

## Letters from Overseas

### Kristine Greenaway Writes from Switzerland

Dear United Church of Canada Friends:

April 2009

Warm spring greetings from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Geneva, Switzerland, where as an overseas personnel associate I am working as Executive Secretary for Communications. This letter marks the start of my second quarter in the role which I took over from John Asling when he moved to the UK in December 2008.

In this week of preparation for the sombre reflections of Good Friday and for the joyous celebrations of Easter, we find signs of rebirth all about us as winter ice cracks open and the spring landscape emerges. In many ways, this story of “breaking open” has been the story of church life worldwide since the global economy moved into crisis at the end of 2008. Throughout the winter we watched and waited to see what would happen to our churches and church-based agencies. Now the changes are happening as rapidly as spring ice breaking up in a stream. And so we hear of restructuring at the General Council Office of the United Church and of proposals for new staffing patterns at WARC. Change is in the air for us all.

But with change comes opportunity for new, creative approaches to long-time problems. In Germany, churches and agencies are reconfiguring in ways that could bring renewed life to faith communities in that highly secularized country. In the Ecumenical Centre here in Geneva, staff members from diverse organizations are working together on everything from the simple routines of developing databases to issuing joint news releases to sharing resources for program initiatives. Just as The United Church of Canada took shape in a time of economic crisis, so may the seeds of a new global ecumenism take root in this time of global crisis.

In the midst of all of this, WARC continues to work on behalf of members of the Reformed family worldwide. A few highlights:

**Madagascar**—In the early evening of March 16, I was doing a phone interview with the president of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar for a news release on the growing tension in the country when he interrupted the call to say he had just received news that there were tanks in the street heading for the country’s presidential palace. Twenty-four hours later, we heard that the church president had been arrested and tortured. Soon after, WARC and the Council for World Mission sent a delegation to the church in Madagascar to bring a message of concern and solidarity on behalf of the global Reformed family. WARC’s news releases about Madagascar are available online ([www.warc.ch/Newsreleases](http://www.warc.ch/Newsreleases)).

**South Africa**—In March, WARC’s general secretary and the world president travelled to South Africa for talks among the diverse churches of the Dutch Reformed tradition. The pain of the apartheid era is still very present in church life and continues to represent a significant barrier to full participation in global ecumenism for some churches. Following agreement to suspend talks for the next while, WARC issued a message of cautious hope

for an eventual evolution of minds and hearts towards a truly inclusive understanding of God's family. The news release about the negotiations is online ([www.warc.ch/Newsreleases](http://www.warc.ch/Newsreleases)).

**Cameroon, Argentina, and the Netherlands**—Three countries with different understandings and experiences of mission and colonialism are engaged in an innovative initiative to reflect on doing mission together in the 21st century. The story has caught the attention of Swiss media. Details about the project will soon be available on WARC's website.

Eight regional theological consultations throughout the year—including one for the North American and Caribbean regions in Pittsburgh, USA, in September 2009—will help set the direction as WARC looks ahead to forming a new worldwide "communion" with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is to be launched at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, USA, in June 2010.

**Canada and the USA**—Indigenous leaders from the Great Lakes region around Grand Rapids, Michigan, are being invited to welcome Uniting General Council delegates to their land in a ceremony to mark the opening of the Council. An article in the current issue of WARC's quarterly newsletter *Update* tells the story ([www.warc.ch/newsletter/Warcupdate.html](http://www.warc.ch/newsletter/Warcupdate.html)).

In this year of celebrations of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin, news is coming in from around the world about activities planned to mark the jubilee. Churches are taking the opportunity to reflect on the continuing impact of this early Reformer's legacy in economics, social support networks, public education, and theology. Of particular interest to Canadians is a seminar organized by Emmanuel and Knox Colleges at the University of Toronto, June 18–20, 2009: "Rediscovering Calvin: Resources for Renewal Today—a celebration of history, theology, ministry, music and literature." Details about the programme and registration information are available at [www.vicu.utoronto.ca/emmanuel/coned/calvin.htm](http://www.vicu.utoronto.ca/emmanuel/coned/calvin.htm).

Without the support of M&S, the mission of linking the Reformed family of churches through communication would not be possible. WARC is blessed by the support of The United Church of Canada for this ministry.

May Easter be a time of joy and renewal for you in your work and in your spiritual life.

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World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)

*Kristine Greenaway is a United Church of Canada global mission personnel associate serving with WARC in Switzerland. The work of this global partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.*

