



**LIVING GOD  
RENEW AND  
TRANSFORM US**  
26th General Council Leipzig – 29 June to 7 July 2017

# WORKBOOK



World Communion  
of Reformed Churches

## 2017 General Council Schedule Leipzig – Wittenberg – Berlin

### Pre-Council Activities

#### Sunday, 25 June

##### **Messe**

Registration for Pre-Council attendees

18:00-19:00: Supper for arriving delegates and staff

#### Monday, 26 June

##### **Messe**

All Day: Registration

9:00-13:00: Women Pre-Council

13:00-14:00: Lunch

14:00-18:00: Women Pre-Council

17:00-19:00: Officers Meeting

18:00-19:00: Supper

19:00-21:00: Introduction to discernment and decision making

##### **Zwochau**

Youth Gathering

Youth Pre-Council

#### Tuesday, 27 June

##### **Messe**

All Day: Registration

9:00-13:00: Women Pre-Council, Youth Pre-Council, Executive Committee

13:00-14:00: Lunch

14:00-18:00: Women Pre-Council, Executive Committee, Training of facilitators & scribes

18:00-19:00: Supper

19:00-21:00: Training of moderators

##### **Zwochau (until 13:00)**

Youth Gathering

Morning: Youth Pre-Council delegates move to Messe

##### **Reformed Church**

16:00-21:00: Youth Gathering: Public Event: *Buen Vivir*

#### Wednesday, 28 June

##### **Sachsenpark-Hotel**

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

##### **Messe**

All Day: Registration

9:00-11:45: Women & Youth Pre-Councils: General Council Orientation

12:00-13:30: Youth Gathering, Pre-Councils: Closing Worship

13:30-14:30: Lunch

15:00-16:30: Orientation 1 for participants

16:30-17:00: Introduction of consultants and staff

18:00-20:00: Orientation 2 for participants

##### **Reformed Church (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche)**

EN/2017:06:25/Schedule

18:00-21:15: Meet & Greet hosted by German churches (open invitation)

21:15-21:30: Evening Prayer

### **Zwochau**

9:00-10:45: Youth Gathering

## **The General Council**

### **Thursday, 29 June: Welcoming the World**

#### ***Sachsenpark-Hotel***

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

#### ***Messe***

8:30-10:00: Worship/Bible Study 1, Jeremiah 10:1-10, Hyunju Bae

10:00-11:00: Plenary Session 1: Opening Actions: Seating of delegates, approval of UGC Minutes, adoption of Rules of Order (discernment & consensus procedures)

11:00-12:30: Journey to Leipzig New Town Hall

#### ***Town Hall (Neue Rathaus)***

12:30-14:00: Reception at New Town Hall, Opening of Reformation Exhibition, Light Lunch

14:00-15:00: Journey to Messe

#### ***Messe***

11:00-12:30: Orientation 3

11:00-14:00: Training of facilitators and scribes

14:00-15:15: Lunch (for participants of Orientation 3, facilitators and scribes)

15:15-16:15: Listening Session 1: Address of the President

16:15-16:30: Words of greeting

- Gottfried Locher
- Sunita Suna

16:30-17:00: Tea/Coffee Break

17:00-18:30: Theme Input Session 1: Economic Justice: George Zachariah and Janneke Stegemann

18:30-20:00: Supper

20:00-21:30: Regional Meetings 1 (Africa, AIPPRAL, Asia/Pacific, Canaac, Europe/Middle East - assigned rooms)

21:00-22:00: Committee, drafting team meetings

#### ***Sachsenpark-Hotel***

21:30-23:00: Nomination Committee

#### ***Reformed Church (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche)***

22:00-22:15: Evening Prayer (open invitation)

### **Friday, 30 June: "Living God, you formed us"**

#### ***St. Nicholas Church (Nikolaikirche)***

7:30: All participants must be at St Nicolas Church Yard at 7:30 to pass security (*Bring your passport!!*)

7:30-8:00 Business Committee

7:45: St. Nicholas Church doors open

9:00-10:15: Welcoming Worship

10:15-10:45: Words of Greeting

- President Steinmeier
- General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit (WCC)
- General Secretary Collin Cowan (CWM)
- General Secretary Cesar Garcia (MWC)

10:45-11:45: Journey to Messe

**Messe**

11:45-13:30: Listening Session 2: Report of the General Secretary

13:30-15:00: Lunch

15:00-16:30: Theme Input Session 2: Theology: Jürgen Moltmann with Isabella Novsima Sinulingga, Marisa Strizzi and Nadia Marais

16:30-17:15: Listening Session 3: Theology

17:30-18:30: Discernment Session 1: Norms and Values; Theology

18:30-20:00: Supper

20:00-21:30: Regional Meetings 2 (Africa, AIPPRAL, Asia/Pacific, Canaac, Europe/Middle East)

21:00-22:00: Committee, drafting team meetings

**Sachsenpark-Hotel**

21:30-23:00: Nomination Committee

**Luther Church (Lutherkirche, Ferdinand-Lassalle-Straße 25)**

20:00-21:00: Concert: "Composers - Messengers of the Reformation" (open invitation)

**Reformed Church (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche)**

22:00-22:30: Evening Prayer (open invitation)

**Saturday, 1 July: "Living God, help us to discern your will"****Sachsenpark-Hotel**

7:30-8:00: Business committee

**Messe**

8:30-9:15: Theme Input Session 3: Justice: Isabel Phiri and Philip Peacock

9:15-10:00: Listening Session 4: Justice

10:00-10:30: Tea/Coffee Break

10:30-11:15: Listening Session 5: Gender Justice

11:15-11:45: Decision Session 1: Reports & Theology

11:45-13:15: Worship/Bible Study 2, Romans 12:1-2, Elsa Tamez

13:15-14:45: Lunch

14:45-15:30: Discernment Session 2: Justice and Gender Justice

15:30-16:00: Tea/Coffee Break

16:00-18:00: Dialogue on Churches and Development

20:00-21:30: Committee, drafting team meetings

18:00-19:00: Journey into Leipzig

**St. Nicholas Church Yard (Nikolaikirchhof)**

19:00-22:00: Visit to/showcasing of social art projects (including light supper)

**Sunday, 2 July: Witnessing to the World**

5:30: Journey to Berlin (***pick up places to be announced; take your passport!***)

9:30-10:15: Worship in Berlin Dom (television broadcast by ZDF)

10:15-11:00: Words of Greeting: Bishop Dröge (MC), Church President Jung, Others

11:00-12:00: Walk to Ministry of Foreign Affairs

12:00-14:00: Reception at Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Programme

14:00-14:30: Light Lunch

14:30-17:30: Historical and Solidarity Visits around Berlin

17:30: Journey to Leipzig, including sandwich supper

**Sachsenpark-Hotel**

20:00-21:30: Nominating Committee

*No access to Messe for committee/drafting team meetings!*

## **Monday, 3 July: "Living God, renew us"**

### ***Sachsenpark-Hotel***

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

### ***Messe***

8:30-10:00: Worship/Bible Study 3: Luke 4:16-21: Mitri Raheb

10:00-10:30: Tea/Coffee Break

10:30-11:00: Plenary Session 3: Nominations

11:00-11:45: Theme Input Session 4: Mission in Communion: Farid Esack and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson  
11:45-12:30: Listening Session 6: Mission in Communion

12:30-14:00: Lunch; Special Lunch: Korea

14:00-14:45: Discernment Session 3: Communion in Mission

15:00-15:30: Decision Session 2: Justice and Gender Justice

15:30-16:00: Tea/Coffee Break

16:00-17:00: Journey into Leipzig

### ***St. Nicholas Church (Nikolakirche)***

17:00-18:00: St. Nicholas Church: Peace Prayer

18:00-19:30: Light Supper (*Nikolaikirchhof*)

19:30-21:00: Leipzig Mission: Reception

21:00-22:00: St. Thomas Church: Organ Concert (open invitation)

### ***Messe***

20:00-21:30: Committee, drafting team meetings

## **Tuesday, 4 July: "Living God, reform us"**

### ***Sachsenpark-Hotel***

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

### ***Messe***

8:30-10:00: Worship/Bible Study 4: Matthew 15:21-28: Elsa Tamez

10:00-10:30: Tea/Coffee Break

10:30-11:00: Plenary Session 4 (Moderator: Jerry Pillay): Nominations

11:00-11:45: Theme Input Session 5: Strengthening Communion: Tinyiko Maluleke

11:45-12:30: Listening Session 7: Strengthening Communion

12:30-14:00: Lunch; Special Lunch: United/Uniting Churches

14:00-14:45: Discernment Session 4: Strengthening Communion

15:00-15:30: Decision Session 3 (Moderator: Jerry Pillay): Mission in Communion

15:30-16:00: Tea/Coffee Break

16:00-16:30: Listening Session 8 (Chair: Yoshi): Focus on Korea

16:30-17:30: Listening Session 9 (Moderator: Jerry Pillay, Chair: Robina Winbush): Public Witness

17:30-18:30: Supper

18:30-19:30: Journey into Leipzig

### ***St. Nicholas Church (Nikolaikirche)***

19:30-21:00: Psalm Concert

### ***Messe***

20:00-21:30: Committee and drafting team meetings

## **Wednesday, 5 July: Affirming the Unity of the Church**

8:00: Journey to Wittenberg

10:00-12:00: Ecumenical Ceremony: Association to JDDJ, LWF-WCRC Declaration, Thanksgiving  
12:00-12:30: Words of Greeting

12:30-13:30: Lunch

13:30-16:30: Visit to the World Exhibition

16:30: Journey to Leipzig

**Messe**

18:30-20:00: Sandwich supper

20:00-21:30: Committee, drafting team meetings

**Reformed Church (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche)**

22:00-22:15: Evening Prayer

**Thursday, 6 July: "Living God, transform us"****Sachsenpark-Hotel**

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

**Messe**

8:30-10:00: Worship/Bible Study 5: Commemoration Jan Hus: Acts 2:1-21 &amp; 37-39: Mitri Raheb

10:00-10:30: Tea/Coffee Break

10:30-11:15: Decision Session 4: Strengthening Communion

11:30-12:30: Discernment Session 5: Public Witness

12:30-14:00: Lunch

14:00-15:00: Listening Session 10: Message and Vision; Constitutional Amendments

15:00-15:30: Tea/Coffee Break

15:30-16:45: Discernment Session 6: Message and Vision

17:00-19:00: Plenary Session 5: Elections

19:00-20:00: Supper

22:00-21:30: Committee and drafting team meetings

**Reformed Church (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche)**

22:00-22:15: Evening Prayer

**Friday, 7 July: Close as a Communion, Departure****Sachsenpark-Hotel**

7:30-8:00: Business Committee

**Messe**

8:30-9:00: Morning Devotion

9:00-10:00: Decision Session 5: Public Witness

10:00-10:30: Tea/Coffee Break

10:30-11:15: Decision Session 6: Message and Vision, Constitutional Amendments

11:15-13:00: Closing Communion

13:00-14:15: Lunch

18:00-19:00: Supper

**Saturday, 8 July: Departure****Messe**

13:00-14:30: Lunch

18:00-19:00: Supper

## RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL

### Guidelines for Discernment Procedures

#### Background

In preparation for the General Council in Leipzig the Executive Committee of the WCRC resolved at its meeting in Havana, Cuba, to propose the following Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business guided by discernment principles. In so doing, they have learned from the experience in using discernment and consensus procedures at WARC's 24th General Council and at the Uniting General Council at Grand Rapids and will put in place measures and training to ensure that these Rules of Procedure are used to best advantage.

## I. DISCERNMENT AND THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

### 1. Theological Basis

At the heart of discernment procedures is a commitment to worship, work, listen and pray together as a community of faith, seeking to discern God's will for the way forward on issues under consideration.

As the Body of Christ, the church is always searching for the mind of Christ, seeking to "understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). Our common commitment to seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our deliberations is confirmed by the experience of the fruit of the Spirit amongst us as we work: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is intentionally a communion built around a common table for both worship and decision making. The table symbolizes the centrality of Christ and our mutual dependence on the Holy Spirit for our life together. We sit equally before God as sisters and brothers.

The WCRC describes itself as a communion that is committed to justice. It is therefore imperative that in its shared life together it operates in a way that fosters communion among its members and which allows them to live justly in relation to one another. All conversations should be edifying and all efforts build *koinonia*.

Our developing *koinonia*, our intentional spiritual fellowship, is dedicated to the prophetic calling to bring God's justice like a mighty river and righteousness like an ever flowing stream to a world thirsty for hope and the grace of the Gospel.

**Discernment** means a prayerful process that builds community and by which a common mind of the General Council is sought concerning the wisest way forward on a particular issue at that time.

There are no winners and losers—we are all seekers and discerners together, affirming through our common loyalty to Jesus Christ that:

- the General Council is a community of faith earnestly seeking to understand God's will;
- each participant in the General Council has been given unique gifts and insights by God;
- every participant's contribution is worthy of respect;
- our aim is to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches through the General Council;
- our commitment is to find faithful ways forward on which all can agree.

Adopting Rules of Procedure, business processes and techniques ensures that the General Council of the WCRC will:

- foster deep **listening** and respect;
- make space for the influence of the Holy Spirit and different perspectives through **dialogue** and **discernment**;
- take the time to **build consensus** in decision making.

### 2. Building Community

The General Council draws together people from different countries, cultures and traditions. It takes time to build the trust and relationships that form a community of faith. That is why 20 percent of our life together during the General Council is dedicated to worship, Bible study and community building.

As we acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and listen for the Word of God in worship together each morning and evening the bonds of community are strengthened. Our diversity and unity in Jesus Christ is also celebrated informally as we live, work and pray together.

All General Council participants are invited to contribute insights and wisdom to any issue being discussed. Bible study groups (home groups) meet each morning.

The link between Bible study and discernment is also expressed by the composition of the Discernment Groups, which will discern the major issues and prepare them for decision making.

## II. RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

### 1. Definitions

**Bible study group** means a group with constant membership meeting on a daily basis after the Bible study presentation, providing opportunities for mutual sharing and support. Bible study groups will be composed of eight people speaking one language, providing familiarity with other participants. Three Bible study groups from different language groups form one Discernment Group.

**Chairperson** means a person appointed by the General Council to chair committees.

**Committee** means a group appointed by the General Council to bring reports and proposals on particular business. There shall be the following committees:

- Business Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Public Witness Committee
- Vision and Message Committee

**Discernment Group** means a cluster of three Bible study groups that discern the main issues of the General Council. Discernment Groups are composed according to the values of empowerment and diversity: Each member shall be given the chance to fully contribute to the discussion in dialogue with voices expressing themselves from different perspectives (see part 10 of these rules).

**Discernment Procedures Team** means persons assisting with the use of discernment procedures (see part 6 of these rules).

**Drafting Team** means the committee of the Scribes of the Discernment Groups that amend the proposals coming from the Discernment Groups in the light of the discussions in the groups (see part 10 of these rules).

**Facilitator** means a person appointed by the General Council to be the facilitator of a Discernment Group. The main task of the facilitator is to ensure that all delegates can fully participate in the discussion (see part 10 of these rules).

### Participants

- Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of *voting delegates*. Voting delegates are defined as the ones who have been entrusted with discernment indicator cards or allowed to vote when called upon.
- An *associate delegate* is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- An *affiliate delegate* is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- An *ecumenical delegate* is one who represents a recognized ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Guests* are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Observers* are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Observers also include the Global Institute of Theology students and the stewards. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council, have the right to speak but may not vote.
- *Consultants* may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.



- *Visitors* are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions or vote.
- *Officers* are the following elected officials of the WCRC: president, vice president, general secretary and general treasurer. The general secretary, by virtue of his office, has the right to speak but may not vote.

**The Pastoral Care Team** is comprised of chaplains and provides support for people who have been harassed or emotionally harmed.

**Scribe** means a person appointed by the General Council to be the secretary of a Discernment Group and to convey its findings to the Drafting Team. At the end of each session the Discernment Group determines which points should be brought to the Drafting Team (see part 10 of these rules).

## 2. Business Committee

The Executive Committee constitutes the Business Committee. Others may be invited as its agenda requires.

The role of the Business Committee is:

- to initiate proposals on any matter relating to the efficient working of the General Council;
- to consider how matters may best be grouped for consideration, so none is disadvantaged;
- to ensure that the General Council is resourced with information from a range of perspectives about each matter, so that an informed way forward may be discerned;
- to review the agenda regularly, prioritizing items needing deeper deliberation and more time;
- to alter the agenda as needed;
- to authorize the translation, copying and circulation of printed material;
- to appoint scrutineers to count election ballot returns and plenary session votes if necessary.

## 3. Matters of Consideration

Matters for consideration shall be lodged with the Business Committee for inclusion on the agenda unless already on the agenda. These may arise from reports of the officers, the outgoing Executive Committee, appointed committees and matters raised by a member church. WCRC staff may act as resources in the work needed for discernment on these matters and may be invited to clarify.

The Business Committee receives the reports of the Drafting Team.

## 4. Interpretation and Documentation

The WCRC Constitution requires translation of documents will be available in English, French, German and Spanish. A speaker may use another language only if interpretation is available into one of these. Interpretation facilities are available in plenary sessions, Discernment Groups and committees. The supported languages of the General Council are English, French, German, Spanish, Korean and Indonesian.

Participants are expected to read all material before it is presented to the General Council.

## 5. Moderator

The officers of the WCRC (president or one of the vice-presidents) shall be Moderator of the plenary sessions of the General Council.

The role of the Moderator is to preside in a manner which assists the General Council in seeking to understand the will of God as far as possible and which meets the needs and purposes of the General Council and its participants.

In so doing, the Moderator:

- ensures that the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business are observed;
- watches with the participants for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the wisdom of Scripture throughout all contributions;
- is prepared to pause for prayer or silent reflection as appropriate;
- may invite participants to turn to others nearby for small group discussion or prayer;
- encourages trust and integrity in contributions;

- ensures care and support for those whose honesty may leave them vulnerable;
- invites delegates to indicate their response to speeches and reflects that mood back to the General Council as it becomes apparent;
- looks for creative modifications of a proposal, incorporating insights expressed by speakers;
- summarizes discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the direction;
- does not participate in discussion (if a Moderator wishes to speak to an issue someone else will act as Moderator during consideration of that particular issue until it is resolved);
- acknowledges those who wish to speak to the General Council. Unless directed otherwise, participants who are authorized to speak may stand at the microphone until acknowledged by the Moderator. They begin by stating their name, the church they represent and their category of participation. They address the General Council through the Moderator.
- ensures that different voices are included during plenary sessions.

Participants will respect requests or directions from the Moderator. Out of respect for the office of Moderator, when she or he speaks, all remain silent so the Moderator is heard without interruption.

## **6. Discernment Procedures Team**

Members of the Discernment Procedures Team appointed by the Executive Committees are present to assist with resourcing the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business.

The responsibilities of the Discernment Procedures Team are:

- to be resources for the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business and the discernment principles on which they are based;
- to clarify any uncertainties about procedures in plenary sessions if called upon by the Moderator or the General Secretary;
- to be available to support the Moderator and General Secretary in chairing each session;
- to be available to assist the Moderator in ensuring that all insights are considered as the General Council seeks to discern a way forward for any issue;
- to attend Business Committee meetings to advise on procedures as necessary;
- to advise participants about procedures as necessary.

## **7. Use of Discernment Procedures**

The General Council will use the discernment process to make all decisions except for: approval or changes in procedures, elections and constitutional and bylaws changes. If a resubmitted matter does not receive approval through the discernment process, and the General Council takes the view that a decision must be made on this item of business at this meeting of the General Council then a vote will be taken.

## **8. Building Blocks of the Discernment Process**

The basic building blocks of the discernment process are:

- Introduce and clarify the issue (listening sessions)
- Explore the issue and look for ideas (Discernment Groups)
- Look for emerging proposals (decision sessions)
- Discuss, clarify and offer proposals (decision sessions)
- Test for agreement (decision sessions)
- Implement the decision (Executive Committee)

## **9. Listening Sessions to Introduce and Clarify the Issue**

The General Council must be fully resourced with information about an issue, proposal or report. Seeking to discern God's will for a faithful response presumes participants hold a clear understanding of the rationale and theological basis for possible ways forward.

Listening sessions shall be prepared in conjunction with the Business Committee.

During the listening sessions the reports and matters are received. A number of speakers may be invited to present varying aspects of a particular issue before clarification questions and discussion.

*Reception of a report* means agreement to consider the substance of a report. This is approved in the listening sessions after the report is presented and any clarifying questions are answered. Reception means that the proposals in the report are now before the General Council for consideration. A report as a whole must be adopted if its substance is to become policy, or specific proposals arising from a report must be considered before agreement to act can be assumed.

At the end of each listening session draft proposals to be discussed by the Discernment Groups shall be introduced.

## **10. Discernment Groups to Look for Emerging Consensus**

### *Composition of Discernment Groups*

The Discernment Groups will formally be appointed by the president and approved by the General Council. Their specific composition will be driven by language. Since participation from all is a foundation for a successful discernment process, delegates need to feel comfortable communicating within the Discernment Groups. Language, however, is not the only factor used for creating the groups. Factors that need to be included (and sometimes weighed against each other):

1. **Diversity:** Groups should not be geographically driven. The discernment process is designed to unite the Council and its decision-making process from the grassroots. It is thus important not to have a group composed solely from a single country or region.
2. **Communication:** All members of a group must be able to communicate effectively with one another. This does not necessarily mean that groups are composed based on primary language, however. Options include grouping those fluent in the same language or providing interpreters.
3. **Balances:** Besides geographic diversity, each group should be balanced between gender, age, ordained/non-ordained and abilities.

Discernment Groups should be constructed using *language fluency* (rather than primary language) as a criteria. Discernment Groups will be limited to one or two languages to reduce demands on interpreters (and hence the budget). If this is not possible, then a limited number of multi-lingual Discernment Groups would be created.

Another critical aspect of each group's composition is the *leadership*. Each group needs at least two pre-selected (and trained) leaders: one to *facilitate* the group and another one to act as *Scribe*, not only recording the decisions of the group but also taking those decisions to the Drafting Team. The *Facilitator* will need to be able to facilitate a process that respects all members' voices while striving at reaching consensus on the issues within the time allotted.

### *Process in Discernment Groups*

The introductory session of the Discernment Group will introduce the discernment process to the group and set the "norms" (rules, guidelines, etc.) of how the group will operate. Setting the norms also gives the members a first experience of the discernment process and can be used by the leadership to accommodate differing cultural needs, fix any glitches in the system (especially translation), etc. While structured to produce constructive results that will move the process to the Drafting Team, the discernment process is geared to hear all voices and invite the movement of the Holy Spirit into all groups.

The Discernment Groups are guided by materials they receive from the Business Committee; they discuss and amend the proposals that were introduced during the listening session. Decisions within each group should be made through consensus. If consensus cannot be reached the group defines the point of disagreement and requests the Scribe to take the different opinions to the Drafting Team.

The discernment process during the General Council is value driven and should respect each individual and her/his voice even as the process unites the delegates through discussion and consensus. No delegate should be marginalized based on any factor, especially, in this process, language: "The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another" (WCRC Constitution, Article IV, Section B).

At the end of each Discernment Group session, the Scribes will gather to distill the variety of material produced into a report with specific recommendations. The processes used in the Drafting Team to create the report will also be by consensus and use norms as determined by the group.

## **11. Decision Sessions to Discuss, Clarify and Test for Agreement**

The final reports of the Drafting Team will be brought to the plenary. The reports should be presented by at least two Scribes, selected by the Drafting Team. Delegates will hear the voice of their Discernment Group in the report and its recommendations, changing the tenor of the discussion positively. The plenary will then discuss and come to consensus on the reports and recommendations.

### *Procedures in Decision Sessions*

Orange and blue indicator cards are provided for voting delegates (not for other participants). At the end of each speech, voting delegates may choose to indicate their response to the content of the speech, by showing their orange or blue card. The cards provide a quick and visible indication of the mood of the General Council.<sup>1</sup>

- Showing an orange card indicates warmth and appreciation towards a point of view.
- Showing a blue card indicates coolness and hesitation towards a point of view, or that more discussion is needed.

Cards may also be used to indicate to the Moderator that it is time to move on; a speaker may be getting repetitious, or the points may have been well made already. In this case, a delegate can hold the two indicator cards crossed in front of her/his chest, as a silent indication that pursuing debate is not likely to be helpful.

The Moderator alerts the General Council to the strength of feeling expressed through the indicator cards as appropriate. The delegates may express their thoughts and offer proposals.

Possible outcomes of discernment process:

- All in agreement (unanimous);
- Most are in agreement (minority give consent to move forward);
- Consideration on matter postponed;
- Agree no decision can be reached;
- Refer an issue to another body, either to bring advice to the General Council on how to proceed or to determine the referred issue on behalf of the General Council;
- Issue brought to a vote, if this is agreed by a two-thirds majority of voting delegates present (see below).

The Moderator may determine that a proposal be referred to a small group of participants nominated by the Moderator, with a view to the small group bringing an amended proposal likely to receive greater support. The matter is resubmitted to the General Council for decision when the Business Committee determines.

In the event that:

- the resubmitted matter does not receive support, and
- if the Business Committee takes the view that a decision must be made on this item of business at this meeting of the General Council,
- then the General Council may determine that a two thirds majority of delegates present and voting is sufficient to determine this item of business.

## **12. When Voting is Required**

Only voting delegates may vote. The Moderator declares the method of voting (show of hands, standing, written ballot, etc).

A majority of delegates present and voting is required for approval of the proposal.

After the vote, the Moderator declares the proposal approved or not approved.

All participants are encouraged to return to their churches advocating the resolutions of the General Council, even if they would have preferred different outcomes. It is the responsibility of those privileged to participate to explain to those who

---

<sup>1</sup> Orange and blue are used because they can be clearly distinguished even by people who are colour-blind.

were not present why particular decisions were taken.

### 13. Recording Dissension

The basis of discernment procedures is that the community of faith listens, prays, discusses and works together towards discerning God's will for a faithful response. Resolutions are made in that light.

Voting Delegates may record their dissent or abstention on any particular resolution by lodging it in writing with the recording secretaries before the next session commences.

A member church may choose to record dissent by lodging it in writing with the recording secretaries before the next session commences.

### 14. Procedural Proposals

Procedural proposals may be raised by delegates (not by other participants) and relate to how or when the General Council deals with a particular agenda item. When making a procedural proposal a delegate may not interrupt a speaker but seeks recognition from the Moderator to speak. Procedural proposals must be seconded, may be debated, and are determined by discernment procedures or a simple majority vote (50 percent plus one).

Procedural proposals include:

- *Fixed order*: proposes that the General Council deals with business previously set for that time. It may be linked to a procedural proposal for the adjournment of the current discussion.
- *Adjournment*: may be proposed by a delegate who has not spoken in the current discussion. If approved, any person whose speech was interrupted may speak first when discussion resumes.
- *Closed Session*: all who are not delegates leave the session while the General Council considers an issue in private. If approved, it requires a subsequent procedural proposal ("that the General Council cease sitting in closed session") to return to an open plenary session.
- *Closure of the debate*: may be proposed ("that the vote be now taken") by a delegate who has not spoken in the current discussion. The Moderator may also propose closure.

### 15. Points of Concern

*"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..."*  
(Galatians 5:22-23).

The General Council will engage in its business and corporate life in a way that ensures that the fruits of the Spirit are supported and expressed:

- prayerful listening respect for all participants;
- compassion with one another;
- trust;
- encouraging shared goals;
- exhibiting an openness/vulnerability to one another.

A delegate may raise a concern at any time by gaining the attention of the Moderator and stating, "I have a point of concern." The Moderator asks the delegate to state the concern.

Concerns that may be raised are:

- A speaker is thought to be digressing from the matter under discussion.
- A delegate may claim the right to make personal explanation if a subsequent speaker grossly misrepresents her/his remarks.
- A delegate may raise objection if remarks are thought to be offensive or derogatory.

The Moderator may without debate:

- rule on it immediately;
- ask advice from selected participants and then rule on the point;
- ask the General Council to decide the matter by discussion and discernment.

If the Moderator's ruling on a point of concern is challenged, the challenging delegate may speak, and the Moderator may reply before putting it to a vote to sustain or disallow the ruling, without further discussion. The decision is resolved by simple majority.

#### **16. Nominating Committee (procedures may be replaced by Executive Committee)**

The General Council, on recommendation of the Executive Committees, elects a Nominating Committee of not more than 10 people, taking into consideration geographic distribution, cultural and denominational diversity and gender. Nominating Committee members are not eligible for election.

The role of the Nominating Committee is to process nominations for officers and members of the Executive Committee, to prepare and present a slate of candidates to the General Council and to facilitate elections.

In so doing, the Nominating Committee:

- considers delegates proposed by member churches, regional meetings and delegates, and their own knowledge of their regions;
- ensures that the list of nominations includes the necessary expertise and achieves a balance of gender, age, denominational diversity and regional representation;
- presents a draft list of nominations for comments from the General Council prior to elections;
- considers feedback on the draft list in preparing a final list of nominations;
- presents a final list of nominations 24 hours prior to elections.

#### **17. Public Witness Committee**

A Public Witness Committee is appointed by the General Council from among the delegates upon nomination by the Executive Committees.

The role of the Public Witness Committee is to prepare statements and proposals on issues of public concern that warrant discussion and adoption by the General Council.

In so doing, the Public Witness Committee:

- considers concerns raised by member churches;
- holds an open hearing to gather input from participants;
- works in small groups if necessary to consider possible statements and proposals.

#### **18. Vision and Message Committee**

A Vision and Message Committee is appointed by the General Council from among the delegates upon nomination by the Executive Committees.

The role of the Vision and Message Committee is to:

- receive the reports of the President and General Secretary, along with any proposals;
- listen to the Holy Spirit during all sessions of the General Council;
- engage with Discernment Group leadership;
- prepare over-arching visions to guide the work of the WCRC in the next seven years;
- prepare for member churches a message expressing the heart of the General Council;
- prepare other messages of recognition and thanks as needed.

The over-arching visions, message for member churches and other messages of recognition and thanks will be brought to the General Council for approval.

#### **19. Special Rule of Procedure for Committees**

The combined report and proposals of each committee should be reasonable in length. A proposal to receive the report is brought. Questions for clarification and discussion may follow, but the plenary session is not in a position to change the report.

When the report has been received, proposals arising from it are presented for consideration, possible modification and resolution as actions of the General Council.

## **20. Adoption of the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business**

The General Council in its first business session determines by simple majority vote whether to adopt or modify these Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business. During the course of the meeting, suspension or amendment of all or part of the procedures may be agreed by discernment procedures or a two-thirds majority of delegates present and voting.

## Concept Paper: Theology

### Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

Inspired by the Reformation movements in France, Italy and the Czech Republic, in Germany, Switzerland and many other countries the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches meets in Europe and considers what it means to be a church of the Reformation. The theme “Living God, renew and transform us” takes up the call of the Reformers to renew the church and to transform the world and applies it to the challenges of the present.

The Reformation understood itself as an exercise in theological empowerment. All Christians should be able to read the Bible and to discern God’s will for the world. The catechisms and confessions gave focus and direction and prepared every member of the congregation to contribute to theological discussions.

The theology plenary at the General Council wants to reconnect with this spirit and encourages all participants to engage with the way the WCRC is doing theology. In the Reformed tradition, theological concepts and ideas do not claim eternal validity, but are being tested continuously in the light of the challenges that the world is posing to our churches.

The first chapter of this concept paper presents some questions that members of our Communion are asking in response to these challenges: How can we more fully live out the powerful legacy that we have received from our forebears in faith? How can the ideas handed down to us help to discern God’s will amid the problems of our time?

The proposal summarizes these suggestions and ideas in the light of the confessions of Barmen, Belhar and Accra. The decision of the General Council shall give theological focus and direction to the programmes of the WCRC.

### Questions for Discernment

1. The WCRC should develop **new insights into the Reformation**, which according to Reformed understanding is the ongoing need for the church to be renewed and transformed: What is the “unfinished business” of the Reformation? What are the themes and insights of the Reformation that we have not fully “made good on?”
  - a. Have we fully realized “the priesthood of all believers” in our churches and in living out Christian vocation in the wider world?
  - b. The Reformers never desired a division of the church. Calvin even spoke of this as a “dismembering” of Christ’s body. Restoring unity is perhaps “unfinished business.”
  - c. How do we think about *sola scriptura* today in in our religiously pluralistic contexts where there are multiple “scriptures?”
  - d. Our theology is still shaped by western paradigms. How can we develop theological languages that give voice to the faith experiences of people of all continents?
2. WCRC’s vision of being **“called to communion – committed to justice”** should be further developed.
  - a. How can we express the connection between communion and justice in a way that it can be understood and embraced by all parts of our Communion?
  - b. How might we be informed by the Accra Confession with its economic and ecological focus as we pursue this vision?
  - c. The theme of “grounding theology in grace and the promise of flourishing of life” should be emphasized. The living God seeks fullness of life for all. How can we live out this gift in our theological work?
3. The living out of our central vision “called to communion – committed to justice” could be focused by establishing **guiding ideas**:
  - a. *Wounded discipleship*: In response to the idolatries and theologies of glory of our time the WCRC emphasizes the significance of the cross: Theology done in response to the wounds of our world is theology in the mode of “suffering seeking faith and understanding.”
  - b. *Just accompaniment*: Theology should develop justice as the key theological concept that guides the relationships within the Communion and the world.
  - c. *Committed dialogue*: To be relevant, ecumenical dialogues shall pursue the unity of the churches and their shared witness to the world.
  - d. *Sustained discernment*: Reformed churches relate to confessions and declarations of faith according to the principle of “critical hospitality.” Every generation needs to revisit the confessions and declarations of our Reformed tradition and to live them out in response to the challenges of the present.



4. Seven years after the formation of our *World Communion of Reformed Churches* the WCRC should continue to explore the question: What is the meaning of “**communion**?”
  - a. There have been regional conversations on the meaning of communion across our regions in these seven years. What are the fruits of these dialogues? Each region may have something to contribute to our understanding of our identity as a communion. How can we develop our communion so that it embraces and fulfils all these different expectations?
  - b. How do we navigate our very different interpretations of Scripture that sometimes threaten the unity of our communion?
5. WCRC’s **vision** must be **contextually shaped** to address the challenges of our time faithfully and effectively.
  - a. The rise of authoritarian and populist movements in many parts of the world requires response. We have seen how racism, castism, xenophobia and religiously motivated violence that characterize our contemporary contexts constitute a threat to life. Our commitment to justice calls us to address the threat to the environment (eco-justice), the threat to women (gender justice), the threat to the poor (economic justice) and the threat to any who are designated as “the other,” particularly the racial or religious other (social justice). The demonization and dehumanization of people by the politics of separation and division is as rejection of God’s love and hospitality. New idolatries present themselves, and a prophetic response is needed.
  - b. What is the best way forward for this? The General Council could start a process towards a declaration to renounce the systems and structures that threaten life. This declaration could discern threatening developments in several contexts. Can the church rise up in a unified prophetic protest? Is something like the Barmen Declaration called for in our time? What might we learn from the Confessing Church?
  - c. Perhaps a first step is a call to “lamentation” along with a call to confession and to prayer. We need to find ways of bringing to speech what people are wanting/needing to say in the face of the threats to life named above.
  - d. Part of the task is reading the signs of the times and discerning what kind of response will be most helpful to our churches. Whatever our current response, whether declaration or lamentation, the church would not only confront the world, but also itself, because the church is as divided as our cultures and has contributed to the current problems in many ways.

## Proposals

### 1. Taking up the “unfinished agenda” of the Reformation

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

- to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;
- to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;
- to the partiality of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor;
- to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;
- to the priesthood of all believers;
- to peace, reconciliation and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;
- to the *sola scriptura* principle as basis for Christian communion; and
- to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Examples of what this might entail are listed below:

- a. Following the principle of the ***Reformed Church always reforming according to the Word of God*** the WCRC shall continue to express its identity in the present tense. The ***Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra*** guide the WCRC on its way to become a confessing communion that uses the confessional heritage to respond to the challenges of the present.
- b. ***God’s justification in Christ*** ultimately aims at setting things right for the *poor and oppressed* (Luke 1:46-55). In accordance with the Biblical witness the WCRC shall further develop a theology of life that emphasizes the ***partiality of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor*** to restore life for the whole of creation.
- c. ***Evangelism*** is sharing the Good News both in word and action. The WCRC shall continue to emphasize the ***inseparable link between evangelization and justice*** in all areas of its work.
- d. The WCRC affirms the ***priesthood of all believers*** in all areas of its work and calls upon its member churches to fully live out this central principle of the Reformation in worship and in the leadership of the church.
- e. The WCRC understands unity is a divine gift and calling and shall therefore promote ***theologies of peace and reconciliation*** and continue to engage in ***programmes of unity*** of the Christian church.

- f. In the context of ever sharper conflicts about the right approach to understand the Bible, we need platforms where people of different theological convictions can meet. In these discussions the ***sola scriptura*** principle of the Reformation shall be emphasized as ***basis of Christian communion***.
- g. Unity is God's gift to the whole world and reaches beyond the boundaries of Christianity. At a time where religions are increasingly co-opted to the justification of racism, xenophobia, violence and war the WCRC shall strongly engage in programmes of ***interreligious dialogue and cooperation***.

## 2. Operating Principles

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

- the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;
- the commitment to contextuality, the diversity of voices, the multiplicity of languages and to the voices of young people;
- the commitment to do theology beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed and aiming at their liberation; and
- the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice.

A fuller elaboration of these principles is presented here:

- a. Theology shall be conducted in ***global perspective***: All programmes of the WCRC shall give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents. Theological texts should therefore draw from theological insights from all over the world.
- b. Theology of the WCRC shall be ***contextual*** and express the ***diversity of voices*** in each context. Theological work shall embrace the ***multiplicity of languages*** and give space to the contributions of ***young people***.
- c. In accordance with the confessions of Behar and Accra the theology of the WCRC shall ***begin*** with the ***experiences of the poor and oppressed*** and ***aim at their liberation***.
- d. All programmes of the WCRC shall express the ***inseparable link between communion and justice***.

## 3. Confessing Christ against separation and division

The General Council resolves to consult with churches in all regions to discern whether authoritarian and populist ideologies that violate the rights of people and deny full participation in society because of race, gender, caste, ethnic affiliation or religion shall be renounced in the form of a confession.

If taken up,

- a. such a process of confession should begin with lamentation and a call to confession of own complicities and failures;
- b. the exercise should draw from the many examples where Christians rejected separation and division and embraced God's love and hospitality;
- c. the confession should not only confront the world, but also the church. Many churches are as divided as the communities in which they are;
- d. the testimony should lead to a prophetic reconfirmation of the WCRC commitment to justice (eco-justice, gender-justice, economic justice and social justice).

## 4. Ecumenical Dialogues

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

- to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the General Council in Grand Rapids;
- to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners; and
- to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:
  - relevance for the WCRC and its member churches;
  - global perspective rooted in contextual realities;
  - and the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the communion.

Our engagement is marked by attention to:

- a. ***Relevance***: Dialogues shall answer concrete needs of the WCRC and its member churches.
- b. ***Global perspective***: Dialogues shall address ecumenical challenges from all the regions and give voice to theological languages from all over the world.
- c. ***Application to discussions within the communion***: The WCRC shall prepare materials that will make methodologies and contents of ecumenical dialogues useful and fruitful for debates within the Communion.

Many issues discussed in dialogues (e.g. acknowledgement of each other's ordination) are also controversial among member churches of the WCRC. The methodologies of dialogue opens ways to recognize differences but to nevertheless stay in communion.

## Concept Paper: Justice

### Preamble

In 1989 at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Assembly in Seoul the seeds of the “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” programme (JPIC) were sowed, starting the organization on its path toward seeking justice faithfully. The programme for JPIC influenced the ecumenical movement and continued its journey through various ecumenical bodies and individual churches. The WARC continued its commitment to justice, culminating in the Accra Confession, Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth. This document boldly named Empire as that overarching system under which we live, and to which, we as the church, are called to resist. The Accra Confession acknowledged that (articles 17, 18):

*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 (John 10:10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.*

*We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).*

The Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), too, brought to the WCRC their involvement in justice and social issues. Reports such as “The Church and its Social Calling” (1980), “The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation” (1996) and the affirmation of the Micah Challenge (2005), addressing specifically economic justice, are some examples of the REC's concerns and commitments to justice.

Following the call that the Accra Confession made to us and to the ecumenical movement—and what was affirmed in its centrality to the life of WCRC at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids<sup>1</sup>—we arrive at this General Council affirming our responsibility to engage critically to work for justice in the world, read the signs of the times and discern the will of God according to the Gospel values that Jesus proclaims: human dignity and justice for all God’s creation.

That commitment has been expressed in many statements and declarations from the WCRC itself and in partnership with ecumenical organizations or denominational bodies. It has also been the frame of the programmatic work of the WCRC in the last years, following the spirit of its predecessor bodies. From Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth, programmatic pieces to the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative, just to mention two key pillars, we felt the echoes of what the Accra Confession declares (articles 41, 42):

*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.*

*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 (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

### The Foundations of Our Justice Work

As we think about justice as the building of right relationships, between us and God, us and others, with ourselves, with the Creation, we identify three important pillars that have been shaping the justice work of our Communion:

1. Reading the signs of the times as the first steps in understanding and discerning the will of God and where we have to come together in collaboration with God’s plan. Reading the signs of the times is the imperative that Jesus calls his disciples into and implies that we must address questions of structural inequality in the world. To circumvent this is to avoid the roots of the problem and is a refusal to allow the radically inclusive love of God to reach all of God’s creation.
2. Justices issues are all interconnected. They cannot be separated and treated individually but are undergirded with the prerequisite of true peace that is inclusive of social, political, ecological and economic justice.
3. The mission of the church can be summarized in working with God in building just and inclusive communities that are alternative spaces of resistance and hope in the midst of Empire that turn us against each other and break solidarity and human community. Specifically, this means that justice has to be at the core of the theology we

---

<sup>1</sup> Record of Proceedings United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, p. 137.

produce to help churches in their mission. Justice has to be at the core of our passion to become a communion. It further means that there is a necessity to forge a communion that has justice at its very heart.

### Reading the Signs of the Times

In the years since the Accra Confession was written, the world has changed dramatically. On the one hand we have had a seeming “adjustment to the economy” with the subprime issue. While many at that time believed that it was cutting at the roots of the system, unfortunately neoliberal capitalism has emerged stronger and the rich wealthier than before. Looking back it seems to have been a way in which the wealthy gained not only more resources for themselves but state support for doing so.

On the other hand we now find a growing movement towards the political right that is driven by a racist and misogynist agenda on the one hand coupled with the collapse of the workers movement on the other. The unprecedented rise of what can best be described as Trumpism in the United States of America and the consolidation of political, military and economic power has come as a blow to progressive movements around the world. But the Trump phenomenon is just a reflection of what has been happening and continues to happen around the world. The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union for narrow, parochial and xenophobic reasons; the rise of right wing governments in Asia and increasing conflict in West Asia are just a few examples of this.

Further militarized resource extractions from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have only intensified and have worked to serve global elites in their continuous drive to consume while breaking the back of labour, bulldozing communities and bruising the land.

Even the rises of the Indian and Chinese economies have not resulted in greater equity for their own populations but have resulted in the appropriation of wealth and the exploitation of labour in these two countries and particularly in contested markets in Africa and other parts of Asia.

We are living in an age that is on the brink of self-destruction through nuclear warfare. Deadly war games in the South China Sea and escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula have made the threat of nuclear war an imminent danger. The posturing of nuclear testing has made war an ever-present reality.

The onslaught of the market and its continual search for resources has treated the Earth like a tap and a sink, imagining that there are unlimited resources and that we can pollute in unlimited ways. But the economic system is and always has been embedded in the ecology, and unrelenting economic activity is bound to have its effect. We now face an ecological crisis of unparalleled proportions. Climate change and drastic events are already harming the most vulnerable and threatening life as we know it. Our reliance on fossil fuels is only exacerbating the problem which is further fueled by changing ideologies which see humans as being distinct from the rest of creation and positioned to dominate it.

These global movements have resulted in a certain paralysis of analysis; the world is becoming more and more complex and discerning the signs of the times has become hard but all the more necessary. It is difficult to predict the way in which neoliberal capitalism will morph and what it will co-opt and appropriate next. For example, we are living in a context where even resistance and environmental consciousness have been subsumed under the logic of profit making where “buy green” and “just trade” have become catch words of consumerism.

The alienation caused by the onslaught of market capitalism has simultaneously resulted in parochial identity politics that have been fed by religious fundamentalism. This is across board and across all religions. Moreover, this religious fundamentalism has turned to violence against the other, either with explicit state support or by non-state actors. The religious question has been further fueled by a growing Islamophobia across the world which further seeks to drive fear and right wing agendas.

While we are not sure what the future exactly holds or what neoliberal capitalism is shifting towards, we can be sure that there is an unrestrained, savage, imperial greed that is committed to ensuring the good health of Empire. We can also be sure that the future holds displacement, war, extreme poverty, fundamentalism and the persecution of religious minorities the world over. Further the life of the planet is at threat with a growing climate crisis, nuclear threat and military conflict.

In such a critical moment in the history of humanity and the Earth we acknowledge that the way before us can lead our paths toward a future devastated by climate change, by a paradigm of development based on destructive industries and a distorted vision shape by greed. Nevertheless, we always have the opportunity to “choose Life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). We must take

the path that will lead us to sustainability, powered by renewable energy. We must reconcile as human beings with the Earth. We must leave to our children a thriving and healing planet.

This is the year we celebrate the five hundred years of the Reformation. Were we to read the works of the Reformers we would note that their prophetic voice was not just directed towards the church but towards society as well. Both Luther and Calvin wrote strongly about involvement in political and economical issues. Calvin was specially concerned about the rate of interest of credit. He made a distinction between when credit is taken to have access to basic needs and when it is done to produce profit. Even though he accepted the right of a rate when the credit is used to produce some profit, he affirmed and emphasized that a limit is necessary, otherwise it will be usury, and he particularly warned against that.

Calvin also proposed that we may take with joy the fruits of our labour and what the rest of creation gives to us but in such a way that we do not compromise the future of the coming generation or deprive others of similar possibilities. Also if we take into consideration the First Reformation Movement, like the Waldensians, we find strong concerns about the risks that wealth brings to faith.

Though we recognize that the Reformed tradition shifted away from nature at the start of modernity and industrialization, for the sake of ecological justice, it is time to overcome our alienation toward the natural world, listening to God's wisdom in creation and her vulnerable people, restoring its sacred value and seeking answers to environmental challenges in harmony with creation, of which we are a part.

The immense ecological challenges we face demand as well a "green reformation." More than a change in lifestyles, this entails a just transition to a zero carbon, post-growth economy. Such a transition needs to be supported by a new international financial and economic architecture that values and accounts for social and ecological tasks. It cannot but be nourished by a spirituality of resistance and transformation – exemplified by Indigenous concepts such as "Buen Vivir"<sup>2</sup> that comprehend that all beings are interconnected in a wondrous web of life.

We need to draw from the spirit of these reformers and see discerning the signs of the times as both a spiritual and theological exercise. To discern the signs of the times is to name the demons of our age and commit to their exorcism. This is not just an ethical imperative but is one that derives from a position of faith. It is a deep belief in a God of life and a God whose heart beats for justice—and that moves us towards responding to this God with faith that is justified by the doing of justice.

In recent times we have been witness to the Occupy and Black Lives Matter movements; student movements in South Africa and Central Europe as well as movements for life and livelihood and democracy have made inroads in South Korea and the Philippines. At the same time community, church-based and ecumenical initiatives have also succeeded in presenting alternatives to global capitalism. Success stories and best practices within the work of the Oikotree and Peace for Life show us that it is possible to not just imagine another world but to live faithfully in this one.

At such a time as this the justice work of the WCRC cannot stand by itself but is necessarily involved with the work of theology and communion of the WCRC. Justice needs to be undergirded by theology and theology is to be for the sake of justice. At the same time we cannot struggle for justice in the world without addressing the structural inequalities that exist between churches in the Communion and the struggles for life and dignity within each church.

### **A Biblical Paradigm**

The WCRC is a communion of churches, congregations and people who come from all walks of life. Some come from communities which are broken by Empire while others have seemingly benefited from its machinations. What we need is a biblical paradigm that can help us to articulate our vision for the future of the justice work of the WCRC.

Perhaps a helpful text is the story of the Egyptian midwives as found in Exodus 1: 8-22. It is a story that is located in the context of Empire in which people on opposite sides of the structural equation are able to find a common humanity that is rooted in resistance to the dictates of Empire. On the one hand it is about the Egyptian midwives that are afforded some amounts of privilege because of their ethnicity who undermine the dictates of their community and their community leaders to do what is right and work towards the protection of life. On the other hand it is about the abused slaves who enter into a tricky solidarity with those who are perceived as being from the oppressor community for the sake of the salvation of the children. This solidarity obviously involved deep amounts of trust of each other.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Sumak Kawsay* in the Quichuan language. The principle *Sumak Kawsay* orients the interrelation within the Quichua society and of this one with nature.

The story is further complicated by the entry of Pharaoh's daughter who does not commit class suicide like the midwives but is able to use her privilege for the protection of life, which ultimately results in the liberation of all the Hebrew slaves.

The text speaks to us in the context of our communion that struggles to live out the discipleship commandment of love with justice. In a present context that is torn by economic inequality and is supported by the power of military might which has divided us by class, nation and ethnicity the imperative is for us to come together in the building of unusual alliances that offers the possibility of living faithfully in the context of Empire. It offers us a way in which we can even resist Empire as individuals.

### **Responding as a World Communion of Reformed Churches**

In the context of our celebration as a worldwide family it is crucial to recommit ourselves as a communion united in its passion for justice. That means we must affirm the bases of our work for justice as we move forward into the future. Hence, we affirm that reading the signs of the times is the imperative methodology to understand our call to resist and overcome Empire and protect life as a gift from God. We need to recognize that while some of our churches have benefitted from Empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Therefore we need to continue our work on nuancing Empire and its implications for the Communion and for communion. Lastly, we must continue to affirm the interconnections between all justice issues.

Accordingly, we also affirmed the mutuality with matters around communion, mission and theology. Therefore, partnership and dialogue between our two programmatic areas is an imperative for our work. Themes around **migration and forced displacement** should be addressed as part of the work around mission. **Interfaith and interreligious engagement** should be approached not only from the justice perspective but in partnership with theology. Issues around **human sexuality** and its connections with **human rights** should be part of common effort to link them as matters of justice as well as matters of communion, theology and mission. A very strong collaboration between justice and theology is needed to work with all matters around economic and ecological justice and climate change.

As the WCRC we have been working ecumenically in the NIFEA project by a mandate of the Uniting General Council. It is important in this General Council to affirm this initiative in partnership with the Council for World Mission (CWM), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC). Affirming NIFEA means we recommit to work in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. It also means we need to do our homework to make the NIFEA initiative one that belongs to our member churches and regional bodies. There is also a need to flesh out the economic issues behind racism and gender injustice and see how this feeds into NIFEA as being the central piece of the justice work. As part of the development of the initiative within our regional bodies and member churches we can move beyond the work of the ecumenical panel in and attempt to recognize the link between economics and humans and human relationships, also conscientious management of resources within the household of God in a way that provides for the needs of all. As part of that process the piece of work toward our regions and member churches can concentrate on alternative economics practices. NIFEA also will need to reinforce its vision and alternatives for a new financial and economic architecture that address climate change and promote eco-justice.

Likewise, this should be the opportunity for our member churches to commit to do more in promoting climate justice. There are steps our churches and regions can engage in addition to be faithful and bold in addressing people in their pews, in bodies within their own structure, governments, corporations, etc. about the ethical responsibilities we all have in protecting the Earth. Churches divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing only in companies that are involved in peaceful pursuits, like providing renewable energy to more than the 1 billion people in the world who lack access to electricity are things we must encourage among our worldwide family.

### **Called to Communion, Committed to Justice**

The Gospel calls us to collaborate around issues of justice. We perceive of justice as the practice of solidarity from below so as to transform society in ways that seek to align the world with the will of God. We therefore perceive WCRC justice work as having the following core areas as seen in the graphic below:



**Proposals:**

1. The primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.
2. The New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be a central priority for the WCRC, in collaboration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.
3. The WCRC will initiate conversations between member churches on global systems of oppression, concentrating on the specific ways in which Empire changes who we are and the contexts in which we live. This will include a recognition that while some of our churches have benefited from Empire many others have deeply suffered its consequences. Resources should be produced collaboratively with regions and member churches to enable churches and communities to resist Empire and to live faithfully as disciples in this context. Churches should be able to present themselves as beacons of change and alternative communities in a context that crushes life.
4. The WCRC will continue its advocacy to international forums and organizations, especially through collaboration with the PC(USA) and other ecumenical offices in the United Nations, to present concerns around economic and ecological injustices, militarization, peace and reconciliation, escalating xenophobia and fundamentalisms.

(An immediate opportunity comes to write a letter on behalf of our community, representing 80 million Christians around the world, to the oncoming meeting of the G20, reminding the most powerful countries of the world of their responsibilities to ensure life and justice for every person in the world.)



## Concept Paper: Gender Justice

### Introduction

As context for our work on gender justice, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of the General Council's theme: "Living God, renew and transform us." This theme is a prayer to the Living God in communion with whom we seek new life. As a petition, it acknowledges the brokenness of our faith and practice, that renewal and transformation are needed.

We lament injustice to women as a result of such brokenness. As the biblical reflections that follow will show, our ancestors in the faith lamented this injustice and sought justice before us. Their enduring and persistent faith is validated in the life and the ministry of Jesus who affirmed the faith of these women.

We recognize that this injustice is a result of sexism and patriarchy, which is historical and systemic. It is ancient and deep; scholars and theologians argue that patriarchy is the oldest form of oppression, and that it is one of the root causes of all domination.<sup>1</sup> Injustice to women manifests itself in myriad ways. At this General Council we will focus on two ways: institutional injustice in the churches where women are denied the full equality of the baptized (Galatians 3:28); and violence against women throughout society.

An example of the first is the denial to women of ordained ministry. This denial is contrary to the Gospel because both men and women are equally "created in God's image" (Genesis 1:27), and "God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:11). God has been calling both women and men to leadership, granting different gifts to different people. Still, traditional ecclesial rules and practices in some member churches have prevented women from responding to God's call. It is time for renewal and transformation.

Injustice to women is also manifested in various forms of violence. Evidence of gender-based violence discussed below is startling. Women—just because they are women—are targets of sexual assault, rape, and physical and emotional abuse. This gender-based violence is found all over the world, though to different degrees and with different consequences from place to place. It is alarming to note that this violence may be growing. Thus we as a Communion must respond to it with urgency. It is time for renewal and transformation.

Injustice against women is interconnected and entangled together with other forms of injustice. We must address women's issues together with other issues. For example, domestic violence against women is often related to poverty. Sexualized labour is a form of classism and racism. A helpful perspective is found in the World Council of Churches' statement, *Economy of Life, Peace, and Justice for All: A Call to Action*. Here the churches affirm that "...various aspects of climate, ecological, financial and debt crisis are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately any more. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of the natural resources."<sup>2</sup> When we look at economic exploitation and ecological violence against nature, it is not difficult to see how they are connected with the plight of those who suffer from poverty and violence. Women, children, the poor and even nature itself in the global south are most affected by the current neoliberal, male-dominated, capitalist structures of the global north. It is time for renewal and transformation.

This Council invites all of us, delegates and the members of the Communion's churches, to pray, discern and make necessary decisions towards gender justice, and thus towards the renewal and transformation of our churches and our world.

### Laments of Biblical Women Against Injustice

Matthew 15:21-28, Luke 18:1-8, Judges 11:34-40

Lament, found in a number of biblical passages and in the lives of women today, means to "cry out." It can be a prayerful plea to God for help or a complaint to God over systemic injustice that needs redress. In these three texts women cry out against the unjust system of patriarchy, which has been codified in law, both societal and ecclesial.

In lament, these women and women who come after them seek to bring pressure for change on all who hear their complaint. The focus on gender justice at this General Council stands in this tradition. Through recommendations and calls to action, it

<sup>1</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: T & T Clark, 2005); Maria Miles, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> *Economy of Life, Peace, and Justice for All: A Call to Action* (WCC, 2012), paragraph 10.

presents a way forward for the WCRC to affirm equal place for women within its own structures and its member churches and also to witness to justice in the wider society. The General Council is called to lament, to cry out against injustice and to work for change.

In Matthew's Gospel a gentile woman approaches Jesus and asks for healing for her daughter. He ignores her, but she continues to cry out. The disciples find her cries so irksome that they ask Jesus to send her away. He responds only to the disciples, denying her appeal. However, the woman persists, imploring him, countering every argument he makes. In the end he recognizes she has strength of character that will persist in calling out—naming the injustice of limiting God's call to a particular religious and cultural group—until he responds. In the story she, a gentile woman with a demon-possessed daughter, is someone Jesus and his disciples would be expected to ignore, but she refuses to be ignored and cries out against such unjust cultural and religious expectations. Jesus recognizes the strong faith within her to lament and to keep on lamenting until her cries are heard, and a positive response results.

In the story of the widow facing the power of an unjust judge (From the Gospel of Luke), once again we hear lament, a crying out against the unjust structures that keep her life less than it should be. She cries out in vain again and again until the judge seeks to have her dismissed, fearing she will give him a “bruised eye.” In first-century Palestine the widow is the one who is supposed to receive protection under Torah law. As recorded in Exodus, Torah law indicates that if a widow cries out, calling attention to any abuse, God will hear her cry and God's wrath will burn hot (Exodus 22:21-24).

Through her lament, her ongoing cries for justice, the widow goes public to make her case. She condemns the system for what it is and calls it to be what it should be. Walter Wink, addressing systems of domination, states, “Whenever anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth—that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain too....If the main pillar of a system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth.”<sup>3</sup>

The third story, found in the book of Judges, comes from a young woman and her female friends. Notice in all three of these stories, the women remains nameless. Jephthah has made a foolish vow. So desperate is he to win a battle over the Ammonites that he promises God that whatever first comes out of his house to greet him on his return home, he will sacrifice to God. When his daughter greets him, his first response is to blame her.

However, he does not have the last word. She takes over the story, asking that she be given time to go to the hills with her friends to lament her fate. In the end her father does to her as he promised. No god saves her as the God of the Hebrews saved Isaac. Ensuring that evil does not have the last word, every year after her death her friends return to the mountains crying out against a system that murdered their friend, a cry that women through the centuries have continued to make.<sup>4</sup>

Lament—a powerful way to cry out against oppressive systems and to call for redress. In her definition of how patriarchy works, Elizabeth Johnson acknowledges that “the traditional pyramidal pattern of social relations in the government, families and the church and the like has become so much the way things are that this pattern appears natural.”<sup>5</sup> But it is a lie, and like the widow in Luke's gospel, once again we go public and declare the system or patriarchy in all its forms to be sinful. Its structure is not divinely ordained but humanly constructed. Even as we say this, we are aware that religious patriarchy is the most difficult system to dismantle because it understands itself to be “divinely ordained.”<sup>6</sup> Thus as the WCRC we need to look at our role in perpetuating violence against women both in their bodies and in their souls before pronouncing a statement on the issue of violence against women. No system should be supported that is biased against women, causing marginalization and in many cases violent death.<sup>7</sup>

## Gender-Based Violence

Today lament is becoming more and more a crying out from women in every corner of the world, suffering because of what is called gender-based violence. Gender-based violence has been understood and defined by the United Nations as violence that happens as a result of the vulnerability of women based solely on their gender. “Violence against women occurs in a patriarchal cultural context. The control and submission of women by men has traditionally not only been tolerated but also

<sup>3</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 98 as cited in William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). See also pp. 215-232.

<sup>4</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988), pp. 53-70.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth E. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Please see the concept paper for Theology .

legitimized. This is structural violence, and it arises from a series of sociocultural norms, which both justify and downplay the oppression of this type of conduct. In short, gender-based violence has its roots in the inequality between men and women. It is instrumental in character: it is not an end in itself but rather an instrument of domination and control. We are speaking here about a type of violence which is not individual in its origins, nor in its consequences, but which does certainly result in individual acts of aggression.”<sup>8</sup>

That is the primary reason the planning team of the Women’s Pre-Council decided to rephrase the General Council theme as: “Living God, in a world of violence, renew and transform us.” The program for this Pre-Council is focused on gender based violence and takes various entry points to address the challenge of being a church, a communion of churches around the world that hears the laments of women everywhere and responds in ways that make us faithful to the Gospel we preach. As gender-based violence prevents women and girls from attaining the abundant life of which Jesus speaks we must respond according to our call. In unmasking patriarchy and the violence that sustains it, we believe we work for justice and contribute to building among our member churches the communion we aspire to be.

In strengthening our communion, the WCRC and all its member churches in various regions should continue to embrace the various global campaigns: the “Thursday in Black Campaign,” the United Nations Campaigns “Orange Day” and “HeforShe”, and commemorate November 25th as the “Day against Gender-Based Violence” as well as the “16 Days of Activism” prior to this day.

### **Women's Ordination**

As we lament injustice to women across the globe and long to find effective ways to right the wrongs, we come face to face with injustice to women within our own Reformed churches. One significant action proposed to this General Council is the adoption of “A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination.” The text can be found in this workbook. The Declaration addresses two kinds of institutional injustice to women in our churches and calls for urgent remedial action. The first injustice is the refusal to receive women in ordained offices of the church. The second is treating ordained women as inferior to ordained men. General Councils at least since 1989 have consistently urged the churches to remedy this injustice.

The Declaration first affirms the conviction, grounded in the Bible, that “God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.” We observe, both in the Bible and in the subsequent history of the church, that it has often been hard for people of faith to see God calling women to leadership in the community of faith because of cultural assumptions that claim women’s inferiority to men. Still we also observe that God has indeed been calling women to leadership and granting them gifts and graces necessary to carry out their ministries. It is a matter of justice to reject assumptions of women's inferiority to men and to recognize publicly those women God is calling to leadership in the church.

The Declaration then calls on the churches of WCRC to “pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation must be determined on the same basis as for men.” This call to a common practice with regard to women's ordination is both a call to live out a public witness to the justice we proclaim, and also a call to live more fully into the communion<sup>9</sup> that WCRC increasingly embodies.

Our Bible study for 1 July, on Romans 12:1-2, will call for transformation and renewal to discern the will of God. What follows is Paul's description of the church as the one body in Christ with many members who have different functions according to the graces God has given them. There is no suggestion that the graces are divided according to gender. Indeed, Paul in Romans 16 acknowledges that his women colleagues have received such graces of leadership.

Adoption of The Declaration represents a challenge to all our member churches. Those churches that do not yet ordain women will be challenged to rethink the way they read the Bible or the way they witness to their faith in the world. The churches who do ordain women will be challenged to explore whether ordained women are treated with the same respect as men. We hear voices from churches in the North, South, East, and West lamenting the unequal treatment of women ministers. All our churches will be challenged to accompany one another in solidarity as they try to be faithful to the pledge they have taken together.

### **Proposals**

---

<sup>8</sup> Taken from a report on violence against women in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Special Report from the Ararteko institution to the Basque Parliament, December 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Please see the concept paper on Strengthening Communion.

- 1. That the General Council adopt "The Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination."**
- 2. That the General Council directs the Executive Committee to produce and adopt a Gender Policy and that they collaborate with the regions to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches.**

## A DECLARATION OF FAITH ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION

**A Declaration of Faith:** God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.

This declaration testifies to our belief that women and men were created equally in the image of God and that they therefore should be treated with equal respect and dignity. It testifies to the profound unity of all who have been baptized. It testifies to our experience over centuries that God has been calling both women and men to ministries of spiritual leadership and granting them the gifts and graces to carry out those roles. In some of the cultural contexts in which our churches live today, this declaration goes against the prevailing ethos. Thus faithful Christians are often called to be countercultural. Theological integrity and justice require that the churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in solidarity courageously declare their commitment to assure that both women and men have equal standing to reflect their common incorporation into the body of Christ in baptism and service.

The churches of the WCRC now pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation will be determined on the same basis as for men.

### The Context

*Why do we make this declaration now?*

The women's pre-assembly at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA (2010), through its commitment to full partnership between women and men, affirmed both the need to work towards a binding commitment of the Communion to the ordination of women, and also the need to achieve equal representation of women and men on the Executive Committee.

The Uniting General Council then affirmed women's ordination as central to the understanding of communion, stating: "True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized."<sup>1</sup> Among the recommendations approved by the WCRC General Council was a commitment to "...promote the ordination of women and work toward a time when the ordination of women will be binding on communion."<sup>2</sup> To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

The brutality of the treatment of women across the world today reflects a long-standing view in some cultures that women are by nature inferior to men, born to serve and obey men, that the girl is less valuable than the boy, that women deserve neither respect nor dignity. We see that the girl and the mother are often the last in the family to be fed and are the least educated, so that their life possibilities are limited. We see mass rape of girls and women used as a weapon of war with appalling consequences. We see women forbidden to leave their homes and take part in the wider life of society. Even in highly developed nations, women are paid less for the same work than men, sometimes have restricted access to healthcare and are rarely fully represented in national governing structures.

Churches rightly protest assaults on the human rights of women, but their moral authority is compromised when they demonstrate by their institutional life that they, too, believe in the inferiority of women and their incapacity to serve as ordained church leaders. The churches' refusal to ordain women is experienced by them as painful oppression, robbing them of their proper dignity. Even when the women have been ordained, they often face discrimination and marginalization.

The churches of the Reformed family today, spanning the globe and rooted in diverse cultures, have the opportunity and the obligation to witness before the world that women and men alike are created in the image of God, deserve equal respect and dignity, and can find in the institutional life of the church an affirmation of those beliefs. The ordination of women is a powerful witness to the equality of women and men in the eyes of God. It is also an expression of gratitude for women's rich gifts of leadership that invigorate the life of the churches.

### The Biblical Foundation: Creation and New Creation

---

<sup>1</sup> Record of Proceedings, United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, USA, p.160

<sup>2</sup> Idem

The Bible, foundation of Reformed belief and practice, has been used to support both the approval and disapproval of women's ordination. The Bible in fact both reflects and challenges the patriarchal world in which it was written, prompting us to define a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the Bible. Reformed Christians generally read the Bible in the light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, aided by critical biblical scholarship and rigorous reflection and discernment in the community of faith, upheld by prayer. This approach to discerning God's will avoids simply studying and citing isolated texts. God's grace for the whole of creation leads us to approach the Bible embracing mercy, justice and liberation in the face of the fallen world and structures of oppression. Galatians 5:1: "For freedom, Christ has set us free." There has been a fundamental shift in critical scholarship that has supported a renewed understanding of the equality proclaimed in the Gospel. This has guided us in our firm conviction that the ordination of women is a fully biblical imperative. We will sketch the basis of that belief, focusing on two texts: Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28.

**Creation:** Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (NRSV).

Fundamental to our understanding of the proper role of women is this verse, announcing at the very beginning of the biblical narrative that women and men together are created in God's image. This is a statement of equality and solidarity. Neither here nor in the following verse's charge to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth is there any suggestion of division of labor by sex or of women's subordination.

Opponents of women's ordination often point to Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (NRSV). The term "helper" has been seen as a sign of subordination. In the Hebrew, however, the word carries the opposite connotation. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures the same word often describes God creating and saving Israel, a source of strong support. The recognition by the man in Genesis 2:23 that the woman is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is again a declaration of mutuality and solidarity.

We reject theologies that teach that women are by their biological nature inferior to men, or that women reflect the image of God less fully than men, or that women's proper role is limited to procreation and the domestic realm, excluding them from taking public responsibility within creation.

God's intention at creation is equality and solidarity between women and men in harmony with all creation. After the fall both the woman and the man experience distortion of those relationships. In Genesis 3:16, the woman hears that she should be subject to her husband as punishment for sin, and the man is punished by the cursing of the land and his labor. The biblical narrative continues then to portray a patriarchal society. Jewish women in the Hebrew Scriptures rarely appear in official leadership. We do read of Queen Esther and of Deborah the judge, and of prophets like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah. A rich succession of able women nonetheless pervades the biblical text, such as the clever Hebrew midwives in Egypt, and the beloved Ruth with her own book.

**New Creation:** Galatians 3:27-28: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (NRSV).

The ministry of Jesus portrays many challenges to the oppressive practices of society, where public contact between women and men was strictly regulated. For example, he intervened against stoning of the woman taken in adultery. He allowed the hemorrhaging woman to touch his garment, and he healed her. He was surrounded by both women and men as disciples and empowered them in life and ministry. He taught about the reign of God that was already beginning among them and that would upend the current way of life. His intimate friendships with Mary and Martha permitted them to engage in theological conversation. He accepted the Syro-Phoenician woman's challenge to his understanding of his mission, and yielded to her plea to heal her daughter. He crossed the conventional boundary by engaging in a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, talking with her at length, and enabling her to return to her community and minister by sharing the good news. His interaction with Mary Magdalene transformed her into a faithful disciple who witnessed the resurrection. After his resurrection, he appeared to women disciples and sent them to tell the others that he lived. These examples demonstrate the countercultural nature of Jesus's ministry and indicate the value and significance Jesus gave to women in ministry.

In the band of disciples that gathered in Jerusalem to pray after Jesus' resurrection were "certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14, NRSV). All were present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Peter, addressing the people of Jerusalem to explain how the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah, took his text from the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters

shall prophesy...Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18, NRSV; cf. Joel 2:28-9). In this new era of the reign of God where the Spirit has been poured out, women will have a far more egalitarian role than before. So it should not surprise us to read in the book of Acts about women prophets like the daughters of Philip, about Priscilla with her husband teaching the preacher Apollos and accompanying Paul on his journey, risking their necks for him, he says, and about the women hosting house churches. Paul speaks warmly and gratefully about his women colleagues in ministry: among them Junia the apostle; Phoebe, the minister (or deacon) of the church of Cenchreae; Priscilla and Mary. Some had been jailed with him (Romans 16:1-16). The widows who cared for the poor (I Timothy 5) were understood by John Calvin to be part of the office of deacon. There are many records in the early centuries of the ordained women deacons.

It is in the context of the new creation, where the Holy Spirit calls those least expected to give leadership, that we read Galatians 3:27-28 as part of an ancient baptismal rite. All who are called into faith and baptized into Christ's body have become one family where human barriers accepted by society must fall. We know from the book of Acts how difficult a struggle it was for those early Christians to accept that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, previously sanctioned by religion, had been broken by the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet a clear decision was made that Gentiles given the gift of faith must be accepted into the community without circumcision. Some of our churches were still struggling in the late nineteenth century with the implications of that phrase “no longer slave or free,” but the teaching of the Bible eventually led them to decide that slavery was morally wrong and that Christians could not be slave-holders. It took another century for some of our churches to understand that the racial barrier has also been broken by the Holy Spirit, and there can be no racially segregated churches. Our Reformed family at the WARC General Council in Ottawa in 1982 declared that apartheid (which had extended to church structures) is sin, and justifying it morally and theologically is “a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy.”

We now are at a moment in history when our churches must declare that among the baptized there is no longer male and female. This means that men can no longer be exclusively privileged with church leadership.

### **Experience in the Life of the Church**

Women lost their equality with men in the Church in the early centuries as the house churches moved out into public spaces, and the Church became institutionalized. Theologians living in the dualistic thought of the Hellenistic world lost the Hebraic belief in the goodness of creation. They adopted from Greek philosophy and Roman law unbiblical views of the subordination and inferiority of women. Thomas Aquinas, for example, adopted Aristotle's view of women as defective males, damaged in the process of gestation. Apart from some women deacons in the East who marched with the clergy in the early middle ages, the only official role available to medieval women in the church was that of a nun; but some nuns did exercise remarkable influence. Christine de Pisan, a lay woman, set off around 1400 a centuries-long literary debate about the nature of women in which she challenged the theologians' assumptions. Marie Dentiere in the early years of the Reformation in Geneva took up this debate, insisting that the liberating Gospel called on women to speak and write, and she did. She asked, “Are there two gospels, one for men, another for women?” Women writing in this tradition pointed out the varied roles of women in the New Testament, reading the Bible very differently than either Catholic or Protestant male theologians. Attempts were made to silence these women.

Luther's Reformation, honored in 2017 at its 500th anniversary, gave to all of Protestantism the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the right of all the baptized to stand before God to pray for one another and to teach one another divine things, declaring God's gracious love and forgiveness to one another. This priesthood is distinct, however, from public ministry on behalf of a congregation. Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians repudiated the Aristotelian view of women, gave greater dignity to marriage, and even encouraged women to join congregational singing in public worship. Nonetheless they did not understand the priesthood of all believers to undermine the tradition of exclusively male clergy carrying out public ministry. After five hundred years, it is time for us to declare that a full understanding of the priesthood of all believers calls for equality of women and men in public ministry as well.

The ordination of women already has a long-standing tradition in the Reformed family. The Congregationalists have been ordaining women ministers since 1853, when Antoinette Brown became the first woman Congregational minister. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley in 1889, but no other Presbyterians followed for many years. There have been women deacons since at least the late 19th century, and women elders since at least the 1930's. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, increasing numbers of Reformed churches around the world have been regularly ordaining women as ministers, elders and deacons, and today most do so. Therefore, we have abundant evidence that women in diverse cultures on every continent can become fine theologians and have fruitful ministries. Our churches have confirmed through their experience with faithful women leaders that God is indeed calling women to ordained ministries and through them strengthening the churches.

Through history and in the present there is a disturbing recurrent experience in churches that do not ordain women. It is the disjunction of ordination from the practice of functions ordinarily related to ordained ministry. In all our churches women carry out tasks that churches with Presbyterian governance typically assign to elders and deacons; yet where ordination of women is refused, women carry out those tasks without the authority of office, without the ability to participate in the decision-making of governing bodies, and without the collegial support of ordained colleagues. In unusual situations of flux and transition, where pastors are scarce, where men are at war, on the mission field and in remote locations, able women are also called to exercise pastoral functions. They organize churches, lead public worship, preach, lead and teach in theological schools, and provide pastoral care. Yet even if they are theologically educated, they, too, lack the authority of office, participation in governing bodies, and collegial support, and they cannot offer the sacraments. They are also paid much less than pastors. The Reformed tradition has closely tied ordination to the functions of ministry. If women are trusted to carry out the functions of ministry, they should be ordained. This is a matter of faith and of justice.

When surveyed, most of our member churches that do not ordain women do not cite theology as the reason but culture. Some live in contexts where secular society does not accept women's leadership. Some are minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic or Orthodox countries and feel ecumenical pressure to refrain from actions their neighbors find offensive. These cultural pressures are significant and sometimes life threatening. The Church throughout its history has faced such challenge in its struggle to make a faithful witness in the world. The WCRC needs to accompany these churches in solidarity. In Christ we are called to be a new creation, transcending the oppressive aspects of culture.

Since the Seoul General Council of WARC in 1989, general councils have been calling on the churches to re-examine their practice if they do not ordain women and developing ways to assist them in this process. Those churches that do ordain women have been asked to study whether women ministers have equal access to placement opportunities and equal pay for equal work. The survey made by the office of partnership between women and men in 2009 (WARC) presented not very precise information since all churches did not respond properly. It showed that at least 42 churches do not ordain women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Those churches are distributed as follow: Europe 7, Africa 18, Middle East 3, Latin America 5, Asia 9. From 2010 until now we have not been able to elicit a clear response from the member churches, though the regional councils that allow us to update these figures point out that those numbers are still valid.

We now seek to live out our commitment to communion and justice as we make this common Declaration of Faith, praying: Living God, renew and transform us!



## Concept Paper: Communion in Mission

*Liberating Discipleship: Living out faith in the face of idolatries of power and privilege*

Mission is at the centre of the witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Guided by the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra the General Council discerns the challenges of our time and calls the WCRC to affirm a theology of discipleship that from the large richness of mission theology put emphasis on those concepts that will support the church to live out its faith in the face of idolatries of power and privilege.

### Preface

*“Be it known to you, O king, ... that we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up” (Daniel 3:18).*

The **Accra Confession** called many Reformed Churches to a **faith position that denounced the injustice of our economic systems as sin**. This theological critique exposed the unjust forces and powers which pollute, exploit and corrupt the world God made and loves. At the heart of this are powerful interests that have fundamentally inverted the relationships God calls to be at the heart of life and have deliberately engineered an economic and political system that favours the few and threatens all of life. The Accra Confession committed churches within the Communion to “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).

The critique of the Accra Confession was to see how Reformed discipleship was being subverted by loyalties to powers and systems counter to God’s vision of life. These are **idolatries** and they arise from a devotion to counter powers to God’s power. Faithful people today are like Daniel’s people under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, under the threat of idolatries which silence and co-opt us to the systematic looting of the treasure God has made in all life. The WCRC understands this to be the idolatry of the “golden statue,” which Accra named as neoliberal globalization, and its constituent gods (de-regulated markets, commodification, consumption, technology etc.) function at the centre of systems of power to co-opt, seduce and silence all counter visions and voices.

**If this was the case in 2004, it is even more so in 2017.** The WCRC comes at the questions of this time conscious that we are in the midst of powers and structures seeking to co-opt or silence us, and realizing that we are called in and by mission to counter and subvert such powers and systems. Babylon has many faces and forces today, and the peoples’ and planet’s visions and voices that New Babylon oppresses long for redemption. At the heart of Babylon are chauvinistic, patriarchal, racist forces which must be resisted by common, inclusive justice-creating movements, which befit the Spirit of God who walks through Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace **to show the true power of God alongside the victims of Empire**.

The Accra Confession was built on an honourable, joyful and radical tradition of speaking truth to power. This General Council meets in the context that voiced the **Barmen Declaration** in 1934. This act of defiance to fascism offers inspiration and challenge for today’s context where many see fascist ideologies emerging again. There are signs now of the Gospel being domesticated and co-opted to violent and supremacist ideologies now as there was in Nazi Germany. The Council can be mindful as it meets in the contexts of today’s threats to life of the costly discipleship of Bonhoeffer and Niemöller and the Confessing Church movement. The Reformed tradition knows the sin of racism must be named and resisted. The Belhar Confession also commissions this Communion to be bold in its announcement of a joyful vision of common humanity and its denunciation of racism in all its forms.

***Bound by this tradition the WCRC feels called upon to testify against a series of idolatries believing in God’s converting and de-colonizing power and presence.***

### **Idolatries of Power and Privilege: Exclusive and Excluding Nationalisms**

Many of our member churches and regions are testifying to the **racism, xenophobia and violence** swirling around issues like migration, human diversity and poverty and disenfranchisement. Hatred and intolerance are manifesting themselves in many forms, in political and community life. The implications of political changes like the election of President Trump, Brexit, etc., are still becoming clear but already the rights of minorities, migrants, indigenous people and people of colour are at risk, as is commitment to action on justice issues like climate change. Chauvinistic conservatism and ultra-nationalisms have captured the political will of many nations. It is visible in Europe in emerging and established far right political populist parties in France, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands, in the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, in the anti-immigrant policies of Hungary, in Erdogan’s shift to autocracy in Turkey. This reflects Putin’s Russia and Assad in Syria. The state of Israel continues to repress Palestinian rights to their land and legitimizes its ultra-nationalist settler programmes. Hindu ultra-nationalism holds sway in India under Prime Minister Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Islamic style

nationalisms of Pakistan or Malaysia. China's Communist Party uses more and more nationalist rhetoric in its internal and external politics.

Civic visions of nationalism have been usurped by exclusivist interests and are accompanied by supremacist and chauvinistic ideologies which threaten minorities and migrants, risk international consensus on key justice issues, from climate change to human rights, and will threaten peace at a national, regional and even international level. This makes many fear and suspect a **global rise of fascism in various forms**. Gathering in Germany for this General Council reminds us it is the lesson of the 20th century that fascism must be resisted, and is best resisted at its earliest stages. The values of the Gospel are at stake as societies oppress the weak and churches are called to costly discipleship in the face of such power and politics.

### **Idolatry of Inequality: Exploitation by Dominant and Domineering Groups**

Eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, according to a report published by Oxfam in January 2017. The World Economic Forum identified economic inequality as one of the most urgent global risks in 2012. **Wealth continues to be sucked up by the wealthy; there is no trickle down.** Oxfam cites that the incomes of the poorest 10% of people increased by less than \$3 a year between 1988 and 2011, while the incomes of the richest 1% increased 182 times as much. In the United States, new research by economist Thomas Piketty shows that over the last 30 years the growth in the incomes of the bottom 50% has been zero, whereas incomes of the top 1% have grown 300%. This is to amplify and accelerate all that Accra denounced.

The fact that this wealth is also owned by men highlights **gender inequality**. It has become an almost routine assertion to say that poverty itself is unequal and impacts on women disproportionately. Men and women differ in their access to almost every aspect of life, from health care to education, human rights to access to power. Sexism at an individual level and patriarchy at an institutional level continue to overshadow gender relations and thus thwart gender justice. Unequal access to wealth and employment continue to show subordinate position of women in almost every context. The prevalence of gender violence, domestic violence and female genital mutilation shows the objectification of women. Experiences of exclusion from education, decision-making, positions of leadership and even citizenship within society or civil institutions, including churches, testify to the social, political and religious sanction of ongoing discrimination. The diversity of human identity is often repressed and exploited, whether it be in terms of gender, sexuality, ability or ethnicity. Many of these communities experience violence at the hands of dominant groups, often sanctioned by religious power.

**Racial inequality** is also interconnected with patriarchal systems. Racism and xenophobia is showing a marked increase in political movements and policies, and it breaks out in acts of intolerance and violence. It is systematic and often religiously rooted. It continues to be a global issue for black people, particularly as a legacy from the transatlantic slave trade. The United Nations has dedicated 2015-2024 as the "International Decade for people of African Descent" in order to bring respect and justice to the black diaspora communities around the world. The US-based "Black Lives Matter" movement reminds us why this is urgent; a movement which has emerged as an act of resistance and pride following the killings of black people by police and vigilantes, within a social and legal system virtually criminalizing blackness.

This echoes the **experience of many ethnic groups**. Dalits and Adivasi in India experience acute religiously inspired oppression, and even some churches practice caste. Minorities like the Rohingya in Myanmar, Uighurs in China, Yazidis in Syria, Bihari in Bangladesh and more continue to experience violence and exclusion. Alongside this anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are evident at many levels of social, political and religious life. Indigenous peoples' lands and rights continue to be denied and exploited. Inclusion and discrimination continues to be a battle ground, be it in the areas of race, gender, sexual identity or disability and by and large "religion" is identified as an exclusivist anti-social force. Ethnic violence is also characterizing community and tribal relationships in Africa and destabilizing national identity and minorities and migrants are experiencing violence.

### **Idolatry of Consumption and Profit Seeking: The Deepened Ecological Crisis**

Accompanying these heightened inequalities are the connected and consequential crisis of human-caused **climate change**, driven by the economic system and values of the global economic system. Global warming continues. 2016 marked the third year in a row that record global temperatures were set. The average global temperature change for the first three months of 2016 was +1.48°C, essentially equalling the 1.5°C warming threshold agreed to by COP 21 negotiators in Paris 2015. We are witnessing heightened storms and extreme weather events. Heatwaves that previously occurred once every three years are now happening every 200 days thanks to global warming. With rising temperatures come rising sea levels; the two major causes of global sea level rise are thermal expansion caused by the warming of the ocean and increased melting of land-based ice, such as glaciers and ice sheets.

This is already **threatening life now** with species extinction, threats to food and water security and loss of land, threatening population groups and entire nations. It is also causing forced migration. In the last six years, some 140 million people have

been forced to move because of climate-related disasters. According to the UN, by mid-century one in 30 people could be displaced, many as a result of climate change. Existing global inequalities are exacerbated by the injustice of climate change that severely affects the poorest and most vulnerable, those who have contributed least to the climate crisis.

### **Idolatry of Boundaries: Forced Migration**

The UNHCR Global Trends Report finds 65.3 million people, or one person in 113, were displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution in 2015. Twenty-four people were forced to flee each minute in 2015, giving a refugee population four times larger than a decade earlier. **Forced migration** is a general term that refers to the movements of refugees, trafficked people and internally displaced people as a result of conflicts, as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects. This global displacement of people affects almost all nations' politics while impacting heaviest on many of the poorest nations of the world. In all, 86% of the refugees under the UNHCR's mandate in 2015 were in low- and middle-income countries close to situations of conflict. Worldwide, Turkey was the biggest host country, with 2.5 million refugees. With nearly one refugee for every five citizens, Lebanon hosted more refugees compared to its population than any other country. According to the UNHCR children made up 51% of the world's refugees in 2015; many were separated from their parents or travelling alone.

Accra exposed many of the factors driving this. Economic and ecological injustice, coupled with militarization drives this crisis, exacerbated by xenophobia and intolerance. But at the same time as nations enforce their boundaries the global economic system is prospering **human trafficking**, which has become an illegal global business second only to the illegal trade in weapons. It is fed by the economic system that always drives down the cost of labour and wants to dismantle labour rights. It is made possible by the commodification of people, especially those that patriarchal attitudes deem less important, and it is often rooted in the nexus of poverty, climate change and militarization.

### **Idolatry of Self-interest: Militarization, Religious Extremism and Communal Violence**

The World Bank estimated in 2015 that 1.2 billion people, roughly one fifth of the world's population, are affected by some form of violence or insecurity. **Militarization** is evident in such conflict areas as Syria, Iraq and Palestine. But it is also evident in the militarization of police and security forces in places like the US and Africa. The urgency of peace-making is clear on the Korean peninsula, Syria, Israel-Palestine, Kashmir and West Papua.

**Religiously motivated conflicts** continue to be on the rise at communal, national and international levels. One third of the world's population meet hostility because of their religious affiliation, be they Christians, Muslims, Jews or of other belief systems. Inter- and intra-religious conflict is also a factor in displacing populations and in destabilizing communities. It can be seen in the waves of Islamophobia in US politics, violence across Israel-Palestine with the systematic oppression of the Palestinians, religious and tribal unrest in Nigeria, violence targeting non-Muslims in Pakistan, Hindu nationalism in India, the persecution of Rohingya refugees in Myanmar and beyond.

Our world is confronted with sophisticated form of **religious extremism** that expresses itself in terrorism. Religious teachings have been perverted and co-opted to justify heinous acts of violence against humanity. All of these points to a multi-faceted political, social, psychological and religious struggle in our midst which is causing enormous harm; stands as a judgement over our discipleship.

**In response to God's encompassing love of all creation we must redeem religion as a means to justice and as a source of peace.**

### **Communion in Mission - Solidarity in Resistance**

***These are the missiological implications of this reading of the signs of the time for the work of the WCRC in the coming time.***

### **Discipleship in the Midst of Disaffection and Disenchantment**

Populist disaffection and disenchantment is driving a shift to authoritarian attitudes and policies. Across the West, establishment parties of the right and the left are being disrupted. The losers from globalization are finding champions of anti-globalization that are challenging the formal mainstream orthodoxy. Thus, the traditional distinction between centre-right and centre-left is breaking down as the WCRC is not alone in seeing that economies do not support all our communities. After the collapse of the housing and credit bubble, following the great financial crisis, economic discontent is proving a powerful tool in politicizing and radicalizing populations away from the centre ground. A recent German-led study shows that from 1870 to 2014, a financial crisis has tended to be followed by a 30% increase in voting share for far-right parties. People are turning to new movements. There are signs that youth movements in settings like South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Papua New Guinea are pressing beyond those institutions in seeking to raise freedom's voice.

But the **disaffection** sits alongside **disenchantment** with the promises of change and those who make them. In the Western context this has accompanied generations of disenchantment with and decline of political, social and religious institutions. Many member churches can testify to the decline in religious affiliation, especially to mainline churches—and no longer just in Europe. Daniel tells the story of those who live out their faith in Babylon, who must be true to the sovereignty of God under the shadow of the emperor.

While Christians are amongst the persecuted in many settings, we are not alone in being the persecuted, not should we forget we also number strongly against the persecuting. There are disturbing signs of Christians and churches taking ultra-nationalist and even white-supremacist views or seeing that so called “Christian values” are supported by such movements. Many of the idolatries named above have their location in Christian ideologies and practices. Churches have and do connive with domineering powers and model themselves and God in that image.

**The WCRC is a communion seeking to be in mission together**, in communion with God and with each other. Can one Christian community speak to this alone? Certainly Reformed perspectives can and should be given, informed by various theologies and histories and contexts. Yet the scale of the issues has reached beyond the confines of one part of the Christian community, especially given the limitations of resource and leadership. Thus, partners and neighbours must risk together resisting the idolatries of Babylon.

But these issues also ask if only one religious community can speak to this? The issues here stem from living in divided and destructive ways and so they are human issues, affecting us in common, because they are arising from us as a species. The ecological crises befalling the life God created come from one part of its life. These threats strike at the heart of all life, and the sustainability of our life as a creation, because of a “flood” humanity has caused. **Thus, our vision of communion should be challenged to embrace all whom the Spirit of Life gives life and all who share in visions of justice and transformation.**

#### **God’s Continuous Creation in the Midst of the Crises of Our World?**

**Pockets of resistant life** can be seen in the face of the authoritarian powers and the idolatries we have named. In this 500th anniversary of the Reformation we bless and invite how the church stands in hope and danger of being reformed from the margins, and in ways which defy easy ecclesiological categories. The threats we have named emanate from humanity’s common life and endanger all of human life, indeed all creation’s life. We are one part of the Christian family, one set of clans amongst the human tribe, and we can see that our vision of communion needs transformation. Many of the forces we face can only be overcome by common action. Our refusal to honour life’s relatedness across the boundaries of identity, faith, nation and personhood is prospering violence and those who profit from violence. The task is to deepen our inclusive practice for many are participating in the continuous creation God invites. **Texts forged in the face of Empire will suggest signs of where God’s continuous creating presence is at work.**

#### **Subaltern Voices Shaming Idolatries of Power and Privilege**

The **Bible** has many **subaltern voices confronting human and divine authorities**. Prophets speak truth to power as they confront the political power of kings or the religious power of priests (Nathan, 2 Samuel 12). Patriarchs and matriarchs call the divine to account over unfulfilled promises and longed for life (Genesis 18: Abram and Sarai). God comes in Jesus as God from below to speak from this subaltern position. Like the prophets he confronts powers, and his words bring life and hope and change. Even Jesus is confronted from below: The particular privileges he experienced as a Jewish male are confronted by a Gentile woman (see Matthew 15:22-28, etc). This results in the transformed health of the woman’s daughter. But so are the boundaries of the community and their sense of to whom God belongs.

**Transformation from below** is lived out amongst persons and communities living lives counter to the idolatries named here, and communion should be sought with them. **The Communion’s mission is to further subvert the systems of dominance on the earth and within the churches as part of our vision of the Sovereignty of God.**

#### **Prophetic Voices Calling Out the Idolatry of Consumption and Profit-making**

All faiths are being co-opted to the narcissistic desires of the idolatrous powers systems we live amongst. The church is amongst those being conformed. It is evident from the histories and complicities of the mainline churches to the emphasis on the prosperity across a range of new religious movements.

Yet **all faiths have nurtured alternative communities** where new visions of life have emerged to counter the predominant values of their day. And amongst them lone voices have emerged. Voices like Jeremiah whose message to the sons of Josiah condemned consumption and profiteering, asking them “Are you a king because you compete in cedar?” and announcing, “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wage” (Jeremiah 22:12ff).

The prophets broke like waves on the borders of Empire, and they mark out the contested spaces where God's counter-creation emerges or is destroyed. Thus the signs of prophetic individuals and communities must be sought, places that hold briefly God's alternate vision of life, even if they do not name God at the midst of it. **The Communion needs attend to the prophets of today to discern a new ecclesiology of mission which opens fresh ways to live out the discipleship of Christ.**

#### **Vulnerable Persons Trespassing over the Idolatry of Boundary**

Migrants and refugees are scorned worldwide, reviled and despised amongst communities of all faiths, the church included. The first act of human violence in the biblical story symbolises the tension between settled communities and migrant ones (Genesis 4). The rivalry, anxiety and enmity between Cain and Abel is visible in our world today. Many are marked like Cain with suspicion of migrants like Abel. Yet the prophet Ezekiel was sent by God into migration, made an exile to symbolize God's rejection of Israel's idolatries of power (Ezekiel 12). Communion with such individuals and nations is to tabernacle with the angels God sends amongst us (Hebrews 13). **Theirs is the vulnerable power to renew** closed and callous communities, and in their bodies they redraw the geography and community of humanity.

As we discern what God is counter-creating in the midst of such dominant powers and idolatries the task is to develop discipleship for life in Babylon—a discipleship which inhabits the realities of the world as it is and the potentials of the world God is calling forth in counter-creation. Such discipleship will have the hallmark of resistance to Empire and hospitality to its subjects and victims. **The Communion in mission can only be in mission if we make common cause with the need for justice for the earth as well as the dispossessed, it will be to live out a mix of challenge and blessing, it will be to live out a mix of challenge and blessing in the face of power and privilege, such as can be seen in another prophet of Babylon, Jeremiah** (e.g. Jeremiah 29:4ff).

#### **Imperial Victims Exposing the Idolatry of Self-interest and the Beginnings of a New World**

**"Mission from the margins"** invites fresh perspectives on the direction from which God brings change and with whom. Those whom the architects and builders of Empire reject turn out to be the most important of all. As those called to confess Jesus is Lord we do so recognizing this is now as seditious an act as it was originally. The Lordship of Christ was revealed in irony by Pilate as the religious authorities of Jesus' day sought him silenced. Imperial political power and imperial religious power acted from the impulse of self-interest, and as Jesus reminds his people, those who seek to save their lives will lose them. The life our systems seek to save, assert and prosper are a form of death, both because of the dying they inflict on creation and human community and because they are counter to the life God invites.

The reformation of faithful holy community begins amongst and with those our systems sacrifice. In this then is a vision of evangelism that authentically witnesses to the life and Lordship of Jesus, who is not the uber-Caesar but the contra-Caesar. **In Christ's companionship and alongside those his Spirit calls, this Communion must articulate afresh and in living ways a vision of mission which counters domination with life-centred reformation.**

#### **Reconfiguring Religious Community and Action in Solidarity**

The dominant paradigm for the representation of religion in contemporary society is as a sectarian and intolerant force. Religions are often co-opted to a "culture of war" view of contemporary life. This language is evident in the analysis of religion from outside faith perspectives and is clear in the rhetoric within some religious movements. Religiously justified violence is evident at many levels of local, national and global life. And all the world faiths are complicit at some level in this violence.

But, there are also **signs of dialogue and solidarity**, where people of all faiths and none are gathering to address together for common concerns and threats to life. This challenges the dominant paradigm of religions as anti-social and anti-human, but such forms of dialogue and solidarity are often suspected and criticized within the faith traditions. Inter-religious solidarity and dialogue is a key part of entrenching a culture of peace and anti-racism and discrimination work. This serves as an urgent call that is so loud for the church to bear witness. It is vital in sustaining hope if humanity is to overcome global threats to our common humanity. **For the church to be the church, it must endeavour to intentionally engage with other faith communities and all people of goodwill to confront the evil forces and principalities that cause segregation and intolerance for others.**

## Proposals

1. The General Council resolves to recommit the World Communion of Reformed Churches to the following affirmations that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on mission, justice, theology and communion and its strategic plan:

- a. God's encompassing love, which sustains the world inside the church and beyond, offers humanity the power and purpose for transformation through acts of justice, mercy and peace.
- b. The living God renews and transforms us in mission as the reign of God appears among us. In the global crises and threats, we call for ways of mission that take the form of genuine peace-building, partner with all humanity, and anticipate the oneness of life shown to us in God's Spirit, (Ephesians 2).
- c. Our witness begins amongst and with those our systems sacrifice. Here we find a vision of evangelism that authentically witnesses to the life and Lordship of Jesus.
- d. Babylon has many faces today. We acknowledge that religions have made idolatries of themselves and admit that they have been misused to perpetrate injustice, intolerance and violence and have brought despair and dispossession, even and especially in God's holy name.
- e. Religions need to be redeemed as a means to justice and as a source of peace. God persistently calls us to resist the ultra-nationalist, patriarchal, racist forces of Babylon. God's Spirit enters our realities and creates alternatives to the wrongs we face, offering us cause for hope and even joy in the face of the evils of our time.

2. The General Council resolves to:

- a. reaffirm its commitment to the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra and shall continue to testify against the idolatries of power and privilege, inequality, consumption and profit seeking, of boundaries and of self-interest;
- b. call on the Communion to work with mission boards of the member churches and partner mission bodies to develop mission programmes for "Liberating Discipleship."
- c. recommit itself to a praxis of evangelism that does not devalue, but partners with all whom the Spirit empowers in seeking liberation and reconciliation. The WCRC shall continue to emphasize the inseparable connectedness between mission, justice and communion in its life and will implement it in all its programmes.
- d. agree that its mission shall be inspired by those who, like Jesus, assert their faith as an alternative and counter to those with power. The General Council therefore supports the World Council of Churches' assembly in Busan in its call for a "mission from the margins" and calls upon its member churches to study the "Together Towards Life" document and to take up its concluding affirmations;<sup>1</sup>
- e. move together with all who accept the invitation of the WCC to participate in the "pilgrimage of justice and peace"<sup>2</sup> to advocate for life-affirming economies, to prevent climate change, to promote nonviolent peacebuilding and reconciliation and strive for human dignity and calls upon its member churches to join the pilgrimage;
- f. engage with other religious communities in interreligious advocacy towards justice and to stand together in solidarity with people who are oppressed and in situations of conflict;
- g. confirm that it will stand with those who are persecuted for their faith in the God of justice and peace and calls for the protection of freedom and belief of all people as a fundamental human right.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes", in: International Review of Mission, v101 n2 (November 2012): 250-280, §§101-112.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

## Concept Paper: Strengthening Communion

### *Setting the stage for Strengthening Communion within the context of Contemporary Global Challenges*

#### Introduction

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was born out of a historic merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council when they met in June 2010 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, at the Uniting General Council. This union was intentionally interpreted as a missional invitation of the member churches to embody the unity promised in Christ for common witness and service to the world. However, the concept in itself is open to different interpretations by the member churches depending on their ecclesial traditions and doctrines. In spite of the fears that some churches had about the appropriateness of the term for an ecumenical body, its missional invitation to draw closer as a communion was accepted by the majority with justice affirmed and embraced as a core value. The rallying call of the World Reformed Communion family is: *"Called to communion, committed to justice!"*

The Triune God is one whose relationship is rooted in communion. The call to communion is a call to participate in God's own communion. The divisions in the world necessitate that the churches be in communion to offer authentic witness and service because praxis authenticates communion. The missional witness offered by the Reformed churches in the struggle against apartheid in solidarity with the member churches in South Africa and the 2004 Accra Confession (that called for global economic and climate justice) made issues of justice central to the understanding and practice of the unity that Christ gave to the church. The experiences of member churches of the WCRC, who are united and uniting, have radically moved the understanding of communion to rise above the false barriers of denominationalism to emphasize oneness, and that moves beyond the structures of the church to engagement in ministry and mission.

#### Communion: What is WCRC called to be and do?

The purpose of this plenary is to trigger debate on how the understanding and practice of communion can be strengthened within the WCRC family. In its mission statement the WCRC affirms:

*We are called to be a communion of churches joined together in Christ, to promote the renewal and the unity of the church and to participate in God's transformation of the world... responding to God's call to meet spiritual needs and foster justice for all in the transformation of the world through the love of Jesus Christ... collaborating with other church movements on issues of common concern such as climate change, gender justice and theological dialogue<sup>1</sup>*

However, the communion (*koinonia*) identity and vocation of the Reformed family of churches is an *"already-not yet"* existential and eschatological experience. It was given by Jesus, the head of the church, but remains an unfulfilled potential of the church's ministry and mission. In every era, communion must be contextually appropriated and applied. The communion experience is available in each local ecclesial gathering in worship and witness where people share communion with God and with others around them. The attention given by the global Reformed community to the phenomenon of communion over the years has focused on acceptable theological formulations than on practical application. In spite of major developments in different forms of unity among Reformed churches, communion within the family has remained a phenomenon that is talked about rather than a reality that is lived out.

#### Overcoming Differences in the Understanding of Communion

The challenge in 2017 is linked to the WCRC's quest to strengthen communion in the life of the community. The quest for strengthening calls into question whether *becoming stronger* should be the goal of communion or whether it should be embraced as an invitation to resist and subvert life-denying systems of power in this world. *What are the qualities of the communion we seek?* The process of strengthening must further expand on the understanding of communion considering the *diversity within the Reformed family*. The histories of the member churches are different. Their contextual realities have given each a unique missional identity and witness. Should these different contexts be interpreted as putting limits on the understanding and practice of communion? While it is important to discuss and understand the limits of our communion, we should also gaze at the eschatological vision of fuller communion to which we are called. In every context there is need to stress wholesome relationships that value the dignity of all people. Therefore, the key questions to be interrogated seem to be: *Why communion? Whose need is it seeking to meet?*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2011 Executive Committee Minutes, page 146.

If the intention of this discussion is to facilitate meeting inner ecclesial needs then the process is destined to fail. However, if the communion being sought is one that leads to engagement in risky boundary crossing discipleship, reaching out and sharing fullness of life (John 10:10), and building life giving relationships with others—this form of Reformed communion is good news.

### **The Changing Contemporary Landscape**

The 21st century has seen the “ascendancy of moral lowlifes” as the standard of leadership in many institutions of governance.<sup>2</sup> The perennial temptations of avarice and abuse of power and privilege by leaders has become toxic and is destroying public trust in national leaders. The fast pace of social change has created “pluralities and diversities that sometimes breed conflict, and many persons are no longer willing to give their allegiance to any centre. Democracy in the contemporary neoliberal model functions like a bubble in a very delicate state of existence that can easily burst and have its life-sustaining contents spilt.”<sup>3</sup> Neoliberalism seeks to define human beings by the self-serving interest of the market. Billionaires and their large corporate lobbies seek control over national governments and their policies to protect themselves from the constraints of democracy, from paying fair taxes, following environmental rules and paying living wages to their workers. Removal of political red-tape and de-regularization of key rules of good governance allow big corporations to make their own rules without being accountable to the people of the land. Through their insatiable appetite for acquiring more, they become dysfunctional, and governments use taxpayers’ money to bail out the companies and mortgage the nation’s future wellbeing. The ultimate objective of neoliberalism is the removal of political and economic power from the majority of God’s people.

The contemporary era of global Christianity has entered a new phase in which certain types of conservative brands of evangelical Christianity have become allied with extreme nationalistic political and economic forces promoted by populist and amoral political leaders. It has resulted in deep public disappointment with those that bear the name Christian and church because of their commodification of the gospel and ineffective public engagement with issues that deny millions the fullness of life.

We live in a world of growing conflicts and divisions caused by radical inequalities and the re-emergence of racism, gender discrimination and other discriminatory practices. Yet we do also notice the overcoming of historical divisions within and between churches as well as the growing presence and visibility of women in church and society.

A new wave of global people movement has been triggered by migration, refugees, modern slavery and wars. The impact of technology and computation have created advanced forms of communication that is unlike any other time. With the immeasurable benefits have also come negative consequences that are best demonstrated in growing dehumanization. Secularization has unleashed both positive and negative challenges and opportunities for the church’s ministry and mission. For example, the focus on individual rights and freedom has led to the release of creative solutions, but on the other hand has also contributed to the weakening of institutional life that places emphasis on communal endeavours.

The church is facing a global credibility crisis because of the betrayal of the gospel of Jesus. Persons who have become disappointed with Christians and the church are seeking authentic spirituality that fosters relationships, healing, reconciliation, and redemption. The growing influence of the “Prosperity Gospel” as an ally of political and economic nationalism deceives the poor and the vulnerable with false hopes. This has weakened the authenticity and credibility of churches and their leaders in the public spheres who are also seen as proponents of greed.

The ongoing challenge of climate change has exposed the culpability of human beings as disobedient stewards of God’s creation. Such behaviour must be radically transformed if the planet is to be saved. Urgent attention is needed to fostering an economy of life, ecological justice and an in-depth reflection on eco-theology. Fortunately what we are also seeing is the growth of people’s movements of resistance challenging present systems of injustice and exclusion locally, national and globally.

### **What is the way forward: How can Communion be strengthened?**

#### **Communion Accompaniment: A Journey from Theoretical Obsession to Missional Praxis**

<sup>2</sup> Roderick Hewitt, *The Moral lowlife in Political culture*, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100903/cleisure/cleisure2.html>, accessed April 4, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Hewitt, R. R. 2014. *Spirituality for democracy: Spiritual resources for democratic participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Verbum et Ecclesia, AOSIS Publishing Services, Cape Town.



The challenge of strengthening the Reformed expression of communion necessitates that attention is shifted from “*knowing about communion*” to “*doing or practicing communion*.” Communion must move from being a noun to become a verb! *The language of communion must be refashioned* to accommodate the language change of the contemporary era that values praxis over mere theory. Communion must be celebrated and strengthened, not so much for what the church believes but what it does that is life affirming. Therefore, authentic communion must work towards the building of solidarity among all people around the world who are afflicted and oppressed by the dehumanizing neoliberal policies.

Such radical communion in practice eschews all forms of racism, xenophobia and gender-based discrimination and all forms of social exclusion and nurtures wholesome relationships. If we experience God’s grace as Paul and Peter experienced it, then *communion with “the other” must value the dignity of all peoples*. For example, Peter’s transformational encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), led to his acceptance of people with other faith experiences; and Paul’s encounter with Onesimus (Philemon 1) also confirmed how genuine encounter with “the other” can lead to radical positive changes in social relationship that are rooted in love and justice. The Luke 24:13-35 narrative describes Jesus’ post-resurrection accompaniment walk with his depressed and disillusioned disciples on the road to Emmaus and how that “communion relationship” led to missional transformation that catapulted them into becoming witnessing agents. These different perspectives on the understanding and practice of communion seem to suggest that the concept cannot be an exclusive phenomenon but rather is inclusive—open to all who are willing to cross boundaries to risk sharing life. Therefore, there is an inherent contradiction in communion: there is value in being in communion with those that don’t necessarily believe the same things, and may not necessarily want the same things, but nonetheless actively seek out to be a member of a communion that seeks justice for all.

## Conclusion

To be true to its missional identity and vocation the WCRC must move beyond an understanding and practice of communion that meets inner ecclesial needs and risk engaging in the sharing of fullness of life with others. This necessitates that the WCRC prioritize justice and peace-building acts of solidarity to overcome and resist the global threats to life. The agenda for this kind of justice-serving priority must be set by the felt needs of others, especially those that live on the margins in different contexts. Authentic discussion on this relational and missional subject of communion will make some members of the family uncomfortable. But the understanding and practice of communion within a context of diversity cannot be expected to be done in comfort. If the goal of communion is to do what the Lord requires of you, then the mandate is to “...do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

## The Key Themes to be Addressed:

***Inseparability of justice and communion:*** As a communion we become paralyzed and fail to do justice because of our fear that it may affect communion. We cannot have communion at the cost of justice. Jesus, in Luke 11:40-42, states, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth...but you neglect justice and love of God...” Therefore, authentic radical communion seeks ecological and economic justice, gender justice and justice to all those on the margins. The issue of ordination of women to priesthood is an issue for the communion to address. The communion of the suffering community is both a place and space where the Triune God in Communion expresses love for all peoples and all of creation.

### Proposal 1:

**That the WCRC promote the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.**

***The centrality of the Bible:*** Issues that can be a threat to communion such as racial injustice, gender discrimination, poverty and migration can be challenged by the churches because there are many biblical texts to support us in the struggle against these issues. But the Bible has also been open to misinterpretation and abuse in some instances. The WCRC must promote a Biblical model of communion and justice: The biblical examples of the mission of Jesus including gentiles in his work confirms that the experience of finding the God who is “already there,” allows the new Christian followers of Jesus to model his ministry and risk engaging in mission with the people at the margins of the community, which allows Christian followers to journey through a process of “moving beyond” knowledge about Jesus to belong, to believe and become disciples of Jesus that risk radical engagement in an open and inclusive community.

### Proposal 2:

**That the WCRC engage member churches in a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture inspired by the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all and provides resources as necessary.**

**Communion and Sexuality:** As the Communion and its churches struggle with the issue of human sexuality, we encounter a wide variety of biblical texts that celebrate human life and oppose all forms of injustice and discrimination. The Scripture that inspires us to act with justice needs to be highlighted even as we respect each other as honest readers and interpreters of the Bible. Even so, we acknowledge that the Bible has often been used to defend discrimination against women and sexual minorities; therefore, there is need for a deeper and critical hermeneutical approach to reading and engaging with Biblical texts. It is complex because such uses of the Bible have been overemphasized for centuries and have been used to support discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the issue of communion and sexuality should be addressed by raising the liberating role Bible teaching can play in the life of the churches. How can the Communion keep all in the family together and create safe spaces for members to stay together and encourage each other to discover what is just and right?

### **Proposal 3:**

#### **That the World Communion of Reformed Churches:**

- a. **Set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and sexuality—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge and mutual accountability become key values.**
- b. **Facilitate means in which to engage each other to embrace our diversity, to accompany real people, to draw on the theological resources of our Reformed tradition and to utilize our critical reading of Scripture.**
- c. **Accompany churches and regional councils to organize consultations, discussion groups with Bible Study and reflection to address issues around communion and sexuality.**

**Empowering Leadership in the communion:** The fundamental question that faces the WCRC is linked to the quality of missional leadership that is offered to the society. The Reformed identity is based on an affirmation of the priesthood of all believers—of lay and ordained, women and men, young people—offering leadership to the world. The *character of the practitioners* who offer pastoral and missional leadership must therefore be radically formed, and the commitment to walk together despite differences is crucial. There is no structure or theological statement that can alone strengthen the communion without personal commitment. This is of special importance since most people define their identity as being “against [to].” Communion is therefore a life transforming reality and experience, where we see God’s presence already at work in the life of the other. Otherwise the person who does not agree with us or is different from us is made the “other”—as someone who must be convinced or defeated or even eliminated—rather than as being a sister or brother in Christ who is different from us. The special insight that must be brought to the table is not just a theological dialogue but an encounter of sisters and brothers with different backgrounds and experiences of God’s justice and grace.

### **Proposal 4:**

**That the WCRC embarks on a process of engaging the churches in a critical analysis of leadership considering the communion we seek; by modeling new and inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—his resistance to the ethics of domination and control.**

**Affirming the centrality of the regions in the work of communion:** The strength of the WCRC is in embracing the local, regional and global levels. Regions can and should play an important cohesive role in this bonding between the global and local. This important work, however, is not where it should be, as was noted at a consultation held in February 2017. It must be ensured that the regional expression of the WCRC with each of their contextual diversities plays a pivotal role within the construction, contemplation and action of the communion.

### **Proposal 5:**

#### **The General Council:**

- a. **Reaffirms the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches; and providing spaces for dialogue and action;**
- b. **Reaffirms the participation of regional representatives in decision making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions;**
- c. **Affirms working styles that energize the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.**

## CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

*WCRC Constitution and Bylaws with proposed amendments*

*Changes and new text underlined*

*Deletions are denoted ~~with strike-through~~*

### WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

#### CONSTITUTION

#### AND

#### BY-LAWS

**[Adopted 2010, Amended 2016]**

Knochenhauerstrasse 42

30159 Hannover,

Germany

### WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

#### THE CONSTITUTION

#### PREAMBLE

Jesus Christ is the foundation and head of the Christian church.

It is in Jesus Christ that the Word became flesh and the gospel is embodied.

It is to God in Christ that the Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bear witness.

It is through Christ that God gives abundant life and spiritual vitality to the members of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The churches in the World Communion of Reformed Churches are called together in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Under the sovereign God, with Christ's followers across the globe, sharing one baptism, the members of the communion belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

#### ARTICLE I – NAME AND SUCCESSION

The name of this organization shall be the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The following constitute the name of the organization in French, German and Spanish:

Communion Mondiale des Églises Réformées (CMER)

Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGRK)

Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization, registered as a corporation under public law in Germany and as a 501(c)3 corporate entity in the State of Michigan in the United States of America. The membership of the registered entities is the same.

As of the 2010 Uniting General Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches succeeds the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its antecedents, as a united ecumenical body for Reformed churches.

#### ARTICLE II – BASIS

The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to this triune God that the church bears witness. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as

articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, and as continued in the life and witness of the broader family of Reformed, United and Uniting churches.

### ARTICLE III – VALUES

A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to demonstrate and live the oneness in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that enable all member churches to share their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God's saving purposes for the good of all and for the transformation of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches serves its members with love and care, encouraging their mutual support and nurture of one another.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches embraces God's covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation through Jesus Christ. In doing so, it affirms the biblical calling of the members to recognize the gift of baptism in one another, and the call to be unified in ministry, and together to bear witness to God's justice and peace and to the integrity of creation.

### ARTICLE IV – IDENTITY, MISSION AND PURPOSES

A. Drawing on the heritage of the Reformed confessions, as a gift for the renewal of the whole church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches which shall foster communion among its member churches by:

1. affirming the gifts of unity in Christ and promoting unity in and among churches through the mutual recognition of baptism and membership, pulpit and table fellowship, ministry and witness;
2. interpreting Reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness;
3. encouraging the renewal of Christian worship and spiritual life within the Reformed tradition;
4. renewing a commitment to partnership in God's mission through worship, witness, diaconal service and work for justice, so as to foster mission in unity, mission renewal, and mission empowerment;
5. encouraging leadership development and nurture of the covenant community;
6. engaging with other ecumenical organizations and churches of other traditions in the ecumenical movement through dialogue and cooperation in ministry;
7. expressing unity and solidarity with those minorities living in the context of marginalization and violence.

B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall assist its member churches by

1. widening and deepening understanding and community among the member churches and helping them to fulfil their own responsibilities in the service of Christ;
2. facilitating the transformation of the member churches into interdependent missional communities that support, empower and challenge each other as partners in the one mission of God;
3. promoting the full and just participation of all members, of all ages, in all aspects of the church's life and its public witness;
4. promoting the full and just partnership of women and men in church and society;
5. encouraging and promoting diaconal service in the church and society;
6. expressing unity and solidarity with those of its members who are persecuted or marginalized.

C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall also contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world by:

1. promoting economic and ecological justice, global peace, and reconciliation in the world;
2. promoting and defending religious, civil, and all other human rights wherever threatened throughout the world;
3. encouraging and promoting relief and sustainable development in the world and focusing on the eradication of poverty;
4. providing Reformed perspectives on church unity.

### ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP

- A. Any church of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, other First Reformation, United, and Uniting traditions is eligible to apply for membership, if such a church affirms this constitution.
- B. Member churches are expected to join in achieving the Mission and Purposes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches by, among other things, participating in meetings, financially supporting its existence, taking seriously its actions and decisions, and engaging in its collective work.
- C. Fellowships and associations of churches that affirm a Reformed identity and include in their membership World Communion of Reformed Churches' members are eligible for associate membership. Such associate members shall share in the fellowship and programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, participate on a reciprocal basis without a vote in governance, and thereby strengthen the broader Reformed family's participation in the church ecumenical.
- D. An institution established by one or more member churches or whose faith basis and operation are in agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions are eligible for affiliate membership, without voting privileges.
- E. Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches does not limit the autonomy of any member church or restrict its relationships with other churches or with other ecumenical organizations.
- F. Members in the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall support the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through an annual financial contribution reflecting the resources and membership of that church. The General Council or the Executive Committee shall set a minimum contribution requirement for all member churches, associate and affiliate members.
- G. Application for membership shall be made to the office of the General Secretary not later than six months before a General Council meeting. Admission to membership shall be by decision of the Executive Committee following consultation with other member churches in the region. The General Council shall ratify new members by a two-thirds majority of ballots cast. A new member shall not vote on the ratification of its own membership.
- H. A member church may terminate its membership by giving notice in writing to the office of the General Secretary. It will be encouraged to give reasons for this action.

#### ARTICLE VI – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of Article II - Basis, Article III - Values, or Article IV - Identity, Mission and Purposes of this Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the conditions stated in the Bylaws.

#### ARTICLE VII – GENERAL COUNCIL

- A. The General Council is the main governing body of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Council is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when representatives of one-half plus one of its member churches are present when the General Council convenes to establish a quorum.
- B. The General Council ~~shall:~~
1. ~~provides~~ leadership for the World Communion of Reformed Churches in achieving the aims and purposes of the organization;
  2. ~~may~~ adopt and ~~may~~ amend the Constitution and the Bylaws;
  3. ~~makes~~ and ~~adopts~~ policies and programmes for the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
  4. ~~elects~~ officers and members of the Executive Committee;
  5. ~~considers~~ matters brought before it by member churches;
  6. receives decisions of the Executive Committee for ratification.
- C. Decisions of the General Council concerning its organization and institutional activities shall be binding.
- D. Decisions of the General Council involving the life and witness of the member churches are advisory in character.

#### ARTICLE VIII – MEETINGS OF GENERAL COUNCIL

- A. The General Council shall ordinarily meet once in every seven years.

- B. At the request of at least one-fifth of the member churches, the Executive Committee shall convene the General Council into special session.
- C. The time, place, and programme of a General Council meeting shall be determined by the Executive Committee.
- D. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall adopt rules of procedure for the conduct of its business.

#### **ARTICLE IX – COMPOSITION OF GENERAL COUNCIL**

- A. Participants at the General Council are voting delegates, associate and affiliate delegates, ecumenical delegates, consultants, observers, guests, and visitors.
- B. Member churches shall be entitled to appoint voting delegates on the basis of their membership. The World Communion of Reformed Churches will accept the information each member church submits based on its normal counting procedure. The same numbers will be used for attendance at the General Council meeting and for the basis used to determine membership contributions.
- Member churches with up to 300,000 members are entitled to appoint up to four voting delegates.
- Member churches with between 300,001 and 1,000,000 members are entitled to appoint up to six voting delegates.
- Member churches with 1,000,001 members or more are entitled to appoint up to eight voting delegates.
- Each delegation shall be gender balanced and no more than half shall be clergy. At least one voting delegate shall be thirty years of age or younger on the date the General Council is convened.
- C. Each of the officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be an ex-officio delegate (with vote) to any General Council that meets during the officer's term of office.
- D. Only delegates from member churches and Officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall have the right to vote and to move or second motions in all sessions of the General Council.

#### **ARTICLE X – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

- A. The Executive Committee shall have twenty-two (22) members elected by the General Council (including six (6) officers). The Moderator, President or Convener of each Regional Council shall be members. The General Secretary shall be a member ex-officio (without vote). The Executive Committee is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when a majority of its members is present to establish a quorum. The officers and members of the Executive Committee shall hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
- B. Either the moderator, president, convener or secretary of each Regional Council shall be a full member of the Executive Committee.
- C. The Executive Committee may invite Executive Secretaries to participate in its meetings in an advisory capacity.
- D. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Committee, an alternate may be appointed under the provisions in the Bylaws.
- E. The Executive Committee shall meet annually.
- F. When the President and the General Secretary deem it necessary to secure a decision of the Executive Committee between its meetings, a vote by mail, email, telephone conference, or other electronic means may be taken. In such cases the required majority (one-half plus one) is based on all the members of the Executive Committee.
- G. The Executive Committee shall:
  1. exercis[es] general oversight of the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council including, but not limited to, the formation of departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

2. authorizes the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council. The Executive Committee may, by way of exception and if needed, appoint one or more additional persons to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
3. performs all duties specified elsewhere in this Constitution and in the Bylaws or committed to it by the General Council.
4. has authority to approve the annual financial reports and adopt the annual budget.
5. fills vacancies among the officers and in its own membership, as specified in the Bylaws, which may occur between meetings of the General Council.
6. elects a General Secretary and appoints Executive Secretaries.
7. decides on admission to and suspension of membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches in consultation with local member churches subject to ratification by the next General Council.

#### **ARTICLE XI – OFFICERS OF THE WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES**

- A. The General Council shall elect the following officers from among those present at the General Council to hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
1. one president
  2. four (4) vice-presidents
- B. The General Treasurer is elected by the Executive Committee and serves as a member of the officers, and serves until a successor is elected
- C. The officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be formed into an officers' committee with power to act to perform their responsibilities as stated in the Bylaws.
1. Approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings.
  2. Ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
  3. Provide advice and direction to the General Secretary.
  4. Report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken.
  5. Oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- D. Any two of the following: the President (or one of the Vice-Presidents if substituting for the President), the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer, are authorized to sign jointly for all legally required registrations, opening of bank accounts, and other legal transactions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

#### **ARTICLE XII – GENERAL SECRETARY**

- A. The General Secretary shall be the chief executive officer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and shall be responsible to the General Council and to the Executive Committee to direct and coordinate the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Secretary is responsible for advising the Executive Committee and the officers of risks and potential liabilities that may pertain.
- B. The General Secretary shall serve a term of seven years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another seven-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each seven-year term and prior to the decision to appoint the General Secretary to a second seven-year term. The performance review shall be conducted by persons appointed by the Executive Committee.

#### **ARTICLE XIII – EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES**

- A. Executive Secretaries shall be appointed for the operations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. The number of Executive Secretaries serving at any one time, and the scope of their responsibilities, is determined by the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the General Secretary.
- C. Executive Secretaries shall serve a term of five years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another five-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each five-year term and prior to the decision to appoint an Executive Secretary to a second five-year term. The performance review is conducted by the General Secretary.

#### **ARTICLE XIV – FINANCE**

- A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be financed by contributions from member churches, associate and affiliate members, and gifts from individuals, congregations, organizations, and other sources.
- B. The General Treasurer and the General Secretary shall be responsible for the preparation of the annual budget, which shall be presented to the Executive Committee for approval.
- C. The financial accounts of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be audited annually by auditors approved by the Executive Committee. The audited accounts shall be presented annually to the Executive Committee for adoption.

#### **ARTICLE XV – DEPARTMENTS, COMMITTEES, OFFICES, AND COMMISSIONS**

- A. The General Council or the Executive Committee may form departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. All committees or commissions shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee.
- C. Departments and offices shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee, through the General Secretary. They shall function in a manner that promotes the coherence of the programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. To this end they are not independent entities but function interdependently.

#### **ARTICLE XVI – ORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS**

To promote the closest possible community and cooperation among member churches in a particular area of the world, and the effectiveness of the total work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the General Council may authorize the organization of a Regional Council composed of the member churches in that defined geographical area. Such a Regional Council shall be accountable to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through its appointed administrative structures.

- A. The number, boundaries, and names of the Regional Councils shall be determined by the General Council or by the Executive Committee in consultation with the member churches of the region.
- B. The organization of a Regional Council shall be effected by the member churches within the area, in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Each Regional Council shall adopt its own Bylaws subject to ratification by the Executive Committee.
- C. Each Regional Council shall meet from time to time within the geographic area, provide for an Administrative Committee, and elect officers, including a Moderator (or President or Convener), a Secretary and a Treasurer, pursuant to its Bylaws, subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.
- ~~D. Each Regional Council shall elect a President, a Moderator or a Convener.~~
- ~~E. Each Regional Council shall elect a Secretary and a Treasurer to serve the Regional Council subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.~~
- D. A Vice-President, or another member of the Executive Committee, shall be appointed by the Executive Committee to be a corresponding member of each Regional Council.

#### **ARTICLE XVII – DISSOLUTION**

In the event that the World Communion of Reformed Churches ceases to exist as a corporate entity, any remaining assets or liabilities shall be distributed pro-rata to the member churches.

#### **ARTICLE XVIII – AMENDMENTS**

- A. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegates in attendance at any meeting of the General Council, provided the proposed amendment has been transmitted to each member church, to members of the Executive Committee, and to the Regional Councils at least six months before it is submitted for approval.



B. The Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the delegates in attendance at a meeting of the General Council, provided notice of at least 24 hours has been given to the delegates attending that meeting.

C. Between meetings of the General Council, the Bylaws may be amended by a two thirds majority of the Executive Committee. Such changes shall be submitted to the next General Council for ratification.

## **ARTICLE XIX – OFFICIAL LANGUAGE VERSION**

The English version of this document is the definitive document for interpretation purposes.

## **WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)**

### **THE BYLAWS**

#### **I. GENERAL COUNCIL**

A. The Executive Committee shall serve as the Business Committee of the General Council.

B. The President, with the advice of the Executive Committee, shall appoint from among the delegates such Standing Committees and Task Groups as may be necessary for the efficient operation of the General Council when in session.

C. The status and classification of participants at a General Council meeting shall be as follows:

1. Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of voting delegates.
2. An associate delegate is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
3. An affiliate delegate is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
4. An ecumenical delegate is one who represents a recognized ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
5. Guests are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
6. Observers are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed churches. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council but do not have the right to vote.
7. Consultants may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.
8. Visitors are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions, or vote.

#### **II. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

A. Elections

1. The General Council shall elect officers from among the voting delegates appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.
2. The General Council shall elect an Executive Committee from among the voting delegates appointed to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, experience, and the advice of regional councils.
3. The Executive Committee members shall hold office from their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
4. Officers and members of the Executive Committee shall be eligible to serve for not more than two consecutive terms.
5. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall elect a Nominating Committee of not more than ten persons, two of whom must be under 30 years of age, one of them female and one male. The nomination procedure shall take into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, and gender.
6. Members of the Nominating Committee are not eligible for election as officers or as members of the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee shall receive and consider proposed nominations from delegates and from Regional Councils and shall make its own proposals.

7. The Nominating Committee shall present to the General Council a slate of nominations for officers and for members of the Executive Committee. When the proposal of the Nominating Committee has been presented, nominations from the floor may be proposed as an alternative to any of the nominees recommended by the Nominating Committee.
8. The election of General Council Officers and Executive Committee members shall take place no sooner than twenty-four hours after the presentation of all candidates.
9. Each member of the Executive Committee shall be required to disclose potential and real conflict of interest issues. A signed form for such disclosure shall be retained in the office of the General Secretary.
10. Delegates elected to the Executive Committee are ordinarily expected to represent the interests of the General Council.

#### B. Alternates and advisers

1. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Executive Committee, the President and the General Secretary, after due consultation, may appoint an alternate from the same region, to serve for that particular meeting as a member of the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee may invite churches or organizations to appoint a representative to attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Such an invited representative shall be able to participate in the meeting without the right to vote.

#### C. Removal from office

1. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee is deemed by another officer or member to have failed to perform his or her duties, a hearing or hearings shall be conducted.
- ~~2. The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person to the Executive Committee.~~
3. Having heard the accusations, having considered the appropriate evidence and having heard the response the accused person chooses to make, the Executive Committee may reprimand, suspend, or remove the accused person, or declare that the person's service will continue. The seriousness of the offence will determine the action to be taken—not necessarily the number of occasions of transgression.
4. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee has been found guilty of an offence by the ecclesiastical procedures of his or her church, the Executive Committee may declare the office or membership vacant after having taken note of the official statement of the charges (formal accusation), decision, and censure (judgment, sentence). The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person (at her or his own expense) to the Executive Committee.
- ~~4.~~ Whether or not there is a response, the Executive Committee may remove or suspend the person, or take no action.

#### D. Vacant positions

When the position of a member of the Executive Committee becomes vacant through death, resignation in writing to the General Secretary, removal from office by action of the Executive Committee, or non-attendance over an extended period, the Executive Committee may fill such vacancy in the following manner:

1. If the office of President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office of President by election from among the Vice-Presidents or the elected members of the Executive Committee.
2. If the office of a Vice-President becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall fill the office by election from among the members of the Executive Committee.
3. If the office of General Treasurer becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee shall select a person to fill the position.
4. If a general position on the Executive Committee becomes vacant between meetings of the General Council, the Executive Committee may fill the vacancy by election from among those who were delegates to the previous General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.

#### E. Meetings

1. The Executive Committee shall meet once a year, the specific time and place to be set by the Executive Committee or by the President and General Secretary at its previous meeting or by way of circular decision as provided for in article X.E of the Constitution. Failing this, the President and the General Secretary decide as to the time and place of the Executive Committee's meeting. If they cannot come to an agreement, the President decides.
2. The President and the General Secretary may call special meetings of the Executive Committee, and shall do so at the request of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee.
3. A quorum shall be a majority of the total voting membership of the Executive Committee in attendance.

### III – SUSPENSION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of the Basis, Values, Mission and Purposes of the Constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the following conditions: The following procedure shall be followed:

1. Such action may be proposed to the Executive Committee by one or more member churches, after such church or churches have previously presented their concerns to the church in question. A proposal to suspend a member church shall be presented to the Executive Committee at least six months prior to its meeting.
2. The Executive Committee that has received a proposal for suspension shall conduct an investigation. The officers shall develop an investigative process for the specific charges. The process shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
3. The Executive Committee shall take final action only after the church in question has been given sufficient opportunity to defend itself.
4. After such an investigation has been completed, the Executive Committee may decide by a two-thirds vote of members present to suspend the membership of the member church in question or refer the case to the next General Council. When an Executive Committee decides suspension, it may be lifted at any subsequent Executive Committee meeting.
5. When a member church is suspended at a General Council meeting, that suspension may be lifted at any subsequent General Council meeting upon recommendation of the then current Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall, therefore, maintain communication with that member church about the matters related to the cause for suspension.
6. A suspended member church may send observers to plenary sessions of the General Council but shall not have the right to vote or address plenary sessions of the General Council except by extraordinary permission of the President. A suspended member church shall not have any financial obligations to the World Communion of Reformed Churches during the suspension, nor shall a suspended member church be entitled to financial support.
7. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason to the secretariat for three consecutive years shall have the privileges of membership withdrawn by the Executive Committee until the requirements of membership are fulfilled. A member church whose membership privileges are withdrawn shall be considered an inactive member. An inactive member church may attend a General Council meeting as an observer but will not have the right to speak or vote. Inactive members do not qualify for financial support from the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
8. Any member church that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason with the secretariat for three consecutive years may not participate in the Executive Committee. Such a member church may be reinstated by the Executive Committee upon resumption of contact and fulfilment of its obligations.

#### **IV-OFFICERS' COMMITTEE**

The elected officers, the General Secretary and the General Treasurer shall form themselves into an officers' committee (chaired by the President) to perform the following functions:

1. approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings;
2. ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
3. provide advice and direction to the General Secretary
4. report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken;
5. oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches;
6. along with the General Secretary, conduct risk assessments as needed and report conclusions reached to the Executive Committee.

#### **V – GENERAL SECRETARY**

A. The General Secretary shall make all necessary arrangements for the convening, reporting, and proper conduct of the General Council.

B. The General Secretary shall supervise the personnel of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and be responsible for the proper functioning of the secretariat.

C. All WCRC publications (excluding those from Regional Councils) shall be under the supervision of the General Secretary. The General Secretary shall be the official spokesperson for the policies and statements of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

#### **VI – FINANCES**

- A. The Executive Committee may propose to the member churches proportional financial contributions to the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. Any proposals for the disbursement of any funds relating to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, other than disbursements included in the annual budget, shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
- C. In exceptional cases, the General Secretary shall be permitted to initiate an action with financial consequences, within the parameters of the purposes and aims of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, after consultation with and the approval of the President and the General Treasurer.
- D. If necessary for timely consideration, the Executive Committee may vote on the adoption of the budget by mail ballot, teleconference, or other electronic means upon the recommendation of the officers.
- E. The General Treasurer and the finance coordinator shall report regularly to the Executive Committee.
- F. The expenses of the President, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, and other members of the staff will be met from the funds of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when they attend meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee.
- G. The expenses of delegates to the General Council and of members of the Executive Committee attending the General Council shall be paid by the churches of which they are members unless a prior agreement for support has been negotiated.
- H. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall pay for the expenses of the Executive Committee in accordance with established administrative guidelines.
- I. Each Regional Council shall submit to the General Secretary a copy of its annual audited financial statements.