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Grand Rapids, 17 June 2010

***The gift of communion in Christ***

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It is a great privilege for me to bring greetings to this Uniting General Council on behalf of the World Council Churches. The World Council is a fellowship of 349 Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant and United churches representing 560 million Christians in more than 100 countries. A great many of the WCC member churches are present here in this historic council of the Reformed churches worldwide. It is an honour and a joy to share this moment of communion with you on behalf of the wider fellowship of churches.

The vision that brings you together is one of common life in Christ, making your unity visible and witnessing together for justice and peace. The merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council is an historic moment for the churches of the Reformed family and also for the church everywhere. The formation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a source of inspiration for all of us who see the call to unity, to mission and to promote justice as one, undivided call. It is urgently needed, whether we are in Haiti – where I came from – or here in Grand Rapids.

You who are gathered here today seek to respond to Christ's prayer that we "may all be one" as Christ is with the Father, "so that the world may believe" (John 17.21) that God really loves this world and all who live here. However, the new communion that is born here is a gift from God. It is not merely by a formula of agreement that you stand together as one, but by receiving the same gift of grace in Christ. That is what also makes it possible to receive communion as a gift from Christ. The theme under which you gather expresses well the commitment of this communion of Reformed churches to be one in faith and in your ministry in the world. All churches need this sign as it is a commitment going beyond the membership of this communion.

The world also needs this unity based on something else than unity in power or in common interests or in agreed opinions. The deepest unity is given in the "unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace", as Paul beseeches the Ephesians. This is a unity allowing us to be ourselves, a unity "of bearing with one another in love", always aiming at what is best for the other. Therefore, it is a communion fostering both

justice and peace. This is a communion needed in a struggling and divided world. The confessional world communions have a special call to make it visible that

sharing the communion in Christ is not a matter of confessional exclusivism, and that it is a gift for people in all parts of the world and in all conditions in the world. Unity in Christ always has a purpose.

This Uniting General Council is also an important moment to give thanks for the particular witness of the Reformed churches. It is our hope that the World Communion of Reformed Churches will continue the tradition of its predecessors in serving as a platform by which Reformed churches can strengthen their dialogue with other Christian families, their common witness to the Gospel and their mission in the world. This is not simply important for the communion of Reformed churches, but for all churches everywhere.

The Reformed communion plays a significant role in the in one ecumenical movement. The bilateral dialogues with other Christian traditions contribute significantly to building up the one body of Christ. The Reformed witness for justice in the economy and with creation has inspired many other churches to see that another world is possible. The vision of mission in partnership as sharing faith in service to God's people is helping to reshape relations between churches everywhere, but especially between north and south, east and west.

The continuing Reformed witness is of great importance for our common future in the ecumenical movement. We must work together to reinforce the spiritual nature of this movement. It is a movement born from Christ's prayer. It is a movement of the cross, of Christ crucified, and we must carry it together.

We must work together with all churches in seeking to make unity in Christ visible for the world to see. Celebrating 100 years of the modern ecumenical movement helps us to understand how much global Christianity has changed and how imperative it is for Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches to grow together in one faith and one baptism.

We must work together as councils of churches and as communions of churches to strengthen the ecclesial nature of the ecumenical movement. Our task as councils and communions is to serve the whole body of Christ.

Finally, on behalf of the fellowship of WCC member churches, I pray God's abundant blessings upon this Uniting General Council. May your communion in faith be complete. May your life together in prayer be a communion of hope and praise. May your deliberations lead to a communion of faith through consensus. May your discernment lead to a communion in love and action. And may your communion be maintained in the years to come by "unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace".

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
General Secretary