



Chris Ferguson and Setri Nyomi at the installation service for the incoming general secretary.

Ferguson elected general secretary

Chris Ferguson has been elected as the next general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Ferguson was elected by the WCRC executive committee after an extensive search process.

“The WCRC is at the edge of a new moment of renewal and transformation. It is exciting and uplifting to be called to be part of this renewed commitment to communion and justice,” said Ferguson.

“I’m convinced Chris Ferguson will be an outstanding general secretary,” said Clifton Kirkpatrick, convener of the search committee. “I look forward to great things for the WCRC under his leadership.”

“It is critical that in this new location we have somebody who has solid ecumenical networking to sustain the visibility and work of the WCRC. Chris has this, as well as ecumenical experience on all levels, from the local to the global,” said Jerry Pillay, president of the WCRC.

Ferguson was born in Canada, was ordained to the ministry in the United Church of Canada and has served

in ministry in Canada, the Middle East, various parts of Latin America and at the United Nations.

“I’m very delighted that Chris has been elected,” said Setri Nyomi, current general secretary. “I think he will bring gifts to move this organization forward as a communion committed to justice. I’ve known Chris for many years and believe he is the right person for this position in this time and place.”

Nyomi has served the maximum of two terms (14 years) as the general secretary of both the WCRC and its predecessor organization, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. He will remain in office through the end of August.

Ferguson and his wife Susan will relocate from Bogota, Colombia, to Hannover this summer. He will begin his duties on 1 August, providing for a month’s transition time with Nyomi.

Ferguson was installed as the incoming general secretary at a worship service on Sunday, 18 May, at the Reformed Church in Hannover.

From transition to transformation

We have moved, says WCRC president. Now we need to change.

At the end of 2013, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) transferred its international office from Switzerland to Germany.

“I am personally impressed with the smooth move and relocation,” President Jerry Pillay said in his address to the WCRC executive committee. He urged the committee not to continue business as usual after the move but to look “at the life, work and witness of the WCRC through new lenses. How can we help transform a world of sin, suffering and struggle?”

The WCRC is the most diverse of the world Christian confessional families, bringing together in one communion Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches. “It is a joy and a privilege to have such a wide connection and fellowship,” Pillay said, but diversity also brings its challenges.

Straddling six continents “reveals to us the vast discrepancies and inequalities that prevail in our world” that we must confront as we build our fellowship.

Theological diversity and ethical disagreements also put communion under strain. “We are witnessing splits in denominations, severance of long-standing denomina-



WCRC President Jerry Pillay also preached at the last remaining Huguenot church in northern Germany on Sunday, 11 May.

tional partnerships, and a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach justifying separation and disunity,” Pillay said. The WCRC should take more seriously its role as “a platform and a facility” to help its member churches embrace diversity and difference.

Communion needs to be built from the bottom up “if it is to be meaningful and true,” Pillay stressed. The WCRC needs to revisit its plan to empower the regions and make it work more effectively. “We need to encourage a ‘culture of sharing’ resources, people and experiences. We need to facilitate opportunities for people to share their stories and life experiences across the globe.” We need to empower our member churches at the ground level “so that they are actively involved in ministry together, as

a visible Christian witness to our unity.”

This was the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession, Pillay reminded the committee – “perhaps the WCRC’s clearest statement on justice in the world.” A decade on, we need to assess what we have done to implement the confession. “We are an organization in transition and in need of transformation as we seek to transform the world to reflect the glory of God,” he concluded.

Setri Nyomi thanked for service

The evening of Saturday, 17 May, saw members of the executive committee, friends, colleagues and family gather to celebrate the tenure of Setri Nyomi as general secretary of the WCRC. His term will conclude this summer, and the tributes flowed freely throughout the evening. Highlights included a special edition of *Reformed World* devoted to Nyomi, a photographic reflection (both on the screen and in printed form) and best wishes from around the world.

In closing remarks, Nyomi said, “It’s been a journey” but one not taken alone, as he was accompanied by God and many circles of people, including family, member churches, leaders, colleagues and ecumenical partners.



(Photos: WCRC/Koopmans, Tanis)

Germany selected for next general council



The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is returning to the birthplace of the 16th-century Reformation to demonstrate that this happening now belongs to Christians around the world.

At its meeting in May the WCRC executive committee decided to hold the 26th general council in Erfurt, Germany, in 2017. The WCRC meets in general council every seven years.

This marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Wittenberg, along with other historic Reformation sites, will play an important part in the general council, although most business meetings will take place in Erfurt.

"Holding the council here reminds us that Germany is only one small province in the huge worldwide map of Christian churches," said Peter Bukowski, president of the Reformed Alliance, one of the four German member churches that will host the meeting. "It is so important to widen the perspective of this jubilee."

One goal of the 26th general council is to invite other Christian traditions to join the anniversary in Germany and then take the celebration around the world.

"Our choice of Germany in 2017 says that the Reformation belongs to the whole world but also aims to provide new ways of understanding how churches are called to work together," said Jerry Pillay, president of the WCRC. "We are looking forward to an amazing celebration that will draw people from every continent."

The executive committee also decided on a theme for the general council: "Living God, renew and transform us."

"The 1517 Reformation was about the renewal of the church," said Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the WCRC. "This council will gather our churches worldwide to reflect on how the church is renewed today and on our calling to be God's agents for transformation and justice."

Germany was chosen after an invitation to all WCRC member churches to submit proposals to host the event. Besides the four German

Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Sander

churches, a member church from the global south also expressed interest.

Erfurt was selected after careful analysis and discussion. Several reasons were given, including Erfurt's connection to Luther: He was a student and an Augustinian monk there in the early 1500s.

Erfurt is the headquarters of the Evangelical Church of Central Germany, a church from the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK), with which the WCRC has been working to strengthen its relationship.

The executive committee also appointed a council planning committee, with Lisa Vander Wal, of the Reformed Church in America, as its convener.

The general council is the main governing body of the WCRC. The executive committee, elected at a general council, acts as the WCRC's governing board between councils, meeting annually.



WCRC supports release of Nigerian schoolgirls

The executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches formally adopted a statement joining its voice to all those calling for the release and return of the kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria.

Earlier in the week the executive committee joined the #bringbackourgirls movement through social media and offered prayers for them throughout the week.

Here is the statement in full:

We are meeting here at a time when the world has been agonizing over the plight of the kidnapped Nigerian schoolgirls. We join the strong global voice to say: “Bring back our girls.

We are shocked and saddened that young people, especially girls, cannot be given the opportunity freely to further their education. We hope and pray that this injustice will be rectified, not only here but globally.

We believe that the action against these Nigerian girls is reprehensible and repugnant for people of all religions – Christians and Muslims and other people of faith who know the peace for which our religions call.

We, the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, support the efforts that are being made to find and free these girls and reunite them with their families.

We have prayed for these girls in our meeting and we shall continue to pray.

Nominations invited for prize promoting women in church leadership

The WCRC is calling for nominations for a prize encouraging women to become leaders in their church.

The Sylvia Michel Prize is awarded once every two years to a woman in the Reformed church movement who provides exceptional leadership in promoting opportunities for women to serve as leaders in their church and community.

A prize of US\$5000 is awarded to an organization or individual work-

ing to encourage women to assume leadership positions in their church or investigating unequal opportunities for men and women to become leaders in WCRC member churches around the world.

The award is named for Europe’s first female church executive president. In 1980, Sylvia Michel became the first woman to be elected as the church council president of the Cantonal Church of Aargau, Switzerland.

A jury consisting of the women presidents of Reformed churches in Switzerland and the WCRC executive secretary for justice and partnership select the winner.

Applications should be submitted prior to 31 August 2014. The entry form and eligibility criteria are available at wrc.ch/sylvia-michel-prize/





Call of Accra Confession more important than ever

A consultation on the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession concluded that “in the ten years since the Accra Confession was adopted, nothing much has changed.”

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

The consultation’s open letter presented to Caribbean and North American church leaders also stated that “many of the economic, ecological, social and political realities have deteriorated and become deeply entrenched” and called for a renewed “spiritual engagement against evil” in the world.

“The Accra Confession was developed not as an ideological piece to present a particular social ideology,” said Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the WCRC in comments at the consultation. “It was born out of the anguish of the hearts of people of faith reading the signs of our times and reading the Word of God—and concluding we can do no other.”

“It places demands on us,” said Nyomi. “It is humbling—and we too, churches and church structures, individuals and groups in churches, need to acknowledge that we stand in judgement under the claims of faith inherent in this confession. If we are not living out the implications of the Accra Confession we are still part of the problem.”

Leander Warren agreed: “The church needs to be an example of looking into ourselves and see where we have failed and where we may have actually facilitated the evils that we see.”

“The matters the Accra addressed as injustices 10 years ago are still cries we hear even louder and more painfully than before,” said Dora Arce-Valentín, WCRC executive secretary for justice and partnership. “The Accra Confession should be part of what frames our mission as churches because it is a biblically rooted, powerful and prophetic document.”

The consultation on the Accra Confession was held immediately before the joint meeting of the WCRC’s Caribbean and North American Area Council and the Council for World Mission’s Caribbean and North America Council for Mission. Both sets of meetings were held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, from 20-29 March 2014, and were hosted by the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

Lisa Vander Wal, a member of the consultation’s writing team, presented the open letter to the joint meeting. She then challenged the participants to engage the letter and confession, asking them what they heard, how their own context intersects, and what concrete steps could be taken.

The consultation itself proposed “three areas of partnership toward justice that can bring action to the tenets we confess in the Accra Confession”: human trafficking; poverty, inequality and unemployment; and seeds for life (agricultural reform).

For the full letter, please visit the WCRC website: wrcr.ch

This was the first of several regional consultations on the Accra Consultation. The consultations are organized by the Justice and Partnership Programme Office of the WCRC in dialogue with the regional councils. For more information, please contact Dora Arce-Valentín: dav@wrcr.eu.

Reformed-Catholic dialogue focuses on justice

Theologians from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) met together 6-12 April at Coatbridge, Scotland, for their fourth session in the fourth phase of the International Reformed-Catholic Dialogue.

The theme designated for this current phase of the dialogue, which is slated to conclude in 2017, is “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice.”

The two teams discussed several papers on topics related to the theme of justice. Marina Behara presented a paper titled “Sanctification: The middle term between justification and justice.” Jorge Scampini presented a paper on “The relationship between the Eucharist and justice from a Catholic perspective.” George Hunsinger addressed the topic “The Eucharist and social ethics.” Peter De Mey offered a paper on “Justification and the universal call to holiness.”

The two teams were also privileged to receive members of the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, which has promoted ecumenical conversation since 1977. The members of the Joint Commission shared with them results from more recent rounds of talks, including a study document on the ecclesiological significance of the sacrament of baptism and a publication containing papers given at two theological conferences: the first in Glasgow (2009) to commemorate the quincentenary of John Cal-

vin’s birth and the second in Edinburgh (2010) to mark the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation.

Martha Moore-Keish, of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia (USA), and Kevin Rhoades, bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana (USA), co-chair this phase of the dialogue on behalf of WCRC and the PCPCU, respectively. The secretaries for the co-chairs are Douwe Visser, executive secretary for theology of the WCRC, and Gregory J. Fairbanks, secretary of the PCPCU.

Members of the Reformed team are Reinerio Arce-Valentin (Cuba), Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (Switzerland), Christopher Dorn (USA), George Hunsinger (USA), George Sabra (Lebanon), Lindsay Schluter (Scotland) and Benebo Fubara-Manuel (Nigeria).

Members of the Catholic team are Peter Casarella (USA); Peter De Mey (Belgium); William Henn, O.F.M. Cap. (Italy); Jorge Scampini, O.P. (Argentina) and Dr. Annemarie Mayer (Belgium).

The event was sponsored by the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the Church of Scotland. The Conforti Institute, an educational initiative of the Xaverian Missionaries, generously provided the accommodations for the participants, who were especially grateful for the warm hospitality they received.

In spring 2015 the two teams will convene to receive and revise drafts of chapters to be included in the final report. A venue has still to be determined.



Hogar El Faro: A light shining in the darkness



(Photo: Spanish Evangelical Church)

Deep economic inequalities and the social exclusion of Indians and *mestizos* have led to chronic poverty affecting more than 5 million Bolivians.

Of the population 62% identify as indigenous, 50% are female, 44% are under 18, and almost 5% are illiterate. Rural flight is significant: 60% of the population and 45% of the child and adolescent population live in cities and conurbations.

Unplanned pregnancy and child-bearing in adolescence pose a serious problem. A quarter of Bolivian teenagers become pregnant before age 17. Often these mothers are victims of

incest or rape. Often they are abandoned by their families.

The El Faro home in the city of Santa Cruz is designed to accommodate 10 girl-mothers aged 11 to 16 who are pregnant or have young babies and are in urgent social need. The aim is to promote self-reliance and social integration, in pursuit of which the home runs programmes in education, health care, maternity and psychosocial care. In a second phase (2015-2017), it is planned to expand the home to care for 20 girl-mothers.

The Partnership Fund helps such work in mission and service in the global South. Historically, it has also helped Reformed churches in southern and eastern Europe, many of them minority churches.

This project, supported by the Partnership Fund in 2013, straddles that divide. It is part of the international outreach of the Spanish Evangelical Church. The Methodist Church of Bolivia provides logistical and structural support. Several congregations in the city work with the project.

This is the last Partnership Fund article I shall write for *Reformed Communiqué*. I leave the WCRC staff at the end of June. In the last three years, we have successfully funded over 50 projects. In the years ahead, as the resources at our disposal grow, we expect to fund many more.

I am deeply grateful to Setri Nyomi for asking me to do this work and to Douwe Visser for his friendship and trust.

I expected, when I began, that the Partnership Fund would be mostly about managing money. In fact, as the stories we publish show, it's mostly about helping people.

We call ourselves a communion, and so we are. But it would be more accurate to say we are becoming a communion. In Joachim Jeremias' phrase, we are a communion "in the process of realization" – and our communion becomes real when it is practical.

This is what the Partnership Fund does; and we need to find more ways of doing the same thing. As the apostle says, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6.2).

—*Páraic Réamonn*

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 wcrf.ch/partnership-fund/ or by emailing partnership.fund@wcrf.eu.

Setri Nyomi reflects on 14 years of service

Setri Nyomi is concluding his two terms as general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on 31 August. Below are edited excerpts of an interview with him, the full text (and video) of which can be found on the WCRC website: wcrc.ch/setri-interview/

What did you bring to the position of general secretary?

What I received as a gift from the ecumenical movement is what I brought. I received as a gift that the emphasis on the church has little credibility unless we are working in unity with the whole church. [And] the fact [is also] that the church has little credibility if it is not a counter-force against evil in the world, and injustice is a major evil in the world. Whenever I've gone into a situation in which the church is silent when there is evil, I simply can't excuse that.

[I have a] strong feeling of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that needs to be shared; [but] also it needs to be accompanied by a passion for making a difference in God's world. I brought all these in.

[In] one of my first interviews [as general secretary], I said I was an African and that no one was going to take that African-ness out of me, and I think that was also something that I brought in. I believe that each of us bring gifts that have to do with how we were shaped, from where we were shaped, and the African value for

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communal life, for deciding on things together, for ensuring we are moving together as a body and not just as a one-person leadership are things that meant a lot to me. The value for receiving the different gifts that each part of the world brings into this organization comes from that, from

Did you come in with some initial goals as general secretary?

Yes, one cannot come into a position like this without initial goals. I was actually very excited about the history of the then-World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which has accomplished so much in its existence since 1875 and its clear commitment to Christian unity and actions that make a difference in the world.

And so I came telling myself that whatever I do in this position holding together the quest for Christian unity and making a difference, especially in the area of justice in this world, should be a clear focus.

The second thing for me was I knew how painfully in the Reformed family we are the most apt to divide. So I wanted to lead an organization in which this body could be a safe space for discussing difficult things, but also the organization [should] be trusted when divisions are occurring somewhere for us to be able to mediate and help if possible.

Then I made myself open to what I would learn in this organization in the first two years of ministry



because I was very much aware that I was coming into something new.

Let's talk about the 2004 Accra General Council and the confession that came out of it. What was that process like? Where did it come from? And how did it all come together?

[Before I started as general secretary] the World Alliance was very clear that unless economic injustice was tackled with the same fervor that apartheid was tackled, it would have no credibility. So they actually called for a strong action.

A process [was] put in place before I came, thankfully, so I didn't even need to invent that anew. That's the process that we led from 2000 to 2004, having some more regional consultations, having a clear aim in Accra to have something that would be something definite.

And in Accra we brought all those in, and thankfully it resulted in the acceptance of a confession to give the clear point to us that this is not simply a peripheral issue. This is at the core of our calling.

What do you think the confession's importance is today, ten years later?

The issues that the Accra Confession talked about are still with us. And in fact they are expressing themselves in more vicious ways than they were in 2004. We still have economic injustice, we still have many, many, many people dying as a result of the way the global economy is shaped.

Since 2004 that has also touched the global north in a way that couldn't have been envisioned in 2004 when people thought, "oh that's the issue for Latin America and Africa and Asia." But in 2008 we had the economic meltdown that impacted the north and I personally had letters from people in the global north saying, "looks like this is the very thing the Accra Confession is talking about."

And so ten years later we have those issues still with us. For me the unfortunate thing is I don't see how it is being lived out, even in the lives of our church members, to the extent I would have liked to see.

It's not the kind of confession that you put on a shelf and say, "We've achieved a good statement." It's not even the kind of confession that you're happy about if once in a while you recite it in churches.

It is one that calls on us to engage in some actions, and unless we are doing those I would say we have failed.

You also talked unity, and the pinnacle of that was the Uniting General Council and the formation of the Communion. Could you lead us through that?

I like the fact that we always say, "To be Reformed is to be ecumenical." Our calling is to also contribute to the oneness of the whole church, not just the Reformed family. But we, of all families, are often the most apt to divide.

In 2000, I came to see that there were five global organizations serving the Reformed family alone. This was unacceptable. I was happy again that I could build on what had been happening before because the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the WARC had since 1988 engaged in some conversations together. So I asked myself how could we deepen those conversations so that at least the two biggest of the five could show some form of unity.

And in the year 2004, we raised the question whether or not we could increase cooperation at the time. I must confess we did not talk about organic unity. We didn't even think about it.

In the year 2006, when we met in Grand Rapids, Michigan those three days of meetings yielded something which was beyond what any of us could have set as a goal. And I will always say that very clearly and honestly. None of us went to that meeting feeling we would leave here with a decision to become one body. We went with a goal of working more closely together. But the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit and we cannot dictate to the Holy Spirit. Our first meetings were to share with one another. By the end of the day we were asking the question: Why are we not one organization? And that's what started the moves. While I'm being careful not to claim that we

orchestrated it and it came from our wonderful human planning, I will say this: that indeed once the decision was made, it was what met my wildest dreams of how we can be one together, and the next three years of working on that vision together were very fulfilling.

What's been your greatest joy of being general secretary?

Seeing what our churches are doing effectively, seeing that Reformed churches are living and acting and working effectively in different parts of the world and what we do can resource

them, can encourage them, can strengthen what they do. But the important thing is that they are doing wonderful things.

The second thing I will point to is the dedicated staff teams that I've had to work

with. We have always risen to the challenge and done more than we are called upon to do.

And it's also been a joy for me personally to know the family support that I've had from my wife, from my children, who have not only had to deal with long absences but even when I'm at home, my weird hours of working. I think if I didn't have a supportive family in that I wouldn't be able to work.

What are you doing next?

God willing I'll return home later this year, and I'll be pastoring a church in a suburb of Accra, Ghana, so I look forward to going back to the basics. I was ordained as a pastor in 1980, and at that time all I thought I would be doing was being a pastor of a church, and for more than half of those 34 years I have done other things but pastor a local congregation. So I'm going back now to the basics of pastoring a local congregation—and hopefully contribute what I've learned globally to the national scene, as well.

The issues that the Accra Confession talked about are still with us. And in fact they are expressing themselves in more vicious ways than they were in 2004.



Scholarship fund promotes female leadership

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.

Claudette Williams, a recipient of a scholarship, describes her situation and the impact the scholarship had on her life below.

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



I am a confessional member of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and am originally from Cape Town, South Africa, where I was born, raised and lived for 26 years of my life.

I wanted to become a minister ever since I attended youth group. I was the youth leader at our church, and I always believed that God had a special plan and purpose for my life. I had a passion for his Word and wanted to learn more.

I started studying theology at the University of the Western Cape for a year, and the next five years I studied at the University of Stellenbosch, where I also received my bachelor in theology, masters in divinity and my licentiate in theology in 2004. I received my calling to URC Florienville in Kimberley in 2005 and have been a full time minister in the congregation for the past nine years.

I became aware of the TEF programme while doing my master's

in divinity. Without any doubt, the scholarship has indeed been a blessing in that time of my life. I remember the tuition fees increased each year, and as much as my parents tried, they wouldn't have been able to have paid it. So the scholarship took a load off their and my own shoulders. I was able to concentrate fully on my studies without having to worry about finances.

Being a female in a male dominated occupation wasn't easy. But I feel that females have a very different approach to church matters, allow me to say a softer side. Also, you would find in South Africa that many females are still seen as inferior to males. Many females are being abused. Females in leadership roles are needed to help these females to restore dignity to their worth and self esteem. The problem sometimes is that when females get into these leadership roles, we tend to forget about those females who actually need us. And my aim and focus is to be there for them and uplift their spirits.

I think the challenge for females studying theology is being called to a congregation after they have completed their studies. More than often you would find that a congregation would rather choose a male instead of a female.

Being a female leader in church also has its own challenges. Sometimes it feels you have to work twice as hard just to gain the respect of congregation members and to prove yourself.

As I mentioned earlier, I become a reverend with my degree, serving

I always comfort myself in the fact that Jesus revealed himself first to females after his resurrection.

my congregation but also our community. Our church is situated in a fairly poor area, some would say in the poorest area of Kimberley. We have many outreach programmes in our church for our community; for example handing out of food parcels, distributing blankets within the community, even old clothes which we hand out to various welfare organizations. We have also adopted a primary school that has lost its money for their feeding scheme, so we are collecting tin foods and maize for the children, so that food can be made for them. Many of these children arrive at school hungry, have to be hungry the whole day and go home to a house where there is no food.

I would like to encourage every female who wants to go into ministry by saying don't let anything or anyone discourage you to do it. If God has placed that calling upon your life, he will be there in the tough and hard times too. I always comfort myself in the fact that Jesus revealed himself first to females after his resurrection. They were the first ones to see him, and he used them to proclaim it to the disciples. So, too, I believe that he uses females up until today to proclaim the Good News.

Free on the Inside

Members of Cornerstone Christian Reformed Church don't sound any different than most other Christians:

"The redemptive power of Jesus is without limit. As long as you're still breathing, Jesus can still work a miracle."

"We want this church to help us to grow, to be better people, to be people of God."

But Cornerstone is not like most other churches. It's located inside the South Dakota State Penitentiary (United States), a high-medium security facility that holds people imprisoned for murder, armed robbery, sex crimes and other serious offences.

Eight years ago Steve and Diane Moerman began a church inside the penitentiary with a congregation of inmates who were excited to continue or begin a relationship with God.

"We are here long-term to help these guys grow in their faith, to take them beyond the milk of the gospel to the meat," said Steve.

The Moermans' efforts are working. Not only did the local classis of the Christian Reformed Church in North America recognize Cornerstone as an independent church last fall, more importantly the inmates have embraced the church, stepping into leadership positions and growing it within the walls of the prison.

"We're doing it in the belly of the beast. We're in an environment that does not encourage this lifestyle. But we do it anyway," said one member. Others emphasize the impact the church has had in their lives:

"Being in here with Christ working with me and working through me with the Holy Spirit and the church literally saved my life."

"Without a hope of eternal life, this is all you get. You look forward to church because it lifts you up and it gets you out of the loneliness of the cell."

"The Lord takes away the guilt and the shame and just sets you free, I guess, free on the inside."

"I've become freer now inside than I ever was on the outside."

Moerman said becoming a recognized church means the congregation has come of age. "It means that the outside church has entrusted the church behind the walls to stand on its own and handle its own affairs. It helps the men to see their place in the kingdom and gives a true sense of purpose, a true sense of ownership," he said. "For those who often have little or no status in the world, this means a lot."

"It's a family inside the walls," agreed an inmate. "It's a structure. Being a part of Cornerstone for me, has kept me humble because I have things to look forward to. If they see me acting up, they'll catch me on it and put me back to where I need to be."

"We want the people on the outside to continue to pray and love us and cherish us for what we are, trying to help others to grow and to be the person that God wants us to be."

Watch a video with interviews of the inmate members of Cornerstone here: tinyurl.com/FreeInside

(Kyle Hoogendoorn and interviews conducted by students from Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, contributed to this article.)



Uprooted by force

Displacement and eviction in Colombia

“Isn’t it dangerous?”

That’s the question people in the United States usually ask when they learn I live in Colombia. My answer: Yes and no.

No, I am not fearful for my personal safety. For outsiders, Colombia’s current tourism slogan may be accurate: “The only danger is wanting to stay.” The generalized violence that plagued the country over a decade ago has diminished, and the incidence of kidnapping has declined dramatically.

But at the same time, the answer is yes. There continue to be dangers and tensions that warrant our prayers, advocacy and concern, and these predominantly affect the most impoverished and marginalized members of Colombian society.

The largest category of victim in Colombia’s decades-long internal armed conflict is that of internally displaced persons. Displacement occurs in a variety of ways, but often involves the violent appropriation of land being farmed by small rural landholders, making it available for lucrative commercial uses such as cultivating palm oil. The result is this: well over 10% of Colombia’s population has been internally displaced—turned into refugees in their own country. Displacement in Colombia emerged as a serious concern in the 1980s, and the ranks of the displaced continue to swell.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (known as the IPC, for its Spanish initials) have grown together in ministry since 1856,



when the IPC was founded by a mission from U.S. Presbyterians. Today, an important part of our joint mission and witness as the body of Christ is to seek reconciliation in a society where

very few can recall days before the conflict began.

In many respects my identity as a pastor has been shaped by the IPC and its ministry with the displaced. I offer you here a few stories, in the hope they might touch and disquiet your heart.

As a young woman, Marisol lived in the Urabá region of Colombia, an area of the country blanketed with banana plantations. Labourers seeking improved wages and working conditions faced threats and intimidation. One day, 72 people from her town were killed and loaded onto a truck, like so many crates of bananas. She was

displaced for the first time that day, a violent uprooting that would be relived twice more before she settled in El Tamarindo, where we met.

Marisol and her husband are now part of a cooperative of displaced farmers. Members of their community have spent the past twelve years living on and farming land that was vacant and unclaimed when they arrived and settled. They had hoped to acquire the land legally through government assistance available to displaced persons. A few years ago, however, owners appeared with a title to the property. You see, El Tamarindo is situated in a duty-free zone, established near a port city to facilitate the swift and steady increase in international commerce projected to accompany the implementation of Colombia’s new free trade agreements with the United States and Europe. Property values have increased enormously in the area, as it is suddenly attractive and strategic for business use. Vast warehouses are cropping up to store commercial goods and construction materials, in some cases obliterating food production and the small farm lifestyle.

Life in El Tamarindo has been simple yet livable for its residents—or at least it was until the land was sold out from under them. What they seek is simple: the security and confidence of land to call their own. The Colombian government’s rural development office is working with them to purchase land in a more remote area, but the steps involved in that bureaucratic process involve significant delays, and the outcome remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, Marisol and the rest of the community at El Tamarindo find themselves once again pushed off the land they call home. One day when I visited with a few members of the IPC’s North Coast diaconal committee, Marisol wept as she showed us the land where she had lived, house and crops bulldozed and burnt.

All of this [lifetime of violence and displacement] I have borne, and now I am suffering still more, same as it has always been. Where are the things the government has promised us? What is this news that peace is coming to Colombia? Where is our peace? Have I had peace, living in need since I was 18 years old? I’ve never been able to rest, never eat a decent meal in peace. It’s always been like this, running, crying, shouting, everything. What a disgrace, to be Colombian.

In the IPC’s North Coast Presbytery, the diaconal service committee offers pastoral presence, assistance



with small agricultural projects and connections to legal resources for groups of displaced persons in the region. This is one expression of the church's ministry with the displaced, which has taken different forms over the years. Diego Higueta currently serves as executive of the IPC, but he started out in ministry in his small hometown in the mountains of Colombia's Antioquia region. He tells this story about a transformative moment in ministry for him, nearly twenty years ago now:

The woman had lost her farm in the beautiful mountain valley in Colombia's countryside. Her husband and older children had been killed by paramilitary soldiers, falsely accused of collaborating with the guerrillas, and now her life was in danger, too. In fear, with nowhere else to turn, she found herself, with her surviving child, on the pastor's doorstep.

Diego was working part-time as the ambulance driver from his small town to the state capital. He was well-acquainted with the army and paramilitary check points along the only road through the mountains, so when the woman asked him to smuggle them out, he knew that he would be putting himself and his own family at risk.

If the ambulance were stopped and the back doors



opened, driver and passengers would likely be killed.

The thought of it terrified him, but he did not know how to refuse. He asked the woman to return after dark, and they set out in the ambu-

lance with nothing but a small bag of clothes for the baby and a prayer for protection.

Thanks be to God, they passed through safely and reached Medellín.

"Where shall I take you?" he asked.

"Under that bridge will be fine," the woman replied.

She knew no one in the city, was simply hoping that the anonymity of the crowd far from home would offer her and her surviving child a chance. Diego had nothing else he could offer her. So he did as she asked, and left them there to wait out the rain and seek their fate in the morning.

As he returned home, he gave thanks for safe passage but lamented having nothing better to offer this woman. Knowing that she was one among thousands, he shared his concern with the church. Soon, he and others in the IPC were offering an array of services to families displaced by the violence of Colombia's armed conflict.

In the Urabá Presbytery, ministry is not so much with the displaced as of the displaced; around 80% of the members of local churches have been displaced themselves. In some cases, entire churches have been displaced from one town and have rebuilt together in a new place. In other

cases, sisters and brothers in Christ have found one another and started new congregations, patching together community in makeshift towns that spring up wherever displaced and impoverished people from different areas converge.

In each situation, the church is a source of hope and healing for its members. Lives battered and bruised by incomprehensible violence find strength in joining together to build something new. Women bake empanadas over wood fires and sell them to finance the church. A congregation cultivates a fishpond to raise food and funds for its members. Men plant fast-growing trees, hoping sales from the lumber will support retired pastors. Even the humblest congregations offer after-school support to children from the neighbourhood. And, almost every day, there is worship.

One local church member has a gift for song-leading. On a recent visit, I learned this song from her home state of Chocó:

I have a new ministry with music and joy

That the night might be as day, and

God's Spirit move

Let it move, let it move, let God's Spirit move

Love abounds in the churches of Urabá, and the singing often continues well into the night, filling it with hope and confidence in God's presence even in the midst of uncertainty. These churches are growing and multiplying, sharing in the movement of God's Holy Spirit. They find strength and an affirmation of faith in their connection to the broader church in Colombia and to the world. As Bernardino López, moderator of Urabá Presbytery, says, "We learn we are not, in fact, a small church. We're a very large church."

We are the body of Christ together. Predecessors of the Presbyterian Church (USA) founded the Presbyterian Church of Colombia in 1856, and our two communities of faith have learned and grown together ever since. It takes all of our gifts, along with a willingness to work with courage and steadfastness, for us to respond faithfully to God's call in this hurting world.

Promises of peace arising from negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrilla forces are a hopeful sign, but an end to hostilities will not bring wholeness and restoration to the displaced and other victims of the armed conflict. The churches in Colombia are discerning the ways that they can be agents of reconciliation in a hoped-for "post-conflict" time. Let us pray and work for a peace worth living.

Sarah Henken lives in Barranquilla, Colombia, and serves with Presbyterian World Mission as regional liaison for the Andean countries of South America (Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela). She blogs sporadically at andeanjourney.wordpress.com.

Regional meetings discuss issues, select leaders

Three regional councils of the WCRC had meetings this spring, discussing important topics and selecting new officers. General Secretary Setri Nyomi was able to attend and address both the European and Caribbean/North American meetings and sent a video message to Asia. Here are brief summaries of each:

Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC)

Hosted by the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, CANAAC held a joint meeting with the Caribbean and North America Council for Mission in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. Nyomi delivered the sermon at the opening worship and was later thanked and honored for his contribution to the ecumenical endeavours of the churches in this region.

CANAAC chose Lisa Vander Wal (Reformed Church in America) as their convener, Valeska Austin (Guyana Congregational Union) as co-convener, Karen Georgia Thompson (United Church of Christ) as secretary/treasurer and Kelvin Marte Sena (Dominican Evangelical Church), Bill Thomas (United Church of Canada) and Robina Winbush (Presbyterian Church (USA)) to serve on their steering committee.

Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC)

Twenty-four participants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan gathered in Tokyo under the theme "Peace and Reconciliation in North-east Asia." The theme was chosen to cope with rising political tension in the area, particularly over territorial issues, as well as historical issues. In the theological consultation, three presentations following the theme from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan were delivered.

NEAAC picked Kyeoung Shin Kang (Presbyterian Church of Korea) as their moderator.

WCRC Europe

Hosted by Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, representatives of dozens of European Reformed churches met in Warsaw. Ádám Hámori, a sociologist and member of the Reformed Church in Hungary, presented a report examining religiosity in the countries of eastern and western Europe. He noted that there is no single clear picture of religiosity on the old continent. In the west the secularizing trend is inconsistent. While in the eastern part of Europe

it is very diverse; in some countries there is a renaissance of religion, in others processes of individualization and privatization of religion and in some secularizing trends.

WCRC Europe re-elected Jan-Gerd Heetderks (Protestant Church in the Netherlands) as president, Balázs Ódor (Reformed Church in Hungary) and Martina Wasserloos (Reformed Alliance of Germany) as vice presidents and Alexander Horsburgh (Church of Scotland) as secretary.



Northeast Asia Area Council



WCRC Europe



Caribbean and North American Area Council

This year in Jerusalem

For the past three years, Páraic Réamonn, a minister of the Church of Scotland, has served as deputy coordinator of the Partnership Fund. This month, he finishes work with the WCRC.

But a funny thing happened to him on the way to retirement.

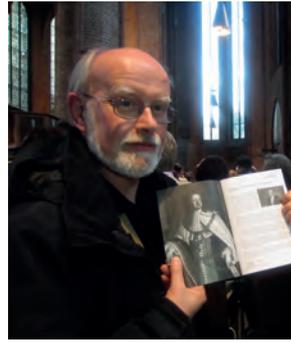
“I shall still stop in June,” he told *Reformed Communiqué*, “but two months later I start work again!”

During a meeting of the Kirk’s presbytery of Europe in Gibraltar this March, it was suggested that he think about St Andrew’s Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem.

“My wife Vivien asked me what the conversation had been about,” he recalls. “I said it was about turning our lives upside down.”

St Andrew’s is in central Jerusalem, looking over the ill-reputed valley of Hinnom to the old city, and was built while Britain was busy turning Palestine upside down.

In December 1917, General Allenby led his troops into Jerusalem, entering on foot through the Jaffa gate. A month earlier, the British cabinet authorized the Balfour Declaration, favouring the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish national home, while insisting that nothing be done to prejudice “the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”



Páraic Réamonn enjoys some culture in Hannover. (Photo: WCRC/Fontaine)

From 1993 to 2004, he was the first full-time communications secretary of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

“Many of our member churches raise their voices on the question of Palestine, not always singing from the same hymn sheet,” says Réamonn. “My being in Jerusalem may help the WCRC itself engage with this issue.”

St Andrew’s Scots Memorial Church, David Remez St 1, Jerusalem. Sunday worship: 10 a.m.

Ten years later, St Andrew’s was opened as a memorial to the Scottish troops who died to capture Palestine. Today, its strapline is “remembrance – reflection – reconciliation” – reconciliation above all between the two communities Britain did so much to set at odds.

Networking and communication are a large part of what attracts Réamonn to St

Reformed Alliance elects new general secretary

The General Assembly of the Reformed Alliance in the Evangelical Church of Germany elected Achim Detmers as its general secretary. He is to take up office in October 2014. He is the successor of Jörg Schmidt, who will be retiring in December.

Detmers grew up in East Frisia (*Ostfriesland*) in a Reformed congregation. His theological research and doctoral thesis focused on the Reformers’ (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger and Melancton) theological understanding of Israel.

Detmers, who is married and father of one daughter, began his ministry in the East German church of Anhalt.

In 2008-2009 he was in charge of the Reformed Alliance’s projects related to the Calvin Anniversary celebrations and since 2010 has been responsible for distance education within the Evangelical Church of Central Germany.

The Reformed Alliance in the Evangelical Church of Germany is the umbrella organization for one and a half million Reformed Christians among 24 million Protestants in Germany. Its members are the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany, The Regional Church of Lippe and the Reformed Association, which has a

membership of 350 congregations and approximately 600 individuals.

The office of the Reformed Alliance is located in the same building as the WCRC’s international office at the Calvin Centre in Hannover, Germany.

Agreement Signed



The bilateral agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the World Communion of Reformed Churches has been signed and is now in force, giving the WCRC legal status in its new home. Pictured above are Dora Arce-Valentin, Douwe Visser, Johann Weusmann, Setri Nyomi and Günter Krings, German secretary of state.



Setri Nyomi, General Secretary

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever ... he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad; and all wickedness stops its mouth. Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord. (Psalm 107)

It is time to give thanks. By God's grace I am about to complete my ministry as the general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. On 31 August this year, I will take leave of the WCRC and return to my home church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana. After 14 years of engaging in this ministry, it is indeed time to give thanks to God. As I write this last general secretary's column for the *Reformed Communiqué*, permit me to be more personal. Following the example of the Psalmist, there are many things to be thankful for when we consider the steadfast love of God.

We give thanks to God for the privilege to serve a great family of churches that understand our calling to be a communion committed to justice. We give thanks to God for the vision of leading a dedicated team to live into the gift of unity of the Body of Christ that we have received and to participate with God in overcoming divisions and working towards Christian unity. We give thanks to God for the response to God's gift of unity that led to the formation of the WCRC in 2010. We give thanks to God for the opportunity to lead a communion of churches in responding to the call to be prophetic instruments of transformation—proclaiming, “Thus says the Lord” to the forces of injustice, destruction and death. We give thanks to God for the Accra Confession and its demands on our mission and lifestyles.

We give thanks to God for the WCRC's member churches. Most of our member churches have been faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of the challenges and divisive forces that surround them as they engage in their mission so that all may have life in fullness. These churches have inspired me and energized me in the last 14 years.

We give thanks to God for the leadership that God has given WCRC all these years. The leadership and friendship of the current and the immediate past presidents with whom I have worked closely have brought the communion a long way forward. The WCRC is truly blessed by their leadership. I am grateful to God for the members of the current executive committee and past executive committees who have kept the faith in contributing to good governance of the WCRC—and keeping the vision of fullness of life for all alive.

The staff teams with which I have worked in these last fourteen years have simply been great. Over the years we have faced some challenges and have experienced God's providence as we sought to build team spirit together in serving the communion faithfully. They have been and currently are amazing folks, and I will miss them.

I give thanks to God for my wife Akpene who has been a true partner in ministry as we serve the worldwide Reformed and ecumenical family. Together with our children and their spouses, Akpene has been a person of prayer and support. Pray for us, as we journey with God into new spaces of service.

As we give thanks to God for what has happened in the last 14 years, I give thanks to God especially for my friend Chris Ferguson, on whom the mantle has fallen to lead the WCRC as its general secretary into the future. I ask for two things as a parting gift from the WCRC community: First, pray for Chris and support him in his ministry as general secretary; second, be faithful to God in responding to the call to communion and the commitment to justice.

May God bless each of you. Let us all consider the steadfast love of God and the privilege of participating in God's work as instruments of transformation in the world. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for God is good.

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**World
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Called to
communion,
committed to
justice