

# INTRODUCTION

In 1552, in a letter to the English reformer, Thomas Cranmer – the first protestant Archbishop of Canterbury – John Calvin exclaimed that he would cross ten seas to promote the unity of the church. Cranmer had proposed a meeting of Reformation church leaders to confess their common mind on central Christian doctrines. Calvin saw the divisions in the church of his day, destroying human fellowship and Christian relationship, as among the chief evils of that time.

In August 2004, delegations from 217 Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian and United churches in more than 100 countries will “cross ten seas” to gather in Accra, Ghana, and bear witness to their common faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ. The meeting in Ghana will be the 24th general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It will be a celebration of faith and life at the start of a new century. Guided by the theme “That All may have Life in Fullness” (John 10.10), participants will reflect on the threats and challenges to life while seeking God’s will for our response.

For Reformed Christians, the unity of the church springs from our common commitment to Christ, which implies the commitment to live in communion with one another. We find our source of life in Jesus Christ. We live out that life as churches, communities and individuals in covenant relationship with one another.

As the Reformed family prepares for the 24th general council, the World Alliance envisions a gathering process, through which the concerns, insights and prayers of Christians around the world will be gathered together. What are the life-related issues facing your community? How is your congregation responding through prayer and mission? How are you working with others to bring fullness of life to all?

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Each of the following studies tells a story, looks to the Bible for meaning and asks questions. The World Alliance hopes this resource will stimulate discussion on issues of life and faith in your congregation.



*John Calvin was ready to cross ten seas to bolster the fellowship of believers worldwide.*

It is suggested for use with Bible study groups, congregational fellowships, Christian education programmes and youth groups. Where a study group does not exist, consider forming a group with members of your congregation.

You may wish to use all or some of the studies. Likewise, you may wish to supplement the studies with your own stories and biblical reflection.

## CHALLENGED BY SCRIPTURE

The theme “That All may have Life in Fullness” (John 10.10) provides the biblical grounding from which to listen for the word of God as it speaks to us today. It is a theme concerned with life – fullness of life for the whole of creation.

But the theme also calls us as a worldwide fellowship of believers to contend with the forces of disparity and death that pervade our world. In a world where many struggle to survive, our faith in Jesus Christ asks what fullness of life means and what fullness of life for all requires.

## ADDRESSING IMPORTANT ISSUES

What are the issues we face together and how are they intertwined? What is God’s will for our response? What are the implications for our mutual covenant, the mission of the church and our spiritual lives? The following are some of the issues we face together:

### **Fullness of Life for All: Healing**

Reconciling divisions, renewing the church and overcoming the spread of diseases such as HIV/Aids are among the challenges calling the Reformed family to a ministry of healing and reconciliation.

### **Fullness of Life for All: Honouring Diversity**

We are men and women of many colours, young and old from many cultures, but we are one in Christ. Most of us live and worship as religious minorities. How do Reformed Christians witness amid such pluralism?

### **Fullness of Life for All: Inclusiveness and Participation**

People are excluded because of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or for other reasons. Entire nations are excluded from the international governance system. Yet the good shepherd's promise of abundant life is an inclusive one. How can our witness to faith in Jesus Christ transform exclusion?

### **Fullness of Life for All: Peace**

International conflict, civil war, urban and domestic violence are on the rise. In response churches around the world have declared 2001-2010 a "Decade to Overcome Violence". How do we lift up peace and reconciliation as a way of life?

### **Fullness of Life for All: Gender Justice**

The gospel calls us to challenge Christian traditions and social norms that suppress the gifts of women. How is partnership between women and men renewing both church and society?

### **Fullness of Life for All: Creation**

The earth is the Lord's. Land, air, seas, animals and plants also rejoice on the Sabbath day of rest. How can we be better stewards of creation?

### **Fullness of Life for All: Economic Justice**

The world economic system favours trade for profit over an economy for life. Debt and corruption have left many countries dependent on global financial institutions. The flow of speculative finance has increased a hundredfold while in many places families cry out for daily bread. How can the Reformed family covenant for greater economic justice?

### **RESPONDING TOGETHER**

These are some of the pressing life issues that we must bear in mind as we engage in biblical reflection on the theme "That All may have Life in Fullness". Seeking to discern God's will for our response, we are challenged to do more than issue statements and resolutions. Jesus' promise of inclusive salvation has implications for our covenant as a family of Reformed churches, for our mission among God's people and for the spiritual life of our congregations.

As we journey towards Accra 2004, the World Alliance invites Christians around the world to add their voices, naming issues, offering insight, praying earnestly and reflecting biblically on what fullness of life means and how the witness of the family of reformed, presbyterian, congregational, waldensian and united churches can make a difference.

### **LET US HEAR FROM YOU**

To make the journey towards Accra a real gathering process, the World Alliance wants to know about the challenges facing your community and how your congregation seeks to bear witness to the fullness of life offered by Jesus Christ. Your testimonies will inform the worship, Bible study and deliberations of the meeting in Ghana.

*Share your concerns, insight and witness with  
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