

**CHRIST'S LOVE MOVES US TO
RECONCILIATION AND UNITY**



**A REFLECTION ON THE THEME OF THE 11TH
ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

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Written in June 2022
Seoul, Republic of Korea



**God calls us
To a new moment
To walk together with God's people
It is time to transform
Those things that don't work anymore
Alone and isolated
Nobody can do it
So come,
Come join the circle, you too!
You are very important**

**"Um momento novo",
Ernesto B. Cardoso**

This Brazilian song, which invites us to join hands like children do in an ever-widening circle dance, introduces us to the theme of the 11th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." Christ's love is that which moves, which invites all of the world to join the circle dance to restore relations that are broken.

The Reformed family reflects on the theme as God's invitation into a dance. As Christ's love moves us, all of creation dances and rejoices, and all are invited (Psalm 148). We sing in our languages, dance in our own ways, with the bodies we inhabit; we weave a tapestry of movement, of sound, of breathing. This is a dance that is worship with all our hearts, minds, bodies, and vulnerability. It is God; Creator, Redeemer, and Reconciler who invites us into this dance with all of creation, where all are welcome, all can participate, and all do belong. This is the dance that creates a safe, joyful, and transformative space (*chora*). In using the metaphor of dancing we include all forms of movement including breathing, recognizing that for some



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physical movement may be a challenge. Nobody is left out of this dance.

God invites us to dance together as God's people. However, we recognize that sometimes the beat to which we dance is not set by God, but that we are swayed by empire. The Accra Confession says, "We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire" (Article 11).

The choreography of the dance reflects the lived realities of God's people: a world of violence, growing inequality and inequity, discrimination, racism—exacerbated by wars, the pandemic, renewed global tensions in a neo-Cold War order, and attempts to erode hard-won rights.

Thinking about Christ's love, reconciliation, and unity as a circle dance in which we hold each other's hands, our movement is interdependent and interconnected as is the *oikos* all of God's creation inhabits. Only in the consideration of multiplicity we avoid reducing the endless diversity to the idolatry of a single perspective, interpretation, normativity, or experience. The consequences of this idolatry are discrimination based on race, gender, religious beliefs, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability. This also exacerbates neo-colonialism, segregation, apartheid, xenophobia, loss of biodiversity, land grabbing, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, femicide, and genocide.

God incarnated in history, in creation, and God invites the church to participate in God's mission across time and contexts. Christ's love, reconciliation, and unity can only be considered through the lens of intersectionality with justice.

This reflection invites you to join the dance with past and future generations. It invites you to hear the voices of those in the margins, to respond with love, and to act towards reconciliation for unity in all our magnificent diversity.

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CHRISTOLOGY

Historically, the Reformed church was the church of refugees or *ecclesia semper migranda*—the Church of the Wandering People of God. Jesus was also a wandering preacher, traveling in particular places which people consider margins of the society. Christ was actually always at the margin, “the end of the world,” where the oppressed, victimized, discriminated, and powerless are placed and abandoned, and Christ was inviting the church to come to find him.

The idea “Christ at the margin” radically challenges our conception of the church. Christ is out there at the margin with people whom we have been excluding from the church. Christ is calling us to come to the margin to restore God’s justice and work toward reconciliation. We Christians confess this Christ is our Lord. Our identity and practices are rooted in this confession. Therefore, Christ is the test of everything that claims itself to be Christian.





Christ “is our mediator and, in God’s sight, he covers with his innocence and perfect holiness my sinfulness in which I was conceived.”

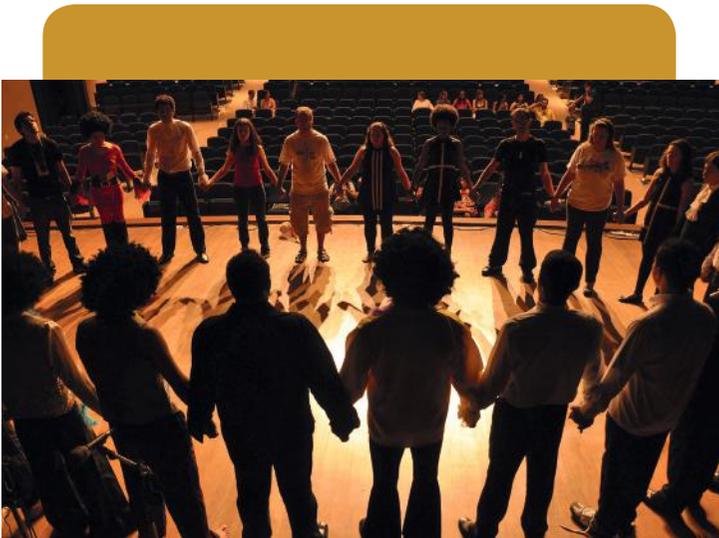
Christ, in and through his redemptive history with creation, is our window into the inner triune life of God. Incarnated God is concrete, personal, tangible, transformative—both to humans and the rest of the creation. Christ opens up a new vision of the divine, one that rebels against an understanding of God who remotely operates the world as its patriarchal father, master, and lord. God, as manifested in Christ, is the God who pours Godself into the human/creation as one of us and God with us, as a vulnerable God who weeps and laments with creation out of love.

The early Christian communities, as they sought to make sense of Christ for the world, insisted that his significance lies in the cross. For them the cross was the wisdom of God and the power of God. For them, Christian theology was a theology of the cross. They were aware of the scandalous nature of the cross, yet they insisted that therein lies a window into the life of God: God’s reconciling history with humanity/creation. Christ

expresses identification with the suffering humanity in and through Christ's passion.

As the collective human person, and God's elect, Christ takes into the life of God the suffering of human communities. The Spirit in whose accompanying power the Son had endured the cross gathers the suffering humanity into the triune life God. In this exchange, God identifies with the sufferers, and sufferers are taken into the triune life of God. Since Christ becomes one (at-one-ment) with the broken, it is these broken people that mediate the reconciliatory process by announcing that the kingdom is at hand, therefore repent. Thus, reconciliation happens when those who perpetuate violence turn towards the victims in repentance and seek pardon from the broken ones. And this is the good news for the Christians: Christ is the Good News of reconciliation. The Heidelberg Catechism says in Question and Answer 36, that Christ "is our mediator and, in God's sight, he covers with his innocence and perfect holiness my sinfulness in which I was conceived."

It is from the Christological perspective that we try to understand the concepts of love, reconciliation, and unity. We have seen misuses of these concepts in the history of church and theology, abuses of marginalized groups by people using the very terms that stand for the core of the Gospel. But with our understanding





of Christ as God incarnate, crucified, and risen—incarnated into the flesh of creation and resurrected for the sake of all of creation—we reclaim these concepts as hopeful, life-giving, and subverting. We imagine our Christian discipleship and mission as a reconciling and ongoing engagement and process, not as a onetime event to be finished.

Church as the Wandering People of God happens in preaching the Word, exposing violence, and finding identity in remembering the dangerous memory of the cross, thus affirming that remembering of the body happens in our participation in the broken and fragmented lives. Church happens as the Wandering People of God join Christ in embodying Christ's discriminatory and subversive love for the "least of them," as the church lets itself be moved by the transforming and life-giving Spirit of Christ, binding us not only to Christ but to one another and to all of creation. This Spirit that lifts up those who suffer and cry for justice is the very same Spirit who calls the perpetrators of injustice and violence to repent, to die to the power of evil, and to break the chains of injustice in order to live the new life of righteousness to which Christ has set us free. Church happens as the Church of the Wandering People join together in the unity of living, embodied costly solidarity, bound to Christ and to each other, continuously attempting to live the fierce love of Christ in courageous acts of reconciliation.

LOVE

Dance is a love language everyone speaks. The movement of our bodies, of our breath, celebrates love, life, and justice. In Palestine the dabka is a traditional dance that celebrates community. People join hands, but the circle remains open as an invitation for anyone to join. The beat of the dabka is a celebration of life and love: it defies oppression and is a sign of *summud* (resilience). Dancing the dabka challenges segregation, discrimination, structures of apartheid. Despite oppression, despite hardship, the dabka calls people to share each other's burdens in costly solidarity.

Love, life, and justice are inseparable as God sent Jesus as the *incarnation* of God's love: Jesus is God incarnate not only into the human flesh, but in all creation. This means that love is caring, intimate, and con-sensual. According to the Christian faith, God moves and is moved by love to create and to give life. All of



life flows from the triune God's love, a radical, holistic love.

God's love is a radical love as was shown to us in the life and death of Jesus "who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45); who tears down the mighty and powerful and exalts the lowly (Luke 1:46-55); and whose love is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence. It therefore requires a commitment to struggle against and resist the powers that obstruct the fullness of life that God wills for all, and a willingness to work with all people involved in movements and initiatives committed to the causes of justice, dignity, and life" (*Together Towards Life*, para 45).



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People with disabilities struggle for their dignity and lives to be acknowledged in church. They do not feel they belong in the church community because of the stigma associated of sin, punishment from God, and lack of faith, with disabilities. They are purposely excluded and othered. The radical love needs to be embodied in the real life experience in worship through the accessibility and accommodation for all abilities.

"God is love and whoever abides in love, abides in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4: 16b). Love seeks justice and subverts the binaries that emphasize otherness, that set boundaries to God's love, that perpetuate patterns of us and them, strangers and neighbours, normal and abnormal, and many, many more. God's love is inexhaustible; it is contextual, interrelated, and interdependent. Living God's radical love means embracing vulnerability as an *incretional* reality of the church.

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a major theme around which many contemporary Reformed confessions are constructed. Reconciliation is fundamentally about the restoring of just relationship—relationship that has been broken or has been damaged—and it is therefore both a theological and a socio-political concept at the same time; the two cannot be separated.

On the cross, God reconciles all of creation with Godself. In Christ, we are reconciled to God and to one another and the whole of creation. Christ's work of reconciliation models a way to reconcile humanity with humanity and humanity with the rest of creation through changing of human exploitation. It is important to recognize that in God's act of reconciliation, it is God, as the wounded party, who not only initiates the process of

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reconciliation but sets out the terms of reconciliation. In the act of reconciling, God comes in the person of Jesus to live with, to listen to, and to be transformed by other victims.

Alongside the ministry of Jesus, Christ's death and suffering are seen as the heart of reconciliation. Reconciliation can never be easy, but emerges out of and along with truth-telling, lamenting, the Korean concept of *Hway-Gae*, and action and involves the addressing of the underlying socio-political structures that have caused the breach of relationship. Reparatory justice is necessarily a part of reconciliation. Reparatory justice is a process to remember, repair, restore, rejoin, replenish, set right, make amends, and reconcile.

Truth-telling

Truth-telling is the intentional act of bearing witness to the vicissitudes of racism, sexism, and human speciesism. This involves both memory and the speaking of truth to power. Truth-



telling allows for right remembering, including facilitating and encouraging more public awareness and civic engagement. In the telling and the listening of the stories of brokenness and pain we remember voices of the victims of history and nature, and in doing so we seek to re-member broken community. Such telling of these memories serves as prophetic truth-telling to those in power who have an intentional forgetting and seek to suppress truth because it is to their disadvantage. And so the stories of the oppressed, the stories of comfort women, the stories of the transatlantic slave trade, the stories of Indigenous peoples must be told and have to be listened to. We are reminded that listening is an ethic and to the Christian it is holy.

Lamenting

Lament is a form of protest, calling on God's saving presence. It is easily ignored and bypassed, through the cold reality of evil and injustice. It is a longing for God's saving presence. Lamenting calls us not to move too quickly from the pain of Good Friday to the joy of Easter but to dwell in the liminal space

and time of Holy Saturday, which is the holding of space for us to lament and to bear with a profound sense of loss. Lamenting is calling on God who has a strong solidarity with the broken creation to do justice and be faithful and to also call on people to do justice (Lamentations 1:12). What is needed is a mutual lamentation by both those who suffer pain and those who have caused the suffering. This requires a refusal to move quickly and a conscious decision to stay in sorrow, pain, and regret.

Hway-Gae (Metanoia)

In the process of *Hway-Gae*, the offender must bear and endure the tension of committing to a change of heart and a change in way of life. Forgiveness is not a destination and only follows a recognition, remorse, restitution, and remembrance. This calls for the summoning of the ancestors, through sacred memory and truth-telling, into the act of dealing with the apology since they are our cloud of witnesses. While a repentant apology is a necessity for breaches to be repaired, it is the victims and not the offenders who set the terms of reconciliation, and it is the





victims who will discern the genuineness and appropriateness of the apology produced.

Action

Truth-telling, lament, and *Hway-Gae* are incomplete unless they are met with concrete action. The interconnectedness allows for remembering that necessitates the dismantling of structures that created broken relationships. It requires concretely addressing the web of intersectional oppression of systemic issues. It means courageous intention to change both structures and people. It means the creation of brave spaces where these conversations can happen and the offering of resources that will right wrongs. These spaces are spaces of radical hospitality that reflect the triune God's perichoretic dance. Reconciliation must be reconcili-action.

UNITY

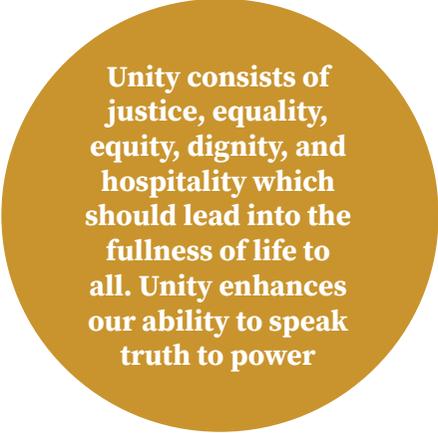
In the midst of brokenness, unity provides sustainability and resilience. To acknowledge unity is also not to imply uniformity but to respect diversity and differences. Unity is both a gift and an obligation to sustain and nourish by sharing values. In this understanding of unity, we need to keep in mind the ambivalence; even within unity there are a lot of definitions of unity. For example, a South African expression, *Ubuntu*, means: “I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours.” Moreover, the Korean concept of *Sangsaeng*, as used by some Korean theologians, ascribes to a mutual life or living together. While we are inspired by these concepts, we struggle to embrace the unity we are called to.

We acknowledge that in the broken world, unity has been misused to oppress. Those in the margins are co-opted into a unity that benefits only the privileged. Unity needs to be grounded in the experiences of those on the margins, otherwise unity leads to injustice. As recognized by the Belhar Confession,

...[U]nity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God...

Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:7-13; Galatians 3:27-28; James 2:1-13

Unity consists of justice, equality, equity, dignity, and hospitality which should lead into the fullness of life to all. Unity enhances our ability to speak truth to power. We acknowledge the gift of United and Uniting churches and the quest of healing ecclesial divisions. However, it is not the only expression of unity. We



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appreciate the value amongst Indigenous peoples placed on harmony between human beings and creation. Unity is not limited to human relationships alone but also includes the entire creation.

As God invites us to dance together, in unity we can dance in harmony while we acknowledge the movement of all as the Belhar Confession affirms: “that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice, and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another.”

MOVEMENT

The theme “Christ’s love moves us to reconciliation and unity” beckons us to respond to God’s call to dance in different ways. God’s inward and outward movements calls us to move. God moves us, and the groaning of creation moves God. God leads us in dance, through the brokenness of Good Friday,

the trauma and grief of Holy Saturday, the joy and hope of the Easter resurrection, and the anticipation of the returning Christ.

If Christ's love moves, then we cannot remain static. It takes churches to prioritize the movement that we are, with less emphasis on the institutions and establishments that keep us in survival mode. The ecumenical movement is called upon to reaffirm its commitment to dance with Jesus and make a difference in our broken world. In this dance, we are called to move beyond seemingly benign interpretations of love, reconciliation, and unity which sometimes simply get adopted by powerful, oppressive forces.

In his life on earth, Jesus was not co-opted by powerful political or religious forces. To the contrary, the love of Jesus meant he suffered and died at the hands of those forces. This is what





moves us. Following Lord Jesus Christ's self-emptying love, we are called to dance with God to bring authentic reconciliation and unity to all of creation.

There is need for self-examination on the part of the church to discern its complicity in injustice, inauthentic forms of love, division, and disunity. Self-examination needs to move to repentance and *metanoia*.

We call the church to be courageous in love following God's *incretional* example of kenotic self-giving and to investigate (and interrogate) the boundaries set for belonging.

We call the church to embrace the logic of love that stems from the foolishness and the wisdom of the cross that challenges violent structures of oppression, segregation, and discrimination.

We understand this call to the churches includes

- 1. To be committed to transformative justice in every sense.**
- 2. To be rooted in God's love that is mediated to us in and through Christ.**
- 3. To be and become Christ's beloved community manifesting the gifts of reconciliation and unity which are obligations of God's love.**
- 4. To become a Gospel event through its witness to Christ who resides in the margins.**
- 5. To be there where it belongs—dangerously with broken people and groaning creation, suffering the brutality of the authoritarian regimes and their funding corporations.**

This call embodies the affirmation that in our woundedness, we experience God's healing and mediate God's healing in response. Come, join the divine dance!



*I danced on a Friday
When the sky turned black
It's hard to dance
With the devil on your back
They buried my body
And they thought I'd gone
But I am the dance
And I still go on*

Dance then wherever you may be...

“Lord of the Dance”, Sydney Carter



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**World Communion
of Reformed Churches**

**Knochenhauerstr. 42
30159 Hannover, Germany
www.wcrc.ch
wcrc@wcrc.eu**