

MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN'S PRE-COUNCIL

We are Reformed Christian women from the regions of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and the Pacific who gathered at the Women's Pre-Council to the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI., from June 14-17, 2010. We live in different contexts and speak different languages yet possess the Pentecostal gift that allows us to hear each other's cries and see the image of Christ in each other.

We represent member churches of the World Alliance Reformed Churches and Reformed Ecumenical Council. We gather in response to God's call to discern how women and men might work together as God's instruments of peace and reconciliation, by creating and engaging transformative actions in the new Communion.

We are aware that in times of transition and change God calls us to be vigilant and accountable to God and to one another, relying on the Holy Spirit to empower us to create and maintain just practices, structures and relationships.

The use of Ephesians 4:3 as a theological rationale for the new direction we have embarked on, raises critical concerns for us about the values that the Communion might consider significant in promoting "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" in its body. We are suspicious about the ways in which Ephesians functions as a text that (1) promotes the notion of oneness at the expense of excluding what does not fit and (2) endorses hierarchy and power as ways of normalizing unequal relationships and negotiating differences. How will the communion navigate the multiple and overlapping diversities that constitute its body given its biblical and theological rootedness in Ephesians? How will the Communion treat alternative visions? How will the communion determine the lens from which it decides on or negotiates what does not fit? How will the Communion treat notions of power and authority, assumed by dominant and hegemonic power relations that already persist in the very fabric of its constituent parts?

We, the women of the Pre-Council entered a season of worship, prayer, biblical reflections and engagement in socio-economic analyses on the current global economic crisis. Emerging from that space of discernment, we call on the General Council to listen and to commit to action in three key areas identified by us as critical in the work for peace and unity: justice, communion, and partnership.

Justice

God's rule of love and justice for all peoples and the earth is a core value of reformed theology.

Our visits this week to women's ministries serving people marginalized by the current economic crisis brings us face to face with the poignant ways in which the global economic crisis has wreaked devastation in the lives of women and men, even in the North. The work of women in these ministries remind us of the strength and tenacity women bring to advocacy for justice, healing and reconciliation. Women involved in resisting injustice say "no" to structures of violence and economic injustice, but we are often ignored or silenced. Yet, we persevere with resilience and hope, developing new strategies for resistance and change.

Women participating in the Pre-Council envision a Communion that will build on the legacy of actions towards justice in the economy and the earth by living out the Accra Confession. We

anticipate a commitment to mission in partnership that clearly names and monitors responsibilities for continuing (1) the Covenanting for Justice process; (2) the program work on gender justice and racial justice; and (3) the allotment of equitable human and financial resources for justice and theology programs.

We therefore call on the General Council to:

- 1) Guarantee the gains that women have made through WARC's work for gender and racial justice, with specific attention to the work done in the naming of the justice issues emerging from the intersections of women's multiple identities - including abilities, caste, race, language, class, sexuality, status in church and society and marital and family status.
- 2) Continue the justice commitment to the Accra Confession's emphasis on life in its fullness for all peoples and its active engagement in the process of Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth.
- 3) Maintain the involvement in the struggle to end violence against women, children and the earth and recognize these as justice issues.
- 4) Continue to engage in the struggles for life in its fullness for persons who are differently-abled.
- 5) Create mechanisms for ensuring and monitoring just relations in all of its structures and practices.

Communion

Communion offers opportunities for dialoguing on the things that make for unity and peace and for nurturing right relations in the body of Christ. We call on the General Council to:

1. Actively support women's ordination, thereby valuing the distinct and different gifts and insights by which God equips women for leadership in the Communion and its member churches.
2. Enable women's equal participation in all decision making bodies and processes of the Communion and its member churches.
3. Maintain support for the formation of women for leadership in church and society, including education, training programs and scholarship funds.
4. Create structures that facilitate, monitor and implement policy provisions to achieve equal representation of women and men at all levels in the Communion and its member churches.
5. Actively challenge the ways in which culture and theology intersect to undergird and support the patriarchal structures, understandings and attitudes that provide legitimization for how the church is organized and how it lives its witness.
6. Ensure that women are included in all staff categories in the Secretariat.

Partnership

We celebrate the distinct gifts that women bring to the task of working in partnership with men towards God's visions for a renewed earth.

We call on the General Council to:

- Uphold the rich legacy of working with global partners for justice - including regional ecumenical organizations, World Council of Churches and interfaith movements for justice.
- Support women in different parts of its body in their struggles for justice and partnership.
- Institutionalize a gender responsive budgeting process.
- Disallow the principle of the imposition of the English language as a condition for membership on the Executive Committee.

We are convinced that the new Communion will find unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, through justice, communion and partnership.