

Reformed communiqué

Articles in Deutsch, English, Español, Français

APRIL 2019

Call made for action against discrimination, authoritarianism and nationalism

A Consultation on Resisting Cultures of Discrimination, Authoritarianism and Nationalism has “discerned this to be a *kairos* moment when God has issued a challenge for decisive action. The appropriate theological response at this moment requires *status confessionis*.”

The consultation was sparked by the rise of racist ideologies that are more often than not fed by nationalist discourses. “The fact is that religions of all hues have enmeshed themselves with dominant and dominating ideologies and have provided the ideological underpinnings of racism and other cultures of discrimination,” said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness.

The consultation gathered together Dalits and people of African descent from the Americas to seek to redeem religion from the idolatry of power and privilege by drawing from theologies and ideologies that intentionally have positioned themselves outside of traditional power structures.

Meeting initially in Bangalore, the group was exposed to the Dalit reality in India. They visited the Kolar Gold Fields, where Dalits work in dire conditions, and a Dalit community in the city itself. Two Dalit activists, Ruth Manorama and Alphonse G. Kennedy, deepened understandings through stories of resistance.

The consultation then moved to Bangkok, Thailand. Allan Boesak, via Skype, presented the keynote address, “Full Humanity Requires Freedom: Being Reformed: Yearning



for Justice, Fighting for Freedom, Standing in Dignity.”

Building from lessons learned during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Boesak said, “[W]e may speak today of a phenomenon called ‘global apartheid’ which includes socio-economic exploitation and inequalities, political exclusion, racial and ethnic discrimination, as well as gender injustice and heteronormative oppression.

“The common element here is the systemic, violent, pervasive and totalitarian nature of that oppression. ... In a more precise sense, ‘global apartheid’ is best understood in the all-encompassing, global expression of what we call ‘empire,’ a reality we can no longer afford to keep out of the discussion.

“Although in South Africa we were serious and effective in our engagement with the perversion of the Reformed tradition expositing in the theology of apartheid, we did not grasp the vast ramifications of the argument about empire as it pertains not just to white racism and its onslaught on black humanity, but white supremacy and white privilege

as essential, and indispensable functions of white, global Christian imperialism,” he continued.

“[T]hat the Reformed tradition has been abused for the justification of oppression is unquestionably true, but it is not the most important. More important is the fact that that same tradition has given rise to theological, social, and political resistance,” he said. “It testifies to the manner in, and extent to which, the Reformed tradition, rightly understood, has helped oppressed people claim their agency and embrace their historic task of fighting for freedom, justice and dignity.”

Presentations were made by Kerri Allen, Michael Blair, Iva Carruthers, Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Aruna Gogulamanda, Nikhila Henry, Billy Michael Honor, Jayachitra Lalitha, Michael Livingston, Deenabandhu Manchala, Monica Melanchthon, Immanuel Nehemiah, Satvasheela Pandhare, Peniel Rajkumar, Vasantha Rao, Rodney Sadler, Anne Smith, Mitzi Smith, James Elisha Taneti and Karen Georgia Thompson along with Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, and Hanns

continued on page 15

Marathon Dutch worship service a testament of faith

Through both word and action, the World Communion of Reformed Churches has demonstrated its support of the Bethel Church (The Hague, Netherlands) as its marathon worship service protected an asylum-seeking family facing deportation.

Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness, and Hanns Lessing, WCRC executive secretary for communion and theology, worshiped with the church in December.

The Bethel Church held a 96-day, continuous worship service from October 2018 to January 2019. Under Dutch law, authorities cannot enter a place of worship while services are ongoing. The Armenian Tamrazyan family, who had a request for asylum initially granted and then overturned, sheltered in the church. The service was able to end when the Dutch government shifted its position on deporting the family.

“The Protestant Church of The Hague respects court orders, but finds itself confronted with a dilemma: the choice between respecting the government and protecting the rights of a child,” said a statement on the church’s website. “The purpose of the church asylum is to create rest and safety for the family and to offer some respite to the family during which we invite politicians to discuss with us the family’s fate.”

During the worship service, Lessing and Peacock offered “our profound gratitude on behalf of the whole of the World Communion of Reformed Churches for the care that you give to the Tamrazyan family and the testimony that you give to the world. We are with you with our prayers and with our solidarity. Your witness is an encouragement for the many uprooted people in our Communion and for the many members of our churches that are working for



a world in which migrants are safe and can live a life in dignity.

“Your continuous worship here is an expression of faith that turns to God in a situation where God’s goodness seems less visible. Your gathering, praying and sharing is an expression of your faith that God is present in this world. Your insistence that unjust actions of governments and courts must not have the last word on the well-being of human beings makes your worship in its deep spirituality become very political.

“In the best tradition of our Reformed Church, you testify that also in a secular society the institutions of the state are under God’s will. In the experience of persecution and migration, our churches have

learned that governments pursue what is good when they protect the weak and safeguard the livelihood of those who are not protected by citizenship. This witness is as relevant today as it was when it was first expressed in the history of our church.

“The continuous worship service that safeguards the sanctuary for the Tamrazyan family is a very important sign and a confession to God’s goodness. In a situation where it is difficult to believe that the institutions of the government will protect the well-being and the livelihood of children and their families, the continuous worship is a strong witness of God’s presence in a scandalous world.” ●

Dialogue examine l'impact de l'eschatologie sur la mission

La cinquième session de l'actuel dialogue réformé-pentecôtiste s'est tenue à Legon, Accra, Ghana, sous le thème «Répondre aux besoins du monde: Mission et Eschatologie.»

Au début et à la fin de chaque journée, les participants, représentant la CMER et diverses églises pentecôtistes classiques, se sont réunis pour prier, chanter, lire et réfléchir ensemble sur la Bible. Ce temps de partage de spiritualité et de culte a aidé à contextualiser les discussions et à créer une meilleure communauté entre les participants.

Cette année, le dialogue a porté sur la signification de l'eschatologie - la théologie de la fin des temps et du retour de Jésus-Christ - pour la mission. Pour ouvrir la discussion, Karla Ann Koll (réformée) et Van Johnson (pentecôtiste) ont présenté des exposés reflétant les enseignements de leurs communautés religieuses. Les participants ont ensuite soulevé des questions et répondu dans le cadre d'une discussion libre qui visait à dégager des intérêts et des préoccupations communs, tout en soulignant les différences de compréhension.

Dans sa présentation, Koll a dit que les chrétiens réformés, comme les pentecôtistes, attendaient le retour de Jésus Christ qui apporterait le règne de Dieu dans sa plénitude. Leur principal objectif a été de partager l'évangile et de prendre soin de la vie et du bien-être des autres d'une manière qu'ils croient conforme à ce règne.

Suivant les enseignements de Jean Calvin concernant la souveraineté de Dieu et leur croyance que l'intention rédemptrice de Dieu englobe toute la création, les réformés se sont moins concentrés sur les événements entourant la seconde venue du Christ et plus sur l'appel qui est adressé aux églises de servir jusqu'à son retour, dit Koll. Ils soutiennent que le Saint-Esprit leur donne le pouvoir de pro-



mouvoir l'évangile et de travailler à transformer la culture et la société en accord avec la volonté du Christ.

Johnson a fait valoir que le temps et l'espace ont influencé la façon dont les pentecôtistes conçoivent et mettent en pratique leur compréhension de l'eschatologie. Les pentecôtistes croient que Dieu a restauré la pureté, la passion et la puissance de l'Église par le Saint-Esprit en attendant le retour imminent du Christ et l'inauguration de son royaume.

Comme l'église primitive, leur attente que le temps fût court avant le retour du Christ a motivé une grande partie de leur activité missionnaire dans laquelle ils ont souligné l'annonce de l'évangile aux «perdus». Pourtant, après un siècle d'existence, les conceptions pentecôtistes du temps sont en train de changer, ce qui entraîne des changements dans leur façon de voir la mission, a dit Johnson. S'ils ont plus de temps pour vivre et agir, leur vision du monde qui les entoure doit être prise plus au sérieux que par le passé. Tout en continuant à affirmer le «retour rapide» du Seigneur, leur conception de la mission s'est élargie au-delà de la seule proclamation ou évangélisation pour inclure d'autres activités missionnaires. Aujourd'hui, la mission comprend une gamme d'activi-

tés allant de l'évangélisation à la préservation de la création en tant que signes du royaume du futur.

Les participants au Dialogue ont rencontré le président et le corps professoral du Séminaire théologique protestant, œcuménique de la Trinité pour s'immerger un peu dans la vie de l'Église, l'histoire et la culture du Ghana. Le groupe a été accueilli par des responsables de l'Église presbytérienne du Ghana (PCG) et de l'Église évangélique presbytérienne dans la maison de Setri et Akpene Nyomi.

Le dimanche, les participants ont participé au culte avec la Congrégation de la Foi (PCG). La lecture de 1 Thessaloniens 3:8-13 semblait particulièrement pertinente pour les discussions des participants au dialogue. Après le service, ils ont été gracieusement accueillis pour un repas en tant qu'invités de l'église. Ils se sont également rendus au château des esclaves d'Elmina pour une journée de réflexion sur les manquements passés et présents de l'Église.

Le dialogue, qui s'est tenu du 29 novembre au 4 décembre 2018, a eu lieu à l'invitation de la CMER.

Le groupe réformé était constitué par: Karla Ann Koll, coprésidente (Église presbytérienne (USA)/Costa Rica), Hanns Lessing (secrétaire exécutif pour la communion et la théologie, CMER), Setri Nyomi (Église presbytérienne évangélique, Ghana), Bas Plaisier (Église protestante des Pays-Bas) et Gabriella Rácsok (Église réformée en Hongrie).

Le groupe pentecôtiste était constitué par: Cecil M. Robeck, coprésident (Assemblées de Dieu, USA), Teresa Chai (Assemblées de Dieu, Malaisie), David Daniels (Église de Dieu en Christ, USA), Jacqueline Grey (Églises chrétiennes australiennes), Jean-Daniel Plüss (Mission pentecôtiste suisse) et Van Johnson (Assemblées Pentecôtistes du Canada). ●

Relationships foundational for CANAAC

Relationships—both the personal and corporate—are the foundation from which the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) will build over the next years. CANAAC met as an Assembly in Georgetown, Guyana, at the end of October under the theme “Living Faithfully, Building Relationships.”

“The Assembly was a truly special time for all of us. A time of spiritual awakening, a time of life-giving worship, a time of listening and reflection,” said Angela Martins (United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands), who was elected convener. “The biggest accomplishment of the Assembly was the quality of fellowship and the resulting relationships which have emerged.”

Assembly delegates learned about the Guyanese context through four immersion experiences: Red Thread (women’s advocacy), Plastic City (economic justice), the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination and the Mangrove Restoration Project. A public forum deepened their understanding of economic, ecological and human rights issues in Guyana, and they also worshiped with a variety of member congregations on the Sunday.



An introduction to the WCRC’s strategic plan and four themed plenaries—human sexuality, racism in church and society, the Accra Confession and “From Despair to Hope”—provided additional information and a space for discussion and discernment about the priorities and projects for CANAAC in the coming years.

“CANAAC must become a steady force in support of its members, serving as a voice of reason, able to speak truth to power in its own way,” Martins said. “The strength of CANAAC has not been realized. It is through strengthening relationships and the shared dialogue that CANAAC will find its place as a source of strength and possibility across the Caribbean

and North America’s Reformed faith community.”

The Assembly produced a message to the member churches of CANAAC, agreed on a draft set of goals and elected a six-person steering committee along with three officers: Martins as convener, Colin Watson (Christian Reformed Church in North America) as deputy convener and Gail Allan (United Church of Canada) as financial secretary.

Assembly delegates came from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, *Iglesia Evangelical Dominicana*, *Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba*, Guyana Presbyterian Church, Guyana Congregational Union, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church of Guyana, Presbyterian Church of Trinidad & Tobago, Reformed Church in America, United Church in Jamaica & the Cayman Islands, United Church of Canada, and United Church of Christ. ●



En Cuba, Kassab pide a las Iglesias ser un signo de esperanza

Las vidas pueden transformarse en un instante; en otras circunstancias, promover un cambio puede llevar años, incluso décadas. La reciente visita a Cuba de la presidenta de la CMIR, Najla Kassab, demostró ambas cosas.

El día previo a la llegada de Kassab a Cuba, un extraño tornado golpeó La Habana. En 15 minutos, 4000 viviendas resultaron dañadas, 200 personas resultaron heridas y cuatro personas murieron.

Kassab visitó las zonas dañadas junto con líderes de iglesias locales y otros visitantes, entre ellos Agnaldo Gomes, presidente de la AIPRAL, la Alianza de Iglesias Presbiterianas y Reformadas de América Latina. Fueron testigos de cómo la Iglesia Reformada Presbiteriana en Cuba estaba ayudando a las víctimas a recuperarse, un proceso que podría llevar meses o incluso años.

Tanto Kassab como Gomes visitaron el Sínodo de la Iglesia Reformada Presbiteriana en Cuba (IPRC), pero antes del sínodo, Kassab participó en una conferencia conmemorativa, “José Martí: para el equilibrio del mundo”. Martí fue un filósofo revolucionario y teórico político del siglo XIX que sentó las bases de la búsqueda de la independencia de Cuba.

En la conferencia Kassab habló sobre “La paz y la ética cristiana”, basando su presentación en Juan 10:10. Su ponencia tuvo cobertura televisiva nacional. “La paz no es la ausencia de guerra sino la lucha por tener una vida mejor para todas las personas”, expresó. “Con el bienestar de la gente, el fluir de la voluntad de Dios para que todas las personas tengan plenitud de vida, “vivir la paz es la esperanza de alcanzar una vida digna para todos y todas.”

“La paz se puede alcanzar porque somos personas de esperanza”, dijo. “Si queremos resumir lo que está sucediendo actualmente en el

mundo, vemos con claridad cómo el mundo está abrumado por la cultura del miedo en lugar de la esperanza. Los grupos radicalizados han tenido éxito en sembrar el miedo en todo el mundo. Levantarse es vivir conforme a una cultura de la esperanza, y la iglesia tiene que liderar eso. Como pastora que vive en el Medio Oriente y que trabaja con nuestras iglesias en el Líbano y en Siria, he aprendido cómo, a pesar de todas las divisiones, la iglesia puede ser una señal de esperanza.”



“De niña nací y me crié en tiempos de guerra en el Líbano, y oro para que la paz en el Medio Oriente ocurra durante mi vida”, concluyó Kassab.

Kassab, Gomes y Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, co-moderadora de la Iglesia Presbiteriana (EE. UU.), tuvieron ocasión de dirigirse al Sínodo del IPRC, en tanto que otros miembros de la Comunión estuvieron también

representados allí, incluida la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Corea.

Dora Arce Valentín, ex secretaria ejecutiva para justicia y compañerismo de la CMIR, fue elegida moderadora de la IPRC.

“Estoy muy agradecida por la oportunidad de tener tantos compañeros y compañeras en nuestra reunión sinodal, incluida la AIPRAL y la CMIR como comunidades regionales y mundiales”, dijo Arce Valentín. “Su presencia, así como la de nuestras



iglesias asociadas, nos dieron la certeza de que somos parte de un gran cuerpo que rodea a cada miembro con amor y esperanza para el futuro. Nos da la fuerza que necesitamos para alcanzar nuestra misión de anunciar las bendiciones del Reino de Dios, la justicia y la paz para toda la creación de Dios”.

El Sínodo añadió las confesiones de Accra y de Belhar a su libro de orden a la vez que emitió una declaración en la que señala el reciente deterioro de la relación entre Cuba y los Estados Unidos y el impacto que esto tiene en las familias que viven en ambos países. La declaración solicita “un proceso para la reconciliación y la normalización de las relaciones entre ambos países” y la reapertura del consulado de Estados Unidos de NA en La Habana como una medida concreta. ●

Zur Erinnerung an das Leben und Werk von Karl Barth

In einer neuen Wanderausstellung sowie mit einer Veranstaltungsreihe ab Dezember wird an Leben und Werk des Schweizer Theologen Karl Barth erinnert. Das Thema der einjährigen Gedenkfeier ist „Gott Trifft Mensch“.

„Karl Barth ist der größte Theologe des 20. Jahrhunderts, und sein Werk ist auch in der heutigen Welt sehr relevant“, sagte Dr. Achim Detmers, Generalsekretär des Reformierten Bundes.

Der 50-jährige Todestag von Barth am 10. Dezember 2018 markiert den Beginn der Veranstaltungen in Basel, Schweiz, mit der Verleihung des Karl-Barth-Preises durch die UEK (Union Evangelischer Kirchen) und einer Ausstellung in der Bibliothek der Universität Basel.

Es soll auch an das Erscheinen von Barths bedeutendem Kommentar zum Römerbrief von 1919 erinnert werden, mit dem seine internationale Karriere begann. Im Laufe dieser Karriere wurde Barth zum Widerstandskämpfer gegen den Nationalsozialismus und zu einem bedeutenden Theologen.

Der Reformierte Bund ist für das Gedenkjahr in Zusammenarbeit mit der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), der UEK und dem Schweizerischen Evangelischen Kirchenbund (SEK) verantwortlich. Bis Mitte 2019 wird es eine Vielzahl von Veranstaltungen geben, darunter eine Wanderausstellung an den Barth-Standorten in Deutschland, der Schweiz und den Niederlanden.

„Was wir mit der Ausstellung und verschiedenen Veranstaltungen zum Werk und Leben von Karl Barth hervorheben wollen, ist seine dialektische Theologie. Er ist ein Theologe, an den man sich erinnern sollte, und man sollte sich ein Bild von seiner Arbeit machen“, sagt Johannes Voigtländer, der für die Vorbereitung, Planung und Durchführung



des Themenjahres verantwortlich war. Der Reformierte Bund hat bereits Themenjahre zu Calvin (2009) und dem Heidelberger Katechismus (2013) durchgeführt.

Barth wird als Hauptautor der Barmer Erklärung gewürdigt. Im Mai 1934 traf sich in Wuppertal-Barmen die erste „Reichsbekennnissynode“ und schrieb mit der Theologischen Erklärung von Barmen Geschichte. Erstmals einigten sich reformierte, lutherische und unierte Kirchen auf ein gemeinsames Zeugnis als Fundament der Bekennenden Kirche. Sie wurde verfasst, um den Christen zu helfen, den Herausforderungen der Nationalsozialisten und der sogenannten „deutschen Christen“ zu widerstehen, jener Bewegung, die keinen Widerspruch zwischen dem Christentum und den Idealen des Nationalsozialismus Hitlers sah.

Die Erklärung von Barmen ist für die Arbeit der Weltgemeinschaft der Reformierten Kirchen von wesentlicher Bedeutung und war eines der grundlegenden Dokumente bei den Überlegungen zur Untrennbarkeit von Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit auf der Generalversammlung von 2017. Die Mission der WGRK als

einer Familie von Kirchen, die zur Gemeinschaft berufen und der Gerechtigkeit verpflichtet ist, besteht darin, ihre Identität als bekennende, ökumenische Gemeinschaft im Geiste der Erklärung von Barmen und der Bekenntnisse von Belhar und Accra auszuleben.

Barth war ein reformierter Theologe, wurde aber von einigen Theologen wegen seiner Vision als „ökumenisch“ bezeichnet. Barth und seine Arbeit haben auch heute noch einen großen Einfluss auf Theologiestudenten, Wissenschaftler und Pastoren, und seine Worte passen zu seiner Würdigung:

„Das ist sicher, dass es kein theologisches Recht gibt, der in Jesus Christus erschienenen Menschenfreundlichkeit Gottes unsrerseits irgendwelche Grenzen zu setzen. Unsere theologische Pflicht ist es, sie als immer noch größer zu sehen und zu verstehen, als wir es zuvor getan hatten.“ (Karl Barth, Die Menschlichkeit Gottes, 1956)

Weitere Informationen zur Ausstellung finden Sie unter diesem Link: <https://www.karl-barth-jahr.eu/19437-387-388-65.html> ●



Taiwan Ecumenical Forum wrestles with issues, sets goals

Some 150 ecumenical and church leaders, church officials, activists and intellectuals from across the world attended the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF), which was organized and hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) at the end of November 2018.

One of the highlights of the concluding day was a presentation on “Broadening ecumenism as solidarity for justice and peace in Taiwan and beyond.”

Jijimon Alakkalam Joseph, a professor at the Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei, felt that despite the contributions of the ecumenical movement to promote justice and peace in the world, “at times we are overwhelmed by the fact that many people in the world today experience justice and peace only as a mirage...and a dream.”

“If churches want to be an instrument of justice and peace in the world, they must demonstrate their interdependence and solidarity. A fragmented church lacks peace within...and such a church can never be a channel and instrument of peace,” he told the gathering.

During discussion following the presentation, Victor Hsu stated that there had been a growing positive rela-

tionship between the PCT and the Catholic Church in Taiwan since 1991.

Sudu Tada, an indigenous person and an ordained minister of the

PCT said in his presentation that learning the worldview of Indigenous people is like “treating land as our mother,” and can help us promote and justice and peace in the world.

TEF participants heard Bible studies on “Deepening analysis of empire” by Dario Barolin, Lo Kong-Hi, Yuki Takai-Heller and Reuel Marigza.

A reflective report, drafted by the Listening and Discernment Group, was presented for consideration. The moderator of the group, John Proctor of the United Reformed Church, said that the report mainly addressed the Steering Group of TEF to offer signposts, directions and questions to assist its task to plan the future work of TEF. The report commended the PCT for its commitment to justice, partnership, friendship, unity, resilience, candour and for taking the voices of youth seriously.

“The Youth Forum that preceded the meeting produced some excellent materials,” the report said, adding that “we commend this work warmly to member churches.” Gender justice, climate justice and economic justice must be a constant challenge in shaping the churches’ wholistic witness, is one of the thirteen suggestions and recommendations to the Steering Group. ●



Snapshots from around the Communion



In February, General Secretary Chris Ferguson met with Isabel Apawo Phiri, associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Owe Boersma (not pictured), international coordinator for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. Topics discussed included peace in the Middle East, cooperation on strategic priorities and the upcoming WCC General Assembly.



The Global Christian Forum Committee met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February, to contemplate future directions for this important ecumenical space. Chris Ferguson represented the WCRC while Wes Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the Reformed Church in America, served as an advisor.



A NIFEA Planning Workshop on Just Taxation and Reparations was held in March in Durban, South Africa. Those gathered included Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness, along with church leaders and experts on tax justice and people from communities impacted by cuts in social spending, climate change and continuing legacies of slavery.



President Najla Kassab was a keynote speaker for the 2019 conference of the Uniting Church in Sweden. Her title was "To be a Changing Leadership (A Leadership in the 21st Century)".



The Gender Policy Working Group met in Hanoi, Vietnam, to develop a policy and implementation plan that they trust will be a step towards gender justice.



...a conference of pastors, deacons, youth leaders
den Ekumeniakyrkan in January. She spoke on
(Change).”



...over, Germany, in March to finish the policy
the next step in the WCRC’s work toward



The WCRC with the Reformed Alliance hosted a meeting of Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) staff members in November. The group discussed the work of all three organizations and possibilities of future partnerships.



A delegation from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, including PCT General Secretary Lyim Hong-Tiong, visited the WCRC offices in February. Topics discussed included the implementation of the strategic plan and the current situation in Taiwan and Asia.



The Strategic Planning Program Group gathered in March to monitor the work taken up through the strategic plan, which includes communion, justice, theology, witness, ecumenical engagement and mission.

Ordenación de mujeres: una poderosa fuerza para la justicia

La Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas se encuentra particularmente comprometida con la justicia de género y con la plena y justa participación de las mujeres en todas las áreas de la iglesia y la sociedad. La Asamblea General del año 2017 adoptó „La Declaración de Fe sobre la Ordenación de Mujeres“ y asumió el compromiso de acompañar a aquellos miembros que todavía no ordenan mujeres. La ordenación de mujeres no se limita solo a tener más mujeres en el ministerio, sino más de reconocer que la inclusión de mujeres en el ministerio y como iguales en el liderazgo de la iglesia, se creará una poderosa fuerza para la justicia social y económica en todo el mundo. Este artículo es uno de una serie sobre mujeres en el ministerio que subraya esta convicción.

“La iglesia debe mirar más allá del sexismo y ofrecer un espacio igualitario a las mujeres en el ministerio”

La Reverenda Priscilla Rawade está convencida que las mujeres no deben ser subestimadas. Ella afirma que las mujeres están hechas a imagen de Dios y que Dios ha bendecido a las mujeres con conocimiento y sabiduría; por esta razón, ellas deben liberarse de las cadenas del aislamiento.

“Nuestro Dios es amor, y el cristianismo habla de liberación, libertad y amor. La liberación y la libertad deben brotar de la iglesia, y la iglesia debe mirar más allá del sexismo y ofrecer un espacio igualitario a las mujeres en el ministerio. Al igual que en el mundo secular, la esfera religiosa debería brindar oportunidades equitativas a las mujeres”, expresa la Rev. Rawade.

“Me alegra tener una plataforma, mi púlpito, desde donde puedo ayudar a las personas a reflexionar a través de la lente de una mujer”, dice Rawade. “Hay personas que piensan que mi interpretación es errónea. Los textos religiosos son complejos y la reflexión sobre las Escrituras es algo en lo cual me enfoco. No se anima a las mujeres a ser pastoras y ministras, pero creo que eso está cambiando. A veces también es cuestión de dar el primer paso y de apoyar a otras mujeres en su peregrinaje. Es un proceso gradual”.

Rawade, una ministra ordenada de la Iglesia del Norte de la India, de la Diócesis de Kolhapur, es también docente en el Colegio Bishop, en Calcuta, India. Ella compartió su



experiencia de ordenación como mujer, algo que no tiene mucho apoyo en su país.

Para ella, personalmente, la decisión de ser ordenada no fue una lucha. “Siempre quise estudiar teología. Aunque mi madre pensaba que las mujeres no pertenecen al púlpito, los estudios teológicos me hicieron luego cuestionar su perspectiva. “Hombres y mujeres son iguales ante Dios, así que ¿por qué no en la ordenación?”, afirma Rawade.

Para obtener su Maestría en Teología, Rawade centró su investigación sobre la homosexualidad en el contexto del “Código de Santidad” que se encuentra en el libro de Levítico, y sus áreas de interés incluyen literatura sapiencial, lecturas feministas y mujeristas, sexualidad humana y género.

Ella expresa que la teología feminista es muy interesante porque abor-

da la comprensión de Dios desde la perspectiva de las mujeres. Cuestiona el papel de las religiones patriarcales que discriminan y subyugan a las mujeres en nombre de Dios. En su iglesia, muchas personas, tanto hombres como mujeres, todavía sienten que solo los hombres deberían ser pastores u ordenados al ministerio.

“La ordenación de las mujeres es importante porque la mayor parte de la interpretación de la Biblia ha sido hecha por hombres, y vemos la Biblia a través de su perspectiva”, dice Rawade. “Sea en India o en Pakistán, la religión juega un papel importante, y lo que nos dice la persona que está en el púlpito nos va modelando. Por ende, la voz de las mujeres y su perspectiva también deberían ser escuchadas desde ese lugar, ya que aportan experiencias enriquecedoras y fortalecen a la iglesia”.

Aprende más: <http://wrcr.ch/es/justicia/ordenacion-de-mujeres> ●

Ordaining Women: A Powerful Force for Justice

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is particularly committed to gender justice and the just and full participation of women in all areas of church and society. The 2017 General Assembly adopted “The Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women” and pledged to journey with those members who do not yet ordain women. The ordination of women is not just about having more women in the ministry; rather it’s about recognizing that by including women in ministry and as equals in church leadership would create a powerful force for social and economic justice throughout the world. This is one in a series of articles on women in ministry highlighting these beliefs.

“Being an ordained minister is a true and live demonstration of God’s love and equality.”

“Change needs time, patience and prayer. It happened in the Arab World and in a Muslim majority city, Tripoli in Lebanon; it can happen everywhere in the world,” said Rola Sleiman while discussing her ordination as a minister.

Sleiman, the first female pastor in the Arab Christian world grew up as a church-going girl who later decided to study theology. She studied at Tripoli Evangelical School for boys and girls, a school that belongs to the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL). For high school, she went to the Near East School of Theology and obtained her Bachelor of Theology in Christian Education.

At 14-years-old, Sleiman started asking deep questions about life and what really gives it meaning, especially to a girl living in the Middle East. She pondered questions of finding truth, including why she was born into an evangelical family in a Muslim-majority country.

After studying some parts of the Quran, the Old Testament and the New Testament she fell in love with the young man from Nazareth, Jesus Christ, who changed the world with his love, sacrifice and compassion.

“I said this theology I want to adopt, this person I want to follow and such principals I want to preach. I logically became a believer,” said Sleiman.

She was ordained on 26 February 2017 as the first female pastor in



Lebanon, the Arab world and the Middle East.

Explaining how she became the first female pastor, she recalls the challenges on her way.

“In my country Lebanon—and throughout the Middle East—it was known that it is not possible for a woman to be a clergy. It never happened before in all the churches. There are huge social and cultural difficulties and barriers, not to mention that we live in a merely patriarchal society where female leadership is not well appreciated,” said Sleiman.

She explained that 50 years ago in Syria and Lebanon, the Presbyterian Church ordained women as elders. Not all churches ordained women elders, but the majority of the Synod Presbyterian congregations did, which meant that women were a part of the decision-making process in the church and part of the session of the church despite not being ministers.

Recalling the debate about ordaining women as ministers, she said that the problem was not theological, but social, with questions such as: “Which church will ask her to be their pastor? Who will accept a women pastor in a patriarchal society and among a majority of Orthodox and Catholic churches? How will she build relationships with other churches? The more conservative Evangelicals? The Muslims?”

She added that the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches met around eight years ago and agreed on a statement that churches should start ordaining women to serve the Sacraments. Everyone signed that statement, but it was only on paper.

“If you asked me or anyone else five or ten years ago whether we were going to see a female ordained minister in the Arab world, I would have answered maybe in 50 or 100 years. Fortunately, more than a year ago, this situation has changed,” said Sleiman.

According to Sleiman, the change happened because the church in Tripoli asked for her to be ordained. In the late 1990s, Sleiman was appointed by NESSL to serve in the Bekaa Valley as a Christian educator. She moved to Tripoli in 2002 as the church’s Christian educator, but often substituted for the church’s pastor when he traveled. In 2008, she became the church’s de facto

Continued on page 13

Declaración de AIPRAL y WCRC sobre Venezuela

La Alianza de Iglesias Presbiterianas y Reformadas de América latina (AIPRAL) y la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR) desde hace mucho tiempo han estado atentas y acompañando la difícil situación de Venezuela con varias visitas pastorales y acciones solidarias. La realidad de Venezuela es compleja y exige un abordaje que evite miradas simplistas y slogans fáciles. Esto lejos de ser una solución real para el pueblo de Venezuela, enrarece aún más la situación.

En tal sentido y desde nuestro humilde lugar llamamos a todas las partes involucradas tanto en el país como en el exterior a evitar posicionamientos rígidos que lleven la ya difícil situación social, económica y

política de Venezuela a una escalada de violencia sin punto de retorno.

Llamamos también a un proceso de diálogo sincero, inclusivo y basado en el derecho internacional que tenga como prioridad la solución pacífica y justa para el pueblo venezolano. Es tarea de todas las partes y especialmente de las naciones hermanas apoyar y facilitar ese diálogo antes que hacer de Venezuela parte de un ajedrez geopolítico.

Desde nuestra fe cristiana estamos llamados a la paz: “Bienaventurados los pacificadores, porque ellos serán llamados hijos de Dios.” (Mateo 5:9). Además estamos convencidos que el diálogo basado en la paz, la justicia y el amor al prójimo son las únicas bases posibles sobre las cuales se pueden superar los conflic-

tos y construir alternativas duraderas para el bien común. La negociación de una situación compleja exige y amerita perseverancia y una voluntad irrenunciable en busca de acuerdos y consensos.

Nos comprometemos a colaborar en todo lo que esté a nuestro alcance para favorecer espacios de diálogos y construcción de paz. “...El fruto de justicia se siembra en paz para aquellos que hacen la paz.” Santiago 3:18

Nos comprometemos a seguir orando por Venezuela y todo su pueblo en la certeza que Dios con su Espíritu Santo nos acompaña en gestar tiempos de paz. ●

Call for prayers and support after devastating seminary fire

A dormitory fire at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University in the centre of Budapest, Hungary caused significant damage in January. One hundred firefighters responded and battled the flames for hours with the dormitory and nearby buildings evacuated.

There was one death, a guest at the dormitory, and the living quarters of the students were completely destroyed, with students losing nearly all of their possessions.

A damage assessment is underway, but it was determined that the students would not be able to return for a long time. The lecture rooms in the building were also damaged, and it is uncertain when teaching will be able to resume.

After the tragic event, the Reformed University suspended the

exam period and sent all students home. They were able to finish their semester with individual schedules. For all those who lived in the dormitory, regardless which university they were studying at, aid was provided so that they could buy warm clothes and train/bus tickets to travel home.

The fire was spotted by a theology student, who immediately called the fire department and started evacuating the building with his friends. The students also played an active role in the identification process of their colleagues and helped everyone to reach a safe place during the evacuation process. The press reported that they remained calm and behaved bravely during the fire, and prioritized saving their fellow students above everything.

Donations started to arrive already on the night of the tragedy

from churches and individual donors. All material donations were collected and distributed by the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid; housing for the students was offered by other universities.

One of the students said: “The love and willingness to help that is around us at the moment is very rare to experience.” István Szabó, presiding bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary, issued an official statement to thank everyone who helped in fighting the fire or evacuating the dormitory. ●

God's call guides young leader

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."
—Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

Guided by these verses (and those preceding it), Katalin Szalai, the World Communion of Reformed Churches new intern, sees her year with the WCRC as an important step in her journey with God.

"Matthew 25:35-40 inspired me to understand the inequalities embedded in our societies and also to have an open eye and heart to the suffering of other people and how I might be able to help them," she said. "I believe that we need to challenge those practices in our world, which put a certain group of people into a disadvantaged position."

Katalin grew up in the Reformed Church in Hungary, attending her local congregation in Szentendre (where her father is currently the leader of the church's board of elders), and also attended the Reformed High School in town.

She's also been influenced by her understanding that "our world was created by the almighty God and that we have the responsibility to look after



it. Perceiving the world as a gift from God not only changed how I value the environment around me, but also how I looked at the people."

This led her to first study sociology and then move on to a master's degree in International Development—Poverty, Inequality and Development "to not only learn about the root causes of the problems in our societies, but also to see how we are able to change them and hence be good stewards of the world that was given to us," she said.

She sees her year with the WCRC as a natural step in her life and career journey: "I knew that I would like to work for a non-profit organization that has social justice among its core values and felt that at the WCRC I could enrich my knowledge of this field and earn practical skills for the future.

"The cooperation and communion that the WCRC thrives to achieve among its member churches also spoke to me, as I always believed that in order to achieve significant change, we need to overcome our differences and learn how to love each other through Christ, even in situations when we disagree on certain things," she said.

The WCRC's internship programme is made possible through contributions by the *Evangelisches Missionswerk, Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn* and member churches. ●

Ordaining Women

continued from page 11

pastor, preaching and offering care to the congregation until her ordination almost a decade later.

"In this case, there are no more social reasons to stand against the ordination, and this was the key change. To me, being an ordained minister is a true and live demonstration of God's love and equality. It means giving the right that Jesus granted to women in ministry and fulfilling the equality that Jesus our Lord planted," said Sleiman.

Sleiman believes that every woman has a role in the life of the church and to plant a seed of hope and light a candle in a dark world. No man and no earthly authority can deprive faithful women from serving God.

"Women surely have plenty of values to offer to the church of Christ, but we have to believe in ourselves, in our abilities and our spiritual talents. We as women are able to embrace a human being in our womb. When God decided to be incarnated and come to this world as a human figure, he was born in the womb of a simple, faithful woman. Just keep the faith and you can make a difference in your world," said Sleiman.

Learn more: <http://wrc.ch/justice/ordination-of-women> ●

The World Communion of Reformed Churches internship programme is designed for highly qualified young people who are interested in gaining valuable experience working with an international ecumenical organization. The internships run for 12 months in the WCRC offices in Hannover, Germany.

Applications are invited from young adults from WCRC member churches for the programme. The next intern will begin in September, and applications are due by 31 May. Full details and applications forms can be found online: <http://wrc.ch/leadership-development/internships>

Kao's faithful dedication remembered

The life of Rev. Dr. C. M. Kao was remembered and the glory of God celebrated at a simple worship service on in February. Kao, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's longest serving general secretary, passed away on 14 February.

"The purpose of the funeral service is to worship God, not praising personal achievements, displaying ostentation, and having speeches from dignitaries," Kao wrote in a 2015 statement. "May those who attend my funeral service sincerely praise the Lord, who gives grace, with mind and soul."

A dedicated human rights activist, Kao served as PCT general secretary from 1970 to 1989, leading the church through the "White Terror" and years of martial law in Taiwan. For four of those years he himself was imprisoned for his alleged help in harbouring an escaped dissident and human rights leader. While in jail, the PCT kept his seat as general secretary open.

He was released from his sentence three years early after unprecedented ecumenical support and advocacy spearheaded by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (a predecessor body of the WCRC) and the World Council of Churches. The advocacy was relentless, beginning with his trial and continuing until his release.

Prior to his imprisonment, Kao was instrumental in the creation and promotion of three prophetic statements from the PCT urging the repressive Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government to move toward freedom, democracy and independence: the "Statement on our National Fate" (1971), "Our Appeal" (1975) and the "Declaration on Human Rights" (1977), in which the church urged the KMT government "to face reality and to take effective measures whereby Taiwan may



become a new and independent country."

"This kind of statement is not basically political, but is a confession of faith. It is like the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church in Germany under the Hitler regime, and, more recently, the statements issued by churches in South Africa," Kao said.

"Rev. Kao will be remembered for his commitment and passion to further the cause of justice not only in Taiwan, but in the world and the ways in which he was able to perceive justice as emerging from a perspective of faith," said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary.

Kao and especially his wife, Li Le-Tin (Ruth), were key in the creation of the Asia Area Council for the World Alliance, which continues within the WCRC as the Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC). The story of Kao's imprisonment was shared during a worship service at the 1982 General Council (Ottawa, Canada), and a hymn he composed while in prison was sung. It was also at this Council that his wife and other Asian delegates discussed the idea of forming an Asia Area Council. Mrs. Kao went on to become

moderator of the Council, which led to reconciliation processes between member churches in Taiwan, both North and South Korea and Japan.

A native of Tainan, Kao graduated from Tainan Theological College and Seminary before serving as a minister at Indigenous churches. He served as the principal of Yushan Seminary, which later became the first school dedicated to Indigenous Taiwanese.

A poet and Chinese calligrapher, Kao wrote and published poems, hymns and sermons in Taiwanese, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and English, some of which he wrote from his prison cell. ●

WCRC mourns death of Robina Winbush

The World Communion of Reformed Churches joined with those around the world mourning the death of Robina Winbush, associate stated clerk and director of ecumenical relations for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and a passionate and energetic leader in the WCRC.

Winbush, 61, died in March while returning from a 10-day visit to the Middle East. She was deplaning in New York when she collapsed at the airport.

“We are saddened to hear the news of the loss of our sister Rev. Dr. Robina,” said Najla Kassab, WCRC president. “She left too early, as we were still envisioning together how justice can be lived and reflected in the life of the church. Her sudden death interrupted our dream. She will be missed as a strong voice for justice, and especially as a source of empowerment to women leaders.”

Winbush was planning to attend the WCRC Executive Committee meeting in May and served as the moderator of the Public Issues Committee at the 2017 General Council. She played an important role in the success of last fall’s assembly of the WCRC’s Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC), a body which she served on for years.

“Robina’s name is in many ways synonymous with CANAAC, which was very important to her,” said Angela Martins, CANAAC convener. “She believed in it and committed much time and effort to the sustained position we have today. She has left us a rich legacy upon which we would do well to continue to offer ourselves for service.”



“Friend, colleague, mentor who was not afraid or ashamed to be female, black and ordained, Robina would not allow injustice or inequity to have space at the table,” said Yvette Noble-Bloomfield, former WCRC

vice president. “She provided not only words of wisdom, but her prophetic utterances often changed the mood and direction of our ecumenical conversation. Truly a sister in Christ, Robina nurtured many Caribbean women in ministry and encouraged us to find our voice and our space at the ecumenical table.”

“Robina leaves a legacy of passion for ecumenism and justice, particularly gender and racial justice,” said Lisa Vander Wal, WCRC vice president. “This was evident in her preaching and through her strong advocacy for women and people of color. She was such a strong and forceful presence that her passing will leave a large hole in the ecumenical circles in which she moved.”

A native of Columbus, Ohio, Winbush received her education from Kent State and Harvard Universities, as well as Union Theological Seminary in New York. She began her ministry at the Presbyterian Church (USA) more than three decades ago. She served in an ecumenical role in Global Missions before taking a pastorate in Queens, New York. She also served churches in Harlem, Long Island, the Bronx, New York and Louisville.

“We are so grateful for her life and leadership in WCRC, and pray that the lord will prepare a cloud of witness that will carry her legacy,” said Kassab. “Although saddened and perplexed with her death, we are not abandoned for we have hope that the Lord who started the work among us will continue it. We will miss you my sister, but we remain sustained in hope whether in heaven or on earth.” ●

Call made for action

continued from page 1

Lessing, WCRC executive secretary for communion and theology.

These inputs, along with their experiences in India, led the consultation’s participants to state: “As we contrasted the struggles for justice, equality, equity and dignity against the backdrop of the current worldwide phenomenon of exclusionary versions of nationhood, it became clear that they are shaped by dominant and dominating religious and cultural resources. These include the politics of fear, xenophobia and hatred, the demonization of religious and ethnic minorities and oppressed communities, the suppression of rights and freedom for invented threats to national security, the development of policies advocating national integration and the utter disregard for democratic institutions. We believe these are detrimental not only to the marginalized but also to the moral integrity of our world.”

“We conclude that such dehumanization, denigration and devaluation of any human being is sin. Such behavior violates a Christian faith that all human beings are created equally in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27).

“[W]e understand our faith to emphasize that we are called to treat all humanity as neighbours in ways that we would wish to be treated (Leviticus 19:18b; 33-34), called by God to intervene on behalf of one another when found in need (Luke 6:27-31), and that our treatment of those deemed the least among us evidences our Christian covenant with God and one another (Matthew 25:31-46).

“As such, we call upon the World Communion of Reformed Churches to act now by implementing programming and engaging the process of *status confessionis*,” a request that will be considered by the WCRC Executive Committee. ●



Chris Ferguson

From the General Secretary

The Immediate Calling

“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”—Psalm 11:3 (NRSV)

The beginning of the Psalm speaks dramatically to our context as everything is falling apart for the Psalmist. There is a danger and social disintegration and wars and violence on all sides. The Psalmist’s friends and supporters say, Now is the time to get out of here, flee to the mountains, the danger is too great. And instead the Psalmist answers, When the very foundations are destroyed, ruined, when everything we count on falls apart, what are the righteous to do? What is the response of those who seek to follow the way of God in a situation where all the premises have disintegrated?

In our context, we see the culmination of several years of making evident which we have seen coming for a long, long time. Very many of the foundation stones of our civilization are now up for grabs. Those who flaunt violence are rewarded and those who are trying to maintain a semblance of the old order are in fact turned into its victims.

We see now the situation ever more dramatically whether it is about climate change, the growing inequality, spread of violence—the foundations themselves are being destroyed. Not only are difficult things happening, but they are happening to us in a way that indicates that the old rules are no longer working. Part of the answer of the Psalmist, of course, is that we can’t flee the situation. There is no simply saving ourselves in the midst of such a situation. The righteous are called to be present. The righteous make themselves present in the midst of the turmoil and the destruction. We don’t simply try to rebuild what was lost, but we try to answer directly and quickly to the call.

Now in biblical terms, we are addressed with an Easter passage. In fact, we can take the whole book of the Gospel of Mark as being a story that is a long lead up to the passion story. And people have often noticed that the context of the Gospel of Mark is war, destruction, where the foundations are shaking and the rules no longer seem to hold. At the same time throughout Mark one of the most used words is “immediately,” particularly in terms of Jesus’ actions. “Immediately” not only in the sense of in a timely fashion but “directly,” not letting anything distract from the goal, that when something happens it is immediately addressed, whether through healing, through prophetic denunciation, through actions, through movement.

In this Easter moment, in the midst of all that perplexes us, we are called to act immediately, directly. The righteous find themselves called to the resurrection moment, to apply to what is happening. In the resurrection story in Mark’s gospel, the encounters with the messengers and later with the Risen Christ are always direct: Go and tell the disciples. Go to Galilee where Jesus is already waiting for you. Go to the graveside. Go and address the pain, the loss and the destruction. The hope is in the immediate making ourselves present to that which challenges the very idea that there are firm foundations. The righteous follow the God who is acting to bring about justice and reconciliation as the very foundations fall.

And we see this happening with member churches in Syria, in Colombia, on the Korean Peninsula—and in many, many other places. They continue to witness, following the God of Life for peace, following Jesus’ own ministry of reconciliation. They show up.

Even as the foundations crumble we see the members of Christ’s church rising up, hearing the resurrection call and bringing hope. When the foundations are destroyed, the righteous follow the God of Life to defend life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Reformed **communiqué**

April 2019
Vol.10, No.1

Reformed Communiqué is published three times a year by the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Unless otherwise indicated, the writers for articles are alone responsible for the opinions expressed. Articles may be reprinted freely with acknowledgement.

To receive your free subscription, send an email to wrcrc@wrcrc.eu or send a request by post to:

WCRC
Calvin Centre
Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover, Germany

tel: +49 511 8973 8310
fax: +49 511 8973 8311

wrcrc@wrcrc.eu
www.wrcrc.ch
facebook.com/worldcommunion
twitter.com/reformedcomunio

Editor: Phil Tanis
Layout: CRC Ministry Support Services
Printed in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

Called to
Communion,
Committed to
Justice