

Proposal by the Officers' Committee on the Election of a General Secretary and the Leadership Model During the Interim

Introduction

In early 2021, the WCRC realized that its long-running sustainability challenges had reached a breaking point that required immediate action. After extended consultations, the Officers' Committee and Executive Committee took the following decisions:

- postponement of the election of a general secretary;
- cutting personnel expenditure (the number of administrators was reduced from four to three);
- Executive Committee meetings would take place in a digital format;
- appointment of a Sustainability Task Group that should explore additional funding sources to assure the short-, mid-, and long-term sustainability of the WCRC.

These decisions were designed to give the WCRC some breathing room to overcome the sustainability challenges. The Executive Committee set the goal that, in 2022, the WCRC should be in a situation that would allow the election of a general secretary and the continuation of normal operations.

To coordinate and direct the work of the WCRC during the interim, the Executive Committee adopted a temporary leadership model limited to one year. Accordingly, it appointed the three executive secretaries as a Collegial General Secretariat (CGS). The Officers' Committee was charged to reassess the situation in February 2022 and discern whether the election of a general secretary was feasible in the current sustainability situation.

During this discernment, the Officers' Committee determined that the necessary funds to finance the general secretary position had not been acquired yet. The current state of the core budget only allows operations with reduced staff and without in-person governance meetings. To this date, there are no firm indications that the financial situation will improve substantially in the near term.

This report summarizes the findings of the Officers' Committee and presents the discernment on the following issues:

- A. Feasibility of the General Secretary election
- B. Leadership during an Extended Interim Period
- C. Towards a Sustainable Working Model for the WCRC
- D. The Role of the CGS during an Extended Interim
- E. Proposals for the Way Ahead

A. Feasibility of the General Secretary Election

In the current sustainability situation, the election of a general secretary is a decision that has a significant impact on the financial stability of the WCRC and the conditions under which it will be able to work. In the current budget situation, the addition of the salary of a general secretary would either lead to immense sustainability risks or would demand a significant reduction of executive staff capacity. Under these conditions, every decision on a

roadmap for the election of a general secretary must strive for the best way to meet the following strategic priorities:

1. the need for a balanced budget;
2. the return to the constitutional mandate to elect a general secretary
3. the transition to a postcolonial working model to improve the future sustainability of the WCRC

Each of these three priorities is important. The WCRC must strive toward the election of a general secretary without compromising a balanced budget or obstructing the possibilities for future sustainability improvements.

However, it might not be easy to do justice to all three of them simultaneously. Therefore, the Communion needs to discuss how to bring these three goals into the best possible balance.

The following analysis explores the impact that each particular strategy would have if it would give preference to one priority at the expense of the others. This exploration flags potential unintended consequences that should be considered.

1. Prioritizing a Balanced Budget

A strategy aimed at securing the financial stability of the WCRC would put all efforts into maintaining a balanced budget.

Under current conditions, this strategy would allow maintaining the status quo of the operations of the WCRC. This stability results from the 2021 cost cuttings exercise: not electing a general secretary, reducing the staffing plan by one administrator, and no in-person Executive Committee meetings. While these cuts allow the WCRC to operate for the foreseeable future, they have a massive impact on the work of the WCRC. In the current situation, the budget does include the additional salary for a general secretary. As a result, the executive secretaries have had to take over these responsibilities. This shift has led to noticeable reductions in the programme work.

To overcome these challenges, balancing an extended budget that would allow returning to the 2021 state of work would require new funding sources. The current sustainability initiative has explored several options.

However, these explorations made clear that there are only a few easy gains to be made. Faced with the impact of the pandemic and other structural challenges, many member churches have experienced financial problems that forced them to cut budgets and reduce staff. This shift in the funding landscape makes fundraising more complex and demanding. Funds available to support institutions have dwindled across the globe. In this situation, fundraisers have to convince potential partners of the relevance of the WCRC's work for the life of their organizations. Only strong relations and considerable trust will allow earmarking parts of such grants for financing the general secretariat.

As long as this situation prevails, it is unlikely that established fundraising patterns for the core budget can raise sufficient funds to pay the additional salary of a general secretary in the short-term and perhaps even in the mid-term future.

To put it bluntly: If the WCRC continues to pursue its current fundraising approach, it won't be easy to reach the financial stability that will allow the election of a general secretary any time soon.

2. Prioritizing the Election of a General Secretary

The Constitution defines the general secretary as the chief executive officer of the WCRC. Therefore, the election of a general secretary is of crucial importance for the WCRC's work. A strategy prioritizing such an election would focus all efforts on obtaining the funds for the salary of a general secretary. Such funds would have to be secured for the whole election period of seven years.

In the current sustainability situation, such a strategy would have to be based on the hope that it will be possible to discover new sources of funding that would allow the return to the "old normal" of operations before 2021.

This hope has so far been disappointed. There are no pledges from member churches that would even get close to the amount required to pay the salary of a general secretary.

Therefore, finding the funds for an additional salary of a general secretary would put the WCRC into a dilemma. Assuming the WCRC does not want to risk its mid-term viability by depleting its reserves, the money for the salary of a general secretary could only be guaranteed by further drastic cost-cutting measures.

Current budgetary limitations would only allow two options. A general secretary would either:

- have to be funded through monies currently dedicated to an executive secretary (which would postpone an election until 2024 when the current executive for communications and operations concludes his term);
- be an in-house appointment (i.e. the promotion of a current executive secretary to general secretary, which could happen immediately).

In both instances, the election would entail the sacrifice of executive staff capacity. In both scenarios, the new general secretary will only have the support of two executive secretaries instead of three.

3. Prioritizing the Transformation to a Working Model for the WCRC

If the current fundraising model cannot provide the necessary income, the WCRC must look for new models to fund its work. A strategy that emphasizes the long-term sustainability of the WCRC would explore the conditions for a "new normal" that will involve the resources of member churches in new ways. Such a strategy could invite member churches, ministries, regions, and ecumenical partners to second staff for certain projects or implement programmes on behalf of the Communion. This approach would need a high degree of

flexibility in obtaining the necessary staff resources, which would reduce the liabilities of the core budget.

Such a working model would also address the structural challenges that affect many ecumenical organizations. Till now, the funding of ecumenical organizations follows old mission structures that raise funds in the North to finance the work of the global church. These traditional funding structures conflict with the postcolonial self-conception of large parts of the ecumenical movement. In the twenty-first century, they are also increasingly unfeasible. The financial resources of churches in the Global North have peaked. Even if the support of the ecumenical movement is still high, these churches will not be able to shoulder the bulk of ecumenical finances the same way as they did in the past.

As Dr. Rathnakara Sadananda, the moderator of the Sustainability Task Group has put it, we need a constructive decolonization of ecumenical finances that regards the whole Communion as a resource. Such a new perception of Communion finances must pay particular attention to churches' funding and working models in the Global South. Unlike churches in the North, these churches do not have large financial resources at the level of assembly offices and governance structures but need to raise funds for financing their central structures from congregations and, in many cases, also from individuals.

To fund ecumenical organizations like the WCRC, the church leadership has to raise particular funds for this purpose. This requires an extraordinary commitment. The central church offices need to reach out to congregations to convince them that ecumenical organizations are worthwhile funding goals. For this work, they need the support of the Communion. Successful fundraising on this level requires excellent member church relations, inspiring programmes, and effective communication.

Seeing these requirements, it becomes clear that such a strategy will require considerable resources for coordination and accompaniment. Our experience demonstrates that the transition to a postcolonial Communion model necessitates sufficient staff capacity, a long breath, and high institutional stability. Even if there are several positive signals of churches that are willing to support the work of the WCRC in the described manner, it is not guaranteed that the funds to finance this overhead can be raised through the programme budgets.

As promising as this postcolonial strategy would look for the future viability of the WCRC, it cannot secure sufficient income to pay for the capacity to coordinate and accompany the necessary transformation. As desirable as it would be to have a general secretary leading the shift to a new understanding of the Communion, the process itself cannot guarantee the necessary funds for the salary in the near or perhaps even in the broader future.

Assessment

None of the described strategies can provide a quick and easy way toward a general secretary election. The three priorities impact each other; the pursuit of one goal leads to unintended difficulties with regard to the others:

1. Without new fundraising approaches, it is unlikely that the funds needed for the general secretary position can be obtained any time soon;

2. Without additional resources, the salary of the general secretary can only be covered by either risking the financial reserves or by cutting executive staff capacity;
3. Without sufficient staff capacity, it will be challenging to organize the transition to a postcolonial sustainability model that makes the WCRC less dependent on core budget income.

This looks like a vicious circle, where the flow from one to the next leads to more problems. In the current situation, it will be difficult to reach the goals of a balanced budget, the election of a general secretary, and sufficient staff capacity to implement a new Communion model simultaneously.

However, the picture is not as gloomy as it might look. The analysis shows that the WCRC is currently in a stable condition and that there is a promising outlook for a more sustainable future.

What is difficult is finding the right strategy that will get the WCRC through the challenges of the short- and mid-term future.

In 2021, the Executive Committee mandated the General Secretary Search Committee and the Sustainability Task Group to each deal with a part of the challenge. The same decision requested the Officers' Committee in February 2022 to discern whether the election of a general secretary was feasible and, if not, make a proposal to the Executive Committee about the way ahead.

Formulating such a proposal requires a comprehensive discernment that needs more time and a broader outlook than was possible since February 2022.

The Officers' Committee, therefore, proposes that the Executive Committee appoints a *Future Direction Committee* that shall consist of members of the Officers' Committee, the Sustainability Task Group, and the General Secretary Search Committee (see proposals below).

This committee shall be mandated to discern the sustainability challenges described in this report and present a proposal to the 2023 Executive Committee meeting on how the conditions can be created that would allow the election of a general secretary while assuring sufficient staff capacity to coordinate the work of the WCRC.

B. Leadership during an Extended Interim Period

The feasibility study, as presented in the previous section, has shown that, under the current sustainability conditions, the only way to elect a general secretary in 2022 is if it would choose one of the existing executive secretaries. Under all other scenarios, the election would have to be postponed until the salary of the general secretary can be secured.

In this situation, the WCRC has to prepare for continuing its operations with an interim leadership model. To prepare for this decision, the Officers' Committee has conducted an evaluation of the current leadership model under which the responsibilities of the general

secretary are delegated to a Collegial General Secretariat (CGS), consisting of the three executive secretaries.

General Observations

As was already stated in the report to the Extraordinary Executive Committee meeting in November-December 2021, the appointment of a Collegial General Secretariat has found much positive interest in the WCRC and ecumenical partner organizations. Several people see the model as a timely experiment of non-hierarchical leadership that is more open to accommodating the diversity and richness of twenty-first century church life. Others have pointed to the collegial tradition of Presbyterian and Reformed churches that have adopted the office of powerful general secretaries only recently. The exercise has captured the interest and the imagination of many.

Inter-personal Relationships

However, some people have raised the concern that the structure strongly depends on good personal relationships among the three members of the CGS and offers only limited resources for conflict resolution.

These observations express undoubtedly a valid concern. At the same time, the WCRC, as an organization with a very lean staff, has always depended on good relationships among the people working in the Hannover office. In the past, attempts to solve conflicts by invoking the authority of a superior office have not been very successful.

The model of the CGS requires a high amount of transparency and mutual accountability. In our observation, the structure has, till now, contributed to good relationships in the office rather than impeding them.

Role Clarity

While the internal transformation to the CGS system proceeded without significant hiccups, there was a learning curve in the relationships with external bodies.

After a while, however, member churches and partners discovered the advantages of relating to the general secretariat in a multi-faceted way that involves institutional relationships and programmes.

The coordination of responsibilities between CGS and WCRC governance bodies raised more complex questions. In the beginning, it was not always understood who was responsible for what. We also had to clarify when the CGS had to appear as a collegium and when an individual would be appropriate.

These questions needed proper attention, but it is our impression that they are solvable.

Learnings for Leadership Development in the WCRC

The CGS started its work only on 1 September 2021. This short period does not yet allow a final assessment. There are, however, some learnings that should be taken seriously in the future development of the WCRC's leadership model:

- **Transparency and accountability:** Because decisions can only be taken in the collegium, the executives must be in continuous conversation with each other. This has led to a much-improved quality of discussion and a deeper integration of the activities. The system has also improved the communication between executives and administrators.
- **Integration of member church relations and programme work:** Since the sustainability model adopted by the Executive in May 2021 calls for the mobilization of member churches, the CGS is now coordinating member church relations and programme work much more closely. Dr. Sadananda sees this fusion of member church relations and programme work as an essential building block of the WCRC sustainability strategy and strongly encourages the Communion to develop it further.

Summary

The CGS model stands in the collegial tradition of Presbyterian leadership and encourages the diversity of relationships, programmes, and approaches in the Communion into a continuous conversation. This is very helpful for the coordination of the life and work of the Communion. The evaluation has not discovered significant problems that would lead to questioning the model in principle.

What has nevertheless been problematic is the increased workload, particularly for the executive staff. It is obvious that adding the responsibilities of the general secretary and the coordination of an extended sustainability initiative to already overstretched portfolios would have a negative impact on the programme work and other activities.

This is, however, not a problem with the model as such but with limited staff resources in the secretariat. The current funding model that relies on member church contributions to the core budget cannot adequately address these capacity challenges. The WCRC needs a new sustainability approach that mobilizes the whole Communion.

C. Towards a Postcolonial Sustainability Model for the WCRC

The feasibility analysis of the general secretary position demonstrates the need for a postcolonial working model that will allow the WCRC to operate with limited financial resources. In a situation without sufficient funds to even sustain core operations, the WCRC needs a structure that is less centralized and allows flexible cooperation with member churches, regions, and other partners (secondments, sharing of ministries, employing consultants for individual programmes etc.).

The Executive Committee has already started to work towards such a new model. At the extraordinary meeting in November-December 2021, it affirmed a definition of sustainability that embraces the different gifts from member churches and ecumenical partners:

We are sustained in all things by the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings our Communion into being and nurtures it according to God's will. While organizational sustainability, including financial stability, is one important part of the faithful living out of our

Communion, we also recognize and celebrate that we have much to share that sustains us in time and space. We take seriously the sharing of prayer, time, friendship, goodwill, and all the gifts of the Spirit as we carry out our ministry. All this is integral to the sustainability of the WCRC. (Action 14)

At its meeting in May 2021, the Executive Committee had received recommendations from the Strategic Planning Programme Group (SPPG) that proposed a working model that would allow implementing programmes in a less centralized way:

The Reference Groups strongly affirmed the ongoing work of the Strategic Plan. We are agreed that this is not a time for scaling back, but a time for stepping up. Toward that end, we commend and commit to developing a new working model that is less leader dependent. Gifts of leadership and the willingness to serve is spread throughout our Communion. Now is a good time to use our creative imagination to find new ways to work together. It may be that we will experience a multiplication of energies and an even stronger communion. In this kairos moment, we know that it is the Spirit who leads us, and we have the courage and motivation to follow. Executive staff leadership would take the form of oversight, coordination, collaboration, and communication. (Actions 13-16)

In close cooperation with the Collegial General Secretariat, the Future Direction Committee should develop this idea of a postcolonial Communion into a comprehensive strategy that, as the 2021 SPPG report stated, will allow the WCRC to “step up” rather than resigning to “scaling back.”

D. The Collegial General Secretariat during the Extended Interim

Responsibilities of the General Secretariat

The feasibility analysis at the beginning of this report has established that a postcolonial sustainability model will require a core coordinating capacity. As the SPPG report suggests, the role of the general secretariat will change. In the future, the Hannover office will be less involved in implementing individual programmes but will focus on coordinating and accompanying the work.

But also in a network structure, the WCRC needs a coordination facility to ensure that it continues to operate as a Communion rather than as a fellowship of special interest groups. Such coordination will be essential during the implementation period when the wider network is being built. Building and sustaining programme networks require staff resources.

This capacity must be financed. However, as pointed out in the feasibility analysis above, the current sustainability efforts have not yielded sufficient pledges to finance this coordination capacity in the general secretariat.

In this situation, the CGS has taken responsibility for coordinating the transformation process toward a postcolonial sustainability model. In executing the decisions taken by the Executive Committee in 2021, the CGS, together with the Sustainability Task Group, advisors, and regional leaders, have engaged in the following activities:

- dialoguing with churches that currently shoulder the main load of the WCRC's income to secure the current contributions and investigate options for possible increases;
- securing the current secondments and staff capacity support agreements and examining options for extensions and potential growth;
- exploring new ways of fundraising on the level of member church congregations and ministries;
- partnering with member churches, institutions, and ecumenical organizations to secure funding for programme capacity.

These approaches have been well received. Member churches and partners appreciate the relevance of the WCRC and want to support its sustainability.

Equipping the CGS Model for the Challenges of an Extended Interim

These processes can only be successful if they are given sufficient time and the support of the Communion. However, these conditions create an organizational contradiction in the interim system that needs to be addressed:

- By definition, an interim is a transitory structure that operates in a limited timeframe. This limitation restrains the authority of any interim structure.
- At the same time, interims are often called in situations of emergency, when the "old normal" has become unfeasible. Under these conditions, the interim is a period of profound change because it must prepare for a "new normal" in which more permanent systems can operate sustainably.

This contradiction also marks the current condition of the WCRC. The interim was designed as a transitory arrangement and, therefore, limited to one year. It was hoped that the necessary funds could be obtained during this time. However, the experiences had thus far point to a situation where fundraising to reach the sustainability goals will take more time than hoped.

This new situation requires the CGS model to be developed further. The transition can only be successful if the people mandated to organize it enjoy the full support of the officers and the Executive Committee. Decisions on the leadership model should recognize that strategic transformation is a long-term process. The current sustainability situation requires a huge investment in member church relations and partnering with like-minded organizations. To achieve long-term sustainability, the WCRC needs the staff capacity that allows the general secretariat to coordinate strong programmes and strengthen relations with members and partners simultaneously.

Additional Capacity for the General Secretariat

This multitude of tasks not only stretches the limits of the possible but seriously overstretches it. The increase in governance meetings has led to less attention to the programme networks. The sustainability demands have delayed the implementation of programmes. Major communication projects, like the publication of the resources of the COVID-19 process and the new website, have been delayed. What is more, all three

executive secretaries have experienced health issues that indicate that this situation cannot be continued indefinitely.

What can be done? Under the current circumstances, the election of a general secretary will be a zero-sum game concerning capacity: Within the limitation of current budget constraints, a general secretary can only be elected if an executive secretary is promoted or if an executive secretary position is abandoned. Neither option offers any new executive or administrative resources.

Under current circumstances, the only feasible relief is the appointment of executive secretaries and associate executive secretaries that will be funded through programme budgets. If it is possible to employ more programme staff, the staff capacity challenges will be reduced. We expect that the necessary coordination demands will be outweighed by the contributions that the additional staff people will bring to programme work and church relations. Such processes are well developed and will bring in additional capacity already in 2022.

This raises the question of how new staff members could be integrated into the existing interim structure.

According to our analysis of the current CGS structure, integrating a new executive secretary into the CGS would not be a problem. This would allow distributing the different tasks upon more shoulders. Associate executive secretaries should be invited to the CGS table if programmatic work is being discussed, but not as full members of the collegium, as has been done with the administrators and their work.

Summary

The CGS needs to be equipped to meet the challenges of an extended interim. The current workload in the Hannover office is unsustainable. The near-term election of a general secretary can most likely not improve the situation because it will require cuts in executive staff capacity. Potential relief can only come through acquiring additional programme staff. While such appointments do not, in themselves, bring additional coordination capacity for the general secretariat, the new staff will allow distributing the overall workload upon more shoulders.

E. Proposal for the Way Ahead

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.