

PRESS RELEASE 1
Press Release on the International Dialogue Between
The World Communion of Reformed Churches
and Classical Pentecostals

Representatives of various classical Pentecostal churches and a delegation from the World Communion of Reformed Churches met in Legon, Accra, Ghana, November 29 - December 4, 2018. This meeting was the fifth session of the third round, which is focused on “Ministering to the Needs of the World.”

At the beginning and end of each day, participants gather to pray, sing, read and reflect upon the Bible together. This time of sharing in spirituality and worship helps to contextualize the discussions that take place, and builds greater community between participants.

This year, the dialogue focused on the significance of eschatology (those things having to do with the end of time and the return of Jesus, which is our blessed hope) to Mission. To open the discussion, the Rev. Dr. Karla Ann Koll (Reformed) and Rev. Dr. Van Johnson (Pentecostal) prepared and presented papers reflective of the teachings of their faith communities on this topic. Participants then raised questions and responded in a free-ranging discussion intended to tease out common interests and common concerns, while noting differences in understanding.

In her presentation, Dr. Koll demonstrated that Reformed Christians, like Pentecostals, anticipate the return of Jesus Christ to bring the Reign of God in its fullness. Their primary focus has been on sharing the Gospel and caring for the lives and well-being of others in ways they believe are in keeping with that Reign. Following the teachings of John Calvin regarding the sovereignty of God, and their belief that God’s redemptive intention encompasses all of creation, they have been less focused upon events surrounding the Second Coming, and more on the call for the Church to minister until Christ’s return. They maintain that the Holy Spirit empowers them both to promote the Gospel, and work to transform culture and society in keeping with Christ’s will.

Dr. Johnson made the case that both time and space have challenged the way Pentecostals think about and act upon their understanding of eschatology. Pentecostals believe that God has been restoring the purity,

passion, and power of the church through the Holy Spirit, in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ and the inauguration of His kingdom. Like the early church, their expectation that time was short before Christ's return, has motivated much of their mission activity, in which they have emphasized the proclamation of the Gospel to the "lost." Yet, after a century of existence, Pentecostal views of time are changing, leading to shifts in how they view mission. If they have more time to live and act, their view of the world around them, their space, must be taken more seriously than in the past. While continuing to affirm the soon return of the Lord, their notion of mission has broadened beyond proclamation or evangelization alone, to include other missional activities. Now, mission includes a range of activities extending from evangelism to creation care as signs of the future kingdom.

In their desire to immerse themselves in something of Ghana's church life and larger history and culture, dialogue participants met with the President and faculty of Trinity Theological Seminary over lunch and discussion. The group was welcomed by church leaders from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in the home of Rev. Dr. Setri and Akpene Nyomi. On Sunday, participants were privileged to worship with the Faith Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The lectionary reading from 1 Thessalonians 3:8-13 that day seemed to be especially relevant to the discussions of dialogue participants. Following the service, dialogue participants were graciously hosted for a meal, as guests of the church. They also traveled to the Elmina slave castle for a day of reflection on past and present failures of the church to live out the Gospel.

The Reformed team, which hosted this year's encounter, included the Rev. Dr. Karla Ann Koll, co-chair, (Presbyterian Church USA/Costa Rica), Rev. Dr. Hanns Lessing (Executive Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches), Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana), Rev. Dr. Bas Plaisier (Protestant Church in the Netherlands) and Rev. Dr. Gabriella Rácsok (Reformed Church of Hungary). The Pentecostal team included: Rev. Dr. Cecil M. Robeck, co-chair (Assemblies of God, USA), Rev. Dr. Teresa Chai (Assemblies of God, Malaysia), Rt. Rev. Dr. David Daniels (Church of God in Christ, USA), Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Grey (Australian Christian Churches), Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss (Swiss Pentecostal Mission), and Rev. Dr. Van Johnson (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada).

Legon, Accra, Ghana
December 4, 2018