

Mission Section Plenary Report

Mission is at the heart of our understanding of the church. As we have gathered in Accra for the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, sharing in the fullness of life (John 10.10) with sisters and brothers from churches all over the world, we have been mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1.12). Our commitment to mission has been strengthened in our fellowship together and through the stories of hope we have shared. In Accra, we have been challenged to rethink our understanding of mission; to reconsider the ways in which we participate in God's mission in our different cultures and contexts, to reflect upon new challenges for mission, and to strengthen our relationships with one another as we engage in mission.

The groaning of creation and the cries of the poor and the marginalized are calling us to conversion for and recommitment to mission. In this report, we wish to share with all our churches what we have learned in Accra and the implications of our sharing together for the future of our common witness to the gospel.

1. Mission in the Context of Globalization

- 1.1 Economic globalization challenges Christian mission and the integrity of the church. However, globalization is no longer an adequate term to describe the threat to life in fullness. As we look at the consequences of globalization for the most vulnerable and for the earth community as a whole, we have begun to rediscover the evangelical significance of the Biblical teaching about Empire. This is related to the Exodus, the Babylonian captivity and the Macedonian and Roman occupation of Palestine (Ex 3-12; Ps 137; Dan 2; Hosea 7; Luke 13; Eph 3; Rev 12-13). Today, we define Empire as the convergence of economic, political, cultural and military interests that constitute a system of domination in which benefits flow primarily to the powerful. Centred in the last remaining superpower, yet spread all over the world, Empire crosses all boundaries, reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, overcomes nation states, and challenges religious communities.
- 1.2 Empire is reshaping the ways that churches relate to one another, globally and locally. In many countries in the world, churches and individual Christians are being attacked. Many of our sisters and brothers are suffering for their faith, and we are in solidarity with them. In some instances, they are suffering because of the seeming identification of globalization, Empire and Christian mission. We have seen irrefutable evidence that gross injustices have been committed in the name of Christian mission in Africa and other parts of the world. In different ways, these continue to be reproduced today. Our recommitment to mission renewal must be accompanied by repentance and forgiveness for what we have done and what we have left undone, both today and in our earlier practices.
- 1.3 We need to draw a clear distinction between Christian mission and the forces of domination, patriarchy, racism, and institutional injustice that are associated with Empire. This will involve a new Christian vision, rooted in apostolic faith, which stands for the fullness of life in a world of worsening poverty, environmental degradation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, terrorism, and war.
- 1.4 In the stories of hope and our sharing of experiences with one another, we see glimpses of this vision (1 Cor 13.12). Our stories of suffering and hope, our experiences of personal, social, and ecclesial transformation in the living practice of God's mission to the world challenge the context of globalization and Empire.

2. Mission in the Fullness of Life: Towards New Missiologies of Life

- 2.1 Mission is the life of the people of God among all God's peoples, bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the life of the Holy Spirit. God's mission is plural and can no longer be expressed in any one single missiology. Missiologies of life are Spirit-centred missiologies, expressed in stories and experiences drawn from our own contexts, in dialogue with the Word of God.

- 2.2 Missiologies of life are a continuation of the mission of Jesus in announcing God's reign (Luke 4.18). The God of the covenant with the earth community was in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was a prophet who resisted Empire and domination of every kind, a priest who comforted those who were powerless and broken, impoverished and marginalized, a King who became a Servant who saw the other side of Empire. Christ is at work today in establishing inclusive and open communities of renewal and hope among us. The mission of Jesus is our mission.
- 2.3 Continuing the mission of Jesus is related to a range of images centring on mission in the household of life (1 Pet 2.5). Households are everywhere, and the flow of mission is everywhere. Mission as communion, partnership, hospitality, stewardship, mutuality, solidarity, accountability, are all related to the image of household. Household focuses on the ecumenical mission of all in each place. Patriarchy imposes limitations upon women in the household, the church, and the public sphere, and ageism limits the participation of youth. Mission in the fullness of life includes gender justice and the participation of youth and is available to all women and men.
- 2.4 Missiologies of life emphasize healing and wholeness in our divided and broken world. Healing brings the waters of life (Ez 47.9) and the promise of new life in Christ (1 Cor 15.22). New life means the healing of memories of injustices that have been done in the name of mission, deliverance from the powers that continue to enslave our peoples; healing in the Body of Christ afflicted with HIV/AIDS, reconciliation among churches, healing of our relationships with other religious traditions, and the healing of the earth community.
3. *Mission in the Life of the Spirit: Engagement with Pentecost and Pentecostalism*
- 3.1 Pentecost is a gift and a calling of the whole church. We need to develop further what this means for theologies of the spirit that can inspire new ways of doing mission. We have heard many stories of the ways that Reformed spirituality resists evil, affirms life in fullness, and calls churches to mission renewal in local and global contexts.
- 3.2 The World Alliance of Reformed Churches is engaged in a dialogue with Pentecostals, the results of which, we believe, can be used by member churches in relationships in their own contexts. The growth, adaptability, spiritual exuberance, and networking of Pentecostals worldwide challenge our churches to new forms of engagement in mission. Dialogue with Pentecostals has also compelled us to reconsider the sources for spiritual renewal for mission in our traditions.
- 3.3 There is much we can learn from the Pentecostal movement. For example, their emphasis on the Holy Spirit in mission, participatory forms of worship, and lay leadership can all contribute to our own life of worship and mission.
- 3.4 At the same time, we must also discern the Spirit in different contexts, because some Pentecostal mission practices are problematic for our churches. For example, we have serious differences on such issues as proselytism, gender justice, and teachings about a gospel of prosperity.
4. *Engagement with Other Religious Communities*
- 4.1 Religious communities are today facing what has been called a "clash of civilizations" as globalization and Empire manipulate cultural, ethnic, and political tensions for the powerful. Religious persecution and inter-religious conflict pose new challenges for mission in many churches and contexts.
- 4.2 Reformed churches have not developed an adequate approach to religious plurality, and yet our churches increasingly find themselves in multireligious contexts demanding new responses. Mission and dialogue are both needed, but we also need new forms of interreligious engagement to address issues of interreligious conflict.

- 4.3 Christians are disciples of Jesus who are the people of God among all God's peoples. All over the world, Christians are living in the midst of people from other religious communities, and our churches must be engaged with them. In our encounter with people of other faiths, we witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, as we learn from and listen to others' unique religious teachings.
- 4.4 We need to develop processes of contextual discernment in relating to other religious communities. This involves interfaith listening and programmes of sharing and exchange. In a world of globalization and Empire, we need interfaith solidarity in mission so we can work together on issues that affect us all. In our attempts to understand interfaith solidarity, theologies of life in fullness will complement more traditional theologies of salvation.
5. *Towards a Fellowship of Reformed Churches Covenanting Together in Mission*
- 5.1 We are called to proclaim the Good News in a time in which the historical challenges seem overwhelming to our churches. Our common calling moves us to pray that we might grow into fuller communion with one another, in obedience to the God who calls us to be in mission.
- 5.2 We are called to be a fellowship of churches in mission. Whether we are churches in poor or in rich countries, we are required to ask ourselves whether our mission relations are fair and effective, whether they are unilateral or multilateral, whether they are captive to the powers of this world or sharing the power of love, whether they lead us to financial dependence or mutual inter-dependence, mutual vulnerability and mutual accountability.
- 5.3 We must confess that Reformed mission has often been an individualistic and entrepreneurial or bilateral effort lacking accountability. This has caused church division in many places. We must move toward new ways of sharing, for mission is not to gain power but to share the power of love. Sharing is expressed by such terms as solidarity, partnership, mutual dependence, inter-dependence, mutual vulnerability and accountability. New disciplines of mission that embody a practice of unity respecting the unique role of churches in each place are needed.
- 5.4 Mission means covenanting together. Our new missiologies must be reflected in the structural relationships we maintain with one another as churches. We therefore call on our churches to prayerfully consider and carefully discuss what it might mean to see the World Alliance of Reformed Churches as a fellowship of churches covenanting together in mission, developing in dialogue with one another new missiologies of life, and exploring together new patterns of sharing for our common calling.