

Letters from Overseas

Kristine Greenaway Writes from Switzerland

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Dear United Church of Canada friends,

On the eve of Canada Day, I send greetings and best wishes from Geneva to my Canadian network of church colleagues and associates.

Even as Canadians worldwide prepare celebrations featuring fireworks and festivities, we recognize Canada is facing many social, economic, and spiritual challenges. As David Giuliano said earlier this year in a news release which I quote in the current issue of WARC's *Update*: "Times of crisis can call out the best in human nature... Solving the current economic crisis will also require our best."

Giuliano goes on to say, "We need to be clear that the needs of hungry children, homeless families, and the working poor supersede the demands of unfettered commerce." He concludes with a challenge to us in The United Church of Canada: "The current economic crisis is calling us to be church in riskier ways than we are used to. I want to encourage you to trust your faith and to take those risks."

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) has been taking the risks of engaging in prophetic ministry on economic justice issues since its last general assembly in Accra, Ghana, when delegates approved a statement called *The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, declaring:

As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term 'empire' we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

...Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe 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 and therefore we confess before God and one another.

This declaration has led to discussion, study, and debate among Reformed churches which focuses on what is meant by "empire" and on whether the document is truly a "confession" or whether it is perhaps better described as a "statement of faith."

These discussions offer new opportunities for member churches to learn from each other about the impact of the statement on their respective communities. An interview with Allan Boesak in the current issue of *Update* highlights a process of dialogue developed by churches in Germany and South Africa so that ordinary people in their constituencies can begin to talk about and take responsibility for the economic and social justice issues identified in the Accra Confession.

The United Church of Canada too is putting concerns for “living faithfully in the midst of empire” in front of church members in creative ways. As I write this letter, I have copies of the study resources produced by the United Church on the theme “Challenging Empire” next to me. How wonderful to see information, questions, and activities offered to children and youth as well as to adults. This is something the United Church does so well and is a gift to the global church. In the same way, the *Mandate* issues on empire include reflective and interactive resources to stimulate our engagement with the forces both within our own hearts and in society which must be transformed if there is to be true and lasting change in the global economy.

On July 10, the worldwide family of Reformed churches will mark the anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Earlier this month, Peter Wyatt and a team from Knox and Emmanuel Colleges hosted an event at the University of Toronto for university and church people interested in exploring the theme “Rediscovering Calvin.” The purpose of the gathering was to learn how “Calvin remains a vital resource for renewal as churches today seek a more compelling witness to, and service of, God’s mission in the world.” Calvin—well-known for the impact his legal and ecclesial reform had on the economy of 16th-century Geneva and on its response to social challenges such as the influx of refugees into the city at that time—is a timely subject of study for today’s churches as they seek to respond faithfully to the 21st century manifestations of similar concerns.

In these and many other ways, WARC and The United Church of Canada share concerns for God’s world. Now more than ever, as WARC seeks financial stability and as the United Church confronts the impact of the global recession on Canada and our church’s global partners, we need to be reminded that WARC has much to offer the United Church and that through WARC, the United Church has much to offer the global family of Reformed churches. The support of the United Church through the M&S Fund which allows me to serve in a ministry of communication with the worldwide Reformed family—115 WARC member churches in 107 countries—is one example.

The meeting of the General Council this summer in British Columbia will be a time of discernment and decision-making. May the Spirit which calls us to community be present to each of you as you gather to look towards the future of our church.

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