

LETTER FROM THE REFORMED DELEGATION AT



TO THE COUNCIL OF THE



June 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers

In the context of worship, Bible Studies and vibrant discussions, we as a delegation of the Reformed family of churches joined over 300 members of the Ecumenical family broadly representing the global Christian church as we gathered in Edinburgh, Scotland from 2-6 June 2010. The Edinburgh 2010 conference, under the theme of ‘Witnessing to Christ Today’, was both a commemoration of the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference, a celebration of what God has made possible in mission since and a moment of deep reflection on the challenges facing churches in the 21st century.

1John 1:3 reminds us that we are to “declare what we have seen and heard” from God in fellowship with one another, and this provides a theological rationale for churches working together for the sake of mission. Matthew 28:18-20 also impels us to share the Good News with the rest of the world.

The touching liturgies, riveting Bible studies, moving songs, engaging presentations and enlivening human encounters have all left a deep and lasting impression on us. Throughout the five days one thing stood out: Mission, understood as God moving towards humanity, remains as urgent a calling for us as it was one hundred years ago. The central message of Edinburgh 2010 is a renewed call for holistic Christian mission from every corner of the earth to every corner of the earth.

Yet the conference also recognized that the context in which Christian mission is to be carried out has changed vastly since 1910. Today the world can no longer be easily divided into the Christian World and the non-Christian World – at least not geographically. If the heartlands of Christianity

were Europe and America in 1910, in our own time Christianity is growing fastest in Asia, Latin America and Africa, the so-called global South.

Whereas the Edinburgh 1910 conference met against the backdrop of colonialism and imperialism, Edinburgh 2010 meets in a context in which these and the Cold War have disappeared in their earlier manifestations. In their place we now have globalization. And yet the cumulative legacies of colonialism, imperialism and the two World Wars followed by countless civil wars have left deep scars on the peoples and countries of the world – Christians not excepted.

A hundred years after Edinburgh 1910, we have come to recognize and acknowledge the presence of other faiths and other traditions. We no longer think it appropriate to define God's other people of faith as "non-Christians". A hundred years later, we have come to a deeper understanding of both human and ecological rights. We realize that while old divisions may have disappeared, inequality, injustice and violence remain with us.

This then is the context into which Reformed churches are called to become witnesses of Christ. As Reformed Churches we are called to celebrate the strides made through God's grace since 1910. But we are also called recognize the challenges that remain.

- Christian mission should no longer be a matter of pride and aggression, but conducted with humility as a witness to Christ the risen Lord.
- As affirmed by the 1989 San Antonio World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Christian mission should no longer be understood as a matter of senders and receivers, subjects and objects. The *Missio Dei* impels us all to become agents of mission. In this manner, mission will cease to be conducted as if it was what rich countries do to poor countries; what whites do to blacks, what the rich do to the poor and what men do to women. In this regard, it is particularly important that we listen to what the Spirit is saying about mission in the life and witness of the churches of the global South.
- At the Edinburgh 2010 conference it became clear to us that unity in mission is important, but it is also important that we allow and make space for diversity of methods and expressions. Christian mission is 'exploding' in different places and in different forms. Our primary duty is one of listening and affirming rather than controlling. And yet as Reformed churches, we must always keep the vision of united witness firmly before us, working hard to move in the direction of unity in diversity, unity in witness.
- Christian mission is not only a matter for adults. It has become essential that we listen to and make space to the voices and concerns of children and youth.
- For us Edinburgh 2010 was unequivocal on challenges relating to social justice, human dignity and human rights. Christian mission is necessarily about the fate and state of the poor and the marginalized in all countries of the world. Christian mission is about human dignity – dignity derived from God. To this end Christian mission aims to confront all the sins that affront the dignity of human beings – poverty, hunger, disease, violence and war.

- However, Edinburgh went further than only recognizing social justice issues. Social justice issues were linked to ecological justice issues. The cry of the poor is the same as the cry of the earth. Just as the poor buckle under the heavy yoke of unjust economic policies and practices, the earth is buckling under the weight of massive degradation and wanton destruction carried out in the name of progress and development. The challenge of mission in the 21st century includes finding bridges and linkages between the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. The option for the poor should also include solidarity with the earth.
- Christian mission can no longer be conducted as if Christianity was the only religion in the world. We have to respect and collaborate with other religions. Yet, at the same time, we are encouraged to remain faithful to our faith and our traditions – bearing witness to Christ from deep within these traditions.

Brothers and sisters, we have taken the liberty to write you this letter from Edinburgh, in order to share with you ‘what we have seen and heard ... so that you may have fellowship with us even as our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (1 John 1:3).

We pray that God will renew your vigor and hunger for mission as you join us in living out these affirmations of mission in the 21st century and, together with our ecumenical colleagues around the globe, in affirming the *Common Call* of Edinburgh 2010, as printed below.

May the creation and the deliberations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches be instrumental in our life and witness together as creative and effective missional churches.

Yours Sincerely,

The Reformed delegation and Mission Today representatives to Edinburgh 2010,

Dr Clifton Kirkpatrick (United States of America)

Dr Setri Nyomi (Ghana)

Ms Jet den Hollander (Netherlands)

Rev Norman Francis (Jamaica)

Rev Adelaida Jiminez Cortes (Colombia)

Dr Tinyiko Maluleke (South Africa)

Dr Mary Mikhael (Lebanon)

Rev Simon Ririhena (Moluccas / Netherlands)

Rev Julio Lopez (Mission Today Pilot Project– Argentina)

Dr Wout van Laar (Mission Today Pilot Project - Netherlands)

Attachment: Edinburgh 2010 Common Call

Edinburgh 2010

COMMON CALL

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.
2. Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.
3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.
4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.

5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.
6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century, we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another's unique charisms, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.
7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.
8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.
9. Remembering Jesus' way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ's coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

Edinburgh, June 6, 2010