



MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT
between
THE UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
(URCSA)
and
THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH
(DRC)

1. Introduction

The Executives of URCSA and DRC have met in November 2011, February 2012 and July 2012 to discuss the way forward after the DRC General Synod has started a process to get the Belhar Confession to be included as a confession in a church orderly way. From these meetings and a mutual discernment of God's will, the Executives has agreed to draw up a memorandum of agreement, sign it and present it to our various church structures for acceptance.

2. Preamble

- 2.1** We as churches have decided to covenant together, because we believe that the Lord, who graciously committed himself to us, requires this of us. We use the term covenanting because we want to bring ourselves and the reunification process under the authority of the word of God and the will of Christ. As the family of churches we already decided together at Achterbergh to journey together.
- 2.2** We envisage a new organically united reformed church, organized according to synodical-presbyterial structures, which lives missionally and is committed to the biblical demands of love, reconciliation, justice and peace. At the same time we are committed to non-racialism, inclusiveness and the acceptance and celebration of our multicultural composition. The different languages in our churches will be treasured.

2.3 From within our common faith in the triune God we commit ourselves anew to Africa, the continent where the Lord has placed us, and particularly to Southern Africa. We wish to take up this calling together to make a difference to the life-threatening problems facing our countries. In the process of spreading the gospel, we covenant to work together in concrete ways such as:

- inviting people to life in fullness in Christ
- promoting of healing and wholeness for all of life
- engaging in prophetic dialogue with others on societal matters
- embodying, modeling and promoting moral values of Scripture
- seeking and advocating justice for all
- achieving reconciliation, which is more than mere tolerance of one another
- opposing violence and abuse of power of all kinds in our society,
- promoting and embracing human dignity and gender equity

3. On church unity

3.1 We commit ourselves to the following model of unity:

From the different models for church unity in different churches, we intentionally choose a presbyterial-synodical church body (i.e. organic) that supports the Gospel of Jesus Christ who broke down the wall of separation between people (Ephesians 2: 14-16).

Ephesians 2

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,

16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

3.2 We believe that this proposed model is a Scriptural embodiment of unity in the Southern African context. This model we believe can help the church on different levels to be the living body of Christ in the world.

3.3 As reformed churches we believe that the local congregation is the expression of the church of Christ in a local community, but we also believe that local congregations live in communion with one another and this communion is expressed in various

manners e.g. presbyteries, synods. The two churches undertake to identify ways in which the local churches can express their unity with each other inter alia forming uniting congregations, receiving ministers across cultures, starting uniting commissions and projects, re-aligning the congregations with their full consent to incorporate wards of other cultures.

3.4 We agree that getting the church to be fully one will be a process and that it will ask of us to commit ourselves to journey and grow together.

3.5 We propose that the churches start a process to obtain the permission of all the congregations of the churches (in the exact way currently prescribed in the church order of the particular church) for the following:

- the forming of a new General Synod as expression of new denominational ties (*kerkverband*)
- the formulating of the confessional basis for the reunited church
- to approve amendments to existing Church Orders needed for the formation and restructuring of a reunited church
- to approve that, after the forming of a new General Synod, a process will follow by which the regional synods and presbyteries engage in processes of expressing the reunited church at their respective levels
- the name of the reunited church
- The church orderly position of congregations with regard to ministry, property, etc.
- The actuarii of the General Synods form a task team to evaluate the existing church orders and to start a process to amend them in the correct way in order to make such a process possible.
- In the process of a General Synod being formed, the Regional Synods will assume unification on the same principles as the General Synod although the finalisation of the new General Synod will have precedence

4. On the Confession of Belhar

4.1 We agree that the Confession of Belhar will be taken up in the confessional basis of the reunited church.

4.2 We understand that the Dutch Reformed Church decided to make the Confession of Belhar part of the confessional basis of the Dutch Reformed Church in a church orderly way and we also understand that it proposed to do it in the following way:

- 4.2.1 *The doctrine which the Church confesses in accordance with the Word of God, takes place in communion with the confession of our tradition as it is expressed in*
- *the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed through which the Church expresses her connectedness with the catholic Christian Church, and*
 - *the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dordt through which the Church expresses her connectedness with the reformed tradition.*
- 4.2.2 *In connectedness with our own context we acknowledge the Confession of Belhar.*
- 4.3 We understand that the Dutch Reformed Church will have to follow the Dutch Reformed Church's Church Order to make the Confession of Belhar part of the confessional basis of the Dutch Reformed Church.
- 4.4 We agree that the churches will journey together in this process of acceptance and renewed engagement of the Confession of Belhar.
- 4.5 We understand that the decision of the 2011 General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church is a journey towards full acceptance of the Confession of Belhar as part of the confessional basis of the Dutch Reformed Church.
- 4.6 Where congregations, ministers, and members of the Dutch Reformed Church do not underwrite the Confession of Belhar as an article of faith, we are committed to journey with them.

5. On restorative justice and reconciliation

- 5.1 We acknowledge that church unity and the Belhar Confession urges us to also speak about restorative justice and reconciliation. As churches we have therefore decided to embrace the following:
- 5.1.1 Restorative justice should not be an end in itself but always lead to reconciliation. Reconciliation should be the restoration of communities at different levels of society: personal, social, political, denominational, economical, emotional and spiritual reconciliation between God and us.

5.1.2 We believe that restorative justice is a Biblical imperative that restores life in its fullness. It restores imbalances of the past and imbalances in God's creation and glorifies God through our restored unity and reconciliation.

5.1.3 We accept that restorative justice is a complex process which will ask some sacrifices. We will therefore need good stewardship but also a clear vision on the possible outcomes of such a process.

5.2 Regarding reconciliation we agreed on the following statements:

5.2.1 We believe that true reconciliation is a deeply spiritual process. Christian principles like sacrifice and forgiveness should not be neglected. Without the necessary spiritual maturity, it could fail dismally.

5.2.2 We accept the reality that conflict, bitterness, hatred, racism, ethnicism, classism, sexism and a lot of emotional pain is still very much part of society. We must address some of the core reasons for conflict like: misunderstandings and poor communication, bad and corrupt leadership, language, culture and religion, ideologies and the greed for political power, injustices, personalities, scarce resources and imbalances in society.

5.3 In order to effect reconciliation we believe that:

- We need to take the emotions of our people very seriously.
- We will have to develop greater passion and willpower to really make a difference. We will have to name the areas of conflict, face it and engage in the situation.
- At the heart of reconciliation is the matter of spirituality and the reconciliation that has already taken place in Jesus Christ.
- We will have to grow in integrity.
- We will have to define a common cause for all our people and enhance the principle of interpathy.

5.4 On restorative justice we want to propose the following practical measures

- Some initial successful examples which could be a model for future actions.
- Cooperate with URCSA in the important 5 year strategic plan of URCSA. We believe that this plan could give us entry points into the restorative justice process.
- To conduct a property audit.

- To propose and undertake some concrete actions.

5.5 We firmly believe that any process of restorative justice and reconciliation must be guarded and guided by good stewardship, discipline, work ethic and healthy moral values.

5.6 We believe that essential to restorative justice and reconciliation is a need for a change of heart and attitude. This will only be possible if we engage with one another and are guided by the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit.

6. Conclusion

6.1 We believe that this process should be accompanied by a specific and focused process that creates safe spaces for listening to God and one another and spiritual discernment on how we need to address all the challenges facing us on this journey and acknowledging our different experiences and stories.

6.2 In the spirit of this covenant, we agree to encourage agreements on different levels of the church that will embody this new unity.

We do this in obedience and dependence in Jesus Christ who is the Lord of the church.

Signed in Kempton Park on this 10th day of April 2013 by:

Dr M-A Plaatjies van Huffel (Moderator URCSA)

Signature:.....

Rev MG Betha (Assessor URCSA)

Signature:.....

Dr DA Kuyler (Scribe URCSA)

Signature:.....

Dr LJ Modise: (Actuarius URCSA)

Signature:.....

On behalf of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) who hereby declares that he/she has been duly empowered and mandated by the URCSA to accept and sign this document on behalf of the URCSA.

Name: Prof CJP Niemandt (Moderator DRC)

Signature:.....

Name: Dr AR Hanekom (Assessor DRC)

Signature:.....

Name: Dr JH Ernst (Actuarius DRC)

Signature:.....

Name: Dr JJ Gerber (General Secretary DRC)

Signature:.....

On behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) who hereby declares that he/she has been duly empowered and mandated by the DRC to accept and sign this document on behalf of the DRC.