

Leadership Development and Nurture
Introduction to Section work at
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World Communion of Reformed Churches

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Every church in the world is concerned with making their members become disciples of Christ. Churches know that their members, having been given the gift of faith, need to have that faith nurtured and grown into maturity.

Churches also know that they have to develop new leadership continually. Some from among their members will emerge to become pastors, elders, and leaders in other capacities. Churches need programs and institutions to educate and train these leaders. As they think of how to develop leaders, they naturally ask who their leaders should be, and what model of leadership should these leaders follow?

Passing on the faith to the next generation is a concern that lies deep in the hearts of all church leaders. How will God work with the next generation? What is the role of the older members as younger members grow and mature? How do leaders balance their rightful authority with the need to pass on that authority and responsibility to emerging leadership? For decades, churches have tried to answer these questions under the rubric of Youth Ministry. Such ministries have been carried on with much trial and error. Churches have struggled to understand changing social dynamics as youth cultures have emerged in society, often in places where there was no separate youth culture.

Member churches of the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches have brought these concerns to the ecumenical forums there. It does not take long to compile a list of issues that have been raised:

- Women's ordination and leadership
- Servant leadership
- Ministry among the youth, and the nurture of the membership
- Lay training
- Ordination of homosexual members
- Theological School development, buildings and libraries, accreditation
- Advanced faculty training, students and scholarships
- Faculty and student exchanges
- Empowerment of youth
- Integration of youth in the life of the church
- Generation gap
- Church offices and ordination
- Authority of church councils
- Discipleship, Stewardship, Partnership, Sharing

Both the WARC and the REC responded to these concerns in the past. Each has had departments or commissions that were responsible for youth work and for theological education.

In formal theological education, the WARC has hosted various discussions. Recently these included a gathering of seminary presidents from the member churches to reflect on what they could accomplish together. The WARC has also managed a [scholarship program](#) for cross-cultural theological training at the Masters Degree level. Nineteen schools from eleven different countries are involved. The WARC did not fund these scholarships, but in an agreement with the schools, they screen nominees for the scholarships available.

At their previous General Council and the present one, the WARC has organized a [Global Institute for Theology](#), a one-month experience for about 60 students and young pastors under the age of 35. The GIT is a serious effort to help young Christians attain a global perspective on church and theology.

The REC created resources for its members with a directory of theological schools. In its later editions, this directory also explored conditions at each school for foreign exchange for students and faculty. The REC hosted a couple of conversations about exchange, but real progress proved elusive. Cultural and academic conditions varied so widely that short-term exchange was difficult. The latest compilation of [theological schools](#) was built onto the REC's web site, where it is a frequently visited sector.

For member churches that the REC called “younger” churches or “emerging” churches, where theological schools were at early stages of development, the REC stepped in for library development. For more than 20 years in its [Library and Textbook Program](#), the REC helped an average of 20-30 schools per year acquire theological books, both new studies and classic used material. It arranged for choices, for shipping, for payment, and made some grants each year to about 15 of those schools. This program, however, depended on being near the Christian publishing houses in North America, and will not be continued as the office of the WCRC opens in Geneva. (See)

Around 2000, as the REC discussed leadership models intensively, it also created a modest Leadership Development Fund, which gave small grants to students, to special training events or projects.

Theologically, as the members reflected together on the nature of the education and training they were offering, the REC hosted a broad [discussion of leadership](#) in 2000 at its Assembly in Indonesia. Here it raised issues of women in leadership, leadership styles, exchange, and lay training. Flowing from that discussion, the REC commissioned a report, received in 2005, about the nature of church offices and authority within the churches. (See the report, [Clerical and Lay Leadership](#).)

The WARC has responded deeply and systematically to the matter of women's ordination. It has dedicated a department to discussing the role of women and men in ministry; it has hosted numerous consultations among its members and is formally on record as supporting the ordination of women for all of its members. There will be

another section on Gender Justice, but in this section, it will be good to look at [the record for issues around ordination](#).

The REC and the WARC addressed the **church's ministry with youth** in different ways. "Youth" is a category that emerged only in the 20th century. In most societies, there were only children and adults, and somewhere between ages 12 and 16, children became adults, usually in a religious and social rite of passage. However, in the 20th century, there emerged a group of people who had left childhood, but did not immediately become adults. These Youth resisted repeating the lives of their elders, desiring to make their own decisions, and they learned mostly from their peers. Initially these were mainly teenaged adolescents, but gradually the boundaries stretched, and the phenomenon of youth includes people up to 30 years old in some societies.

How does the church deal with this group? The REC developed a youth ministry in the 1980s with the vision of integrating youth into the full life and ministry of the church. This work was seen as an education process, teaching the older church leaders what was happening in their societies and helping to bridge the gap between the elders and the youth. REC held a series of conferences from 1980 through its last Assembly in 2005 to gather youth leaders, including both the church-appointed pastors who worked with youth and the leaders who emerged from among the youth to help these groups understand one another and work together. From 1996-2005, the REC employed a Secretary for Youth and Christian Nurture. The literature from this ministry was published regularly in [Reformed Youth Arena](#) in the late 1990s, and in [REC Focus](#), 2000-2006. The REC also published an edited collection of 25 years of ministry in 2007. Copies of this collection will be available for section participants.

The WARC programs mainly saw the issue as one of justice and participation. They witnessed the isolation of youth from the older adults, and saw the discrimination and rejection that youth often experienced as the gap between them and their elders widened. WARC leadership insisted on the inclusion of youth, and made great efforts to give them a platform in their meetings and consultations. Hearing the voice of the youth was considered the starting point for a fair and just treatment, which they believed would lead to acceptance and incorporation. In the last few decades, WARC typically employed a youth staff person in the two or three years prior to a General Council to facilitate the participation of youth during those events.

Although these two strategies are not mutually exclusive, they are still reflected in the way we will deal with youth work at this Uniting General Council. This section will think together about ministries among the youth, with youth involvement, while there is another section titled "Youth Empowerment," which will encourage youth to voice their own views of the issues before this body.

Challenges and Questions

Participants in this section gathered in Grand Rapids will have the opportunity to explore together the ministry they have done in these areas, to find the best practices, and to identify where they might achieve more by working together in the context of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Here are a few questions, but this list is by no means exhaustive, and participants may bring any questions of their own.

1. What will be the future needs of theological education, and where might international collaboration help meet those needs?
2. Are consortiums of theological schools, such as NETAct, a regional model in southern Africa, a helpful model for development? How does our commitment to communion influence our views?
3. In the diversity of Reformed denominations, even within a single country, is there a place for consolidation? What are the pros and cons of joint theological education, such as the Indonesian churches have created in several places?
4. How have we done in encouraging the growth of women's leadership? How have our views of masculinity affected this process? How should our education process be changed to make a more just inclusion of women in church leadership?
5. How could the WCRC be helpful in developing resources, both human resources, faculty development and exchange, infrastructure, such as buildings, libraries, and the accreditation process?
6. Could we share our best practices for lay training? Since many of our members depend heavily on lay leaders, especially in the branch meetings of large congregations, what is the most effective way to help them?
7. What can the WCRC do to balance justly our relative independence and our mutual dependence? We are called to stand up and use the resources God has given wisely, but also to share the wealth God has given us.
8. What is the relationship between empowerment and nurture of youth? How does our understanding of the social dynamics of youth culture help us? How can our commitment to communion help us help each other?
9. What does the church have to do to pass on the faith to the next generation? Where in our communion are the best examples of this happening, and how can we learn from them? What cultural values might hinder us, and how shall we resist the impact of those values?

The Section meetings are not long. We will have only about four hours, in two sessions, to identify key issues and then we will have to draft our proposals together by the third session. In the fourth session, we will review a common proposal with all the other nine sections, to see that our major concerns are brought forward in the plenary reports. Therefore, it is important to come with some preparation to this meeting, but it is also important to come with a careful listening ear, since we will not have much time to hear each other share. May God guide and bless us as we prepare for our journeys and our meeting together.