



MINUTES
REFORMED FAMILY FORUM (ENCONTRO DA FAMILIA REFORMADA)
28-31 July 2017

“Celebrating reformation 500 as a Family of Reformed Churches in Africa”

1. Attendance

Rev Vasco Kachipapa – CCAP (Nkhoma Synod)
Dr Andries Hoffman – DRCA (South Africa)
Dr William Zulu – RCZ (Zambia)
Rev Charles Juro – RCZ (Zimbabwe)
Rev Libias Boloma – CCAP-Harare (Zimbabwe)
Dr Arnau van Wyngaard – SRC (Swaziland)
Dr Gustav Claassen – DRC (South Africa)
Dr Len Hansen – NetACT (South Africa)
Mrs Mariëtte Odendaal – Witness Ministry (Western Cape Region, South Africa)
Rev Masilo Pooyane – DRCB (Botswana)
Rev Peter Azuana – NKST (Nigeria)
Rev William Julius – URCSA (South Africa and Namibia)
Rev Kovilan Moodley RCA (South Africa)
Rev Carlos Erbarde Pedro IRM (Mozambique)
Rev Gabriel Marata – IRM (Mozambique)
Dr Kobus Odendaal – Witness Ministry (Western Cape Region, South Africa)
Rev Timoteo Fabiao – IRM (Mozambique)
Rev Jonah Lagat – RCEA (Kenya)
Dr Gideon van der Watt Partners in Mission (Free State, South Africa)

2. Introduction

Each of the attendees was given a chance to introduce him or herself. It was good to hear each other's stories – this meeting is also about building relationships between individuals. The meeting also sang a few hymns: it was good to gather as family!

3. Opening Friday Evening

Rev Vasco Kachipapa, the current chairperson, opened the meeting with scripture reading and prayer. He underlined the importance that God wants to enter a relationship with individuals and not only with communities. God created us as particular individuals. Noah and his families had to enter the Ark as individuals – so did the animals. He sent his Son as an individual to save us from our sins. Jesus saw Zacchaeus in a tree – as individual – and he showed compassion towards him and his family. In Luke 15 the parables told is also about individuals. In the African context the

emphasis is always put on the community, but in our ministry we should not forget about the individual.

This message was also linked to the Reformation – it has been an individual like Luther who took the initiative to start this movement. As individuals we are called to make a difference in our world.

4. Stories from the different churches

It was decided not to give time for every church to tell its stories, but only to listen to the stories of those churches/countries who are represented for the first time in this forum.

4.1 Nigeria:

Brother Peter Azuana gave out a pamphlet on the NKST (see **attachment 1**). He spoke about the Fulani Herdsmen's attacks on their church, which left deep scars on the church. Many people have been killed and churches destroyed. The Nigerian government is not intervening in this massacre (genocide) by Boko Haram and other Jihadist organisations – it is a new violent colonisation and Christians and churches are wiped out in the process. Rev Azuane pleaded for our continuous prayers.

4.2 Swaziland

Dr Arnau van Wyngaard introduced the Swaziland Reformed Church to the meeting – it is a small church with less than 1000 members. They face challenges from the Traditional African religions and the Charismatic (Neo-Pentecostal) movements. Swaziland has the highest rate of HIV-Aids infections – at some stage 46%. The fact that the King has 15 wives is not helpful in creating moral values and protecting the dignity of women. The communities are impoverished. They have become involved in home based care programs. They are training caregivers, feeding 600 children on daily basis in a feeding scheme and have been taking around 400 children into day care centres. They are also involved in a wheel chair project. All of these projects have become part a NGO named: "Shiselweni Home-Based Care" or SHBC (See pamphlet – **attachment 2**)

Like other Southern African countries, Swaziland is also affected by a severe drought – people are hungry.

At present there is only one "missionary" left in the SRC. There are a few "indigenous" ministers, but they are not yet wel trained.

4.3 Namibia

Namibia is the third new country represented for the first time on this forum. Rev William Julius (URCSA) informed the meeting on the following:

Namibia is currently a very peaceful country. There are many opportunities, but also some challenges. Regarding the ministry, the congregations are often very small and the distances between them very large. Finances are also a big problem. They are losing young people: – what would be an authentic way to reach out to the youth? They try to establish an integrated model – involving everybody. The occurrence of teenage pregnancies is a problem. There is a shortage of

ministers; many of the ministers are also tentmakers (part time). (It is interesting to note that Nigeria, on the contrary, has too many qualified pastors! Can there some taking of hands in this regard?)

The relationship with the DRC is still not very good – the DRC's inability to accept Belhar is a problem. There are about 10 000 members of URCSA in Namibia.

One of the problems the URCSA General Synod is struggling with, is the absence of a general secretary and an office for their General Synod.

4.4 Reformation 500 celebrations in Germany

Some members of the meeting (Gustav Claassen, Libias Bolome, William Zulu, Charles Juro, William Julius, etc.) have been participating in the celebrations of Reformation 500 in Germany. They were requested to give some feedback.

According to Dr Gustav Claassen it has been a wonderful experience to attend the second general meeting of WARC, but also with some disappointments. The spirituality/liturgy of the celebrations was not so good as they expected. A wide spectrum of theological viewpoints have been accommodated, but with a consensus on the core issues. Not much attention was given to, for instance, catechism.

The signing of the joint declaration (by Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed Churches) on justification was a highpoint - the Wittenberg declaration.

According to Dr William Zulu, the WARC is too weak in its operations at regional level. Charles Juro pointed out that the dialogue between Christians and Muslims will become increasingly important, as well as the Jews-Palestinians issue. We must understand that we cannot equate the current Jewish state with that of the Biblical people of God concept.

Mozambique's representatives remarked that they feel totally excluded from these ecumenical bodies and events.

5. Closing prayers Friday evening

Rev Charles Juro closed the meeting with prayer.

6. Saturday morning – opening

Rev William Julius opened with Scripture reading. At the WCRC the theme was taken from Romans 12:1-2 "the living God is transforming us – Reformation 500". In Romans 12 Paul brings us back to the essence of religion – transforming and renewing our lives, our thinking, our acting, our bodies. We cannot be conformed to the world, but be transformed to live within the will of God.

(1) We need to offer our bodies as sacrifice, as temples sanctified by God. We need to surrender ourselves – holiness as goal.

(2) We need to renew our minds; we often think so wrongly about things. We must learn to think biblically, in line with the teachings of the Bible.

(3) Paul is asking us to undergo a metamorphosis – to assume a totally new shape

Rev William then applied it: Instead of building walls (like in the Trump-era), we need to build bridges. Jesus came to break down walls and barriers between people.

7. Stories of churches (continuation)

7.1 Discussion on RCEA (Kenya) – Rev Jonah Lagat

One of the main challenges in their church is financial sustainability – the church is very poor. Ministers cannot be paid. The church however has resources that can be unlocked: buildings, land, resourceful people, etc. The church is not focusing enough on capacity building and stewardship. The current drought is a very big problem.

Al Shaba-ab is persecuting Christian minorities in certain areas, especially the Northern Corridor. They also embarked on aggressive mission programs, financed by Saudi Arabia.

He also requested the meeting to pray for the upcoming elections. In Kenya.

7.2 Discussion on CCAP Malawi - Rev Vasco Kachipapa

Whilst the population is increasing rapidly, Malawi is not growing economically. People survive on rice and fish caught in Lake Malawi and burning trees for charcoal. The church is growing, but it lacks spiritual depth. The role of ministers has been reduced to ministering sacraments from place to place.

There is much political corruption in Malawi. Even Christians have been caught up in being corrupt. The Christian leaders of Malawi are also working with Arab nations for the financial benefits, but it boils down to a new colonisation.

The church is still struggling with the issue of women in office.

7.3 RCZ Zambia – Dr William Zulu

The Church also faces many problems:

- (1) Rising political tension in the country is also impacting the church
- (2) The church is not really involved in community development projects – much need to be done regarding poverty and other social issues.
- (3) The church must find ways to communicate better
- (4) There is no proper retirement scheme for ministers

7.4 CCAP Harare – Rev Libias Boloma

The country faces many challenges: Political, economic, social, etc. Tensions are rising as they approach new political elections next year. There is a great scarcity of electricity and water. Joblessness is over 90%, with no cash for those who have jobs.

The economic problems create a void for Islam to make inroads. Prosperity gospel and other sects are also rising.

7.5 RCZ, Zimbabwe – Rev Charles Juro

Rev Juro also presented a written presentation – *see attachment 3*.

Zimbabwe has no currency of its own – the Zim. Dollar collapsed. The government started to tax churches on their offerings.

He is concerned about Neo-Pentecostal influences in the church

7.6 DRCB – Rev Masilo Poonyane

See *attachment 4*.

8. Summary of important issues from the different churches' stories

- (1) Although the focus is very much on community in the African context, we must not lose sight on the importance of the individual – also in our ministries
- (2) The onslaught of Islam on Christianity and by way of a new colonisation of Africa is evident in all the countries.
- (3) HIV Aids remains an important matter
- (4) The drought (climate change) is having a huge effect
- (5) Many of the countries (especially Zimbabwe) are struggling with poverty – the churches are mostly also very poor.
- (6) The churches are not effectively reaching out to young people – it is mostly older people that are involved in church matters
- (7) Leadership in ministry remains a very important matter – many vacancies in minister's posts. How are we to fill these vacancies? Or must we consider new models of ministry?
- (8) We will have to build the regional strength of Reformed Ecumenical bodies
- (9) We need to find more effective ways of taking hands as sister churches and share our resources.
- (10) Reformation 500 reminds us of the need to continue with the process of renewal
- (11) We must break down walls and build bridges – despite the current opposite approach in the world.
- (12) Pension funds for ministers
- (13) Relation church-politics (the Church's prophetic role)
- (14) Need for transformational Community Development
- (15) Israel/Palestine issue is on the agenda of ecumenical bodies.

9. Community development – Dr Botha van Aarde (see attachment 5)

Dr Botha van Aarde presented a workshop on Transformational community Development. He gives the core definitions and guidelines on how to engage in community development. It has to be understood as a "missional" movement – participating in God's mission to the world. Important concepts are: the community itself is the agent, not us who are endeavouring to do something;

listening and understanding is very important; the aim is to create “us –communities” with restored relationships, etc.

The aim is:

- (1) to focus on the recovery/repair of God’s reign in the world
- (2) by prevention, alleviation, removal, after care of, and endurance with
- (3) the suffering and social distress of individuals and communities
- (4) as well as the promotion of justice (righteousness) within all relationships in church and society

Categories of need:

- (1) material needs – hunger / thirst / without clothes
- (2) pastoral needs – strangers / sick / prisoners

Modi/dimensions of diaconate:

- (1) (Social) welfare diaconate / social well-being
- Psalm 72:12 He rescues the poor who call to him, and those who are needy and neglected. / those without any helper
- (2) Friendship diaconate / evangelisation
- (3) Righteous diaconate / restorative justice
- (4) Prophetic diaconate (on structural injustice)
- (5) Developmental diaconate
= ABCD-diaconate (asset-based-community development)
- (6) Endurance diaconate
- (7) Environmental diaconate

Important concepts are also partnerships and human dignity

10. Workshop on leadership and leadership training – Dr Len Hansen – (see *attachment 6*)

He refers to the link on NetACT’s website (<http://netact.christians.co.za/>) with findings of a wide research project on leadership in Africa (especially Christian Leadership) – <http://www.africaleadershipstudy.org/>

Important concepts:

- (1) Ministers are important/influential leaders – churches play a vital role in Africa
- (2) Women in churches can also impact the world
- (3) Leaders must be able to handle technology
- (4) Mentoring is important
- (5) Relationships
- (6) Education
- (7) Servant leadership

Dr Hansen also discusses the importance of theological training and the assistance that Net ACT can provide in this regard. How can theological training curb the many power struggles in church?

11. Book Launch

The Saturday evening there was an enjoyable celebration and the launching of two very relevant books:

- (1) Gerber, Kobus (ed.) 2017, *Reformation 500 – Some South African Perspectives*, CLF
- (2) Van der Watt G & M Odendaal, 2017, *A Family of Reformed Churches in Africa – Remarkable Stories of God’s Grace*, CLF

The discussion on the two books was very enriching.

12 Church service

On Sunday morning the meeting attended a special service and the Lords’ supper at the Charisma Congregation of the RCA in Laudium. People of different cultures and language worship in this congregation. Rev Victor Pillay preached on the Reformed solas: sola gratia, sola fidei, sola scriptura, solus Christus and soli Deo gloria! After the service he told the RCA’s story and presented a PowerPoint show. The Congregation, together with the Shanti Congregation of Rev Kovilan Moodley, served us with a wonderful meal.

13. Workshop on Reformed Identity – Prof Rian Venter – see attachment 7

Prof Venter referred to the recurring questions on reformed identity and calling. Why are we asking these questions? Can there be one simple answer? Or are we continuously revisit myths about being reformed? The answer is multi-layered and he mentioned 4 challenges:

- (1) Retrieving institutions
- (2) Exploring wisdom
- (3) Unlearning vices
- (4) Innovating the agenda

We must embrace the responsibility for the future (communal flourishing) – also by making a public contribution

13. Business meeting

13.1 Partnership Projects

The meeting decided to focus on the following partnership projects:

- (1) Literature (Catechism book)
 - Jonah Lagat, Covilan Moodley and Vasco Kachipapa are requested to develop a document on servant leadership in the church in Africa
 - Andries and Rev Poonyane are requested to develop a pamphlet on the role of elders
 - develop a pamphlet about the thread of radical Islam in Southern Africa .
- (2) Looking into the possibility of pension funds
- (3) A Conference on reaching out to youth
- (4) Further research on our context/challenges

13.2 Functioning of Forum

- (1) There must be a management committee
- (2) Allow new churches to the Forum – especially the Lesotho Evangelical Church
- (3) Next year's meeting could be hosted by the IRM in Maputo
- (4) Develop a Facebook page, a web-page and more presence on social media (Mariette and Arnau)
- (5) Gideon to write a statement that must go out to all the churches
- (6) Gideon and Kobus to write a MOU/Constitution in order to properly constitute ourselves as a forum.

13.3 Electing a leadership committee

Chairperson: Kovilan Moodley (RCA)

Vice-Chairperson: Timoteo Fabiao

Gideon's office will serve as secretariat/address and Kobus Odendaal will also serve on the management committee

13.4 Next meeting

The weekend of 27/28/29 of July 2018