

Presbytery of Boston
E-Connection
June 24, 2010

World Communion of Reformed Churches is born
New global body embraces 80 million Reformed Christians

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by Jerry L. Van Marter
Presbyterian News Service

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — More than 80 million Reformed Christians in 108 countries around the world formally united Friday when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) approved articles of union and a constitution bringing them together as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The merger of the two organizations took place at the Uniting General Council, which is meeting through June 28 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Although the long-awaited merger went through, afternoon discussion on passage of a constitution and bylaws grew lively and took longer than planned over the issue of representation of women on committees and in leadership positions in the new body.

"We had a very vigorous and intense conversation. It may have taken us longer than we thought it would," but God remained with delegates and the Holy Spirit helped to guide the discussion, said Clifton Kirkpatrick, president of WARC who chaired the discussions for his organization that led to the formation of the WCRC.

By late afternoon, the two separate ecumenical bodies became one. Afterward, delegates gathered around tables to sign the documents passed by the assembly.

REC was represented by 79 delegates from 28 of its member churches. WARC had 301 delegates from 132 member churches present.

Kirkpatrick noted that 73 participants, including 46 delegates, were denied visas to attend the event by the US government.

"We need to acknowledge the deep pain we feel about the absence of these brothers and sisters," he said.

The daylong series of events included separate meetings of the REC and WARC, an opening worship service, recognitions of several leaders who have been instrumental in the unification process, an exchange of greetings and gifts between WCRC officials and Native American leaders and a gala reception celebrating the union.

The articles of union affirm "that such an act of union is implemented not only in order to carry out the major aims for which both organizations have existed separately, but also in order to respond to God's call for service in the church and the world."

The 64-year-old REC — with 41 member churches in 25 countries representing 12 million members — approved the union unanimously with no debate.

It was a different story with WARC, which dates back to 1875 and numbers 214 member churches in 107 countries representing 75 million members. The intense discussion over representation by women was led by delegates seeking assurance that the organization's commitments to racial and women's justice will go forward.

Speaking for the Pre-Assembly Women's Conference, the Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba, said, "During these past years we have seen many advances in the role and status of women — we must not retreat."

Those underlying tensions rose again during consideration of the draft constitution Friday afternoon. After more than 90 minutes of debate, the group amended the document to provide that "when a church sends four or more delegates (to General Council meetings), half shall be women." The drafting committee's recommendation was one-third women.

In a related action designed to ensure the participation of youth, the group increased from two to three the number of delegates accorded to churches with less than 100,000 members. Larger delegations were already mandated to include at least one delegate 30 years of age or younger.

Some delegates expressed hope that the new organization would make sure to show sensitivity to its member churches as it moves forward.

Charity Majiza, of the Uniting Church in Australia, referred to the suspension of three South African churches. In 1972 WARC declared apartheid a sin and those churches that

supported it heretical. She sought assurance that WCRC would address the "woundedness in our separation and not gloss over it."

Kirkpatrick responded that racial justice is "a bedrock commitment" that will go forward, noting that the REC has committed to support of the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth, adopted by WARC in 2004 that reaffirms its commitment to global economic and climate justice.

Peter Borgdorff, president of REC, called the day's events a "construction zone," proof that God is using all Reformed Christians to "build a new spiritual house for God."

Kirkpatrick said, "I do believe it is God's intention that we live together in unity and I thank God for this momentous day, in which we are not just called to be more cooperative, but to be one in Jesus Christ."

Jerry Van Marter is serving as English-language reporter for the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, June 18-26. For complete coverage of the meeting, visit the web site.

<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2010/10514.htm>

Children help usher in new era for Reformed churches

3,000 attend celebratory worship service at Calvin College

by Jerry L. Van Marter
Presbyterian News Service

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — About 3,000 Reformed Christians gathered at Calvin College June 20 for a worship service celebrating the birth of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, which unites 80 million believers in 108 countries.

The service included prayers and scripture readings, anthems and hymns sung in at least a dozen languages, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and a special exchange with children. WCRC leaders told them: "We are coming together not just for ourselves but also for future generations."

One child, Christina Lobulo, responded: "This is our family! We are one! To God be the glory!"

WCRC leaders also explained the communion's new logo, which incorporates a communion or baptismal bowl; a circle representing unity; interwoven threads symbolizing strength, partnership and cooperation; and the cross, which Clifton Kirkpatrick — former General Assembly stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — said "is a sign of our confessional identity."

Kirkpatrick was president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which merged late last week with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form WCRC.

During the afternoon service, Kirkpatrick and others presented a replica of the WCRC logo to the children, who responded, "This is our family! The World Communion of Reformed Churches. To God be the glory!"

Later, another child, Sol Kim, an 8-year-old from South Korea, joined the invitation to the Lord's table.

"This table gives visible witness to the communion we celebrate today," said the Rev. Jerry Pillay, a pastor from the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

Preaching from the story in 1 Kings 19 about God's encounter with a discouraged Elijah, Yvonne Delk of the United Church of Christ in the US, offered "a three-fold word" to those who have great expectations — and doubts — about what WCRC can accomplish.

"Do not fear, God is with us," she said. "We are a people rooted in the unity of the Spirit." And finally, she said, "God is calling us to a bold witness."

In the face of promise and uncertainty, Delk said, "We are a people united in the Spirit and by the Spirit. The Spirit never leaves us as it finds us. The Spirit gives new life in our churches, our structures, our communion and our globe."

If those gathered here will remain clear about this Spirit, Delk said, "then I can say without a shadow of a doubt that the Spirit of God will not leave this communion of churches."

Jerry Van Marter is serving as English-language reporter for the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, June 18-26. For complete coverage of the meeting, visit the web site: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2010/10522.htm>

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Read about the Gulf of Mexico oil spill

As the oil continues to flow into the Gulf of Mexico after the April 22 sinking of the Deepwater Horizon, let us pray for all people and creation affected by the spill. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator, 218th General Assembly (2008); Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly; and Linda Bryant Valentine, Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council have written a pastoral letter to those affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. Environmental Ministries will continue to post updates and resources about the oil spill on the Eco-Journey blog. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance's page on the oil spill has links to further information and worship resources about the oil spill. <http://www.pcusa.org/pda/response/usa/oil-spill-052010.htm>
As we pray for those affected by the spill, let's also examine our consumption of oil, gas, and other natural resources to see how we can simplify our lifestyles and do less harm to God's earth. This won't stop the oil spill, but we can work together to create less demand for drilling in the future.

Study the Biblical foundations for Eco-Justice

Is your church starting to explore eco-justice and earth care issues or looking for an interesting adult class topic? A new study guide, made to accompany the booklet "And the Leaves of the Tree Are for the Healing of the Nations: Biblical and Theological Foundations for Eco-Justice," helps your church explore biblical and theological foundations for eco-justice and caring for God's earth. Use the new study guide for adult classes. Churches can choose between two study guides: one for a two hour class and one for five one-hour sessions. Learn more on the Environmental Ministries website:

<http://www.pcusa.org/environment/restore.htm>

Reflecting on Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice

In 1990 the 202nd General Assembly approved Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, which affirms that God calls the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to care for the earth and work for justice for all of creation, human and non-human. The policy grounds the work of Environmental Ministries and recognizes "restoring creation as a central concern of the church, to be incorporated into its life and mission at every level." Learn more about the policy on the Environmental Ministries website.

On the twentieth anniversary of this policy, Environmental Ministries has asked several people who have been active in earth care over the years to reflect on what the policy has meant to them. Read their reflections on the Eco-Journey blog.

**From: Jack Johnson - Mass Council of Churches
Re: Ecumenical Prayer Vigil**

The Massachusetts Council of Churches invites you to gather in prayer as a witness of deep concern in response to the tragic events in the Gulf.

On July 7th at 7:00pm in Old South Church at 645 Boylston Street in Boston we will come together to pray, to deepen our solidarity with those directly affected, and to present a unified Christian witness to God's love and righteous indignation in the wake of this event as well as the hope we have for the restoration of all things in Christ. Plan to join us; recruit others from your church to attend; share the flier we have provided.

**The Benefits and Challenges of New Technology for the
219th General Assembly (2010)**

Wednesday, June 23, 2010

By Sharon K. Youngs, The Presbyterian Leader.com

Ladieees and gentlemen! Welcome to our featured heavyweight bout between the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and social media!

In this corner is the General Assembly with over three hundred years of tradition and doing business “decently and in order”. . . a team with an undefeated record through the approach of “We do best when we discern together where God is leading the church in the future”. . . a team that trusts the Spirit to stir the hearts and minds of those gathered in one place at one time to make decisions.

And in this corner is relative newcomer social media . . . a team that is nimble with its thumbs and light on its feet . . . a team with a following that spans the globe and can communicate with each other as quickly as if they were gathered in one place . . . a team that trusts the Spirit to stir the hearts and minds of its members to discern the mind of Christ— just not necessarily in the same location at the same time.

Buckle your seatbelts for this one!

Actually, if folks are looking for a fight between these two contenders, they will be sorely disappointed.

A Short Primer

Here is a brief explanation of the social media tools mentioned in this article that may be new to some readers.

Web streaming is a video feed of an event via the Internet.

Blog is a shortened term for “Web log” and is an online journal containing thoughts and opinions of the writer, or the “blogger.”

Twitter is a social medium that allows a user to send tweets, or updates, of up to 140 characters that can be read instantaneously around the world. It has proven to be an invaluable communication tool, especially in disasters such as the Haiti earthquake.

How New Technology Helps a General Assembly

Advances in technology and social media are helping to reshape how a General Assembly meeting is done—from the stewardship of resources (fewer trees hewn for paper!) to the immediacy of the assembly proceedings and actions. Here are some examples.

PC-biz

PC-biz is the name for the electronic system where commissioners, advisory delegates, and all others will read and follow the business for the 219th General Assembly (2010), whether onsite in Minneapolis during the assembly or from another location where they can access the Internet (<http://pc-biz.org>). Included among the advantages provided by PC-biz are easy online access to assembly information, less shuffling of papers (historically, a stack at least six inches high), and business in real time in both committee and plenary sessions.

Web Streaming

Visitors to the homepage of the Web site for the 219th General Assembly (2010) (www.pcusa.org/ga219) during the assembly (July 3–10) may watch the plenary sessions of the highest governing body of the PC(USA) as they happen. One of the highlights will be the election of the Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010) on the first evening of the assembly.

Official GA 219 Blog and Twitter

Plans call for a daily blog on the 219th General Assembly Web site during the assembly meeting. The blog will be shared on a rotating basis by an assembly commissioner and an advisory delegate from each category: young adult, theological student, ecumenical, and missionary. The bloggers will share their experiences and insights of serving in their respective roles.

The Office of the General Assembly (OGA) will also share breaking news and other announcements before and during the assembly through Twitter. The feed will be on the homepage of the 219th General Assembly Web site (www.pcusa.org/ga219) under the username presbyGA. It may also be found at www.twitter.com/presbyGA.

Challenges of New Technology for a General Assembly

For some, including assembly commissioners and advisory delegates, a world without social media is already unimaginable. There are always a few challenges that come with the benefits of new technology. Here are a few related specifically to the General Assembly.

Accuracy of Information

Social media enable people to get news and opinions instantly from anywhere and everywhere. The advantage is immediacy; the challenge is accuracy. Among the scores of Twitter feeds about the assembly, it will be the goal of OGA that the tweets on the 219th General Assembly (2010) Web site will be accurate and neutral accounts of assembly events and actions. The blog entries on the site will be the personal impressions of the bloggers about which the reader will be invited to draw his or her own conclusion.

Being Fully Present

With social media an individual can be engaged in multiple conversations simultaneously with folks in multiple locations. Understandably, those conversations pull individuals using social media away from being totally present and fully engaged with what is happening in their own settings.

In contrast with social media are the principles of Presbyterian polity and governance. Among the materials being developed by OGA for this year's commissioners and advisory delegates is a one-page statement on using social media at the General Assembly. In part, it says,

A major affirmation of our faithfulness together is a trust in the power of discernment when men and women gather to speak and listen to each other and to the voice of the Holy Spirit. . . . At a particular General Assembly, we believe that the commissioners and advisory delegates who have gathered together are uniquely set aside for the decisions they will bring forth at that particular time. . . . The guiding principle for using social media at a General Assembly is to be attentive and present to the community gathered immediately around us and to the mysterious and wondrous movement of the Spirit of Christ in this place. Whatever our thumbs may be doing, our commissions call us to engage our hearts with each other in the moment during the business of a General Assembly. . . . The commissioners and advisory delegates with whom you serve trust that your words are a reflection of your own heart and convictions.

In other words, the statement asks commissioners and advisory delegates who use social media not to serve as proxies for those outside the assembly who want to influence the business, but to be fully present to their call and to the stirring of the Spirit among them.

Ladieees and gentlemen! The two opponents in our featured heavyweight bout are approaching the center of the ring—staring intently at each other. They’re drawing back their arms. Looks like the first punch is coming. . . but, wait! Would you look at that?! They aren’t punching each other. They’re. . . Wow! They’re shaking hands and walking out of the ring together. . . .

Presbytery of Boston Classifieds

Lifeguard Needed!

Camp Wilmot www.campwilmot.org is looking for a certified lifeguard for the month of July. Possible extra work with auxiliary groups renting camp in August. Salary is negotiable, and can include free camp experience for kids/families!

Please email Rachel Allen at rachel1248@aol.com or Rebecca Sommer-Petersen at rpetersen@newtonpres.org if interested. Must be at least 18 years old and have completed a Red Cross Life Saving course of study, and hold current certification.

Part time Youth Director

The Church of the Covenant is looking for a part-time Youth Director. For more information, contact Brad Day, of the Personnel Committee, at: 617-522-1999 / 617-943-4229 or <mailto:bradleyday@comcast.net>. Details are also posted on the Presbytery of Boston website under “About Us/Employment Opportunities.

Events

Please note: If you know of upcoming events that would be of interest to members of the Presbytery of Boston, please send your information to:

presbyteryofboston@verizon.net

July 1-4 – “Gather at the Well” Collegiate Ministry Summit ‘10, Minneapolis, MN (directly preceding GA). For more information see: www.pachem.org/Summit10Conference. **Information on opportunities for grants will be available soon from the Committee on Education for Mission.**

August 11-14 – “Church Unbound,” Montreat Conference Center, NC. Keynote speaker, preacher, and workshop leader **Brian McLaren**. See www.covnetpres.org or www.montreat.org. More information is also provided on page 8 of this newsletter. **Scholarships are still available from CS&D.**