



## WCRC recommits to the Accra Confession

**A** global consultation marking the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession recommended that the World Communion of Reformed Churches, its member churches and ecumenical partners should work to address economic and environmental injustices “in a more integrated manner that analyzes and responds to these unjust social, political and economic realities.”

The consultation, held in Hannover, Germany, 3-5 November, was the culmination of a months-long series of meetings re-engaging the membership of the WCRC with the Accra Confession.

The Accra Confession, a prophetic statement on economic and environmental justice, was created in 2004 by the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). The WARC has since become a part

of the WCRC, and the Confession was re-affirmed at the 2010 Uniting General Council.

“The Accra Confession is saying that the world today is not how God intended it to be,” said Chris Ferguson, general secretary of the WCRC.

“If anything, the Accra Confession is more needed now than it was 10 years ago,” said Jerry Pillay, president of the WCRC. “We need to reclaim the vision of the Accra Confession and ask ourselves what we are doing to address issues of economic injustice and environmental injustice.”

The global consultation brought together representatives from the WCRC’s regions that had held their own consultations (see following articles), as well as other church leaders. All shared both stories of the impact of the Accra Confession and suggestions for better utilizing it in the future.

“The Accra Confession shows our responsibilities as being partners with God in this world we are in,” said Yueh-Wen Lu, a vice-president of the WCRC.

“We still believe that another world is possible,” said Dario Barolin, presenting the perspective of Latin America. “Because at its centre is Jesus Christ, we believe the Accra Confession is calling us to a radical love.”

“All over the world people are rising up against this scandalous world, and they are giving their lives in seeking to challenge and change it,” said Allan Boesak. “They are working for a world where dignity and justice will become a reality.”

The regions reported that while the Accra Confession’s priorities continue to resonate with members, the

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confession itself had only been used sporadically over the last decade. Thus while the confession's calls for economic and environmental justice are being both embraced and lived out by many churches, it is often without realizing the source.

"Do we want them to quote the Accra Confession or do we want them living out the Accra Confession?" asked Roberto Jordan.

And while many churches have been inspired by the confession, "at the same time, certain concepts within the confession challenged member churches, particularly language around empire and neo-liberalism, confession and communion," stated the consultation's report.

It was also noted that the world has changed in the last decade: "Neo-liberal economics, race and patriarchy have entangled in legion manner. Economic inequality has increased exponentially and the obstinate persistence of racism and racial tensions escalate."

The WCRC is thus "called to respond in new ways to the signs of the times in this new day...called

The Accra Confession is reprinted in the centre four pages of this issue of the Communiqué. The report of the global consultation, as well as the regional consultations, can be found online at [wrc.ch/accra](http://wrc.ch/accra).

to faith in God, faithfulness to the Word of God and action according to the principles laid out in the Accra Confession. We recognize that the present social and economic crisis and the state of endless war constitute a crisis of faith and therefore needs a response of faith to witness to the God of Life."

"A confessing church deals with the question of how to be present in the world," said Boesak. "How do we confess Jesus as Lord when the sanctuary is moved to the streets?"

"This process was not only to celebrate and re-engage churches in the Accra Confession," said Dora Arce-Valentin, the WCRC's executive secretary for justice. "But it was to check ourselves and our commitment to justice."

"You cannot have a true communion without justice, because a communion can only be true when it is just," said Pillay.

To these ends, the consultation's report recommends a series of commitments be adopted by the WCRC's executive committee:

- We commit ourselves to openness to the challenges of the Accra Confession itself as new crises arise and call for new understandings of our own prophetic faithfulness.
- We commit ourselves to liberation and resistance against all forms of domination.
- We commit to work together with partners and social movements

with whom we walk this journey of justice.

- We commit to deep listening to voices on the margins and those we have silenced, as well as to the voice of the Spirit as she speaks to us through other religious communities.

A number of "action areas" are also recommended to give impetus to the principles of the Accra Confession: critical reading of scripture and creative resources for congrega-



tions to witness to the God of Life, caste, climate change, gender and sexuality, human trafficking, immigration and migration, the New International Financial and Economic Architecture, racism and the theology of enough.

Each of the regional councils present also committed to specific work that will bolster the Accra Confession's calls against injustice.





# Accra Confession consultation re-energizes region

**T**he African consultation on the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession not only renewed strong interest in the confession, it re-energized the activities of the Communion in Africa.

Organized in partnership by the WCRC and the African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC), the consultation brought together more than two dozen participants from across the continent. Also in attendance were Dora Arce-Valentin, the WCRC executive secretary for justice, and Chis Ferguson, the WCRC general secretary.

Consultation participants used a variety of means to approach the Accra Confession: Bible studies, critical theological analysis and reflections on the ecological, economic, socio-political and religious context on the continent of Africa.

The consultation then grappled with the need to move out of the “mission-station” mind-set, identifying



some of the theological principles and activities in the interim to advance its work of the Accra Confession.

“The Accra Confession brings out the injustices at all levels in human society,” said Lydia Adajawah, ACRC president. “A true introspection enables all to note the negative roles we play as individuals and/or member churches in perpetuating these evil acts.”

Participants also noted that it was not only important to gather together regularly, but essential to work as a Communion in the future. “Working together is the only way we can understand each other from the various contexts,” said Adajawah. It also enables the best use of the human, material, financial and other resources available.

The consultation crafted a statement which was brought to the global consultation (see previous article). The consultation was held 26-28 September, 2014, at the Desmond Tutu Centre of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi, Kenya.



# Northeast Asians raise voices against economic injustices

The local impact of the global economic system was keenly felt by participants in the Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC) consultation on the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession.

In the shadow of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, the Huakuang neighbourhood of Taipei, Taiwan, was a thriving, historic community with generations of families affordably living along its tree-lined streets. Originally on the outskirts of town, the city grew around it over the decades—and the land became increasingly valuable.

Unfortunately for the residents the land they had long lived on was owned by the government. The residents were considered illegal occupants, despite buying their homes, being officially registered at those addresses and paying taxes on them.

In 2007 the government came up with a scheme to turn the area into



Taipei's "Wall Street." After several years of litigation the residents were forcibly evicted, with many also fined millions of Taiwanese dollars for their "illegal occupation," and the neighbourhood was levelled.

The "Wall Street" scheme was abandoned in the wake of the financial crisis, replaced by one to create a new tourist attraction. That hasn't happened either, and today the land sits vacant, the homes demolished, hun-



dreds of trees uprooted and more than 700 families forced to live elsewhere.

Only Mr. Lee remains, squatting on a corner near where his home used to be. Nearly 90 years old, Mr. Lee has lived in the Huakuang neighbourhood for almost 60 years and now subsists on a meagre US\$100 a month in government assistance, plus whatever he can earn from scrounging recyclables.

"Can you imagine losing your home, your neighbours, your memories, your community—and then being fined on top of that? It's hard for anyone to comprehend," said Wei-Hui (Judy) Cheng, a former Huakuang resident who continues to work for justice on this issue.

The consultation participants agreed that remaining silent on this—and other economic and ecological injustices—was not an option. They found that "the Accra Confession is still very relevant and perhaps all the more so ten years later and specifically in our region as we can easily think of problematic examples in our countries which are related to the issues of economic injustice and ecological destruction."

A statement issued by the NEAAC consultation laments that the Accra Confession is not well known among member churches in the region, despite its continuing

relevance. Among other conclusions, the statement includes the following:

"We noticed that although each country faces different issues with inclinations and nuances, many of the issues are not just isolated local events, but are interwoven as a region because of the nature of a globalized world.

"While a globalized economy has brought its conveniences and advantages, it also clearly destabilized our regional economy and marginalized and alienated many people who are under the influence of this global system.

"And because of its global nature it also makes every one of us complicit and entangled in the system. We need to raise awareness of and dig deeper into the workings of such global forces of oppression and exploitation, and we also desperately need to try and find ways to respond to it."

The consultation's statement was presented with other regional conclusions at the global Accra Confession consultation (see initial article in this issue).

Consultation participants came from Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The consultation was held September 9-11, 2014, in Taipei and was graciously hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

# From fences to solidarity: the church's response to refugees

**W**hy is Europe putting up high fences?" was a key question at WCRC Europe's conference on asylum and migration, held in October in Hannover, Germany. "This is a critical problem facing the region," said Sabine Dressler of the Reformed Alliance. How should the church respond?

The high fences were discussed both in terms of physical fences and metaphorical fences that are created by governmental policies and cultural indifference.

Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, opened the conference saying, "God didn't create borders—we did." Both literal borders and borders of comfort are standing in the way of what Christ has called us to do. As Christ broke down barriers between people, inviting all to the feast, so should the church.

The "problem" is caused by colonization and globalization, as Paolo Naso, national coordinator for "Being Church Together" in Italy, remarked. "The problem of migration and asylum: fences! People get hurt trying to simply cross the border."

Naso also made sure to note the difference between migrant and refugee. He said, "There is a difference between a migrant and refugee: A migrant has a clear goal or idea. The refugee only knows that she or he has to run away."

The hope of a better life is stripped away as the walls are erected to provide "safety" and "security," but only for those who are allowed inside. As Samuel Amedro from the Eglise Evangelique of Morocco stated, "From the dream of Europe to the reality of fences, the border is closed."

Amedro and Najla Abousawan-Kassab, from the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, were able to provide a non-European

perspective on the issue. Kassab said there is no time for dialogue because churches are being attacked by ISIS, and people are being killed and simply trying to survive.

Kassab said, "It's easy to send money; the most difficult is to be with people in their pain." But that is what the church is called to do: to be with people. How is this to be done if the border is closed?

For those who are seeking to escape war and terror in their homelands, they come to Europe hoping for a better life, but that is simply not the reality they find.

"We need to be prophetic now," Amedro said. The church is called to help the least of these, to help those who need it most. As Luke 4:18 says: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Alfredo Abad, the general secretary of the Iglesia Evangelica Espanola in Spain raised the issue that perhaps it is time for individuals to get out of their comfort zones and into solidarity. Christianity is messy, it causes people to get out of their comfort zones and into the messiness of it all.

There is enough for everybody, but individualism drives people to not want to share, stated Kassab as she reminded all of the parable of the banquet (Luke 14:15-24). "Sometimes we forget it's a banquet, it's about what we are called to do," she said.

Naso reminded attendees that as Christians, the church has a commitment to these people because they are God's people. As servants to Christ, individuals have to be the servants, going out into the streets bringing in people to feast in the

kingdom of God. Yet work still needs to be done.

For example, Dora Kaniszai-Nagy from the Refugee Mission, Reformed Church in Hungary, reported that integration is still a process that needs work. After an asylum seeker gets recognition, s/he can only stay two months in official temporary housing. After two months, they are expected to have learned Hungarian (but there are no teachers, so must learn on their own), move out of the temporary housing, obtain housing on their own and understand daily life in Hungary.

She said that here needs to be a family support system to help, and while this has begun there are not enough teachers, staff members, funding, etc. So not too much has changed, and without government support or help, things will stay as they are.

All presenters agreed that the time is now to make change; however, there is much opposition from governmental policies and a lack of will to change these policies. In the midst of Christian hospitality, in the midst of churches trying to aid migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, there are still structures that are standing against those in need.

Kassab asked, "How committed are we? Until the very end. Until all persons have their dignity." While the church is struggling against the needs and political regimes, quotas and figures that decide who can stay and who must leave, people must stay committed, for as Christians people are not just to hope and pray, but must act, because Christ did for the least of these.

"She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy" (Proverbs 31:20). May the communities find ways of welcoming the stranger, and continue in dialogue together in hopes of a better future of welcoming.

# Anti-human trafficking campaign readied for Lent

*“We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.” – Accra Confession*

At the communion table, all around the world, Christians celebrate Christ’s willing sacrifice, the offering of his body: “Broken for you.” We receive the giving of his body and life with wonder, moved at his self-giving, courage and dignity. He gave himself freely that we might be free.

Yet there are many who are not free, who do not give their bodies freely. Many of these downtrodden, poor and exploited are caught up in systems that traffic individuals as products.

Human trafficking is an intentional trade; the bodies of women, men and children are used as commodities to satisfy the demand for labour and sex other people are not willing to meet. It is a part of a wide-ranging economic system that commodifies people and assigns unequal values to people based on their gender, race, status and sexuality. The root causes lie in economic systems that generate and perpetuate poverty and recognise no intrinsic value to human beings.

Human trafficking is everywhere. Wherever we are in the world we are at one point along the trafficking routes, either by way of supply or demand. These routes

cross the globe, internationally and inter-regionally, as well as within countries.

A decade ago the Accra Confession exposed these exploitative forces that shape the world economy and called us as a Communion to resist and transform these threats to life. The WCRC’s Human Trafficking Project is providing an opportunity to put the call of the Accra Confession into practice.

An anti-human trafficking campaign—“Broken for You”—is being readied for use during this coming Lent. The campaign will alert all to the self-giving, courage and dignity of women, men and children, all around us, whose bodies are daily broken in physical labour or sexual exploitation for the sake of their families.

The price of their bodies and labour is cheap, often to provide lower cost commodities for trade. Their life conditions offer them little other choice, but in being made such objects of trade, their fundamental humanness is denied. The Christ-like suffering and courage of these men, women and children calls for solidarity, liberation and healing, not least because many of them are broken for us.

The “Broken for You” campaign will not only raise the awareness of the evils of human trafficking but also seeks to engender a spirituality that honours the lives and dignity of all people. Watch for the release of this resource in January on the WCRC website, [wrc.ch/broken](http://wrc.ch/broken).

More information can be obtained from Dora Arce-Valentin, the executive secretary for justice: [dav@wrc.eu](mailto:dav@wrc.eu)



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# Accra Confession

## Introduction

1. In response to the urgent call of the Southern African constituency which met in Kitwe in 1995 and in recognition of the increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction, the 23rd General Council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of “recognition, education, and confession “...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free”, as they heard the cries of brothers and sisters around the world and witnessed God’s gift of creation under threat.
  2. Since then, nine member churches have committed themselves to a faith stance; some are in the process of covenanting; and others have studied the issues and come to a recognition of the depth of the crisis. Further, in partnership with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and regional ecumenical organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in consultations in all regions of the world, from Seoul/Bangkok (1999) to Stony Point (2004). Additional consultations took place with churches from the South in Buenos Aires (2003) and with churches from South and North in London Colney (2004).
  3. Gathered in Accra, Ghana, for the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we visited the slave dungeons of Elmina and Cape Coast where millions of Africans were commodified, sold and subjected to the horrors of repression and death. The cries of “never again” are put to the lie by the ongoing realities of human trafficking and the oppression of the global economic system.
  4. Today we come to take a decision of faith commitment.
- threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death.
7. We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all. The annual income of the richest 1 per cent is equal to that of the poorest 57 per cent, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite paying back their original borrowing many times over. Resource-driven wars claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The HIV and AIDS global pandemic afflicts life in all parts of the world, affecting the poorest where generic drugs are not available. The majority of those in poverty are women and children and the number of people living in absolute poverty on less than one US dollar per day continues to increase.
  8. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. In 1989, one species disappeared each day and by 2000 it was one every hour. Climate change, the depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion, and threats to fresh water are among the devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and storms increase. High levels of radioactivity threaten health and ecology. Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain.
  9. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:
    - unrestrained competition, consumerism and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world;
    - the ownership of private property has no social obligation;
    - capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;

## Reading the signs of the times

5. We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8:22) We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.
6. The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive

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- social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people, are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.
10. This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry.
  11. We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term “empire” we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.
  12. In classical liberal economics, the state exists to protect private property and contracts in the competitive market. Through the struggles of the labour movement, states began to regulate markets and provide for the welfare of people. Since the 1980s, through the transnationalization of capital, neoliberalism has set out to dismantle the welfare functions of the state. Under neoliberalism the purpose of the economy is to increase profits and return for the owners of production and financial capital, while excluding the majority of the people and treating nature as a commodity.
  13. As markets have become global so have the political and legal institutions which protect them. The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.
  14. We see the dramatic convergence of the economic crisis with the integration of economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology. This is a global system that defends and protects the

interests of the powerful. It affects and captivates us all. Further, in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16.13).

## **Confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction**

15. Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God. We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debercen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.
16. Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another.
17. We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn 10.10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.
18. We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Ps 24.1).
19. Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by



- excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.
20. We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9.8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the "least of these" (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18ff).
  21. Therefore we reject the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system or any other system which claims there is no alternative.
  22. We believe that any economy of the household of life given to us by God's covenant to sustain life is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.
  23. Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation.
  24. We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Ps 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.
  25. Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel. We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God's way (Mic 6.8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment, "so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5.24).
  26. Therefore we reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations – gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.
  27. We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (Jn 10.10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Lk 4.18); he supports and protects the down-trodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.
  28. Therefore we reject any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation, in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to "steal, kill and destroy" (Jn 10.10) rather than following the "Good Shepherd" who has come for life for all (Jn 10.11).
  29. We believe that God calls men, women and children from every place together, rich and poor, to uphold the unity of the church and its mission so that the reconciliation to which Christ calls can become visible.
  30. Therefore we reject any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity.
  31. We believe that we are called in the Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ and believe that justice shall prevail and peace shall reign.
  32. We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God.

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33. We humbly confess this hope, knowing that we, too, stand under the judgement of God's justice.
- We acknowledge the complicity and guilt of those who consciously or unconsciously benefit from the current neoliberal economic global system;
  - we recognize that this includes both churches and members of our own Reformed family and therefore we call for confession of sin.
  - We acknowledge that we have become captivated by the culture of consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the current economic system. This has all too often permeated our very spirituality.
  - We confess our sin in misusing creation and failing to play our role as stewards and companions of nature.
  - We confess our sin that our disunity within the Reformed family has impaired our ability to serve God's mission in fullness.
34. We believe in obedience to Jesus Christ, that the church is called to confess, witness and act, even though the authorities and human law might forbid them, and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Acts 4.18ff). Jesus is Lord.
35. We join in praise to God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, who has "brought down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Lk 1.52f).

## **Covenanting for Justice**

36. By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.
37. On this common journey, some churches have already expressed their commitment in a confession of faith. We urge them to continue to translate this

confession into concrete actions both regionally and locally. Other churches have already begun to engage in this process, including taking actions and we urge them to engage further, through education, confession and action. To those other churches, which are still in the process of recognition, we urge them on the basis of our mutual covenanting accountability, to deepen their education and move forward towards confession.

38. The General Council calls upon member churches, on the basis of this covenanting relationship, to undertake the difficult and prophetic task of interpreting this confession to their local congregations.
39. The General Council urges member churches to implement this confession by following up the Public Issues Committee's recommendations on economic justice and ecological issues (see Appendix 18).
40. The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.
41. Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut 30.19).

### **More online**

Additional resources for the Accra Confession, including the confession in different languages, can be found online at: [wrc.ch/accra](http://wrc.ch/accra)

*Partnership Fund*

## Ambassadors bring hope to HIV/AIDS sufferers

The Mbwirandumva Initiative, created by the Mbwirandumva Association (“Speak I am Listening”) in Rwanda, trains “ambassadors of hope” in trauma counselling for persons living with HIV or AIDS. It also works to develop income projects to help lift people out of poverty.

The association links closely with the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda and helps vulnerable and marginalized persons such as raped women, orphans, genocide survivors, people with disabilities and students who



have dropped-out, as well as persons living with HIV or AIDS.

The Mbwirandumva Association saw a specific need to assist people living with HIV or AIDS, since many were facing emotional and psychological trauma, as well as living in poverty.

The Mbwirandumva Initiative realized that these individuals had no one to speak to about their trauma and sought ways to assist them. While the people of Mbwirandumva provide counselling, they also provide counselling training, so that when the persons return to their communities, they are able to assist others as well.

The project aims to provide nine-day training sessions to 120 volun-

teers who live with HIV or AIDS. After training the volunteers give regular counselling to people in their local communities.

According to those involved, this is an important initiative because “we trust that it will allow progressive capacity building of not only volunteer trauma counsellors who are the ‘ambassadors of hope’ for people living with HIV or AIDS but also those vulnerable women and girls” who are most in need of “social psychological advice and support” and income generating projects.

Income generation will be in the form of micro-project development and support, focused on productive activities done by artisans. This will expand to include skills training and

vocational education, such as tailoring, hairdressing, baking and post-card making.

“The beneficiaries involved after undergoing counselling have accepted the situation and have moved on with life,” stated a progress report. “They no longer mourn about their situation but rather they do all they can to have a sustainable and productive life.

“They will have a positive outlook to life, given the training and assistance they have received from Mbwirandumva Initiative and also help their neighbours, family and friends who are in similar positions.”

Applications to the partnership Fund may be made at any time. We especially welcome requests from churches that have not previously applied. Grants are limited to €25,000; grants for emergency aid to €7,500. Further information can be found at [wrc.ch/partnership-fund/](http://wrc.ch/partnership-fund/) or by emailing [partnership.fund@wrc.eu](mailto:partnership.fund@wrc.eu).

*TESF profile*

# Everlyne Nekesa Biboko



*Everlyne Nekesa Biboko*

*The Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women in the South (TESF) was established in 2001 as a means to increase the number of women in ordained ministry and to enable women from a wide network of Reformed churches in the south build their capacity for effective partnership in God's mission.*

*Below Everlyne Nekesa Biboko, a recipient of a scholarship, describes her situation and the impact the scholarship has had on her life.*

*More information on the scholarship, as well as application forms, can be found online here: <http://wrcr.ch/theological-education-scholarship-fund-for-women-in-the-south/>*

At the moment I am studying for a master's degree in theological studies at Eden Theological Seminary and began my second and final year this fall. I hope to advance my education to a Ph.D. level that will enhance my scholarship and teaching in seminaries and universities. I currently live in St. Louis, Missouri, and am originally from Kenya. I belong to the Reformed Church of East Africa in Kenya, Kitale Presbytery.

From 2001 to 2003 I studied for a diploma of theology at the Reformed Institute for Theological Training (Eldoret, Kenya) and before that for a bachelor of divinity degree at St. Paul's University (Limuru, Kenya). I became aware of the Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women while at St. Paul's University.

The scholarship helped me to acquire my bachelor of divinity degree from St. Paul's University and was it not for this fund, I would not be undertaking my master of theological studies.

Challenges facing my church and other churches in Kenya are the endless debate against women ordination and leadership. It is a challenge that has traditionally been implanted in the traditions and constitutions of many churches.

I would like to become a minister and a theological educator in either a seminary or Christian university to help influence ministers in formation to have positive support and involvement of women in ministry. The Reformed Church of East Africa does not ordain women, and I know education is a power that can help have positive change towards women's involvement in ministry.

Subordination of women in the community is an issue that needs to be dealt with, and I will work to empower women over their rights that have been taken away from them and encourage them to speak out the injustices against women. I will be in a position to encourage other women to see ministry as duty for all and encourage them to get involved.

It is important to be involved in my church as a woman because traditionally ministry has been a male oriented task, and women's involvement will help to break the barriers. I believe when we have many women theologians with higher levels of education this will influence the system and intellectual formation of ministers towards change.

I would like to tell girls and women who want to pursue theological education that ministry is for all—both men and women—and it is a noble calling to study theology and become a minister/educator who will be counted upon for the well being and development of the church and the world at large. I believe those called can accomplish these tasks and what they need to do is to believe in themselves, have a positive image and have a positive impact on others.

I would like to thank the WCRC for their continued support of women's theological education and request that you expand the fund to support many women and even to the Ph.D. level. I have confidence that education is power. Thanks for allowing me to be part of this programme.

*News from our member churches*

## Ecumenical ties strengthened through practical ministry

**U**nited by language and a desire to serve God through their local congregations, over 150 pastors, elders and deacons from six countries came together at the end of August for a motivational camp to strengthen their ministries.

Under the theme “Making Church the Sign of Hope: The Theories and Practices of Community Ministries” the participants gathered at a conference centre in Long-tan, Taoyuan county, Taiwan at the end of August.

“The focus on this is for local church leaders in an ecumenical



experience—personal networking and sharing of ideas,” said Rev. Nan-Hsin Tsai, this year’s camp coordinator.

The first part of the conference, lasting four days, brought church leaders together from Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan for a series of lectures, presentations and sharing.

This year the three lectures were: the Biblical Passages of Community Ministries, Reformed Views on Community Ministries and its Development Pattern, and Reflections on Community Ministries and Church Growth.

“All of the participants, including the lecturers and worship leaders, are

engaged in the real ministries on the frontlines for their churches. So this is a very practically-oriented event,” said Tsai, who is also programme secretary for pastoral formation and evangelism for the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. “It’s about the sharing of experiences. So it’s not just a presenter giving to the audience—they learn from each other.”

Two of the four afternoons were devoted to presentations from those gathered, sharing their own models or examples of community ministries. “Each church has its own mission context so it’s very important through the sharing that the participants are able to form certain concepts together about their own ministries,” said Tsai.

One such experience shared was the efforts of an indigenous church deep in the mountains of Taiwan. The town lacked a high school, so it was losing its next generation when they were teenagers, as they had to leave to continue their education. Most didn’t return, and the town was slowly dying.

The church spearheaded the creation of a co-operative, bringing together the local citizens to sell their garden vegetables and handcrafted traditional goods. The money generated from the co-op was used to pay for the local education of their children.

Now instead of slowly declining, the village is attracting more residents thanks to the energy created by the co-op. And the church has also transformed itself into a community centre, with dance and music programmes in the evenings—and through that spreads the Gospel.

Conference participants weren’t only told of such examples. They also saw them, visiting three to five churches during the last three days of the conference. The churches were



selected to show a variety of contexts, sizes, ministries and foci.

“I think this is a very special experience to have this opportunity from different churches to be able to share. It’s normally the denominational leaders, not the local leaders,” said Tsai. “So through this kind of event not only the local pastors from different countries are able to build up their own networking but even the general assembly level it’s easier to have from the bottom up.”

The initial motivation 12 years ago to hold these conferences was to train local pastors to understand Reformed theology and Reformed church ministry. “There was a need for solid Reformed theological training with church ministries,” said Tsai.

Today, however, the conference does much more. “Through this kind of motivation camp it goes beyond regular cooperation—it’s multi-lateral—they form cooperation in ministry,” said Tsai. One such example is the assistance given by the PCT to the GPM (Malaysia) in an outreach ministry to the indigenous people in Salawa (see the September Reformed Communiqué).

The next conference, in two years time, is to be hosted by the Hong Kong CCCC.

# WCRC opens new round of dialogue with Pentecostals



“Mission” was the theme of the first meeting in a new dialogue between Reformed and Pentecostal theologians held in Hungary at the end of November.

This first session also had an introductory character, with time taken to review previous meetings and reports, as well as to get to know participants better.

Once the theme was taken up, participants looked at how both Reformed and Pentecostals have defined “mission”—and how both have put mission into practice.

“Theologically we do not differ on the principles, but the way we live as churches is different,” said Douwe Visser, WCRC executive secretary for theology. “For we Reformed, Pentecostals challenge us to rethink our way of being church. For the Pentecostals, the challenge may be to develop a great variety of thinking and praxis into deeper theological reflection. Both challenges are fascinating.”

On the second day two main papers were presented, one from each perspective but on the same theme: “Ministering to the needs of the World, Mission as Evangelisation and Diaconate.” Dialogue for the remainder of the day sprang from the presentations.

Besides focusing on the dialogue theme, participants took advantage of their location to learn about the local

context by meeting with members of the Reformed Church in Hungary and Hungarian Pentecostals. They also took the opportunity to visit Budapest.

“Mission” will continue to be explored at the next round of this Reformed-Pentecostal dialogue and will be held in December 2015. Five meetings in this round of dialogue are planned.

Nine participants represented the WCRC while a half dozen came from the Pentecostal church. The WCRC’s co-chair is Karla Koll and its co-secretary is Douwe Visser, while Mel Robeck serves as the Pentecostals’ co-chair and co-secretary.

The meeting took place at the House of Reconciliation in Berekfurdo, Hungary, from 17-21 November. The House is owned by the Reformed Church in Hungary. “We are grateful for all work done on making us to feel really at home there,” said Visser.



*The 2017 General Council planning committee held its first meeting in mid-November. They discussed a wide variety of topics relating to the coming event and also visited Erfurt, Germany, to get a better sense of the host city, as well as look closely at the conference grounds.*

## Prayer requests

As a Communion we are called to support each other in solidarity, especially in challenging times. One of the ways we can do this is through prayer. We regularly receive requests for prayer from member churches and share them through letters and online. The most recent calls to prayer are listed on the homepage of the WCRC website, [wrc.ch](http://wrc.ch). Please join with others throughout our Communion to pray for and express solidarity with our sisters and brothers living in the following areas as they strive for peace, justice and reconciliation:

- Hong Kong, Madagascar, Mexico, Ukraine, United States

More details on each of these prayer requests can be found at [wrc.ch](http://wrc.ch).

# WCRC welcomed as agreement approved

It's not often that Calvin and Zwingli are quoted on the floor of the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag), let alone large sections of the Accra Confession.

But that was the case when legislators voted unanimously to approve an agreement between the WCRC and the German government.

The legislators also seized the opportunity to welcome the WCRC to Germany and to comment on a law that is so far unique as it grants an international ecumenical organization certain privileges concerning the status of its staff and its elected officers.

The special status granted by this new legislation was welcomed

by several speakers as an expression of religious freedom and plurality. The specifics of Reformed theology and the teachings of the Reformers John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli were described in some detail by a representative of the Green Party, known to be a human rights activist.

Most surprisingly the Accra Confession was quoted at length by a legislator. He highlighted the fact that the WCRC is committed to social and economic justice on biblical grounds.

In his speech before parliament Dr. Lars Castellucci, a professor of diversity management by profession and a church musician on Sundays, said that the Reformed family con-

siders the disastrous ecological and economic consequences of the present economic world order as issues directly related to its faith and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It can be said that during this time not only was the WCRC officially given a special legal status in Germany but that on its 10th anniversary the Accra Confession also made its official entry into the political arena by being acknowledged in a parliamentary debate of the Bundestag.

(Special thanks to reformiert-info.de for the initial article.)

## Visitors

We have been pleased to receive a number of visitors to the WCRC offices in Hannover, Germany, these past several months. Here are a few:



W.A. Dreyer, moderator of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika



Michal Blair, executive minister for the Church in Mission/L'Église en Mission unit of the United Church in Canada



Claudia Ostarek, officer for East Asia, Australia, the Pacific and North America for the Evangelical Church in Germany, and a minister of the Church in Lippe.



Victor W.C. Hsu, associate general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan



Andrew Ryskamp, executive director for World Renew, the development, disaster response, and justice arm of the Christian Reformed Church in North America



Larry Miller, secretary of the Global Christian Forum, an ecumenical partner of the WCRC



Chris Ferguson

## Troubled Hope

*“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.”*  
—2 Corinthians 4:7-9, NRSV

**G**reetings to all in this large and complex family of churches belonging to the WCRC. In my first few months I have made a special effort to visit and be present in the rich variety of churches in our Communion. Under the banner of “Reformed” we include in our Communion over 230 members: Presbyterians, Reformed, United and Uniting (and they in their wide diversity), Waldensians and others. In my visits I have been able to see across the regions the dynamic interaction between the two interlocking parts of our WCRC identity and mission: Communion and Justice. Everywhere the WCRC churches are caught up in the realities of striving and struggling for unity and deeper community while being deeply immersed in the brokenness of the world.

I am writing this note in Advent and in Hannover, Germany, which means that right under my office window the explosive bustle, lights, sounds and aromas of the Christmas market are being unleashed. The symbolism of anticipation and festive expectation is just bristling, powered as it is by commercialism and affluence, as well as by the vague but insistent human longing for relationships and a better future. Alongside and in spite of that fact we all know that we live in very troubled times.

My first official visits to our member churches have left me astounded by both the enormity of the challenges faced by the churches of our communion and by the irrepressible resilience and faithfulness of those who live in the toughest situations.

The churches in the Middle East face spiraling violence, caught on all sides by conflicting powers and interests and the threat to their very existence. The social, political, disease, ecological and economic crises in the various African contexts are scandalous. Violence against women in all its forms and class and caste discrimination in India. The religiously justified violence in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The enormity of the sin and horror of human trafficking. The forced migration due to climate change and economic exploitation. Churches in the U.S. struggling with their prophetic role in the midst of immigration justice issues, mass incarceration and the ongoing realities of racial injustice. The churches in Europe seeking to address issues of migration justice, asylum seekers and economic justice.

The mission and integrity of the churches all over the world is being further shaken by issues that perplex and trouble us within our own Reformed-plus-plus family: questions of women’s ordination and issues of inclusion and human sexuality divide us, even as we struggle to say that nothing—*not anything*—can separate us from the love of Christ.

We are fully and utterly immersed in the most difficult realities affecting God’s creation. Both the conflicts and challenges to be a true communion and feel that in the midst of all this suffering not one of our churches should feel isolated and alone. Not ever. That goal is far from us, but we need to take on that call and challenge, so that we embrace as well God’s gift of communion. And we are immersed in the sufferings of the systemic and pervasive injustices that threaten God’s creation. The over 80 million members of our family are almost always among those in the midst of the injustices, and the rest of us are either responding in solidarity and service or are citizens of the powerful nations that are part of the systemic problems.

My visits confirmed the obvious truth of the enormity of the challenges and the threats to life—and they also confirmed that in the midst of these troubled times our sisters and brothers in the toughest situations are “perplexed, but not driven to despair... troubled, yes, but not destroyed.” This Advent and Christmas season requires us as a Communion to acknowledge and embrace the fact that we know trouble, and that we also see the stirring of hope, as a gift from God. Not cheap grace or easy optimism but that other, tougher God-given stuff of “Troubled Hope.” The hope that only comes from embracing the truth and enormity of the sin and brokenness, forming true communion with the most afflicted and committing ourselves in response to God’s call to do justice so that the world be transformed.

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