five universities and more than 1,000

primary and secondary schools, as well as their experience in addressing individual and social needs.

Rwandans love radio. In urban and rural communities, they are hooked to their radios or rather to their cell phones, which operate as radios. Their phone stuck to their ear, they absorb music and sermons on the FM band that is saturated with stations.

Two stations dominate the market: Radio Nationale and Radio Maria. Now the new Protestant station wants to slip into their wake – Radio Inkoramutima, "the voice of the heart". The fledgling service faces a big challenge because of the number of popular, high quality commercial stations already broadcasting.

In order to compete for the radio public, Radio Inkoramutima has hired a host-journalist from one of the best commercial stations. Didas Niyifasha himself is amazed by the magnitude/extent of the audience after only a few months of broadcasting.



Rwandan Protestants have launched their own radio station with support from Switzerland (Photo: Protestinfo.ch © M.Kocher)

"When I launch an appeal on air, I get hundreds of text messages in reply from all over the region." His next objective is to increase from 6 to 12 or 18 hours of daily programming.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) provides a grant for the translation of news from English to French by Médias-pro as part of WCRC's support for sharing ecumenical news of interest with its francophone member churches.

Michel Kocher, a journalist and pastor of the Swiss Protestant Church, is the head of Médias-pro.

From the Partnership Fund

Another place is possible

By *Páraic Réamonn*

Simon was 17 but seemed small for his age. He had a strange, quick way of moving, like Maradona dribbling the ball. His eyes were the eyes of an old man, only rarely lit by a glint of hope.



“Another place is possible” – Argentinian mission programme supported by the Partnership Fund (Photo:)

From his father he learned armed robbery. When his dad went to jail, he gave him his gun – “a spotless 38, a really good piece”. From his mother he learned to get through the day with marijuana, glue, and paco. Made from the waste of cocaine production, cut with poisons and powdered glass, and lethally cheap, paco is the drug of choice for Argentina’s urban poor. When his mother fell ill, his grandparents and uncles blamed Simon and barred him from her hospital bed. It was a struggle to see her before she died.

Simon is one of many in the slums of San Fernando y Tigre, in greater Buenos Aires, served by the Evangelical Church of the River Plate, a WCRC member church since 1991.

At the turn of the century, the church set up an ecumenical social action programme in San Fernando, one of five projects in a plan to share the gospel with the poor. The programme, led by pastor Sabino Ayala, is based in a day centre, Otro Lugar es Posible (“another place is possible”) and focuses on the most vulnerable: children, women

and youth. In 2012, the WCRC Partnership Fund supported its work with a grant of USD 33,000.

The programme includes learning support, help to stay in school and for youngsters on probation, and pastoral care for families; macramé, pottery and theatre workshops; summer camps; a guitar group and a youth orchestra; a regular clothes sale – and a mental health programme.

It happened in this way. Sabino Ayala visited a particularly complicated family. “Pastor,” they joked, “we are all mad. You need to bring a psychologist.”

So he brought a team of psychoanalysts, who abandoned the couch for consultations in his car and later in the centre. Their aim was to show that living badly and dying badly is not fate, that even in the shantytowns people can find another “place”, can work, study, start a family.

Not long after his mother died, Simon dropped into the day centre. How were things going at home? Sabino asked him. Did he and his sisters have enough food? He replied that he was “gleaning”, doing gardening or any odd job in the vegetable

market. “I do not want to waste my life.”

Suddenly, Simon asked, “You know what I did last week?”

“I sold the 38. It cost me a lot to sell it. It was a great piece, and it was my dad’s.”

That was three years ago. Last Sabino heard, Simon had been in and out of rehab, found himself a girlfriend, and is working.

Not many stories in the slums end happily – perhaps not even Simon’s. But Sabino and the team in the day centre work hard, showing in word and deed that another place is possible, another world is possible.

The Partnership Fund makes grants to help WCRC member churches carry out projects in mission or service that they otherwise could not afford. Enquiries from churches that have not applied before are especially welcome. For information about how to apply, email partnership@wcr.ch All applications need to be endorsed by a WCRC member church.

Church unity is key to effective mission in the Philippines

“Together, we can proclaim God’s praise to the islands of the Philippines.” This was the message of Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, when he spoke at both the General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines and to its biennial leadership training event (called Banyuhay). Nyomi was speaking at the closing session of the training event in the morning of April 11 and the opening session of the Synod in the afternoon of April 10 in Taygaygay City in the Philippines.

Nyomi noted that doing everything possible to foster the unity of the church is an essential part of effective mission work. Quoting from John 17, Nyomi

indicated that: “In the highly priestly prayer, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed that his followers may be one so that the world may believe.” He praised the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines for its commitment to mission and evangelism and for covenanting to have 150 new congregations in the next 12 years. The General Secretary encouraged the church to make a difference in fostering justice in the world.

Nyomi took his message of the importance of Christian unity and effective action against injustice to the WCRC’s other two member churches in the Philippines, the Uniting Church of Christ in the Philippines and the UNIDA Ecumenical Church.

Global gathering of Reformed and Catholic theologians continues forty-year dialogue

by *Christopher Dorn*

Theologians from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) met from 7 to 13 April at Notre Dame, Indiana, in the United States for the third session in the fourth phase of the international Catholic-Reformed dialogue. The event was hosted by the University of Notre Dame and its president John Jenkins, C.S.C.

The theme of the current phase of the dialogue, which will conclude in 2017, is “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice”. Dialogue between the two communions at the international level began in 1970.

WCRC and the PCPCU hope that this round of conversations will build on what previous phases have already achieved, including a mutual recognition of the church as “creation of the word of God” (emphasized by the Reformed) and of the church as “sacrament of grace” (emphasized by the Catholics).

Another aim is to discern 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 central to the disputes of the Reformation era. In 2006 the World Methodist Council affiliated itself with the JDDJ.

Last week’s meeting featured discussions of two sets of papers on themes approached from Reformed and

Catholic perspectives. Reinerio Arce Valentín of Cuba presented a paper on “Justification and Sanctification in the Reformed Tradition”. Peter de Mey of Belgium read in absentia Mayer’s paper “Justification and Sanctification – A Response from a Catholic Perspective”. In their papers Dorn and Casarella addressed the theme, “The Prophetic Office and Authority in the Church”.

Martha Moore-Keish, of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia (USA) and Kevin Rhoades, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in Indiana (USA) co-chair the dialogue. Douwe Visser, Executive Secretary for Theology, Mission and Communion for WCRC and Gregory J. Fairbanks of the PCPCU work in support of the two chair persons.

The Reformed participants included Reinerio Arce-Valentín (Cuba); Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (India); Christopher Dorn (USA); George Hunsinger (USA); George Sabra (Lebanon); and Lindsay Schlüter (Scotland). Benebo Fubara-Manuel (Nigeria) was unable to attend.

The Catholics were represented by Peter Casarella (USA), Peter De Mey (Belgium), William Henn, OFM cap. (USA/Italy) and Jorge Scampini, O.P. (Argentina). Annemarie Mayer (Germany) was unable to attend.

Next year the two groups of theologians will convene in Scotland for their fourth session. The themes slated for discussion are “Justification: Holy Communion/Eucharist and Justice” and “Justification and Justice: Sanctification/Universal Call to Holiness”.



Kristine Greenaway shares Fair Trade chocolate from Switzerland with Hongtiong Lyim and Ljenljenman in Paiwan Presbytery, Taiwan

Farewell

By Kristine Greenaway

As Ljenljenman spoke, I knew I had found the story to sum up my time in Geneva as head of the Communications office for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). In September, I move to Toronto, Canada to take up my new position as the person responsible for the United Church of Canada's French Ministries Team.

During my visit to Paiwan Presbytery in April as a guest of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT), Ljenljenman told me about her work as Women's Secretary for the predominantly aboriginal presbytery that sits at the southern tip of Taiwan.

Ljenljenman, who is a member of the Paiwan people, told me that women in the presbytery were preparing to celebrate Women's World Day of Prayer in April with a service focused on the concerns of immigrants to France. The funds gathered at the service would go to support a Taiwanese woman missionary in Ethiopia who is involved in a Bible translation project in the country. I was awed by the vision of Paiwanese women praying for people who are seeking a new life in a European country they have never seen. And I was impressed by how a direct connection to a missionary, such as the woman serving in Ethiopia, can generate support for a mission project.

In a few brief minutes, I had heard a story that described the benefits of creating communication links among WCRC member churches so that they can identify common concerns and programme opportunities via the web, print, email and social media. There was no better story to convey what has made my years with

WCRC so vital and why I care so passionately about the role of communication in global ecumenism.

When I conclude my 4.5 years working at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and return to Canada, my "baggage" will include stories of how global migration, culture and faith can form bonds that cut across church and political boundaries. I hope that in some ways these and other stories I have shared since 2009 may have touched your lives and enriched your understanding of why we struggle to keep the global Reformed ecumenical movement alive.

As I send my final edition of *Reformed Communiqué* to press, I want to thank those who have contributed their skills and dedication to the production of this quarterly publication. The newsletter is produced in French and English and published in both a print and electronic edition. Selected articles are translated to Spanish for publication in *La Voz*, the magazine of WCRC's Latin American region, AIPRAL. Articles in German are posted to the website of the Reformierter Bund.

This would not be possible without Stéphane Gally, the layout artist and designer loaned to us by the Lutheran World Federation, Hartmut Lucke, our dedicated volunteer German translator, Roland Revet, our gifted French translator, and the contributions of WCRC colleagues, including interns, who serve as writers, proof readers and administrative assistants. I will miss working on this creative enterprise, but the stories will continue to flow through the Communion and into the wider world.



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

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

“Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.” (1 Peter 3: 10 – 12)

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches joins churches praying “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” in different parts of the world. This is the theme under which the World Council of Churches is gathering in Busan, Korea for its 10th General Assembly in October-November 2013. The WCRC and its member churches (many of which are also member churches of the WCC) are praying along these lines in these months.

In this prayer, we acknowledge that God is God of life in whom we can trust especially when millions of people in this world are faced with realities of suffering, turmoil, conflict, destruction and death. In the face of these realities, we cry, and yearn for fullness of life characterised by justice and peace. This prayer therefore expresses our cries – trusting fully that because God is God of life we can indeed be led to the justice and peace we need and seek.

In this reflection, I would like to draw attention to two small words which at first sight may seem insignificant in the entire theme: the words “lead us”. The prayer is not simply asking God to give justice and peace or to make justice and peace possible. It is asking for those offering the prayer to be God’s agents – to be led to the justice and peace. Sometimes, I wonder whether those who pray this prayer are aware that they are praying “dangerously” – expressing their readiness to be sacrifice themselves to be used by God in the quest for justice and peace. Therefore the question is whether or not we are willing and ready to be God’s instruments for justice and peace.

The good news is that God is God of life and God has the power to lead to justice and peace. The challenge for us who pray this prayer is to consciously place ourselves in God’s hands and be willing to be used by God to set the example as well as set the pace for God’s justice and peace to be reality in this world.

If we truly ask the question what does the Lord require of us, then commitment to justice is essential. So as we yearn in prayer for the God of life to lead us to justice and peace, we are indeed doing what we are called to do. We are even more faithful to God when as we pray, we also say to God that we are ready to be agents of peace and justice. God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

*Praying for Justice
and Peace*

Prayers online

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

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

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**World
Communion
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Churches**

Called to
communion,
committed to
justice