

World Communion of Reformed Churches  
News Release  
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## **Ecumenical Meeting Starts with Protest**

More than 30 representatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) will travel to a small town in south Florida in the United States today to visit and speak with a coalition of low-paid, itinerant tomato pickers about their working and housing conditions and other concerns related to their employment.

As part of a one-day immersion program, WCRC representatives will spend time with workers who are part of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a community-based organization of primarily Latino, Mayan Indian, and Haitian immigrants working in low-wage agricultural jobs throughout the state of Florida. Immokalee is the town where the coalition is based.

“We will learn of the issues that they face and then consider ways in which the WCRC can help them, since justice for workers is a matter that WCRC takes very seriously,” says Peter VanderMeulen, the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s representative to the consultation. The CRC is a member of WCRC and helped host a meeting at which the WCRC was created.

WCRC representatives from all over the world will make the onsite visit at the start of a four-day consultation that, among other things, will seek ways in which the ecumenical organization, formed last summer in Grand Rapids, Michigan, can support immigrant workers who face various challenges obtaining work permits and then eking out a living in this case as tomato pickers in the southern state in the United States.

The visit and consultation emerges out of a mandate provided by the WCRC last year that asks its member churches to find ways in which they can come alongside and support workers worldwide as they struggle for fair compensation and decent living conditions.

In a document accepted at the meeting in Grand Rapids, there is a section that addresses the stance WCRC takes and the actions it wants governments and churches to undertake on issues involving immigrants and their rights.

In part, this document states: “We deplore the ill-treatment of migrants, attacks by individuals, and criminalization by governments ... We urge our governments and churches to see people with dignity and equality. We urge our governments and churches to see people neither as a threat or a commodity ...”

At the meeting with the tomato pickers, say organizers of the event, they will likely hear how “the supermarket industry has yet to agree to the extra penny for

each pound of tomatoes picked. Supermarkets are the only remaining obstacle in the way of a long-awaited, urgent change in the fields.”

After learning from the workers how they have fought to get other parts of the tomato industry to agree to additional payment and how supermarkets are the sole hold-outs, WCRC representatives will gather outside of a grocery store that sells these tomatoes and demonstrate in various public ways about the human injustice involved in keeping the cost of the tomatoes low.

Following the demonstration, they will meet at a nearby church and discuss what they have learned, assess the success of their protest action, and discuss how it fits with WCRC’s strategic vision. They will then depart for Fort Myers, Florida, where the rest of their meeting will be held.

On Friday, the WCRC representatives from countries such as Nigeria, Jamaica, Switzerland, Taiwan, India, Kenya, Canada, and the United States will review the key points, directions, and mandates that came out of the meeting last summer at which the World Alliance of Reformed Churches merged with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

There will then be roundtable discussion, led by such WCRC officials as Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of WCRC. Jerry Pillay, a South African pastor and president of the WCRC, will also lead discussions.

The roundtables will address gender and race issues and economic, climate, and social justice.

The following day, April 2, will be devoted to developing a methodology to implement approaches – educational, spiritual, confrontational, and otherwise – to address key issues brought up last summer.

The final day will be used to refine the methodologies and approaches and draw up key points and future direction for WCRC strategies and priorities.

WCRC was created in June 2010 through a merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). Its 230 member churches representing 80 million Christians are active worldwide in initiatives supporting economic, climate and gender justice, mission, and cooperation among Christians of different traditions.