

## Introducing the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

How well do you know your church family?

If you are reading this, you are almost certainly part of a worldwide family of churches that:

- fosters church renewal, cooperation and relevance;
- calls for economic and ecological justice;
- promotes gender equality;
- publishes thought-provoking theology;
- develops fresh ecumenical efforts to revitalize the worldwide church and its mission;
- runs programmes bringing together young people to counter racism and other ills.

The family is the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), a fellowship of 75 million Reformed Christians in 216 churches in 107 countries around the world. The WARC family is made up of Reformed, Congregational, Presbyterian, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches.

WARC has a family tree with deep roots connecting it to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and leaders such as John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and John Knox, and even deeper roots connecting it to earlier reformers such as Pierre Valdes and Jan Hus.

It was born out of a 1970 merger of two long standing bodies, the Alliance of the Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System (1875) and the International Congregational Council (1891).

Today WARC continues to act for justice amid the disparities of the world, brings churches and Christian communions closer together, studies critical theological issues, gets churches working together on crucial mission endeavours and broadcasts news of the Reformed family to the world.

**Point:** Late last year WARC's economic and ecological justice efforts entered a new phase, strengthening the involvement of member churches in resisting neoliberal globalization and hiring two regional consultants. WARC works with sister organizations in a broad movement launched at Kuala Lumpur last year. This followed a dramatic plea at WARC's 24th General Council in 2004 to resist the evil of an economic system that dehumanizes millions of people and plunders the planet. And it parallels public statements, workshops and publishing that promote gender justice.

**Point:** In a historic meeting of WARC leaders and their counterparts from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) last year, WARC and the LWF agreed to consider giving up their own global assemblies if a broader ecumenical assembly can be forged. Earlier, WARC's president Clifton Kirkpatrick called for a new era of partnership on justice issues in a first meeting with Pope Benedict XVI.

**Point:** WARC continues to lead in creating a closer and more vital Christian family through meetings among Reformed theologians and dialogues with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Disciples and Orthodox on issues as diverse as mission, empire, communion, justification by faith and the significance of Calvin today. It develops Reformed leaders for the future through scholarship prizes.

**Point:** WARC's Mission Project last year helped bring dozens of young people from Europe and Africa to the Republic of Congo to worship, study the Bible and work alongside local people on alternative agriculture, street cleaning and caring for senior citizens and orphans. The Mission Project supports cross-cultural literacy training as well as education and advocacy on economic and

ecological justice in Rwanda, South Africa and Belgium. The project stimulates critical reflection on theological education and mission relationships among WARC's member churches.

**Point:** WARC responds to mission and development challenges, devastating disasters and emergencies through its Reformed Churches Partnership Fund.

WARC communicates news about the Reformed family, both its member churches and the Geneva-based secretariat. WARC's website ([www.warc.ch](http://www.warc.ch)) offers the latest news and information as well as opportunities to purchase books and subscriptions, pay member fees and make donations. *Update*, a quarterly newsletter, offers a regular glimpse of the Reformed family and *Reformed World*, a theological journal, gives readers an opportunity to go deeper on critical theological issues.

WARC has always been committed to playing a key role as a platform through which its member churches fulfil their mission, which includes being agents of transformation and justice in society. Actions from the last four general councils illustrate this graphically: the 21st General Council at Ottawa in 1982 declared church support of apartheid heretical; the 22nd General Council at Seoul in 1989 launched a programme addressing gender justice; the 23rd General Council at Debrecen in 1997 called on member churches to commit to a struggle against economic and ecological destruction.

The 24th General Council at Accra in 2004 adopted a confession of faith that states that "the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization." The Accra Confession has been the subject of much attention and study both within churches and beyond.

What's in store for the WARC family?

There will be a continuing focus on justice issues, ecumenical dialogue as well as theological study and publishing. WARC will work with sister organizations in the ecumenical movement to revitalize and reshape it so that it faithfully furthers the mission of the member churches. Conversations with the Reformed Ecumenical Council about the creation of new global body representing more than 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide is an example of this effort.

There may be others. Pay attention to your church family.

(If you want more information, contact WARC at [warc@warc.ch](mailto:warc@warc.ch) or visit our website at [www.warc.ch](http://www.warc.ch).)

*John P. Asling is WARC's executive secretary for communications.*