



Today · Aujourd'hui · Hoy · Heute

Welcome UGC!

Friday Highlights

1100: Opening worship

1415: Drumming and gathering

1430: First plenary, adoption of constitution

1700: Lawn reception

Bienvenue AGU!

Événements de vendredi

1100: Culte d'ouverture

1415: Tambours et rassemblement

1430: Plénière I, adoption de la constitution

1700: Réception sur le pré

Willkommen bei der Vereinigten Generalversammlung!

Höhepunkte vom Freitag

11Uhr00: Eröffnungsgottesdienst

14Uhr15: Trommeln und Zusammenkunft

14Uhr30: Erstes Plenum, Annahme der Verfassung

17Uhr00: Empfang im Grünen

¡Bienvenidos a la Asamblea General de Unificación!

Eventos del Viernes

1100: Primer culto de alabanza

1415: Acto de tambores y reunión

1430: Primera plenaria, adopción de constitución

1700: Recepción en el área verde



With hugs and anticipation, delegates arrive for the Uniting General Council. (Photo: Erick Coll)

## WCRC: 'A new beginning'

*By Charles Honey, UGC News Editor*

For Maria McDaid, today's opening of the Uniting General Council culminates nearly a year of excited anticipation.

"I was looking forward to meeting people from every part of the world," says McDaid, a 25-year-old UGC steward and Sunday School teacher from London, England. "We're different denominations but we're all Christians. It's a privilege to be here."

Many of the 1,000-plus global church members expected to gather Friday morning at Calvin College no doubt feel the same, as they prepare to usher in a new era of Reformed church history.

In ceremonies at Van Noord Arena, an estimated 400 delegates today will officially form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) -- a worldwide affiliation of 80 million Christians from 108 countries coming together as one body in Christ.

A merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), WCRC will nurture fellowship among its 230 denominations and advocate for justice in the world, leaders say. The gathering of the world's largest Reformed Protestant network will continue through 26 June.

Today marks "a new beginning for Reformed churches around the world," says Setri Nyomi, WARC general secretary, "where Reformed churches say to the rest of the world, 'We are united, we are ready to continue playing the prophetic role that God has called us to as witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to call people to make a difference in the world.'"

For REC General Secretary Richard van Houten, the word "communion" is key to WCRC's identity.

See **NEW BEGINNING**, Page 2

## New beginning for Reformed churches ...

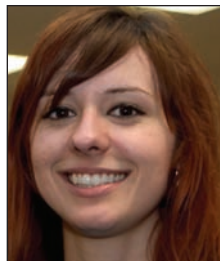
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Naming ourselves ‘communion’ is an incredible step forward,” van Houten says. “Communion means we belong together in a very deep sense. We are all part of the family of God.”

Like all families, WCRC may have disagreements over issues. But members hope their common Christian commitment will fulfill the UGC theme, “unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” while taking firm stands on justice issues.

“I hope that communion and justice can walk hand in hand,” says Judi Fisher of the Uniting Church of Australia, WARC’s Pacific Region Vice-President. “We have a pivotal moment to offer that kind of loving, caring persona that resonates with the gospel and calls for an end to violence in all its forms.”

Over nine days, delegates will deepen their



Maria McDaid

new fellowship with worship and Bible studies while tackling tough issues such as women’s rights, economic oppression and environmental degradation. One of the weightier matters will be the Accra

Confession, a strongly worded justice statement adopted by WARC in 2004.

The conference will stress the rights of Indigenous peoples and the church’s historic mistreatment of them. Tribal chiefs will welcome delegates today with a drumming ceremony and on Tuesday delegates will gather at Ah-Nab-Awen Park for a Pow Wow following a keynote address at Calvin College by American Indian leader Richard Twiss.

Other high points include a celebratory wor-

ship service Sunday afternoon, election of officers and today’s official creation of WCRC. The “birth moment” will occur early this afternoon when delegates are expected to approve a constitution for the new organization.

“It’s not the first step toward a global church as much as a recognition that the church is global,” says Peter Borgdorff, REC President.

It will be a historic event in the same city where WARC and REC leaders first broached the idea of merging four years ago. They hope WCRC infuses renewed energy into Christian cooperation by bringing together historically divisive Reformed churches.

“It’s wonderful for a tradition that’s usually been known for splitting to say, ‘We really can be one,’” says WARC President Clifton Kirkpatrick. “We’re entering an era where there’s a new sense we belong together in the church of Jesus Christ.”

## Meet the UGC communications crew

By *Jerry Van Marter*,  
*UGC correspondent*

An international team of more than a dozen veteran journalists has been assembled in Grand Rapids to provide news and information about the Uniting General Council (UGC) in four languages — English, French, German and Spanish.

The team is led by Kristine Greenaway of the United Church of Canada, who serves in Geneva as director of communications for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. News editors are Charles Honey, a U.S. United Methodist who will edit the daily UGC newsletter, and Chris Meehan, a Roman Catholic working for the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), who will edit news and information for the Web.

The daily UGC newsletter will be distributed each morning in the Plenary Hall during the morning coffee break.

The UGC Web site will also include live-streaming video, as well as blog and Twitter feeds posted by Jane Stranz, a Briton currently working for the World Council of Churches (WCC) as English language translator and coordinator of the WCC’s language service.

Web editor is Phil Tanis, electronic media coordinator for the Reformed Church in America. He will be assisted by Dean Heetderks of the CRC. The UGC photographer is Erick Coll, who heads the department of photography at the Cuban Higher Institute of Design in Havana, and the event’s videographer is Edwin de Jong, a local free-lancer.

The supervisor of the UGC Newsroom is Libby Visinand, a retired WCC staffer who has served in a similar capacity at numerous global ecumenical events. She will be assisted by four stewards — young adults from member churches recruited to assist the UGC in a variety of capacities.

The writing crew includes:

- in English — Jerry Van Marter of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Jackie Macadam of the Church of Scotland; and Achowah Umenei of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.
- in Spanish — Daphne Sabanes de Plou of the Methodist Church in Argentina.
- in German — Jan-Gerd Heetderks of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands; and Frank Worbs of the Swiss Protestant Churches.

Due to illness, the French language reporter is not available. Selected stories in other languages will be translated into French.

The Newsroom is located in Room HC-204 of the Hoogenboom Center, phone 616-526-7885.

## Un “steward” en la sala de prensa



*Por Eduardo Hernández, “steward” de la AGU*

Siempre me negué a aprender otros idiomas. Así es que cuando me enteré

que me habían elegido como « steward » de la Asamblea General de Unificación (AGU), una emoción muy grande precedió a la terrible angustia de no poder participar por no

saber inglés. Dios elige caminos que suelen ser misteriosos: mi familia insistió en que me inscribiera y tomara un curso acelerado del idioma; en la actualidad esta experiencia me ha llevado a desear estudiar con profundidad esta lengua de uso mundial.

Nací y vivo en la República Oriental del Uruguay. Siempre tuve claro en mi mente y corazón que podía definirme como “Ecuménico”, aunque me formé y trabajo en una única iglesia reformada llamada Iglesia Evangélica Valdense del Río de la Plata. Esta experiencia

en la sala de prensa ha reafirmado en mí este sentimiento ecuménico, esta convicción de que somos parte de un mismo cuerpo, una misma iglesia. Es cierto que es difícil para mí dialogar fluidamente con otros pero Dios me ha hablado a través de muchos hermanos que, junto a mí, ponen su mayor esfuerzo para lograr comunicarse de corazón a corazón.

Muchas cosas son diferentes pero es bueno encontrar-nos en una misma Fe, un momento de culto y reflexión, un Padre Nuestro que se reza en todas las lenguas.

## Women, youth come together before UGC

*By Achowah Umenei, UGC correspondent*

Prior to Friday’s opening of the Uniting General Council (UGC), women and youth from around the world met this week at Calvin College to share ideas and prepare for the historic ecumenical event.

The Women’s Pre-Council and the Reformed Youth Forum preceded UGC with events that fostered fellowship and reflection in advance of the soon-to-be-formed World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Meeting under the theme, “Come With Jesus to the Streets,” the Women’s Pre-Council did Bible studies, reflected on key issues affecting Reformed women and carved out a message of their vision for the newborn WCRC.

The women addressed several issues including economic justice, gender equality, violence against women, and commitment to women’s ordination and equal participation in decision-making at all levels.

An exciting moment was their ride in three “Jesus buses” Tuesday to Heartside, a struggling section of Grand Rapids. While some visited a ministry that cares for the vulnerable, others were in the street meeting women leaders and learning about the economic problems of the marginalized.

While the women were praising God and doing serious business, the youths were at work too.



Delegates in the Women’s Pre-Council sing songs of celebration. (Photo: Erick Coll)

Their pre-UGC event was a rare opportunity to share their dreams and visions for the Reformed family. The RYF created space for the youths to ask questions of Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and his counterpart in the Reformed Ecumenical Council, Richard van Houten.

Two youths asked why adults speak to, for and on behalf of youths and about the controversial classification into age brackets. Nyomi and van Houten urged them to tell WCRC delegates what they would like to see changed in their churches and in the new organization.

After one youth asserted a 30-year-old could sound more mature and intelligent than a 60-year-old, Nyomi said age bracketing was

just a sociological definition. He urged youths to take Paul’s advice to Timothy: not allow anyone to look down on them because they are young, but set an example in what they say and do.

The youth presentation to delegates will include an appeal for an inclusive WCRC family whose worship, fellowship and actions are based on just relationships rather than strengthening institutions. And they want the organization to develop governance based on relationships rather than rank.

“It was important for us young people to work together on issues that concern us as Christians to see what we can achieve for our regions,” said Mogomotsi Madiseng, a vocal coach from Rustburg, South Africa.

## Beyond the conference: gardens, parks and museums

*By Jane Stranz, UGC correspondent*

This is my very first visit to the United States. It's exciting to be here but I want to make sure that I get off campus at least once or twice before I take my plane home.

With just an hour or two to snatch, how best might I spend my time to explore Grand Rapids?

A colleague back home already told me about the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, named after the late U.S. president who grew up here. The Pow Wow on Tuesday will take place at nearby Ah-Nab-Awen Park, and starting on 20 June the museum will have a quilt exhibition.

I've heard that downtown there's great shopping and cafés so I hope to get there at least once. Or maybe I'll go for a walk along Lake Michigan and listen to Garrison Keillor on my iPod (yes I know he's a Lutheran, but hey!).

There's also a great new art museum downtown hosting an exhibition about "Dutch utopia" — sounds like something we Reformed should investigate! I've heard rumours of a number 24 bus, but maybe sharing a taxi with friends may be the best approach.

The one visit that I am going to try to fit in



A giant bronze horse designed by Leonardo da Vinci is a favorite attraction at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park near Calvin College. *(Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau)*

will be to the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. It looks wonderful and is "just up the road from here" (more precisely, 1000 E. Beltline Ave. NE), according to my source.

When Americans say that I'm never sure whether it means 300 meters or three miles.

It does sound like the perfect place to go for something very different from discussions, papers, translating and writing.

Following on from today's introduction to discernment procedures, perhaps all delegates should be encouraged to go for a calming walk around the eco-preserve that adjoins the Calvin campus across the East Beltline.

Truth be told, I have so far been nowhere and seen nothing, but my secret tip for a bit of unwinding between sessions: lie on the grass, watch the swallows or squirrels and enjoy the sunshine.

And don't tell anyone, but today I discovered the campus store. I was looking for a toothbrush but was really pleased to be able to browse around the theology books and gift section -- a Calvin bobble-head anyone? I fear my suitcase may be a bit heavier when I go home.

Oh, and it also stocks fairly traded "Divine" chocolate. What more could the seasoned Reformed international traveller want?



## World Communion of Reformed Churches

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Web Editor	Phil Tanis
Editor-in-Chief	Kristine Greenaway
Printer	Calvin College

### Tomorrow · Demain · Mañana · Morgen

#### Saturday Highlights

800: Bible study  
900: Worship  
1030: Keynote event  
1400: General secretaries' addresses

#### Événements de samedi

800: Étude biblique  
900: Prière du matin  
1030: Événement principal  
1400: Rapports des secrétaires généraux

#### Höhepunkte vom Samstag

8Uhr00: Bibelarbeit  
9Uhr00: Gottesdienst  
10Uhr30: Programmatische Ansprache  
14Uhr00: Berichte der Generalsekretäre

#### Eventos del Sábado

800: Estudio bíblico  
900: Alabanza  
1030: Discurso de Apertura  
1400: Discurso de Secretarios Generales