

Minutes

Reformed Family Forum (General Secretaries)

Salima, Malawi - 5-8 August 2016

1. Attendance

See Attachment 1

Friday Evening

2. Welcoming

Gideon van der Watt is welcoming everybody. Everybody briefly introduces him and herself. All are in good health and excited to be present. Rev Charles Juro of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe could not attend, due to ill health of his sister.

Gideon van der Watt briefly explained the purpose of the meeting:

- To build relationships
- To celebrate our identity and reflect on our calling
- To reflect on certain important issues like literature, leadership, community development, our reformed faith, etc.
- To discuss the way ahead with this forum – how could we function cost-effectively, making a significant contribution.

Godfrey Betha closes the evening by reading from Matthew 28:16-20. He refers to the Belhar confession. We are called to witness, in unity. Christ, the All Powerful, is promising to accompany us on this journey. The meeting then prays, thanking God for his grace – also in bringing us all together.

Saturday

3. Opening

Andries Hoffman reads from Ps 40 (and refers to Ps 43 and 47). Most of the verses he reads are a plea to God, to save us, to bless us, to think of us, to change our fortune. Several delegates reflect on the meaning of these texts in their own contexts. Kgosi Tlhowe reminds the meeting that Botswana is celebrating its 50th year of independence. There is gladness, but also much hardship, for Botswana is suffering from a severe drought, with devastating consequences. The Psalm gives them words to plea for God's intervention. Jonah Lagat applies the Psalm to their situation in Kenya – a plea from a position of human weakness, by people living in the presence of death. A plea for God's intervention. God cares; the Psalm gives hope. Brother Libias Boloma also reflects on the meaning of the Psalm in today's Zimbabwe. So many people constantly cry out to God. There is so much poverty – more than 90% are unemployed, but there is also no money, no cash available. It often feels as if God is not near. But the Psalm assures us: even in our time of weakness, we can reach out to God. He will take care.

4. The stories of the different churches (brief narratives)

4.1 Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ)

William Zulu expresses his excitement to be present – he hopes the forum will grow.

Earlier this year, the church celebrated its 50 years of independence. From a membership of about 20 000 fifty years ago, it grew to currently more than 800 000 members. The respective ministries are functioning well: youth, women, diaconal projects, the schools, institutions like the two hospitals, a university, a radio station, etc. There are about 130 ministers, 54 evangelists, 17 presbyteries, 175 congregations (each with different prayer houses).

The strength of the youth, their involvement, brings hope for the future.

There are some practical challenges: dwindling tithes due to joblessness and sustainability of the office of ministers (many opt for other careers). A theological challenge is to teach future ministers a contextually relevant theology. The rise of neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches (prophecy, prosperity faith, etc.) also pose challenges; many members therefore entertain dual membership – going to a charismatic churches in the afternoon.

The church is considering the establishment of an Investment Committee – to make the church financial sustainable and it is doing much to deal with current theological issues.

Tensions in the country rose during the current elections – there is much noise. Some of the RCZ ministers entered politics.

4.2 Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)

The church is still young – only established in 1994. The former Dutch Reformed Mission Church and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa merged to form URCSA. This new church adopted the Belhar Confession, expressing a contextual faith conviction on the church's identity and calling. URCSA has 7 regional synods (including one in Namibia). The membership counts more than 1 million. There are more than 700 congregations, but with too few ministers (There are many vacant congregations). Many ministers are also forced into tent making positions, which is not healthy for the ministry.

The church is cherishing its reformed identity. Much attention is given to the re-unification process in the domestic DRC family, but URCSA will resolve to rather focus much more on building internal unity (between the diverse groups, cultures, languages within URCSA).

The church struggles to move into neighbourhoods, planting new churches. There is no office (full time officer) for the General Synod. The church must also do more to embrace new technology. There is also an urgent need to establish theological seminaries next to the theological training at the public university, with one principal body.

This year the 30th year of the existence of the Belhar Confession is celebrated. The church seeks to find answers in scripture and confession for most challenges it faces and to “live” the Belhar Confession. They are formulating a strategic plan, focussing on certain areas like capacity building.

4.3 Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA)

The DRCA is a small church. Although it has 150 congregations, the church only has some 50 ministers, with a majority of congregations to be vacant. There are four regional synods. The DRCA tries to deal with all the disputes regarding buildings.

The church is struggling to find its identity; there is unfortunately a lot of infighting. Some ministers are old and they often want to maintain an authoritarian style of worship. The church is also struggling with establishing a proper theological training model. Emphasis is put on bringing academic training and the formation of a proper spirituality closer to one another. Currently there are 16 students in training.

There is also not a critical distance between church and (traditional/tribal) culture.

The church obviously also struggle with finances. Members have not yet taken responsibility for tithing (thanks offering).

The church is focussing on the theme: The holiness of God. They want to restore a dignified way of worshipping God. People also realise that the church’s problems will have to be solved from the inside.

4.4 Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod

The church grew out of the mission work by the Cape Synod of the DRC, 1889. There are 185 congregations, with around 1mil members. It has 23 Presbyteries, each with between 5 or 13 congregations. Each congregation has several prayer houses/wards. Preaching is mostly done by elders. They do not always have the knowledge how to prepare a proper sermon. The question around women in office is a crucial issue at the moment. They are busy with an inclusive and responsible process to rethink their position on women in office. There is hope that the matter will soon be solved.

The church is growing rapidly. Some churches even became too big to manage effectively and with a ratio of 3000 members to one minister, the ministry is not done efficiently. In some cases, there are tension between ministers and deacons/elders. But there is also a power struggle within the church and among different synods of the CCAP.

A divisive issue is a struggle “Dutchy” and “Penty” approaches to identity and ministry. Young people push for a new more charismatic approach. The churches lose members, or has to deal with the so-called dual membership.

The church struggles with the provision of literature. They are making plans to revive the printing press. There are some managerial problems to solve.

An important issue is to enhance the spiritual growth of laity. They encourage training of members – for instance Veritas and Nehemiah Bible Training (NBI).

4.5 Igreja Reformada em Moçambique (IRM)

The three synods together form a General Synod of IRM. The three synods together have about 70 000 members.

4.5.1 Nova Synod

It is not going well with the church – it has to deal with many struggles. The church has to adapt to urbanisation. The two big cities of Maputu and Beira fall in their area. They reach out to Indians and Chinese as well. The Universal Church of God, a charismatic church from Brazil, is causing confusion and division.

The church has 25 congregations, 4 Presbyteries, but only 19 ministers. They receive not enough donor money from partners to pay for the ministers salaries. They find it difficult to really become independent. Young people do not want to enter ministry. Currently there is only one student of Novo Synod studying at Hefsiba.

Women are keeping the church alive; women mostly attend sermons.

The civil war between Frelimo and Renamo is reason of concern; it is greatly affecting the economy and the functioning of the church. Ministers suffer under the consequences of the war; everybody is afraid to move from one place to another. People in the Tete Province are especially affected.

They want to train more evangelists and consider ‘tentmaking’ ministry. It is also important to empower members.

4.5.2 Mphatso Synod

They have 31 congregations, each with several prayer houses, 7 presbyteries and 29 ministers. Each congregation has several prayer houses. They make use of elders and evangelists. The language is mostly Chewa (of Ngoni tribe). Mostly a rural church. Long distances. The fight between Renamo and Frelimo also affects them. Mozambique is becoming a poor country, with a lot of corruption. They are also challenged by: too few ministers, too few evangelists, too long distances, transport (some ministers have to travel 100 km by bicycle), etc.

They also look for ways to become financially independent.

4.5.3 Tumbine Synod

They have 25 congregations, 5 presbyteries and 24 pastors. Each congregation has several prayer houses. They also have one missionary and 3 evangelists. They work in a very expanded area. They also work among Muslim people.

Their head office is at Melange, close to Malawi. They face the same challenges as the Mphatso Synod.

The church is happy for pastors serving diligently despite the political conflict. Both Tumibine and Mphatso are also embarking on mission projects, reaching out to new areas.

The struggle in Mozambique today is about constitutional change, because the current constitution states that the winner takes all. The ruling party therefore also rules in provinces where the opposition is by far the strongest party. Renamo is the majority party in six provinces, but they cannot appoint any officials in those provinces.

4.6 Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana (DRCB)

The church finds its roots back to 1827; it grew out of the DRC mission. It struggles to grow in Botswana. There is a historic agreement with the Congregational Church that it will only focus on the Mochudi area. It was the Congregational church who broke this agreement first. They have 19 congregations, with historical schools (taken over by the state) and a hospital. They have a huge shortage of ministers. There is one minister sent by the RCZ (Zambia) who is working in their church. They struggle to maintain their identity and doctrine.

They cherish a good relationship with the DRC Northern Cape. They are in a process of appointing a general secretary.

They also have to deal with the phenomenon of dual membership. People also attend the prophetic churches.

They struggle to have a proper Sunday school and catechism classes. Members do not know the contents of their faith – there is no theological tradition, or institution, that can help them to preserve their reformed tradition. They feel a bit isolated.

4.7 Reformed Church in East Africa (Kenya)

Settler Farmers from South Africa, belonging to the DRC, planted the church among farm workers. Today there are 80 parishes, each with about 15 prayer houses (village churches). There are 10 Presbyteries and about 50 000 members. The RCEA has about 100 ministers and 50 evangelists. The church is spread out over the whole country. It is strategically placed, with schools, resources, etc.

There is a silent conflict between the roles of moderator and general secretary. The roles of leaders are not well defined. There is also a conflict between elders (who often preach) and ministers. Where lies the authority?

Kenya is a very politicised country, with sharp divisions which are also playing a definitive role in church life.

The church suffers from financial problems; people do not know much about stewardship. Although the church has good resources, it is not utilised properly. Even human resources are not actualised; their national minister for finances is a member of their church, but despite his skills, he is not requested to play a leadership role in the church.

Another problem is that students are trained at open faculties and therefore the church's identity is not well defined. There is no proper strategy to train and maintain ministers. Elders, who mostly have to preach, are also not well equipped.

Solutions would lie in constitutional clarity on the role of the different leaders and offices in the church. The church must prevent power struggles. The church must also work and pray for political stability. It has a prophetic role to play. Good investments and the realisation of resources would help to sustain the ministry. Important is partnerships with other churches, institutions and especially around the training of ministers.

4.8 Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) – in South Africa

Missionaries from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa planted the church amongst predominantly Indian people (Hindu's and Muslims). There are about 3000 members, 12 congregations and 8 ministers, with a few evangelists. But the church is becoming more and more multicultural. There are some legitimised ministers who have as yet not received a call.

There are huge challenges. It is challenging to be a minority faith in predominantly Hindu and Muslim communities. The church also struggle with infighting and authority, for instance the fighting between ministers and elders. But the hopeful signs are the depth of the faith of congregants, that people find hope in the church and are therefore still coming to services.

The church is poor, with no funds to function properly, especially on the level of the synod. It is a challenge to maintain the posts of ministers. Tithing remains a problem. Charismatic trends are a cause for concern.

The most important vision of the church is to empower members to take up the task of disciple making. Church planting is also a very important goal.

4.9 Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Harare Synod (CCAP Harare)

The church has been established in 1912 amongst farm workers who emigrated from Malawi. In 1964 the church became independent; at that stage there were about 40 000 members. But after the "land grab" by President Mugabe the church lost many members. Today there are about 11 000 members, with 25 congregations and 22 ministers. They have 4 theological students of whom 2 is studying at Justo Mwale University in Lusaka.

Instead of facing extinction as the Malawian immigrant are displaced, the church focus on contextualisation and reaching out to other cultural and language groups. They do not only use Chewa in their congregations, but also Shona.

The political situation in their country, with increasing conflict, is very challenging. People are now beginning to speak out. Ministers are also raising a prophetic voice. Currently there is this “stay away” methodology. The issues they are raising are: corruption, injustice, unemployment, poor service delivery and the brain drain (most of the skilled people leave the country). There is a total disregard for people and their dignity, unemployment is 90% and there is no cash available. The current draught is worsening everything. It is extremely difficult for churches to function. Ministers do not receive salaries any more.

The church has adopted the slogan: “breaking small to grow big”. They focus on empowering the different prayer houses and training evangelists to become ministers.

Decision

Churches and individuals are requested to make donations for relief work in Zimbabwe, to be sent to the CCAP Harare Synod. Donations can be made via the Witness Ministry of the URCSA and DRC Western Cape

4.10 Nongo uKristu uKen Soedan hen Tiv (NKST) - Nigerië.

The DRC took over the work of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) amongst the Tiv People in early 1900s. In 1954 the church started to train Tiv-evangelists and ministers. The NKST was officially founded as independent church in 1957. At that stage it had 1800 members, with 3000 attending worship services

Around the 1970s the NKST was considered to be the fastest growing church on earth. Today there are more than a million members.

The church faces huge challenges, especially with the rising of radical Islamist movements. The recent devastation of churches, communities and crops by the Fulani herdsmen is but one example.

In order to be more inclusive, the church recently changed its name to Nongo uKristu ui Ser u sha Tar – the Universal Reformed Christian Church.

4.11 Dutch Reformed Church

The DRC was established more than 350 years ago. It has round about 1000 congregations, 1200 serving ministers. The General Synod is made up of 10 regional synods – it is thus a synod of synods.

The General Synod is currently focussing on two important issues:

- (1) Missional transformation – focussing on the local congregation’s identity and calling within its own context

- (2) Relationship within the denomination, between synods and general synod, the role of presbyteries and the unifying process (structural unity) within the domestic family of churches, with the possibility of a interim church order (polity).

The church is currently struggling with a few current issues:

- The drought – wonderful projects were established to assist drought stricken areas.
- The Gay issue – the process is pending, awaiting legal clarity. It is a very emotional debate.

5. Community Development

Prof Jurgens Hendriks facilitated a discussion on the church's calling to be involved in community development. The discussion focussed on the following topics:

- What is poverty? Who are the poor?
- The church's prophetic witness
- Leaders who are the most respected in Africa are those who just do the Christian thing and live out Christian values.
- What are those Christian values?
- It is important for the church to be visible and tell the good stories of what we do in society.
- It is important to understand our contexts – discernment
- What are the root causes of poverty – we need to understand this properly before we start doing community development.
- Community development is about transformation of societies, but especially about the transformation of leaders.
- What does the post-colonial project entails?
- Some values that will help us to transform our societies:
 - o Justice
 - o Human dignity
 - o Compassion for others
 - o Inclusiveness
 - o Wholeness and wellness
 - o Integrity of the earth (caring for nature)
 - o Transparency and accountability
 - o Giving power away (kenosis – emptying oneself)
 - o Servanthood leadership
 - o Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5)
- We need to be prophets that focus more on values than power and money
- The church's business is building kingdom values – Kingdom life.

Prof Hendriks refers to the book by BL Myers: *Walking with the Poor*. See attachment 2

From the discussion, the following issues/truths emerged:

- As sister churches in the Southern African region, we need each other. We need to take hands and form partnerships.
- Huge shifts (political, economic, geographical, sociological, cultural and other changes) are happening in our region. We not only deal with the question about guilt

(like in the time of the reformation), but the predominant question today is about God. Where is God in all of this?

- Because we discover that we have become our own gods, we tried to create our own kingdom without God – and that human built kingdom is now falling apart. People are disillusioned – we could not succeed to build a better world! Therefore, the most urgent question today is about God.
- The new question is: how do we understand God in our new context and how could we follow Him.
- The church must also play the role of channelling information about these new developments; it will have to communicate much more efficiently.
- Leadership remains very, very important. Only if leaders can provide good servanthood leadership, can the church play a meaningful role in healing our broken societies.
- The final question is how can this forum play a role to assist general secretaries in providing servanthood leadership that will transform churches and societies?

Decision:

At the next meeting of the forum, the following question will be discussed further: how can this forum play a role to assist general secretaries in providing servanthood leadership that will transform churches and societies?

6. Literature

Charmaine Stoffberg introduces Christian Literature Fund (CLF). CLF would like to provide a service in creating literature for the sister churches in our region – CLF considers providing material for the Southern African region as a priority. This material could include pamphlets on various topics and in different languages (especially material to equip congregations and assist the ministry), but also books that churches need for their ministries (hymn books, constitutions, liturgy books, catechism material, etc.)

Several new book that are focussing on the Southern African context have recently been published: a book on prosperity faith, one on prophecy, or a book on African Christianity in a globalised world, a book on the history of the Church in Euro-Africa, etc. A book on the history of the church in Malawi will soon be available.

Gideon van der Watt explained a series of books aimed at faith formation in children. The books have been, or are still in a process of being translated into various languages in our region (for instance the *Tell, tell!* series)

Decision:

The forum decided on three books and some pamphlets to be published in the near future:

- **The publishing of a generic catechism /family handbook on what our Reformed Faith entails and how to live out the truths and values of the Reformed tradition within the new contexts of Southern Africa. The initiative will be taken by the Justo Mwale University and the faculty of Theology of the University of the Free State.**

- **A book that will tell the story (history) of the churches in Africa that are connected to the DRC. The book will celebrate the existence of the churches and will contribute to the formation of our shared identity and calling. Mariette Odendaal and Gideon van der Watt will be the editors collecting information and finalising the manuscript.**
- **A basic handbook/guide on leadership – Prof Jurgens Hendriks will help with this publication. Questionnaires will be sent out to general secretaries to complete in order to understand the real problems regarding leadership.**
- **Two pamphlets on leadership, one by Prof Hendriks and one by Rev Jonah Lagat**
- **A pamphlet on the role of elders by Andries Hoffman and Kgosi Thlowe**

7. The NetACT story

Prof Jurgens Hendriks briefly sketched the history and development of NetACT. It was formed in Lusaka in 2001 as a network of theological training institutes in the DRC Family. It was supported financially by an American family. It focussed on the training of pastors, but also on congregational studies. It is helping congregations to deal with challenges in the contexts, like HIV and Aids, community development, etc. A high point was the publication of the book on human dignity (Living with dignity) that was recently awarded the Andrew Murray/Desmond Tutu price.

NetACT expanded – it now represents more than 80 theological institutions across Africa.

An important issue is the question how to train the existing pastors (continuous theological training of pastors). Another issue is how to listen to the youth and the voices of women?

Another important topic is concerning public theology. How do we do that? It means that ordinary Christians (and leaders) live exemplary lives. But it also entails deliberate actions within a specific context.

NetACT will be able to create a platform on its website for information meant for the Family Forum.

Decision:

- 1. Prof Hendriks is requested to look into the possibility of creating a platform for the Family Forum on NetACT's website.**
- 2. The Family Forum will discuss the topic of Public Theology at its next meeting.**

8. Theological Training

Prof Jurgens Hendriks facilitated this discussion:

Why is a family forum necessary? If we can understand that, we will be able to reach our goal.

Somebody pointed out that there are circles/sequences of important theological shifts that happen every 500 years. 500 years ago, theological thinking has been influenced by the

enlightenment era, shifting the emphasis to rationalism and individualism. It happened during the time of the Reformation. The question then was: how can I be saved/have certainty?

In our current era, 500 years later, people are disappointed in rationalism and individualism. The two concepts did not help us to understand and create a better world. The question now shifted to values, relations, spirituality. The church will from now on not be the “sole owner” of spirituality; it will have to work next to business, politics and sciences, among others, in asking ethical questions and forming spirituality. The basic question now is how to participate in God’s mission to the world - our Kingdom task – and discover a missional identity.

If we want to understand our time, there are two basic keys to unlock such understanding:

(1) Power is now defined differently

Firstly power is understood differently. It is no more understood in terms of physical power, violent means, etc., but it is understood as having access to information. Women can therefore be just as powerful as men.

(2) Identity is formed differently

Secondly, identity is no more formed by power structures, from top to bottom (hierarchical), but from bottom upwards. It is no more possible to have a grip on all knowledge and power. This is proven by the role the media is playing in our day. People form identities by having direct access to information. Identity cannot any more be formed in a process from top to bottom.

Resistance identity is becoming very important in our day – resistance to all forms of power from above. Therefore the ball game of being church has changed radically. The church cannot force rules or regulations or uniformity of identity on young people any more. It requires a different kind of leadership than the old method of hierarchical power structures.

NetACT was formed in this changed context. It has a very important role to play academically. But it also helps with leadership formation and spirituality in the new model of identity formation/power relationships.

The three important theological topics in our day (on which NetACT is also focussing) will thus be:

- Community development as a process of discernment: What is God calling us to do now, in our contexts? How do we empower people to become involved (stewards)
- Public theology (exemplary living and formation of a new spirituality). What is our public responsibility? How can the gospel truth reach the market place?
- Opening up access to information (libraries and access to the internet)

Sunday

The group attended a worship service at a local congregation of the CCAP. It has been a touching experience. Brother William Zulu did the preaching

10. Leadership

The churches in our region experience a leadership crisis. The use of electronic- or social media poses many examples of this crisis. Power struggles are widespread. People want to be in positions of power. People openly campaign for power-positions. Young ministers try to grab power too soon. Politics also play a role in power struggles (political motivated leadership). Leaders even revert to corruption to get or to maintain power.

Theological training institutions do not put enough emphasis on leadership training and especially on the formation of a healthy spirituality (a deeper relationship with God).

Ministers who obtained further theological training often find it difficult to fit into the local contexts of congregations. Academic qualifications do not automatically imply good leadership.

It is important to assist churches to create constitutions that will guide the mandates of particular offices.

The creation of mentorship models for young church leaders is important.

But the essence of leadership is to imitate Christ – being good followers of Christ. Following Christ means to give power away, to empower others, to be humble, to strive for servanthood leadership. It also maintains a focus on our calling.

Decision:

The Family Forum will embark on projects to create material on leadership - see decisions regarding literature.

11. Reformed Identity

The question is: what is binding our churches together? Is it our shared history? It is our shared confessional basis? Our shared Reformed tradition – the way we do things? Our shared geographical context – the challenges in our region? Our shared calling? What does it mean to claim unity? Maybe the answer lies in all of these.

Unity remains very important. It is a gift – Jesus died on the cross to tear down the walls of separation. He prayed for the unity of his church... so that the world may believe. Unity is thus not only a gift (indicative), but also a calling (imperative). Brother Godfrey Betha stresses the importance of restoring the unity we once had – it is about reunification. We are family and even if we struggle with relationships and questions regarding identity and calling, ties of being family bind us.

We share the same Reformed identity. But what does it mean to be Reformed today, in our context? Is it correct to cling to being “Dutch” if that means to be strict and formal, maintaining an old tradition that the missionaries engraved into the churches? Is it the opposite of Pentecostal - see the divisions between “Dutchy” and “Penty”? No, being Reformed simple means to go back to the Bible (authority of Scripture), to focus on God (direct, immediate relationship with God) and his grace in Christ, to constantly reform in order to be obedient churches within changing contexts, and to adhere to our calling. Maybe a better description would be to understand our identity as missional – being and taking part in God’s mission to the world.

Decision:

1. The Family Forum should continuously reflect on our identity and shared calling, which eventually implies a radical focus on God, his Word and his mission to the world.

12. Functioning of Forum

Decisions:

1. The name of this forum will in future be: Reformed Family Forum – a Forum of Churches with a historical connection to the Dutch Reformed Church. In Portuguese: “Encontro da Familia Reformada”

2. The inclusion of a Reformed Church in Angola (with strong ties with the DRC Namibia) will in future be included in the forum

3. Consider also inviting a representative from Namibia, Swaziland and the church in Nigeria (NKST)

4. Gideon van der Watt and Kobus Odendaal are requested to formulate a draft MOU for the forum and circulate it to all participants for their comments. It is important to stress the aim of the forum, namely to liaise between the churches; to celebrate our shared identity; to take hands in our joint calling in our region; to enhance partnerships; to reflect on our prophetic role as forum; to encourage servant leadership; to build capacity of general secretaries; to join hands in theological training (also continuous training of existing ministers); etc.

5. Together listening (discerning) to the voices of our contexts (especially the voices of youth, women, the vulnerable, etc.

6. Gustav Claassen is requested to draft a pastoral letter that will be sent to all the churches as soon as possible. Vasco Katchipapa will assist him in this project.

7. Gideon and Kobus will write a draft report on the Reformed Family Forum that will, together with the MOU, be used to inform the respective churches on our goals and functioning.

8. For the time being, the Reformed Family Forum will only consist of general secretaries/secretaries for witness of the respective synods.

9. The next meeting will be convened towards the end of July next year (25-27 July or 28-31 July) in South Africa. The RCA will host the meeting.

10. The next meeting will focus on (amongst other topics)

- leadership

- our prophetic witness

- challenges posed by radical Islamism

11. Keep the minutes of the meetings and refer back – so that we can progressively build on what has already been done.

12. The general secretary of the church who is currently hosting the meeting, will serve as chairperson for the next year (For next year it will be Vasco Katchipapa). The general secretary who will host the meeting next time, will serve as vice-chairperson for the next year (For the next year it will be Kovilan Moodley). Gustav Claassen, Kobus Odendaal and Gideon van der Watt will share the duties of administration – the secretariat.

13. Evaluation

The participants evaluated the meeting. The following remarks were made:

- The meeting helped us to be connected, to interact, to build relationships.
- The meeting affirmed that we need each other – we are part of a family.
- The meeting is a gift of unity.
- It was good to see young children (more than a thousand) running joyfully through the streets of the village demonstrating their presence as Christians.
- We are in a learning process – as we are building this forum.
- It will be very important to assist one another in becoming good leaders (the booklet that Prof Jurgens Hendriks is assigned to write).
- “A family that does not know each other, does not grow”.
- There are no real borders in our region – we belong together.
- Consider meeting every second year – if lack of finances does not allow meeting every year.
- General Secretaries have to perform their duties under huge pressure – we have encouraged each other.
- We could encourage one another and learn from one another
- The feeling to belong to a family is wonderful
- We need each other. It is a Reformed principle: “Wisdom is always a shared discovery”.
- We must make an effort to understand our contexts properly.
- We have enormous challenges – we need each other.
- We are glad that our Kenyan brother could join us.
- CLF would love to play a role in providing literature.

14. Remarks on the Gay issue in the DRC

On request, Dr Gustav Claassen made some remarks on the Gay issue in the DRC. It is all about hermeneutics - how do we read the historical Biblical texts in our current contexts? Some members have appealed the decisions of the General Synod on how to deal with the Gay issue. The DRC must now await the legal process that will hopefully bring clarity on the legal process (procedural matters), and then the contents (theological matters) of the discourse will be discussed further. The DRC requests the sister churches to pray for this dilemma and to join the discussion.

15. Closing

Brother Jonah Lagat, reading from Romans 12, closed the meeting. We are challenged to not only confess our faith, but to live it out in our daily lives – also in our churches.

The meeting expressed its appreciation for the way in which we have been hosted.



The representatives of the sister churches attending a recent meeting of the Reformed Family Forum in Malawi: Front from left to right: rev Godfrey Betha (URCSA, South Africa), rev Libias Boloma (CCAP Harare - Zimbabwe), rev Timoteo Fabiao (IRM Mphatso Synod - Mozambique), rev Vasco Kachipapa (CCAP Nkhoma - Malawi) and dr Gustav Claassen (DRC – South Africa). In the middle are dr Gideon van der Watt (Partners in Mission, DRC Free State SA), rev Jonah Lagat (RCEA - Kenia), dr William Zulu (RCZ -Zambië), rev Gabriel Morata (IRM Synod Novo - Mozambique) and elder Kgosi Tlhowe (DRCB - Botswana). At the back are dr Andries Hoffman (DRCA – South Africa), rev Jaos Herbath (IRM – Tumbini Synod Mozambique), rev Kovilan Moodley (RCA - South Africa), me Charmaine Stoffberg (CLF), prof Jurgens Hendriks (NetACT) and dr Kobus Odendaal (Witness Ministry DRC and URCSA Western Cape).