

## Letters from Overseas

### Kristine Greenaway Writes from Switzerland

October 2009

Dear United Church of Canada friends,

During this week of Thanksgiving in Canada, I have been reflecting on the many blessings of our church's participation in global ecumenism. In my work in the Communications Office of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), I often hear stories which give reason for thanksgiving. In the last few days I have received three such stories from the global family of Reformed churches.

*From the Pacific region, news that the Uniting Church in Australia is appealing for support for churches in Western Samoa who are actively involved in rebuilding communities hit by the recent tsunami.*

Financial assistance from Australia will underpin the efforts of WARC member church, the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, in its work with the Samoan Council of Churches to support survivors. Church efforts have been so effective that they featured in a recent BBC World Service Radio story.

*From Latin America, a news release about a recent solidarity visit to Honduras by representatives of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) to learn about the situation of churches following the recent coup which ousted the country's president.*

The delegation reports that churches, including WARC member church the Christian Reformed Church of Honduras, are divided between opposing views of the need for the suspension of human rights. Following the visit, the delegation issued a call in the name of the church of Christ for government authorities to reinstate constitutional rights and cease human rights abuses.

*From Europe, news of a meeting of WARC's European regional council where church representatives acknowledged that a new understanding and acceptance of the concept of "empire" is emerging among them.*

The breakthrough is attributable at least in part to the results of a process of joint study and analysis between churches in South Africa and Germany which has sought to establish common understanding for differing perspectives on the impact of the dominant world economic model, referred to as "neo-liberal economics."

Use of the term "empire" to describe the mechanism which imposes the neo-liberal economic model has caused considerable debate among WARC member churches in Europe and the United States. The United Church of Canada, however, has been using the term "empire" for several years in its education and advocacy materials. Our church's understanding of "empire" is articulated in a quote from Gary Kenny in *Mandate* magazine (May 2007).

"Empire is a metaphor for interconnected systems of domination...The common thread is the unjust use of power by some resulting in the disempowerment, abuse, or destruction of others."

Do discussions of global justice issues in any way influence or matter to local congregations? Omega Bula's participation in a recent WARC consultation in Johannesburg on globalization allowed her to share what our church has learned as we work with congregations which are seeking to

understand how to respond to the impact of global economics on local communities. And two stories in the recent edition of WARC's quarterly newsletter *Update* tell of congregations in Europe and North America who are working in their local context to address the consequences of economic and social injustice.

- A group of congregations in a lower middle class neighbourhood of New York's Queens District plans to use theatre to encourage literacy among young men at risk of marginalization.
- A small, aging congregation in Belgium has found new life since opening its doors to asylum seekers.

[See the *Update* story about the literacy project online <[www.warc.ch/NewsletterUpdate](http://www.warc.ch/NewsletterUpdate)> or receive both stories in the print edition by sending a message to WARC <[warc@warc.ch](mailto:warc@warc.ch)>.]

### **News about the Uniting General Council 2010**

Renewal is in the air for the global family of Reformed churches as well. In June 2010 at the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, WARC will merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). This historic event marks another step toward the biblical vision of unity which our churches have pursued for so long. Clearly, Calvin's call for unity still speaks to us today in the year marking the 500th anniversary of his birth.

In connection with the UGC, a group of theologians from around the world is set to meet for a program of study called the Global Institute of Theology (GIT). Under the leadership of Peter Wyatt, young theologians will explore the UGC theme "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace" from Ephesians 4 with a particular focus on a theological understanding of the concepts of "justice" and "Communion" within a confessional body.

Organizing an event for an expected 1,000 participants (including the visitors program, day guests and volunteers) is a massive undertaking and we are grateful that Doug Goodwin has volunteered to join the UGC Communication and News Team with responsibility for managing technical support for the plenary sessions. Watch for the December issue of *Update* with the story of the UGC organizing team based at the offices of REC in Grand Rapids.

WARC welcomes volunteers and stewards to help with the many aspects of running the UGC. Information is available on the Uniting General Council website. Visit [www.reformedchurches.org](http://www.reformedchurches.org) for information about how to apply.

At this busy and exciting time in the life of WARC, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity made possible through the support of the Mission and Service Fund to continue to serve the Reformed churches worldwide in a ministry of communication.

May you feel God's blessings in your work now and in the months ahead.

Kristine Greenaway

***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 is made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

