

**The common witness of
WARC member churches
today and tomorrow
and the service of the Alliance**

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches beyond 2004

**A discussion document
for member churches and area councils
in preparing for the 24th general council (Accra 2004)**

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Introduction

WARC general councils are an opportunity for member churches to review past work, listen to God speaking to us about the challenges of our time and plan for the period following the general council. This is both a constitutional and a moral responsibility.

The 24th general council takes place at a time of major changes in the world in general and the ecumenical movement in particular. Unless we take seriously the time in which we live, dare to listen to God and embrace a new vision, the Alliance may become irrelevant to the churches whose Alliance it is.

This document is different from the text “From Debrecen to Accra”, which will be sent to you in the second quarter of 2004. It is not a report on the work of the last seven years. It is intended to help member churches engage in the search for an effective and relevant future for the Alliance, building on the good work of the past. The heart of the document is therefore its *third part*; but this cannot be read independently of the first two parts.

To fashion a future for the Alliance requires us to read the signs of our times clearly; to know where we have come from; and to understand ourselves and our purposes, and why we do what we currently do.

Therefore we begin by listening to the churches. Based on feedback from the regions in which our churches live and work, we draw out some global trends that need to inform the work of the Alliance. In the second part, we outline the historic and current work done by the Alliance, within its self-understanding as an ecumenical confessional body and in response to challenges in the lives of member churches in the past and present. This part goes back beyond the last seven years to provide brief historical explanations for WARC’s life and programmes.

These two parts together set the stage for the third part of the document, which deals with our future together as an Alliance responding to God’s call today.

Part three sets forth a vision for the Alliance in the decade following Accra. It is a vision open to discussion, both in general and in detail. It presents some possibilities and raises many questions. We offer these to our member churches and area councils as discussion starters.

We hope that as member churches and area councils read and respond with concrete suggestions, all of us together can help discern what the priorities of the Alliance ought to be and discover ways of working that engage our constituency more deeply. Your feedback will help to move WARC in a direction we can all own and to which we can all commit ourselves. We invite your critical and constructive response.

Part I

The glory of God is humanity fully alive:

WARC member churches and Christian witness today

1. The Lord Jesus Christ, who said that he came “that they may have life, and have it in fullness” (Jn 10.10), breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples and told them: “as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20.21f, 17.18). The mission of the Son of God was to proclaim and to inaugurate God’s reign of life in fullness for the whole earth community. His teaching, proclamation and healing were good news to the poor and the excluded who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9.35-36). The mission of his body, the church, is to witness in words and deeds, in the power of the Spirit (Jn 16.13), to the gracious self-giving of God in Jesus’ promise and inauguration of a new age for the earth community – the kingdom of God. Inspired by the vision that “the glory of God is humanity fully alive” (Irenaeus of Lyon), Christian churches are called to discern in contemporary history signs of rejection and signs of affirmation of God’s kingdom and to respond to them through renewed forms of prophetic and diaconal witness.
2. How are WARC member churches speaking of the major local and global challenges to the vision of life in fullness for all? How are they affirming the importance of covenanting with each other as they read the signs of the times and seek to renew their missionary calling to love those whom God loves? No reflection, no plans, no decisions about the future of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will be relevant to the life and witness of WARC member churches if they are not fully inspired and ultimately shaped by the answers that the churches are giving to such questions. It is therefore not only appropriate but also necessary and urgent to listen to the voices of the WARC family of churches in the present before speaking of the “world alliance” that will bind them together in the future.

Contemporary challenges to life in fullness for all: Voices from the regions

Africa

3. When our sisters and brothers in Africa speak of the contemporary challenges to their witness to life in fullness for all, they start by asserting that they live in a continent blessed with natural, human, cultural and spiritual resources that reach places and people far beyond the continent itself. They then remind the WARC family that they are called to mission and evangelism amid the human and environmental consequences of a wide range of civil and international conflicts, structural adjustment programmes imposed by international financial institutions, and natural phenomena such as desertification. These consequences include millions of refugees and internally displaced people, the growth of economic exclusion and chronic malnutrition as well as zones of drought and famine, and the emergence of an unscrupulous business sector that adds to the drama of displaced people and refugees.
4. HIV/Aids is the worst pandemic in human history. It is also a test case for Christian witness and mission. In sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge is greatest. Out of more than 42 million seropositives worldwide, 35 million are Africans, most of them women. How to speak of a gracious God who promises life in fullness, in a continent where the old are now burying the young? In 16 African countries, one adult in 10 is seropositive. In some countries HIV/Aids

patients take more than 70% of hospital beds, while life expectancy is now 36 years. One million of the world's 1.3 million seropositive children live in Africa; 95% of the world's HIV/Aids orphans are African. There is a deep link between the crisis of human development and the progression of HIV/Aids in Africa.

5. Christianity in many African countries is growing. Many Christian churches seek ways to proclaim the gospel faithfully. They raise prophetic voices to challenge undemocratic governments and other social evils. They play a leading role in reconciliation and peace-building. Women and young people constitute the majority of the churches' membership, yet they are not always included in church leadership or decision-making. WARC member churches in Africa look to the Alliance for a fellowship of solidarity and support: in standing up against economic injustice and poverty; in development projects and in rebuilding destroyed homes and missions; in providing appropriate theological education; in their women's initiatives and in linking with international agencies.

Asia

6. Our sisters and brothers in Asia often live and witness as Christian minorities surrounded by other spiritual traditions that, far more than Christianity, constitute the cultural identity of communities and countries throughout the continent. They are still often seen as the religious expression of old and new forms of western colonialism. This leads them to raise for the WARC family important questions about Christian mission in religiously plural and post-colonial contexts.
7. In recent years these questions have become acute and urgent, as economic globalization and the "war on terrorism" accentuate social inequalities, threaten peoples' sovereignty, and deepen tensions generated by nationalist movements related to ethnic, religious or regional identity-claims in regions such as south Asia. Religious sentiments and allegiances are widely misused to foment ethnic and political conflicts – often falsely presented in the global media as conflicts between Christianity and Islam, or Christian freedom opposing Muslim terrorism.
8. As they seek to witness to the promise of life in fullness for all, WARC member churches in Asia stress the fundamental importance of interfaith solidarity and dialogue as well as peace, tolerance and reconciliation initiatives across cultural and religious borders. They see themselves as the people of God in the midst of all God's peoples, and turn to the WARC family for understanding and support of this identity.

Caribbean

9. Our sisters and brothers in the Caribbean tell us that major challenges confronting the region include racial relations, poverty, unemployment, social and urban violence, HIV/Aids, extensive migration, and the well-known adverse human consequences of structural adjustment programmes for important public services such as education and health.
10. Christian churches in the Caribbean are challenged by ministry in a multireligious context, ministry to youth, and urgent needs in family life, education, counselling, human rights and governance. Many churches, with inadequate human and financial resources and declining congregations, are struggling to survive. They look to WARC to encourage greater partnership among churches with similar struggles, needs and challenges. They look for exchange programmes, workshops on regional questions, and support for youth work, women's issues and new approaches to Bible study.

Europe

11. Our sisters and brothers in Europe speak of societies grappling with the centripetal forces of market, technology and communications as well as the centrifugal forces of cultural, ethnic and religious identity-claims and xenophobia. Historical Christian churches face a significant spiritual decline of identification and practice: church attendance in some western European countries dropped by more than 20% during the 1990s. In response to secularization, new spiritualities, unrelated to the mainline churches, emerge and flourish.
12. European member churches struggle with dwindling membership and the erosion of their faith heritage, and seek to rediscover evangelism in a secular context. They are challenged by neo-paganism and sectarianism. They grow in fellowship with other Christian churches and practise ecumenical hospitality towards new immigrant Christian communities. They search for cooperation with non-Christian religions. They advocate on behalf of migrant communities, and stand in solidarity with people affected by ecological disasters. Churches in the former communist bloc struggle to come to terms with the past and the ambiguities of the present. They confront the promises and threats of EU membership, the rise of nationalism, questions of ethnic-religious identity, uneven democratization and new levels of economic inequality. Small minority churches in Latin Europe struggle to maintain their social and medical institutions. They face questions of interconfessional and interreligious dialogue, church-state relations and religious illiteracy in public education.
13. Churches in western Europe look to WARC for help in grappling with mission in a post-Christian society and reflecting on the role of Europe in the world. Central and eastern European churches look to WARC for help in their struggle as minority churches. Our Latin European churches expect WARC to work closely with the conference of Protestant churches in the Latin countries of Europe (CEPPE), where they cooperate in Christian education, specialized ministries, migration issues, communication, and church-state relations.

Latin America

14. Our sisters and brothers in Latin America remind us that their churches stem from immigration or Reformed missionary work, and live and witness as minorities in societies marked by both a strong Roman Catholic hegemony and the exponential growth of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches.
15. They draw the attention of the WARC family to the growing gap in many countries between wealthy minorities and impoverished majorities because of the adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund as a “solution” to their foreign debt crises. While public education, health care and social security are collapsing, criminality and social violence in urban and rural areas – often related to narcotrafficking and the military responses to it – are soaring. Growing poverty means more children living on the streets. Fragile democratic structures are threatened by the resurgence of an archaic authoritarianism. The announcement of the Free Trade Area of the Americas has been received with apprehension by church leaders, who see this initiative as a threat to autonomous regional integration processes such as Mercosur/Mercosul.
16. As they implement new social programmes, some WARC member churches in Latin America realize afresh the importance of service (*diakonia*) in Christian mission. Others give priority to personal evangelism and church planting. Still others seek to deepen their political engagement. Aboriginal peoples actively claim their place in church and culture. Latin American churches

look to WARC for help in becoming communities of resistance and hope. They find great value in such programmes as covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth, or Reformed identity and mission in Latin America. They expect improved cooperation between WARC worldwide and the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL).

Middle East

17. Reformed churches in the Middle East, with a combined membership of little over 300,000, are tiny minorities within minorities. They live for the most part in undemocratic or semi-democratic societies. They face within the region the hegemonic role of the US and Israel. Christian-Muslim relations, in a region that was the cradle of Christianity but is now a sea of Islam, cannot be ignored. Christian unity and, in particular, Evangelical unity are high on their agenda. Christian education, leadership development and *diakonia* are priorities.
18. Middle Eastern churches look to WARC for support in strengthening their Reformed and Evangelical identity, in dialogue with the Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and (Roman) Catholics, in interfaith work, and in advocacy in relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

North America

19. North American churches struggle to proclaim their Christian faith and Reformed heritage with conviction and integrity, to resolve internal conflicts without division, to confront worldwide economic injustice and their complicity in it, to challenge consumerist values, protect the environment, and impact sometimes unresponsive governments. They are often divided by questions of sexuality.
20. While this section points mainly to the generalities, there are particularities that differentiate Canada from the USA that should not be overlooked. For example, in the United States, the churches confront a widespread use of the death penalty.
21. North American churches look to WARC for a platform for meaningful relationships with sister churches abroad, other Christian confessions at home, and people of other faiths, for help in strengthening prophetic ministry, and to encourage churches to work together on common concerns. They are also concerned by declining membership and seek opportunities to revitalize church life.

Pacific

22. According to our sister churches, societies of the Pacific islands are facing rapid social, cultural, economic and political change. Until recently, nuclear testing has adversely affected the environment in a number of Pacific countries, exposing them to health risks and even to the disappearance of some islands.
23. WARC member churches in the Pacific struggle to redefine their mission. They are challenged by economic globalization, environmental degradation, the rise of new religious movements and – in some islands – ethnic and tribal conflicts. They need to overcome the tendency to work independently in mission, to encourage the ministry of the laity, and to strengthen their theological education by including in its programme social, political, economic and environmental questions. They look to WARC for help in ecumenical sharing and in strengthening cooperation with other churches of the family.

Contemporary challenges to life in fullness for all: common themes, global trends

24. What characteristics of the contemporary world challenge our family of churches as we seek to witness together to God's promise of life in fullness for all?

Worldwide economic injustice

25. God heard the cry of the Hebrew people in Egypt and experienced their oppression (Ex 3.7; 3.16). In the promised land, solidarity with the orphan, the widow and the foreigner were signs that the covenant society was ordered in the way God ordered the whole creation (Deut 24.17-22). Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom was good news to the poor living in marginalized Galilee (Mk 1.14-15, Lk 4.16-21, Mt 11.2-5).
26. While some of us enjoy and rightly celebrate the growing interaction and mutual interdependence of the global village made possible by information technology, many more experience the inhuman consequences of neoliberal economic and financial globalization: 54 countries are poorer today than they were a decade ago. The world economy taken as a whole is more unequal today than it was 20 years ago. The richest 1% of the global population has as much income as its poorest 57%. Within 30 years, a quarter of the world's population may live in slums. Many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean stagger under the burden of private and public debt. Third world debt as a whole is today 35 times what it was 30 years ago: a crisis largely generated and multiplied by international financial institutions whose principles and practices are not subject to any court of justice.

Environmental degradation

27. We believe in God, "creator of heaven and earth". As we affirm that creation is intrinsically good (Gen 1.31) and intertwined with redemption (Ps 135, Rom 8.19-21, Eph 1.3-10, Col 1.13-20), and as we recognize that our common call to stewardship includes the task of transforming the inhabited earth into the household of God (Gen 1.26, Phil 2.1-8), we must recognize that neoliberal development is generating counter-signs of God's kingdom by destroying life-supporting systems in agriculture, health and the ecosystems. Climate change, tropical deforestation and the decline of water sources are likely to be followed by increasing droughts and floods, rising sea-levels and their predictable disastrous human consequences. Although this is a global problem, the world population should not be held equally responsible for it. While industrialized countries of the northern hemisphere represent only 20% of the world population, they produce 90% of the gases that cause global climate change. The most energy-consuming country in the world has so far declined to reduce even slightly its alarming production of polluting gases.

Threats to peace

28. Jesus Christ, our Lord, is also "our peace" (Eph 2.14). His birth was greeted as "peace on earth" (Lk 2.14), echoing prophetic visions of *shalom* according to which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is 2.4, Mic 4.3). Through his life, death and resurrection, Christ our peace reconciled Jew and Gentile into "one new humanity" (Eph 2.15). He said that peacemakers would be called "children of God" and gave the community of his disciples a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.18).
29. In many contexts social exclusion, amplified by the debt crisis, undermines the hope of self-fulfilment through education, work and family life. Urban social violence, catalysed by the

growing metropolization of the southern hemisphere, becomes endemic. Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity turns into tension and eventually open conflict. A widespread feeling of national and international insecurity, magnified by terrorism, weakens structures of governance, favours the restriction of civil liberties and inspires international relations based on cultural and religious prejudices and the survival of the fittest. Unilateral, preemptive military responses in the “war on terrorism” do not address the root causes of the phenomenon they pretend to resist. Violence and counter-violence create vicious circles. As the ecumenical movement has repeatedly stated: without justice for all everywhere, it is difficult to secure peace anywhere.

The quest for new forms of spirituality

30. Millions of people, north and south, are opening themselves to new spiritual experiences that help them make sense of their own lives, keep their wholeness in times of fragmentation or simply survive in a world in which all that is solid melts into air. In some parts of the world this interest in new forms of spirituality leads to decline in the Reformation churches. In other places it contributes to an extraordinary flourishing of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements and churches that is transforming the face of contemporary Christianity.
31. Can the WARC family of churches let itself be judged, challenged, renewed and revitalized by the call to witness to Jesus’ gospel of hope, conversion, justice, peace and wholeness? Can we become a movement of Christians and Christian communities around the world who covenant to live and work together as the people of God in the midst of all God’s people for a culture of life in fullness?
32. Before addressing these questions in part III, we need first to deepen our common understanding of what WARC is and does.

Part II

God’s covenant and our Alliance

WARC yesterday and today and its ecumenical calling

33. Churches that share the Reformed heritage value the notion of covenant or alliance, one of the overarching themes of the Bible. Since the 16th century, when Reformers such as Bullinger and Olevianus were looking for a biblical principle to organize and present the contents of Christian faith and practice, until recent times, when Reformed theologians such as Barth and Reformed Bible scholars have unfolded other central aspects of its richness, the notion of covenant has contributed significantly to the renewal of Christian theology and church life and witness.
34. The one covenant of grace, inseparable from the whole creation, was established by God with all humanity in Abraham (Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22). It included Adam and Noah (Gen 6.18; 9.8-17) through God’s promises. It was reiterated to Israel (Ex 19.1-6; Ex 24.7) without excluding Ishmael. It was fulfilled in Christ (1 Cor 11.23-25) and in the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh – Jews and Gentiles – at Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13). It expresses itself in justice and reconciliation. It is the source of the witness to the kingdom that constitutes the mission of God’s covenant people.

35. The God of the one gracious covenant is a God of steadfast solidarity, a God who leaves the self-sufficient world of the “gods” (Psalm 82) to live in covenant with those who are groaning in oppression (Ex 2.24-25). The call to covenant unity (Jn 17.21; Eph 4.1-5) – expressed through singular images that do not turn into the plural, such as “body” (1 Cor 12.12-27), “bride” (Eph 5.21-33, Rev 19.7) or “house” (1 Pet 2.1-10) – is a matter of obedience to God whose steadfast solidarity with the earth community endures forever.

One in Christ

What WARC is

36. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches was created in the 19th century out of a deep awareness of the ecumenical imperative to make more visible Christian communion, oneness, and unity in mission. It is a large and diverse family of 215 Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational and United churches, linking more than 75 million Christians in more than 100 countries.

Purposes

37. Article three of the constitution defines the *purposes* of the Alliance thus:

1. To further all endeavours to proclaim the word of God faithfully, and to order the life and worship of the church in obedience to God’s word;
2. To further the work of evangelism, mission and stewardship in all their aspects, to promote common study of the Christian faith and its implications;
3. To encourage the diversity and familial character of ministries in the church under the one head, Jesus Christ;
4. To widen and deepen understanding and community among the member churches and churches eligible for membership and to help them to fulfil their own responsibilities in the service of Christ;
5. To further intercourse between the member churches, through mutual visitation, through the dissemination of information, and by other practicable means;
6. To unite the forces of the member churches in common service wherever needed and practicable;
7. To help member churches that may be weak, oppressed or persecuted; and through all available channels to stimulate and provide aid to needy churches among them;
8. To promote and defend religious and civil liberties wherever threatened throughout the world;
9. To facilitate the contribution to the ecumenical movement of the experiences and insights that churches within the Alliance have been given in their history, and to share with churches of other traditions within that movement, and particularly in the World Council of Churches, in the discovery of forms of church life and practice that will enable the people of God more fully to understand and express together God’s will for his people.

38. It is important to note that in these purposes the word comes first, then the church. WARC understands itself as a fellowship of churches created, judged and nourished by the word of God. This affirms the primacy of the ministry of the whole people of God under the headship of Christ and the diversity of gifts to be shared within the one Christian fellowship.

39. The first three purposes of the Alliance locate its members as churches rooted in the Reformation. After the primacy of the word of God, key elements of the Reformation heritage

are witnessing to the gospel and its ever renewed understanding, and the equal dignity of the ordained and the lay as ministers of the gospel. None of these elements, however, is exclusively “Reformed” nor constitutes a narrow confessional identity. What unites the member churches of the Alliance also encourages them to be open to other churches. We are bound together by a heritage that is at once evangelical, Reformed and “catholic” (universal).

40. The next five purposes identify what we aim to do together in the setting of our Reformation heritage. Purposes 4 and 8 both take the Alliance family beyond its own borders.
41. Purposes 5 to 7 underline that the Alliance fellowship becomes concrete as member churches grow in mutual exchange, unite in common service and help the least of their sister churches. The churches themselves are to be the main agents of a visible communion built from the grassroots up. But the relationship is not all one way. The Alliance fellowship also exists in order to represent a certain Reformed universality to its members, to stop them turning in on themselves.
42. Purpose 9 has to do with bringing the gifts of WARC member churches to the wider ecumenical movement. It reminds us that we are a fellowship of churches on the way: on a spiritual, programmatic and institutional journey, united by a common reference to our Reformation heritage. In the spirit of that heritage, we seek forms of church life and practice that will also unite us with other Christians beyond our confessional boundaries. We are not our own. We belong to Christ, and our fellowship exists within and for the service of the church universal.

Structures

43. The main elements of WARC’s current structure have been in place since the uniting general council (Nairobi 1970), which brought together the Presbyterian and Congregationalist strands in our family. The general council, composed of delegates from the member churches, is the governing body of the Alliance. Its task is to set the direction of the Alliance, making policies and agreeing on programmes. The effectiveness of these programmes is determined by how significantly they respond to the needs and impact the lives of member churches. The general council elects an executive committee to exercise general oversight of the work of the Alliance between general council meetings.
44. To promote community and cooperation between member churches in different regions of the world, the general council may authorize the organization of Alliance areas. At present, there are five such areas: the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL), the Caribbean and North American area council (CANAAC), the European Area Committee (EAC), the Northeast Asia area council (NEAAC), and the Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches (SAARC). In November 2003, at a consultation in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Alliance of Reformed Churches in Africa (ARCA) was launched.

What WARC does

45. What follows is a brief survey of how the present structure of the Alliance has sought to respond to mandates from past general councils.

Department of theology

46. The department of theology was established by the 18th general council (São Paulo 1959). It was created because 1) the common study of theological matters of common interest was a

Reformed way of nourishing fellowship among member churches, 2) member churches in different parts of the world faced new theological issues as they engaged in union negotiations with other churches and asked the Alliance to assist them, and 3) the Alliance's distinctive contribution to the ecumenical movement lay in theology. If we recall that the department also runs programmes related to theological education, we end up with three key words to describe what it has been doing: *studies, ecumenism and education*.

47. In the past 45 years the department has conducted theological studies on ordination and ministry, catholicity, the theology of human rights, called to witness to the gospel today, Reformed self-understanding in context, gospel and cultures, and mission today. It has organized ecumenical dialogues with churches and world communions from the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christian families. It oversees a scholarship programme, is increasing communication with theological schools related to member churches, and is organizing the first Global Institute of Theology, to run in parallel with the 2004 general council.
48. This is our history. However the ecclesial and ecumenical situation to which the department of theology responds has undergone significant change. The face of Christianity has deeply changed. The face of the ecumenical movement has changed. The face of WARC has also changed. Many of its member churches live today as religious minorities and confront harsh questions of survival. These changes generate new challenges.

Department of cooperation and witness

49. The department was established in 1970 with a wide mandate, including responsibility for communication, women's issues, and youth concerns in addition to work on human rights and interchurch cooperation. After the 1989 general council, the first three of these responsibilities were assigned elsewhere, and a more focused agenda was created for the department.
50. One of its key words is human rights. The uniting general council (Nairobi 1970) initiated a study that led to the report *Theological Basis for Human Rights* (1976); the department is currently reworking this text. The Alliance supports member churches in their struggle for human rights by issuing statements or appeals, through solidarity visits and by inviting church activists to address the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).
51. Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) permits the Alliance to make oral and written interventions at the annual sessions of ECOSOC and the UNCHR. During these sessions the department works closely with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and relevant nongovernmental organizations. In recent years, the department has intervened on Equatorial Guinea, Korea and the Philippines, and on capital punishment and economic injustice.
52. The primary agenda of the department today is covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth. This was mandated by the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997). The department has sought to engage member churches in considering the confessional implications of economic injustice and ecological destruction and to stimulate a wider ecumenical response to economic globalization through joint consultations with the WCC, the LWF and regional ecumenical organizations.
53. Other assignments include interchurch cooperation: for example, in response to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Equatorial Guinea's request for assistance in theological education. Most recently the department has sought to deepen cooperation with people of other faiths, in

view of the importance of interfaith conflict in the lives of member churches in many parts of the world.

Department of partnership of women and men

54. The first global network of Reformed women was established in 1888. The 11th general council (Pittsburgh 1921) welcomed the first woman delegate. The 17th general council (Princeton 1954) opened the door to wider involvement of women and established a department of women's work (without staff) to integrate the witness of women more fully into the Alliance; the uniting general council (Nairobi 1970) replaced this department by a "women's section" within the new department of cooperation and witness. The 22nd general council (Seoul 1989) created the programme to affirm, challenge and transform: women and men in church and society (PACT), and the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) went one step further to establish the present department of partnership of women and men.
55. The main purpose of the department is to work with member churches in renewing and transforming gender relations. In recent years, eight regional workshops on gender awareness and leadership development have been organized by the department worldwide. This experience was used to develop a church manual for gender awareness and leadership development: *Created in God's Image: From hierarchy to partnership* (2003) is a tool for use in the churches themselves that will strengthen their efforts to build partnership between women and men.
56. Since the 1950s, the ordination of women has been an Alliance priority. In 1954, the executive committee endorsed the "admission of women to all orders of the word and sacrament of the church". This commitment continued through surveys of the ordination of women in Alliance churches and by creating a network of ordained and lay women. Recently, it has been significantly advanced by the establishment of a theological education scholarship fund for women from the south as a direct support to churches committed to ordaining women.
57. Additionally, the department has responded to gender-related issues, such as HIV/Aids, violence against women (including sexual harassment), women and mission, and gender and economic justice.

Department of finance

58. The department of finance works with member churches to secure the funds needed to carry out Alliance activities. It also monitors Alliance investments. Funds are received through member church annual contributions or as designated income for staffing or programmes from member churches and church mission and development agencies.
59. It is a struggle to secure the resources needed to support the Alliance's mandate. On average, member church contributions cover less than 60% of the general operating budget, leaving more than 40% to be raised through designated funds. This situation, coupled with recent market fluctuations, has resulted in a series of annual deficits. In response, fundraising initiatives with individuals and congregations were initiated and an Alliance for Life Fund was established, but with modest results.
60. A Reformed churches partnership fund was established in 1989 and redefined in 1997. It is supported mainly by churches and agencies in the north and aims to strengthen the development work of Alliance churches through modest project grants. The fund is particularly helpful to the 47% of Alliance churches in the south or in central and eastern Europe that do not belong to

other ecumenical bodies, such as the WCC. The fund also aims to strengthen south to south relations within the Alliance family.

Communications

61. The communications office, re-established in 1993, supports the work of the Alliance through publicity and publications. The office produces *Update*, a quarterly newsletter in English and French, making the material available in Spanish and German for regional publication, and issues press releases as needed. The office also publishes *Reformed World*, a quarterly journal in English, and occasional books in the *Studies* series.
62. The office maintains the Alliance website and cooperates with *Reformed online* in Germany. It networks with church communicators for effective press coverage. In addition the office produces fundraising material and manages the Alliance's information technology, including its database. The office is currently working with different departments to develop more effective means of communicating the Alliance to churches, seminaries and the world at large.

Youth

63. Youth work in the Alliance has a long, though intermittent, history. In 1995, the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden seconded a youth secretary for three years to stimulate a greater awareness of the issues facing young people in the Reformed family. The new youth office created a network of Alliance youth secretaries, and played a key role in mobilizing young people's participation in the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997).
64. The office was re-established in 2002, but with a secretary based outside Geneva because of limits in funding. Its primary tasks are again to mobilize young people's participation in the 24th general council (Accra 2004), to organize a Reformed youth forum for young delegates just prior to the council, and to prepare a stewards' programme that gathers young people from around the world to help in running the general council.
65. Other tasks include empowering young people, helping them make their voices heard in church and society; leadership development; and strengthening churches' commitment to include young people at all levels of church life.

Mission in unity

66. The Alliance has always been interested in strengthening effective mission in its member churches. Six out of eight general councils held between 1948 and 1997 mention Reformed disunity. A certain pluralism is not only legitimate and desirable, but also inherent in the Reformed "ethos"; but Reformed churches often divide for reasons that are scarcely justifiable. An important ecumenical task for the Alliance is to help overcome divisions within the Reformed family.
67. In the last two decades, the Geneva-based John Knox International Reformed Centre undertook extensive research on this issue through consultations and publications. Noteworthy among these is *The Reformed Family Worldwide* (Eerdmans, 1999), a first attempt to survey Reformed churches, theological schools and international organizations. In 1998, the John Knox Centre and WARC established the mission in unity project.

68. The mission in unity project aims to assist the witness of Reformed churches as they respond to contemporary mission and missiological challenges (including life-oriented initiatives in situations marked by economic, social, political, cultural or religious conflict) and seek to overcome historical divisions and move forward together in common witness. The emphasis is on programmatic action to strengthen the mission of churches.

WARC in the ecumenical movement

69. The Alliance is not merely a fellowship of Reformation churches committed to oneness in Christ among themselves. It is equally committed to a wider Christian unity. *It is a confessional body, ecumenically oriented; and its ecumenical engagement is grounded in its confessional heritage.*

70. In the understanding of the Reformation, the church of Jesus Christ is not confined to one confessional tradition or denominational group. The church exists wherever the gospel of God's grace and human freedom, of justification and justice, is proclaimed and received in faith, and where the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are administered according to Christ's will. The church is the communion (*koinonia*) of all believers, who are members of a body whose sole head is Jesus the resurrected. It is because of what the Reformation said and did about the church that the Alliance has embraced with enthusiasm the cause of visible Christian unity, which it understands in this Reformed sense.

71. In 1948, the Alliance's executive committee greeted the formation of the World Council of Churches as "a manifestation of the spirit and will of Jesus Christ". In 1950, the executive committee declared that the role of a confessional fellowship such as the Alliance was to serve the church universal: if the confessional families "make their great world bodies ends in themselves, they will betray Jesus Christ".

72. The 17th general council (Princeton 1954) clarified the meaning of the ecumenical movement for WARC member churches at that time. It affirmed that the table of holy communion is the Lord's table, not ours. "We dare not refuse the sacrament to any baptized person who loves and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour...We cannot proclaim the gospel of reconciliation without demonstrating at the table of the Lord that we are reconciled to one another." The International Congregational Council and the World Presbyterian Alliance saw the purpose of their merger in 1970 as "not only to carry out the major aims for which both organizations have existed separately, but above all in order better to serve the whole of Christ's church". The WARC centennial consultation (St Andrews 1977) affirmed that "there is for us no alternative to involvement in the ecumenical movement".

73. Five aspects of the WARC traditional commitment to visible unity among Christian churches are noteworthy. The Alliance

- 1) is unconditionally committed to the wider ecumenical family. It names the WCC as the privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement. It constantly reiterates and acts on its commitment to the principle of subsidiarity and its willingness "to avoid unnecessary duplication of work that can best be done by the WCC".
- 2) attaches special significance to local church union and explicitly values the many united churches in its membership.
- 3) conducts international bilateral dialogues in the desire to overcome church-dividing differences and to serve member churches that are engaged in union negotiations.
- 4) has a priority commitment to fellowship among the churches of the Reformation.

- 5) is committed to fostering among its own member churches what it seeks to promote within the wider Christian family: more visible unity, as one of the requirements of a more obedient witness.
74. The traditional forms of the Alliance's ecumenical engagement face significant contemporary challenges.
75. First of all, the engagement of many Christian women and men in liberation struggles and solidarity movements has led to a fresh emphasis on the salvation that the God of the orphan, the widow and the foreigner brings to the world in the compassionate person of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, the term "ecumenism" is increasingly "at home" with two other words with the same household (*oikos*) root: ecology and economy.
76. Secondly, for a growing number of Christians the struggle against the divisive forces of economic exclusion, environmental destruction, cultural oppression and gender discrimination subsumes and judges today the reasons why Christian churches seek Christian unity and the methods they employ to overcome what divides them. In the absence of interreligious solidarity in the field of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, the traditional concern for Christian unity scarcely makes sense – particularly when Christian faith is used to legitimate the imposition of a western imperial peace on non-Christian nations.
77. Thirdly, with more than two-thirds of its member churches in the southern hemisphere, the Alliance faces many ecumenical initiatives that neither aim at overcoming inherited church divisions nor confine themselves within the borders of Christianity.
78. Finally, since his installation in 1997, Alliance President CS Song has consistently pointed to ordinary Christians in our churches, and their search for a spirituality that would help them keep their wholeness in a fragmented world, a search that to some extent calls into question both church- and world-centred ecumenism. Other voices challenge the relevance of traditional bilateral dialogues to the present needs of our constituency.
79. All of these factors require a fundamental rethinking of our ecumenical engagement. This is necessary for the sake of the Alliance family, but can also contribute to the wider re-imagining and "reconfiguration" of the ecumenical movement for which the outgoing general secretary of the WCC, Konrad Raiser, has called.

Part III

God's call to the Alliance

The future mission and service of WARC and its member churches

Being the body of Christ together

80. Jesus came that "They may have life, and have it in fullness" (Jn 10.10).
81. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its predecessors have an honourable history. But the practical question regards the future. The organizations of the ecumenical movement are ecumenical *instruments*, intended to serve particular constituencies within the universal church. In a time of ecumenical "reconfiguration", no instrument can take its existence or activities for

granted. For the Alliance this means, we believe, two things. First, that if the Alliance is to demonstrate its continuing validity and worth, we must continue to change. Secondly, that if we are to continue to serve our churches, the churches themselves, individually and together, must say what they think the Alliance should be and do.

Questions

1. What is your vision of what the Alliance should be and how its member churches should relate to one another?
2. Given our common understanding of the nature and purpose of the church, our common confessional memory and the common challenges we face today, can the churches of the Alliance affirm that we intend to stay together from today into the future?
3. Is there, in your view, a sense in which the Alliance fellowship of churches is, or should become, a communion?
4. Can we affirm the Alliance as a fellowship of churches working together for fullness of life for the whole earth community, building a stronger sense of mutual commitment and fellowship in service?
5. What can the churches of the Alliance do together to bear witness to the kingdom of God that will demonstrate God's covenant with the whole earth community and make a difference in the lives of the orphan, the widow and the foreigner and those who are oppressed or downtrodden?
6. How should the programmes, priorities and structures of the Alliance be reshaped to make them more relevant to our churches as we seek to witness to the gospel of the kingdom of life in fullness?
7. How is our understanding and practice of our participation in God's mission in today's world and of the ministry of all believers challenged and renewed by our belonging together within the Alliance family?
8. How can we engage more effectively as an Alliance family with the wider ecumenical movement, other faith communities and peoples' movements?
9. How can we find new and creative ways to link our activities at local, national, regional and global levels?

We develop these questions further in what follows.

New ways of working

82. We are prepared to move as the Spirit leads. In fact, over the last two decades we have already moved towards new ways of working, more closely related to our constituency. To re-imagine the Alliance as *a fellowship of common life and action* (see paragraph 102) implies, however, a decisive break with the model of a global organization that develops programmes that its churches may or may not engage in, according to inclination. Alliance programmes need, more explicitly, to be developed jointly with member churches. Programmes developed in this manner will then represent priorities expressed by member churches and regional groups, taking into account global trends. Together we can implement them and integrate them in the lives of our churches.

Questions

10. How can WARC use consultations, dialogues, workshops, seminars, publications and other traditional methodologies more effectively in involving member churches in the work of the Alliance?

11. How can the Alliance help its member churches to think globally, while acting locally? Can it be an instrument through which member churches in different regions develop together a vision for addressing the global trends in ways relevant to their local challenges?
12. Is WARC's participation in bilateral ecumenical dialogues or seminars on justice issues the most appropriate way to contribute to the ecumenical learning and engagement of its member churches?
13. The opening decades of this century include several important Reformed or ecumenical anniversaries: for example, Heinrich Bullinger (2004), John Calvin (2009), Edinburgh 1910 (2010), Martin Luther's 95 theses (2017). Could WARC use these landmark dates for campaigns on justice or Reformed values to engage people on a large scale?
14. Are there other new methodologies that the Alliance should try? Should WARC, for example, explore the possibility of using rallies, bringing together several churches in one country or in neighbouring countries in a common effort?

83. New ways of working may entail major shifts in communications strategy. In recent years, we have placed the emphasis more on facilitating effective communication *within* the family rather than on speaking *from* the "head office" *to* the family.

84. For its programmes to be meaningful to its member churches, WARC needs to examine its tools of presentation. Final statements and reports, especially when presented in a foreign language, may not be the best way to reach local congregations!

85. Communication between the Alliance and its churches needs to be two-way. Substantial knowledge of what member churches are and do all over the world is essential for the effective running of all WARC-related programmes. Listening to the heartbeat of the constituency is an essential requirement. The Alliance should further actualize its commitment to the 75 million Christians who belong to it.

Question

15. What more would you like done in communications to make WARC more relevant to the Alliance family, the wider ecumenical movement, and the communities in which you live? What would you like done differently?

86. In pointing to new ways of working, our hope is that the Alliance of the future will not be one in which a few are engaged in activities for or on behalf of its member churches.

Programme possibilities for work within a new vision

87. An emphasis on new ways of working raises two questions: What will become of current WARC programmes? What are the possibilities for new programming? This paper is not intended to settle these questions. Responses will emerge from the interactive process in which member churches participate in identifying priorities.

88. The discussion thus far has affirmed ongoing Alliance commitments to theology and mission, cooperation and witness, partnership between women and men, youth, communications and finance as important priorities in the vision for the Alliance beyond 2004.

89. In addition, the discussion of the signs of our times in part I of this text and the emphasis on an ecumenical movement rooted more organically in the churches and the people that are our constituency – a "people's ecumenical movement" – lead us to note the following programmatic possibilities among other:

1. Engaging in mission together
2. Geopolitics, and commitment to peace and reconciliation
3. Leadership development
4. Revitalizing the Reformed movement and Reformed churches worldwide
5. Reformed spirituality and worship
6. Interfaith relations
7. Health and healing

90. Most probably, the programmes of the Alliance in the years following the 24th general council will be a mix of ongoing commitments and emerging concerns. But the council cannot shape our programme directions and priorities without substantial input from the real owners of the Alliance – the churches.

Questions

16. What programme directions would you like to see the Alliance take after the 24th general council?
17. Are there programmes your church would want to engage in within the framework of the Alliance?
18. Are there programmes that your church would want the Alliance to coordinate for member churches?
19. Are there programmes your church would want the Alliance to conduct on behalf of its churches – without your church necessarily being involved directly?

Human resources and financial constraints

91. The Alliance has traditionally worked with a small but dedicated staff. This springs from our conviction that the Alliance should not be a burden upon our churches, but a benefit to them. Small is beautiful! But we need to recognize that there is a price to pay: however dedicated, a small staff limits the work that can be done within the Alliance framework. Not everything is possible!
92. The 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) affirmed that staffing levels must be guided by a vision for the future rather than finance-driven. This is very much the spirit of the present document. We need to recognize, however, that while staffing should not be driven by finance it is undeniably *constrained* by finance.
93. These financial constraints are real and significant. Ever since the uniting general council (Nairobi 1970), our churches have struggled to fund the Alliance's annual budget. In many years, we have closed the accounts in deficit. These difficulties have been exacerbated in the years since 1997 by national, regional and global economic crises, declining church memberships and falling church taxes. In recent years, the whole world economy has slowed down, and unfavourable exchange rates due to the flight of capital to the Swiss franc as a "safe haven" have deepened our difficulties.
94. There is some good news. Over the period 1997-2002, by designing a "fair fee" scheme for member church contributions and implementing it with energy, we increased our gross income by roughly CHF175,000 (or USD 116,000 at current rates). We thank those churches that have increased their giving or have begun to contribute where previously they did not.
95. In particular, we register here our appreciation to two churches in Germany and one in the USA that faithfully contribute at levels well above the average – demonstrating their commitment to

what we do together through the Alliance. We are equally grateful to the growing number of churches in the south and elsewhere who in spite of difficult circumstances are contributing as much as they can, both in financial and in other forms (eg, by hosting meetings).

96. Our financial constraints are real, but in part they are also *self-inflicted*. Delegates to the 23rd general council insisted that every church should make an annual contribution, in conformity with Alliance by-laws. We are not there yet. If churches that did not pay anything in 2002 had contributed at the levels requested, the Alliance would have received an additional USD92,403 in income; if some of our larger and more affluent churches had contributed at the levels requested, we would have received another USD320,000! It is utopian to expect that we can change this overnight, but we need to do better.
97. We also need to explore with particular member churches ways in which they could give us designated income in addition to their membership contributions. And we are currently working on four other possibilities:
- a) the development of an endowment fund
 - b) the use of a professional US fundraiser
 - c) applications to foundations, and
 - d) applications to specific mission agencies for block grants.
98. In July 2003, the executive committee strongly affirmed the Reformed churches partnership fund, which since 1989 has helped many churches in the south and elsewhere in their local mission. This fund is intended to strengthen self-reliance and provides a better model of partnership between our churches than those paternalistic neocolonial relationships in which the north “gives” and the south “receives”. The development of an endowment fund, while still in its initial stages, also aims at resource sharing that will enable churches especially in the south to engage in life-giving mission while supporting the work of the Alliance as a whole.

Questions

20. Are there ways in which your church can demonstrate that, in spite of the many domestic challenges you may be facing, you value our common mission in WARC by increasing your giving?
21. Are there specific areas of Alliance work to which your church, or bodies within it, can contribute?
22. Can you identify individuals or groups within your church or community who could be encouraged to contribute to WARC’s life-enhancing mission?

Priorities

99. The Alliance needs to prioritize, but it needs to do so on the basis of what is important for our churches in responding to the signs of the times. If we try to do everything, we will do nothing well. Given our limited resources, we need to focus on *a small number of priority programmes*. We see these programmes as linked with mission, justice and leadership development.
100. In our discussion so far, we have affirmed that prioritizing should be within the context of
- interchurch cooperation and solidarity
 - our commitment to justice, human rights and ecumenical engagement
 - the call for spiritual renewal
 - a prophetic church in society confronting global power used idolatrously, and
 - interfaith approaches to issues that affect communities in which Christians and non-Christians face challenges together.

- 101.** But now we need to widen the discussion, to involve our member churches and areas in prioritizing for the future. This will ensure that the work the Alliance focuses on will be the choice of its owners, the member churches, and will come with a commitment to work together on the priorities identified.

Questions

23. Among the programme possibilities for the Alliance that you have identified in response to questions 16 to 19, which programmes do you regard as priorities for the future?
24. In what order would you rank these priority programmes?

Structures

- 102.** To be effective, the Alliance must be close to its member churches. This means seeing ourselves as a fellowship of churches engaged in mission together: *a fellowship of common life and action*.
- 103.** On this understanding, the Alliance is not an organization external to our churches, developing programmes in isolation from them that are then imposed on them as an additional task. On the contrary, it is a fellowship of over 200 churches animated by the desire to engage in common programmes and activities. This requires the Alliance to assist member churches in getting closer to one another and working together. It also requires the Alliance to make more effective use of the resources within our churches.
- 104.** This section does not suggest a new structure for the Alliance. It outlines possible ways in which the various elements of the current structure might be used more effectively, and raises questions about what the WARC constituency might like to see in the future.
- 105.** If the feedback from our churches on what they would like the Alliance to be and do, and in particular on future programmes and programme priorities, indicates a need for structural changes, this will be addressed by the new executive committee together with our member churches immediately after the 24th general council.

Governing structures

- 106.** The general council of the Alliance is the forum through which the churches express themselves at the highest policy level. For this to be effective, it requires mechanisms through which the churches may discuss and reflect on issues and directions in the run-up to the general council. In this way the churches, which are the owners of the Alliance, can truly exercise their role as the real decision-makers. In the three years before Accra, we have spoken of this as a “gathering process”.
- 107.** The general council elects an executive committee (including officers) with seven clear functions:
- To oversee policy between general councils
 - To oversee the coherence of the Alliance’s interregional and interdepartmental work
 - To be closely engaged with member churches, listening to them and bringing their voices to the work of the Alliance – a constant link between the churches in their regions and the organization worldwide
 - To fundraise in their regions and interpret WARC’s financial needs in their regions in a way that can be responded to
 - To engage within their area councils in the time between executive committee meetings

- f) To meet one year after the general council and then every two years
- g) To delegate duties to officers.

108. In addition, officers moderate departments and committees within the Alliance.

Questions

- 25. Are these the functions you would like the current governing structures to fulfil?
- 26. Are there changes you would like to see?

Areas

- 109.** Area councils (and mechanisms for linking member churches in areas where councils do not exist) could play a stronger role in future. Where they function well, area councils can be an effective, contextually relevant means for churches to engage together in common witness and mission. The relationships between the executive committee, the WARC secretariat and the area councils need examining with a view to serving member churches more coherently. This must be a mutual process between the area councils and WARC as a whole.
- 110.** Some concrete suggestions have already emerged. One is to appoint full-time staff to coordinate area structures in Latin America, Asia and Africa. These full-time staff, and their volunteer counterparts in other regions, should understand themselves to be and function as part of “a single team under the leadership of the general secretary”.¹ A second is to strengthen constitutionally the role of secretaries (or presidents) of the area councils as corresponding members of the executive committee.

Questions

- 27. What role do you see for an area council in your region?
- 28. Do we need to strengthen the role of area councils within the Alliance structure and, if so, in what ways?

Secretariat

- 111.** The Alliance should be experienced as a resource for member churches in responding to global trends together. It should not be felt as a burden, constantly adding to the churches’ already heavily crowded programmes or nagging about membership contributions. What kind of staff structure will demonstrate that the Alliance is not simply its secretariat, but our churches engaged in mission together? This is not an easy question.
- 112.** In this context, it is helpful to think of three sets of “WARC offices”.
- 113.** The first set is the national offices of our churches. These church offices have many concerns apart from their membership in WARC or other ecumenical bodies; but the Alliance secretariat and its departments need close links with them to serve the Alliance effectively.
- 114.** The second set is the area councils, already discussed above (pars. 109f). The Alliance secretariat and its departments need to work in close cooperation with these, where they exist.
- 115.** The third set of offices is the general secretariat of the Alliance, currently headquartered in Geneva, which should not be thought of in isolation from the other two and works best when it is closely related to them.

¹As articulated in “The Alliance beyond 1997”, *From Seoul to Debrecen*, p.179.

Questions

29. What staff structure will best help your church to be effectively engaged in developing and implementing Alliance programmes?
30. Do we need a more flexible secretariat, where staff can be allocated and reallocated to programme priorities as these emerge or change?
31. Do we need more decentralized structures? Or more centralized structures?

Interns

116. The Alliance has a long-standing commitment to young people and also to leadership development. Creating space for youth interns to work within the structures of WARC can enhance the skills of young people in coordinating youth networks, as well as offer them the opportunity to provide leadership for WARC's work on youth concerns. This will help train a new generation of ecumenical leaders, thus meeting our commitment to leadership training.

Question

32. Would a youth internship programme within the Alliance be helpful to your church? If so, in what ways?

Church professionals

117. In the last few years, the Alliance has been developing its networks of professionals (communicators, theologians, women, youth, etc.). We need to build up these networks further and to involve relevant professionals in our member churches in working with staff in our programme work. For example, in addressing the global trends in current geo-political directions, or promoting and defending religious and civil liberties, one could call on the social witness staffers in member churches to help build a network of active solidarity. Examples could be multiplied.

Question

33. Are there ways in which you can see your church staff or other competent professionals within your church working more closely with the Alliance in our common work?

Conclusion

118. Envisioning an effective Alliance that strengthens the common life and witness of WARC member churches today and tomorrow is a challenging interactive task. We invite all WARC member churches to engage in this task between now and the 24th general council. This is the way in which all can ensure that the Alliance beyond 2004 is what its owners – the member churches – want it to be.