

LETTER FROM OVERSEAS - JOHN ASLING IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

28 March 2008

Dear United Church of Canada friends:

Greetings from Geneva and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) where with God's grace and your support, I continue to work as Executive Secretary for Communications and as an Overseas Personnel Associate for the United Church of Canada.

Once again I thank you for your continuing support of the Mission and Service Fund, which helps make my work here possible.

These are exciting and incredibly busy times here at WARC as we prepare for the merging of WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council in a uniting General Council to be held in June 2010 at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

That historic meeting will formally create the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), an organization that will represent 80 million Reformed Christians around the world. The theme of the meeting will be: "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace."

You will recognize those words from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4: 1-6)

These words remind us of the importance of healing the divisions in our hearts and in our churches and ecumenical organizations. They also suggest that it is worth celebrating when two Reformed organizations come together "to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The new WCRC already has a short basis of union, which reads:

"The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) shall be the Word (John 1) of the triune God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and witnessed to by the Church. This World Communion of Reformed Churches embodies Reformed identity articulated in historic Reformed confessions and continued in the life and witness of the Reformed community."

And the new WCRC already has a set of key callings:

- to foster Reformed confessional identity and communion among Reformed churches, and unity in the whole church;
- to promote justice in the economy and the earth, and all of God's creation, and to work for peace and reconciliation in the world;
- to encourage the renewal of Reformed worship and spiritual life as a global family of God's people;
- to strengthen leadership development and the nurture of the covenant community;
- to promote the full participation of women and youth in all aspects of the church's life;
- to renew a passion among Reformed Christians for God's mission, both witness and service, in a spirit of partnership and unity;
- to interpret Reformed theology for contemporary witness and for the unity of the church.

That's a lot of words, I know. But I think it is a clear reassurance that the new WCRC will adhere to the traditional biblical call to try and understand the will of God in every context and do justice in the name of Jesus Christ.

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What does the merger mean?

For the United Church of Canada, it means the opportunity to belong to a broader, stronger international Reformed body where our witness for justice and peace has a greater chance to be broadcast to a world in dire need of healing balm.

For the wider ecumenical community, the merger is a reminder that God's grace allows Christians to move beyond their differences and make common cause for the sake of preaching and acting out the gospel in a vibrant way.

For the small secretariat at WARC in Geneva, it means a great opportunity to help play midwife in the birth of an exciting new Reformed church organization and plan the uniting General Council that launches it.

All of us in Geneva need your good prayers in the coming months. May God bless us all in our continuing journey to justice and wholeness.

Sincerely,

John P. Asling
Executive Secretary
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