

Drafting Team Report: 20 May

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Questions for the Discernment Session on 19 May 2022 focused on the Leadership Module

Questions and Summary Responses

1. *The proposal presented an evaluation of the CGS model.*
 - a. *Do you have any ideas on ways in which the CGS model can be refined to better serve the Communion during an extended interim period?*
 - b. *How long do you feel an interim period can/should be sustained?*
 - c. *What might the impact of adding a fourth executive secretary to the CGS be?*

It is noteworthy that across the Discernment Groups there was a strong feeling that the CGS model was a valuable and potentially effective model. The approach was referred to as an “experiment” and very much a new way of providing leadership in ecumenical organizations – and we should be excited by that. There was, however, also a general feeling that the terminology – “interim model” – was one that devalued the structure and that there should be appraisal of this term. There was a suggestion that we should use terminology such as “Collegiate Model” as this provides, at least to some degree, a sense of structure and stability.

It was accepted, albeit not entirely desirable, that setting a specific date for the “interim period” was not possible as this depends almost completely on WCRC finances. Concern was, however, expressed on the potential uncertainty this “interim” was creating at levels ranging from member churches to ecumenical bodies. Regional differences in perception of the CGS were also highlighted. This perception issue is something that must be considered and, although accepting that an Acting General Secretary was in place, the Communion is most likely weakened by not having a dedicated “leader” who can direct the Communion’s pathway – this is definitely not because of any lack of diligence in the current model, but essentially the role as is, is very much dedicated to maintaining rather than directing and leading.

A number of suggestions were made on ways in which the Collegiate General Secretariat model could be refined; some of these were based on what was perceived as current good practice others were desired goals. As examples:

- A general view that taking on a coordination role was a positive direction; this benefit was contextualized at both member church and regional level
- The need for clarifying this coordinating role at CGS level – mention was also made of the need to write-in that this coordination needed to be intentional around regional entities as well as with member churches within a region
- Assessing staff capacity and workload
- Defining member church roles with programmes, and clarifying the action they should be undertaking
- Assessing the model in the context of the WCRC constitution

Questions were raised regarding the funding of the fourth executive secretary. While we as Executive Committee members are aware that this funding is not from the core, operational budget and specifically assigned, it is important that we also consider what the perception, once again, may be from “outside” ... “no money for General Secretary, but for this role.” As one group noted – “there are psychological impacts that we must be aware of.” A fourth executive secretary would join the CGS – taking membership to four. Issues of decision-making, split views, etc. were raised as potential harbingers of unsettlement – how would decisions be taken when views were divided – highlighting again the need of a defined leadership face. Finally, while the new executive secretary would clearly have an independent remit, an associated benefit would be the sharing-out of some of the roles currently held by the current CGS – this would be a means of reducing workload.

2. Are there specific items you feel the Committee (individuals from the General Secretary Search Committee, Sustainability Task Group, and Strategic Plan Programme Group, with the Collegial General Secretariat participating as ex officio members) should take up in their work?

In some ways the discussion around this point was to a greater degree a development of the Question 1. The urgent need to decide on the future leadership structure was emphasized and the referring of the current structure as “interim” was again highlighted as being less than helpful to perception. Some interesting insights were made that suggested that the Communion needs to look carefully at the success of what has been deconstructed (via CGS) and how to rebuild (future structure). Reference was made to other ecumenical bodies and how deconstruction had been highly effective and beneficial.

The Committee should be charged to assess the accessibility of the CGS; and of the urgent need to reconnect with churches and regions. There is a need to rebuild trust with member churches, reassessing engagement space at church, region, and ecumenical body level.

With the challenges many churches currently face, it is important that the Committee review the relevancy of what the WCRC is doing – the global needs to be made relevant to the regional. Directed development also must be visible, without a visible and active full-time general secretary not moving forward will be seen as the Communion being “stuck” in space. This must be avoided.

3. Both the reports of the SPPG and Officers’ Committee noted a need to develop a new working model that shifts the secretariat from implementing programmes to providing strategic leadership in networking, coordination, collaboration, and communication. How might this positively or negatively impact the work and witness of the WCRC?

This question appears to have catalyzed the fewest comments and statements – partly, we suspect, as much has already been stated. The concept embedded in the new model was thought to be a very distinct and defined way of making the secretariat more visible. Groups also commented that the WCRC had, and could, become much more accessible with a corporate CGS. There was, across the groups, and as mentioned above a commendation of the model. Reference was made to a view expressed in an earlier Drafting Team report

(18.05.22) that within a region, local churches were very frequently very well networked, the CGS's role should be very much at a global or central level.

4. Both reports also noted the need to become more flexible in securing the necessary staff capacity for programmatic work. What are the positives and negatives of accepting seconded staff?

There was a clear and succinct message from the groups on this. The answer was overwhelmingly positive across groups but with a caveat that secondment of staff for specific, directed and supervised projects and tasks usually proved extremely positive, secondment to more general tasks with possibly fewer clear outcomes was a risk! The means of appointment was also highlighted as something that needs to be wary of; as one group stated, volunteers from member churches are not, of necessity, the best personnel for appointment.

5. Do you have any reactions to or comments on the specific proposals from the Officers' Committee report?

The Officers' Committee proposes the following actions for discernment and decision:

- 1. The Executive Committee postpones the election of a general secretary until such a time when an election is feasible.*
- 2. The Executive Committee continues the interim period with delegation of the responsibilities of the general secretary to the Collegial General Secretariat (as defined in 2021 Executive Committee, action 22), and including the Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy upon her/his appointment, until a general secretary is installed into office.*
- 3. The Executive Committee appoints a Committee that shall consist of individuals from the General Secretary Search Committee, Sustainability Task Group, and Strategic Plan Programme Group, with the Collegial General Secretariat participating as ex officio members.*

This Committee is mandated to:

- focus on the short- and mid-term sustainability challenges described in this report;*
- explore ways in which the WCRC can develop a model that allows flexibility in cooperation with member churches and partners to pursue the vision and mission of the WCRC;*
- present a report with proposal(s) to the 2023 Executive Committee meeting on how the conditions can be created that would:*
 - a. allow the election of a general secretary;*
 - b. assure sufficient staff capacity to coordinate the work of the WCRC.*

4. *The Executive Committee welcomes additional staff capacity that is funded by programme grants or through cooperative agreements with member churches and partners, which may include a more decentralized working model.*

The comments referred to in responses for Question 1-4 above are applicable to Question 5. This is particularly so for issues related to the appointment of a general secretary, the use of terminology including “interim,” and the undefined period of time before the election of a general secretary. These comments apply, in particular, to statements 1 and 2 in the proposal above. It was also mentioned that while the financial situation may be the causal factor in explaining these statements, it needs to be recognized that the lack of a “front person” does influence “the level of trust” that exists between an organization and its members. In this context also, concern was expressed in two groups that without a general secretary the WCRC does not have a recognized (identifiable) identity in the global ecumenical and faith space.

On statements 3 and 4 it was noted that the Committee was mandated on three actions (statement 3). It was strongly advocated that these need to be prioritized. Concern was expressed that the concept of collaboration was not duly recognized along with coordination; and along with this in statement 4 a clarification and specification of what is and what is not centralized within WCRC strategy would be advisable. In this context it was also expressed in some groups that albeit eloquent, the Strategic Plan is a complex document and sets out targets and ambitions that, as an entity, cannot be achieved in the time frame available. It was also highlighted for statement 4, that while “a more decentralized working model” is to be applauded this must not be read as excluding the “Centre.”

In summary, the consensus among the Discernment Groups includes the following:

- There is a definite need for the World Communion of Reformed Churches to prioritize the appointment of a general secretary. The Executive Committee, however, fully appreciate that this possibility is dependent on finding and assuring sustainability of financial support. In such a situation, and reaffirming the decision taken at the Executive Committee in 2021 to establish the Collegial General Secretariat, the Executive Committee request that the role of the acting general secretary as the representational and visible front of the organization be further clarified and defined.
- Noting the potentially devaluing impression given by the term “interim” the Executive Committee recommend the use of “collegiate model” rather than “interim model” with immediate effect.
- The Executive Committee, with consideration to the above two proposals, the views expressed in the Discernment Groups, and the modifications highlighted below, recommend the following proposals for consideration:
 1. **The Executive Committee postpones the election of a general secretary until such a time when an election is feasible.**
 2. **The Executive Committee continues the interim period with delegation of the responsibilities of the general secretary to the Collegial General Secretariat (as**

defined in 2021 Executive Committee, action 22), and including the Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy upon her/his appointment, until a general secretary is installed into office.

3. The Executive Committee appoints a Committee that shall consist of individuals from the General Secretary Search Committee, Sustainability Task Group, and Strategic Plan Programme Group, with the Collegial General Secretariat participating as ex officio members.

This Committee is mandated to:

- focus on the short- and mid-term sustainability challenges described in this report;
 - explore ways in which the WCRC can develop a model that allows flexibility in **collaboration with regions**, member churches and partners to pursue the vision and mission of the WCRC;
 - present a report with proposal(s) to the 2023 Executive Committee meeting on how the conditions can be created that would:
 - a. allow the election of a general secretary;
 - b. assure sufficient staff capacity **to collaborate and to** coordinate the work of the WCRC.
4. The Executive Committee welcomes additional staff capacity that is funded by programme grants or through cooperative agreements with member churches and partners, which may include a more decentralized working model.