

Drafting Team Report 2

A helpful note before reading this report is Action 31 of the 2017 General Council:

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee and Secretariat to develop a Gender Justice Policy by 2019 and that they collaborate with the regional councils to foster and encourage the use of this policy as the practice of the whole communion of churches. This policy shall delineate issues of gender-based violence within church and society. It shall include an action plan for the implementation of the policy and accountability metrics.

—Pages 13-14, *Proceedings of the 26th General Council*

There was some confusion and frustration around the circulation of the final version of the document. There was a varied discussion with concerns and queries about the Gender Policy Draft; this is summarised in the following report.

In your review of the document did you notice any missing elements?

Article III B: Some of the discernment groups wanted the policy to be placed in the context of the WCRC Constitution – Article III B where it talks about “respect, defend and advance the dignity of every person”– this is originally a reference to the Emden Synod; “The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.” This needs to be within the opening introductory statement or in the background section.

Also, there were questions raised around what the document actually is and would appreciate a statement of purpose at the beginning.

Gender definition: It was raised that the document needs to define “gender” in the introduction. There is a contradiction around how “man” and “woman” are used within the document and footnote 8 which defines gender as not being binary.

One comment from a discernment group was that there needs to be a section on gender identity, which discusses the construct of gender. Because if the document is acknowledging the previous, footnote 8 should also be a principle, to advance this policy to the next level. It was understood that the Communion is in different places around this discussion and nothing the policy states will be perfect. However, it was stressed that it could be explained that this policy had been prayerfully worked on, and that there are places and contexts in which this will be difficult, but the churches can begin or continue to work on and discuss these issues.

Language: It was recommended that the document use language that is invitational rather than demanding. However, recognizing that there needs to be strong language around naming unfair treatment of women as sin as stated in the 2017 General Council.

In “Principles of Gender Justice Policy”—“we are each loved and valued for the beauty and diversity of our bodies”—human beings are more than their “bodies”; surely they should be loved for their “total being”?

Implementation: A concern was raised that the policy paper does not refer to how the WCRC will live out this policy. The gap between the policy and the practice needs to be addressed.

Ecumenism: A suggestion was raised to add to the policy that gender equality should be incorporated in ecumenical and interfaith dialogues from both the WCRC and dialogue partners. Perhaps using similar language to point 3 in the Call to Action. To encourage and ensure to the extent that we are able.

Are there any elements of the documents that do not necessarily need to be there?

Quantity: It was noted that the information given was good; however, it was more of a theological position paper rather than a policy document. A query was raised whether the document should be renamed; possibly a position paper?

Footnote 8: Footnote 8 needs to be worked on as it can be seen as though the policy is forcing people into positions which they might not agree with. It would be helpful to take out the possessives from this statement. An option is “There is no longer only one understanding of gender...”. Also it was mentioned that it is not necessary to list all the sexualities in this footnote, this would make it more succinct.

Call to Action: An observation was that the Call to Action in its current form seems overwhelming. It was further suggested that the action points could be split into “to be actioned” and “advisory actions” sections. Another suggestion was that each point should be equally strong.

In what ways do you see this policy can be used on the different levels within the WCRC? From global to the regions to the level of the denominations and even the congregations?

Member differences: It was noted that some did not know if the groups needed to answer this given that different contexts will use this document differently. There are great differences between the member churches within the regions. The discernment groups were aware that not all WCRC member churches are ready to engage in the conversation regarding, for example, gender justice or sexuality. There are churches who have already made the journey (affirming churches) and there are ones which stop engaging in conversation when the topic of sexuality is being discussed. The reception of this report would take a long time for these churches. It was pointed out that it is a long journey to compassion. For many churches sexuality is not on the agenda but justice is. The conversation and this document needs to be focused specifically on justice and communion.

Some members will consider aspects or phrases of the policy more acceptable than others. It is important that the policy is not disregarded in its totality on the basis of these issues that are perceived in a more negative light.

Clarity: A concern was raised that this document requires much more work for clarity, including the definition of purpose. Also, a query around whether it requires a consultative process to be actioned with the member churches through the regions. Because of this it was mentioned that implementation cannot be agreed until purpose is defined, and consultation is action.

What accountability metrics would you suggest for the Gender Policy in order that its implementation be most effective?

Imposition: A very strong opinion was that the WCRC cannot impose this on the member churches and that the WCRC should not suggest any implementation to the member churches. It would be better if this document was used for internal affairs. This contracts Action 31 from the 2017 General Council.

Recommendation from the Drafting Team:

Based on this report and the discussions of discernment groups, the Drafting Team conclude that there is a general feeling among Executive Committee members that more time is required for discussion of the issues in the draft policy.

We therefore recommend that time is taken to collaborate with the regional councils as instructed in Action 31 from the 2017 General Council. Time should also be taken for the working groups to consider the issues raised by the discernment groups.