

World Alliance of Reformed Churches

European Consultation on Communion and Justice
8-12 March 2009, Rüdlingen, Switzerland

Recommendations

1. Occasion

The European WARC Theological Consultation “Communion and Justice” took place in Rüdlingen (CH) from 8 to 12 March 2009, hosted by the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Schaffhausen. It gathered around 20 representatives from all over Europe. It reflected on the themes, which are foreseen for the Uniting General Council between WARC and REC in 2010 in Grand Rapids (USA) as well as the merger itself. The following gives a summary of the main points of the discussions and ends with some recommendations to WARC as far as the merging process and the future new body of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is concerned.

The gathering stressed the relevance of this theme for the Calvin09 year of celebration which has just started. The continuing search for the unity of the church and the commitment for justice were two of the main concerns in the life of John Calvin. This year 2009 is a good opportunity to reflect the common heritage WARC and REC member churches have in the Reformer of Geneva.

2. About “Communion”

Our life as WCRC has its basis in the life of the Triune God, where Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in the eternal perfection of mutual love and joy and whose will to create, reconcile and redeem something other than God, finds expression in the gospel of Jesus Christ made available to the world by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. The WCRC is privileged to share in the blessings of this new life and is inspired, equipped and challenged to live in communion and seek justice as the primary features of its passion to embody God’s mission.

- The idea of becoming a communion of reformed churches was welcomed.
- Communion and justice both have the two dimensions of the cross: *koinonia* means communion with God as well as with the neighbour; justice means the justice given by God to the sinners as well as the dimension of the social consequences of being sisters and brothers.
- What is communion? In January 2008 the WARC Europe Council agreed the following definition: mutual recognition, pulpit and table fellowship, recognition of ministry.
- For a communion, the two ecclesiological aspects (vertical and horizontal) are fundamental, but not subordinating one to the other. In this sense, a communion can also be considered as church. With this definition, the future body is going to shift from an alliance of churches geared towards mainly “action and witness” to also being a church communion. Communion means that church is the human embodiment of the mutual indwelling of the inner-Trinitarian movement of God so that we are “members of one another” (Eph 4.25).
- The communion has to be this spiritually and tangibly, this is more than a mere fellowship. Spiritual cannot mean invisible. The idea of a visible world communion is important especially for minority churches.
- What is the difference between church and communion? Communion would not limit the independence of the churches, but would itself have an ecclesiological

quality, especially towards the other confessions. Nevertheless, an as yet unresolved tension remains between the understanding of church and the understanding of communion. The challenge is to form a new body as a communion of churches where the word can be preached and put into practice, the sacraments celebrated according to the Gospel.

- How to be more deeply in communion? For this we need theological marks of recognition, but we also need an appropriate structure.

- What are the marks of a communion of churches? First discussions gave the following results:

1. The fellowship of table and pulpit;
2. The mutual recognition as church;
3. Mutual recognition of ministry;
4. Witnessing together in the world;
5. Celebrating in a similar way (liturgy);
6. To have a common voice;
7. To develop a reformed spirituality.

- What would change for us as churches in communion?

1. to commit to a deeper level of mutual engagement, including financial obligations;
2. to have a common confessional basis;
3. the development of a common interpretation of reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness;
4. with respect to table and pulpit fellowship and mutual recognition of ministry, we recognize that the churches will need to address issues of interpretation and implementation;
5. to have a common basis for ecumenical dialogue with other confessions;
6. to share liturgical resources.

3. About justice

We cannot go behind Accra, but we now have to move beyond it. We are unequivocally committed to justice as part of our communion. We understand justice as being inseparable from justification. If justice does not flow from justification, we shall come to unjust judgments about churches on the “wrong” and churches on the “right” side. Reformed theology has a strong tendency to become ideological.

Our churches have known the life-giving ministry for a long time. But crying out against injustice is not enough; we need to build structures of justice. We should share best practices of the churches’ positive contributions in the area of justice.

The issue and the language of “empire” is no longer helpful to discuss political structures (1). A confusion has arisen about two things that we have to distinguish: the political structures and a metaphor for oppressive forces. Even as a metaphor, this language creates more problems and divisions than it brings solutions.

Communion is not about getting agreement and consensus, but being an open space where one can feel safe to disagree, without breaking or leaving the communion. The need for mutual engagement means that we are responsible in different ways for the history we share, for healing, reconciliation, mutual forgiveness and economic transformation. We must be able to live with conflict with one another, but in true love.

4. Recommendations

1. To make our new commitment the one to the other visible as well as to underline the fact that we are to create a new body, we need a strong symbolic act during the

Uniting General Council, for instance signing a declaration of communion (2) of WCRC churches;

2. To articulate a shared ecclesiology that reflects vertical and horizontal communion;
 3. To develop means to assess dynamically what is reformed, and define specific and tangible elements of communion among reformed churches;
 4. To make the member churches and the local churches aware that they are part of the communion and what their participation means for them;
 5. To take practical steps to live as a communion (common theological and liturgical resources, intercession, etc.);
 6. To speak with one voice, especially on issues of global concern;
 7. To develop resources on a reformed understanding of the church, church as communion and ministry;
 8. To develop sustainable means for the interpretation of reformed theology;
 9. To organize the General Council in such a way that it has the character of a consultation between delegates from all continents;
 10. To develop the sharing of life-giving ministries among the churches, as well as good practices about the churches' contribution in the fight against injustice;
 11. To encourage and develop a greater sense of ownership among the member churches through committed financial contributions, however small.
- (1) For a few of the participants the language of 'empire' continues to make sense. However, seen from the perspective of so many not being helped by this language, it has been stated that it is not helpful.
- (2) This declaration should be made available to the member churches at the very latest on 1st December 2009.