



Today · Aujourd'hui · Hoy · Heute

Saturday highlights, Day Nine

1100: Closing worship; installation of officers and executive committee

1430: begin share and host weekend with local congregations

Programme du samedi, jour 9

11h00 : Culte de cloture; installation du bureau et du comité executive

14h30 : début du week-end dans les paroisses locales

Samstag, wichtige Programmpunkte, Tag 9

11h00: Schlussgottesdienst; Einfuehrung der Amtstraeger und des Exekutivausschusses

14h30 : Anfang des "Share and Host" Wochenendes

Actividades principales para el sábado, día 9

11:00: Culto de cierre. Asunción de los officials y los miembros del Comité ejecutivo

14:30 : Comienzo del fin de semana de intercambio con las comunidades locales



UGC delegates this week have focused on unity and justice in Christ. (Photo: Erick Coll)

A week of joy and history

*By Chris Meehan,
News Editor*

The Uniting General Council began with high hopes, smiles and enthusiasm as more than 300 delegates from around the world agreed to create the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC.)

Much pomp and ceremony, including a multi-faceted Sunday worship service, accompanied the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council into the 80-million member WCRC.

"We have started a new chapter in the history of Reformed and Presbyterian churches," said Jerry Pillay, WCRC's first president. "We will be engaging the world in the name of Jesus Christ."

Symbolic gestures of unification, friendship and identification with Native Americans in the United States and aboriginal people in Canada took place, making it clear one focus of WCRC will be on people who have been marginalized and ignored.

While there was some debate over how to best balance the new executive committee of WCRC with women, men and younger persons, the event unfolded smoothly overall.

The election of officers and members of the executive committee came without debate, including the election of Pillay, general secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

Key priorities, he said, will be to nurture fellowship and keep the churches in the new body together. "Issues of disunity and struggle continue to be present in the world," he said.

Looking ahead, he said WCRC will be challenged to raise funds for all of its programs as well as the priorities adopted at the meeting ending today, including strong stands on economic justice and human rights. He said the Bible requires Christians to be involved in social justice issues.

"Our voices together are a voice strong," he said. "The strength of that voice is found in the membership of the Communion."

América Latina: aportes desde la espiritualidad y el compañerismo

Por Dafne Sabanes Plou,
corresponsal AGU

“Debemos impregnar a esta nueva comunión de iglesias de espiritualidad y compañerismo”, dijo Helis Barraza Díaz, de Colombia, recién electo como uno de los cuatro vicepresidentes de la Comunidad Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR) en la Asamblea General de Unificación. “Creo que las iglesias debemos constituir más que una unidad orgánica. Estamos llamadas a acompañarnos mutuamente en las situaciones particulares por las que atravesamos y esta tarea debe ser parte de la vida de la CMIR”.

Barraza Díaz, quien es economista, miembro de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia y vicerrector de la Universidad Reformada de su país, consideró que crear espacios de acercamiento

entre las iglesias, no sólo entre el liderazgo sino incluyendo también a los fieles, es parte del llamado a crear fraternidad en la nueva comunión de iglesias. Se refirió a la experiencia de intercambio entre su iglesia e iglesias presbiterianas de los Estados Unidos en el programa “Hacedores de Paz”, que ha permitido compartir un testimonio de fe profundo en medio de contextos difíciles.

“Es importante que aprendamos a vincularnos desde nuevas perspectivas, dejando de lado el estereotipo de que algunas iglesias están para dar y otras para recibir”, agregó el vicepresidente



dente de la CMIR. “Cada iglesia, cada región, tiene que poder aportar aquello que considera valioso, como su reflexión teológica, sus recursos litúrgicos, su vida de fe, su testimonio en las situaciones difíciles y de conflicto, sus soluciones a los problemas, para así enriquecernos mutuamente”.

Al considerar la contribución de las iglesias latinoamericanas a la CMIR, Barraza Díaz consideró que el entusiasmo por el crecimiento de la iglesia puede ser un aporte crucial. “Muchas de nuestras iglesias están creciendo en América Latina y pienso que podemos aportar con estrategias y cuestiones creativas, además de nuestro fervor, para alentar la misión de la CMIR y de otras iglesias en distintas partes del mundo”, señaló.

From small steps, WCRC makes history

By Jackie Macadam,
UGC correspondent

Fifteen years ago no one expected this week would ever happen.

Strong feelings and differences of tradition held the two wings of the Reformed family apart. But many churches were members of both the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC).

“It started with small steps,” says Pieter Holtrop, former WARC executive member and vice president from 1997 to 2004. “But we had to take small steps in the beginning.

“Before 1998, the two white South African churches, suspended from WARC membership in 1982 for their support for apartheid, remained active members of REC. It wasn't really until the largest Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa met the requirements set by (WARC) to resume active membership in 1998 that things really began to move forward.”

Jane Dempsey Douglass, WARC president from 1990 to 1997, takes up the story.

“Other foundations for Reformed cooperation were being laid. Where people invited from both organizations could get together, [they] were beginning to overcome the feelings of distrust,” Douglass recalls.

“After 1998, the groundwork had been done. The lifting of the suspension of the DRC made the way free to try to get the unification on a more structured basis,” says Holtrop.

Despite REC concerns about ethical and scriptural issues, Holtrop says, the first real talks among leaders from WARC and REC took place in Amsterdam in 1998. Following their report, both organizations resolved to continue talks. More meetings followed, establishing trust.

Finally, at WARC's General Council in Accra in 2004 and REC's 2005 Assembly meeting in Utrecht, leaders approved an official program for the process of growing together.

“When I stand here today, looking at the delegates from both organizations, talking, laughing, relaxing and working to solve problems together, it makes me very happy,” Holtrop says.



Pieter Holtrop and Jane Dempsey Douglass

“WARC brings decades of advocacy for social justice to the table, complementing REC's concentration on communion and its confessional heritage. Together the two strands are acting both as a challenge and as a binding force for the churches.”

“We have been working toward this for many years,” adds Douglass, “so I am delighted that this long dream has finally come and is such a happy occasion, with so many believing that this is the right thing to do.”

UGC message speaks to children

The Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches ended as it began: with a special message to children welcoming them to the new “family” of 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide that was created here.

The UGC message, including a special message for children, is to be presented to delegates this morning. In a story-telling style, the children’s message describes the June 18-28 UGC as a family reunion, with all the joys and sorrows, celebrations and disappointments, laughter and tears that go with them.

“It was a shame that 71 family members couldn’t come to the party,” the message reads,

referring to UGC registrants who were denied visas to enter the United States.

The message incorporating children into the life of the WCRC echoed last Sunday’s worship service in which children engaged in liturgical dialogue with WCRC leaders. .

The concluding message reads in part: “Before we said good-bye, we made promises to each other, saying ‘I will not forget you. I will listen to you. You will be my friend. I will be fair to you, care about what happens to you, and if you need me I will be there for you. We will work together for everyone in our church family and for all other families too!’ ”

Une semaine de joies et de luttes

Par Chris Meehan, rédacteur

L’Assemblée générale de l’Unification s’est ouverte dans une ambiance heureuse : les espoirs étaient au plus haut, les sourires et l’enthousiasme étaient de la partie lorsque les trois cents délégués, venus de monde entier ont décidé de créer la Communion Mondiale d’Eglises Réformées (CMER).

Solennités et cérémonial ! Un culte dominical aux multiples facettes pour fêter la fusion de l’Alliance réformée Mondiale avec le Conseil œcuménique réformé pour former la CMER qui compte quatre-vingt Eglises membres de par le monde.

« Nous sommes en train d’écrire un nouveau chapitre dans l’histoire des Eglises Réformées et Presbytériennes » a déclaré le Pasteur Jerry Pillay, premier président de la CMER. « Nous allons lancer un défi au monde au nom de Jésus-Christ »

Il y eut des gestes symboliques forts pour manifester l’unité, l’amitié ainsi que la volonté de solidarité avec les Indiens d’Amérique et les peuples autochtones du Canada. Ce fut ainsi une manière de signaler la priorité qui serait accordée aux exclus, à tous ceux que le monde oublie.

L’élection des membres du bureau du comité exécutif et de ses membres a eu lieu sans débat, ainsi que l’élection du pasteur Pillay, Secrétaire général de l’Eglise Presbytérienne d’Afrique Australe, en voie d’unification.

Les principales priorités seront, dit-il, de bâtir la communion fraternelle et d’approfondir l’unité des Eglises au sein du nouvel organisme. « Désunion et luttes sont encore le lot commun du monde » devait-il déclarer.

« Ensemble nos voix portent loin », dit-il. « La force de notre voix nous la puisons dans nos membres, ceux de notre Communion ».

Treasurer to tackle finances

*by Frank Worbs,
UGC Correspondent*

UGC News interviewed Rev. Dr Gottfried Locher, the treasurer of the new WCRC Executive Committee, about the significance of this Uniting General Council and the tasks facing the WCRC. Just two weeks ago Gottfried Locher was elected as the new president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, which has two million members.

Gottfried Locher, since the last general Council in Accra in 2004 you have been a vice-president of the Executive Committee. What has changed between Accra and Grand Rapids?

The feeling of unity and belonging has become stronger. In Accra social issues were to the fore and created a lot of controversial discussion. In Grand Rapids you can feel the communion of churches much more strongly, our belonging together as a Reformed family, and there’s been more in depth theological work - which may also be a result of the union with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

What is the significance of this General Council for individual churches and congregations?

First of all the Council enriches all those who take part in it. They experience how Reformed churches in other countries live and work. They become aware of the worldwide context of their faith and can see, for example, how

baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or ordination are understood in other churches. So the impact of the Council depends upon how well delegates, observers and visitors communicate this wider perspective in their own churches and congregations.

Putting to one side the recommendations and programmes which the General Council will decide upon, what do you think are the most urgent tasks for the WCRC?

I see two key theological tasks. On the one hand to go forward with intra-Christian dialogue in particular with the Lutheran World Federation and with the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand to strengthen the communion of faith between our own member churches, for example through work on our confessional texts.

What are your tasks and goals as the newly elected treasurer of the WCRC?

To improve the financial situation of the WCRC, and ensure that there are enough financial and human resources available. On the one hand we’ll be speaking with the richer member churches about appropriate contributions to the WCRC. On the other hand we want to work with existing networks for example in North America to strengthen our fundraising.

UGC: What it has meant to us, what we will do with it



“For me, and for my church, this conference has been very much focused on the justice commitments, and what will be of interest will be how we continue committing to justice causes.” -- Gail Allan, United Church of Canada (above L)

“Being part of this alliance brings a heightened level of accountability and relationship, and that, for me, has been the gift of this unification.” -- Robina Winbush, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (above R)

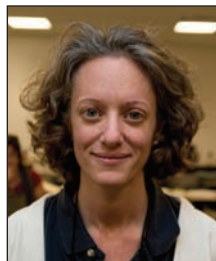
“A conference like this is as important, if not most important, for the contact with other people. You are not strangers, even though you may never have actually met before.” -- Alan Falconer, Church of Scotland



“My moderator and I are going to start as soon as we get home. We’re taking what has gone on here to our synod in September. What better way to start?” -- Jenny Davidson, Volkskerk van Afrika



“We’re very gratified to hear a direct and consistent commitment of WARC, and now we hope WCRC, to issues of justice around the world. We look forward to being, together, God’s hands and hearts in a world that’s hurting.” -- Lydia Veliko, United Church of Christ in the United States



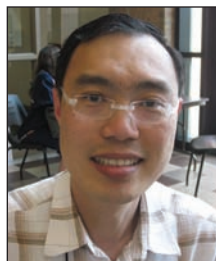
“The new World Communion of Reformed Churches will give us more possibilities of sharing experiences with other churches. It will give us new contacts and means an enrichment of ecumenical life.” -- Dimitrios Boukis, Greek Evangelical Church



“It has taken so long to get to this point, but now we feel at peace with each other. I have enjoyed this meeting so much. It’s wonderful being with so many Christians from all over the world.” -- Bure Karaiti, Kiribati Protestant Church



The idea of working for justice has come across very strongly to us here. There are several groups of people we would like to reach out to, Christians from different traditions. -- Leonard Wee, Presbyterian Church in Singapore



World Communion of Reformed Churches

Churches provide key support

Communication staff of WCRC member churches in North America have made the faces, voices and words of delegates to the Uniting General Council visible to the world. The UGC website www.reformedchurches.org was built and managed by Phil Tanis of the RCA. Chris Meehan of the CRCNA served as news editor for UGC news releases. Dean Heetderks of the CRCNA was a website advisor and alternate web editor. Jim Boldenow of CRCNA was our IT guru. Jerry van Marter of the PCUSA served as a writer on the News Team. To these individuals and to their bosses and colleagues who generously allowed them to devote hours of their time to the UGC, a great big vote of thanks!

News Editor	Chris Meehan
UGC News Editor	Charles Honey
Photographer	Erick Coll
Journalists	Jan-Gerd Heetderks Jackie Macadam Dafne Sabanes de Plou Jerry van Marter Achowah Umenei Franks Worbs
Web Editor	Phil Tanis
Editor-in-Chief	Kristine Greenaway
Printer	Calvin College