

REFORMED CHURCHES UNITED IN MISSION



Ugandans returning from studies abroad introduced Reformed teaching into their country in the 1970s. In the following decades, several churches were founded in Uganda. In 1995, pastors from the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church began searching for closer cooperation. In 2001, the seven Reformed churches in Uganda met to discuss the challenges facing Ugandans today and how they might respond together. In 2002, the churches met again and identified four priority areas for joint action in mission.

Elders, youth leaders, educators and pastors from four churches then came together for a mission action and reflection weekend. The purpose was to put the vision of *mission in unity* to the test. What happens when people from different churches come together to study the Bible and to bear witness in the community?

The group began the weekend by reading the story of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5, examining the characters in the story. In pairs, they went into the community, sharing testimonies of faith and listening to the people they encountered.

WHAT DOES WORKING TOGETHER TEACH US?

Jackson: Simon from the Reformed Presbyterian Church and I visited a family together. We worked well as a team. We are not that different.

Francis: Being together taught me a lot. It made me more open and left me feeling that we need one another.

George: Nelson from the Evangelical Free Church and I shared our different experiences in mission. It taught me some new things. I liked it.

Peace: I experienced the oneness of the body of Christ. We invited a man to church. I didn't point him to my church, but to the closest church. I'm happy if he'll find a home there – and Jesus.

NAAMAN'S STORY (2 KINGS 5)

Naaman's wife: Appearances are deceptive! Women all over the country used to envy me because of my rich and famous husband. They saw how much the King of Aram favoured him. But what did they know of my fear or his shame? Naaman – his name means "loveliness", but his life has become loneliness, loathing and leprosy.

Slave girl: For a long time I hated Naaman! He stole me from my country. Sometimes I cannot even remember my mother's face. And yet, when I saw him so afflicted, I heard my father's voice, telling us stories about how we were slaves in Egypt; how God knew our suffering and heard our cry and brought us forth with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And I remembered the stories about life and blessings if we keep the law, and about our prophets who can do anything in the name of the Lord. Anything!

Naaman: I thought I had everything. When I fell ill, I realized I had nothing. I never wasted a thought on my slaves, yet this one slave girl thought of me. I was ready to do anything to get better, but it was a simple and humble task that brought me healing. I offered the prophet silver and gold, but I was the one who received the gifts – healing, soil and peace. Everything is upside down and I've never been so happy!

Naaman's servants: Our task was minor. We loaded the chariots, prepared the horses and tried to make Naaman comfortable. We were not sure that washing in the Jordan would make a difference, but not even trying made no sense. Well, you know the result. After his seventh dip in the river, his flesh was like that of a young boy! The rest of the trip was easy.

Gehazi: If only these foreigners hadn't come! It is Naaman who brought this curse on me! And if only Elisha hadn't refused his gifts, weren't they well deserved? But then again, if only I hadn't run after Naaman and spun such a tale. If only I hadn't lied to my master. If only...!



WHAT DOES NAAMAN'S STORY TEACH US ABOUT MISSION?

Prossy: I think the slave girl is the missionary.

George: We should stop despising others and listen to everybody. Unexpected people, like the slave girl, may have a message from God.

Peter: It is difficult to know who is God's messenger. Some say our local councils are an instrument of God's mission because they work for justice and peace in the community. Can a secular body be involved in mission? Perhaps God's mission is wider than the mission of the church. In any case, it is important to work together as Reformed churches, but also with other people.

Francis: I shared my faith with a man I met on the street. He wanted to commit his life to Jesus, but he worked in a brewery and my church is against alcohol. He asked if he had to quit his job, but then how would he support his family? I told him he should stay where he was and after a while God might help him to find another job. Was I right?

Sarah: The prophet said to Naaman, "go in peace". Christ accepts us as we are and then he changes us into what he wants us to become. We shouldn't put conditions on people accepting Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. WITH WHOM DO YOU IDENTIFY IN THE STORY OF NAAMAN'S HEALING, AND WHY?
2. NAAMAN WAS A "GREAT MAN" WHO BECAME LIKE A "YOUNG BOY", A GENERAL WHO HUMBLED HIMSELF BY WASHING "SEVEN TIMES" IN THE JORDAN. JESUS ALSO SPEAKS ABOUT GOD'S REIGN THROUGH CONTRAST AND SYMBOLS. HOW DO CONTRASTS AND SYMBOLS HELP US TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

3. FRANCIS RELATES NAAMAN'S DILEMMA TO THE DILEMMA OF THE BREWERY WORKER. WHAT DILEMMAS DO CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS FACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

4. WHAT IS GOD'S VISION FOR YOUR COMMUNITY? CAN YOU SEE SIGNS OF GOD'S REIGN? HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN ROLE IN GOD'S MISSION?

5. WHO ARE YOUR PARTNERS IN GOD'S MISSION? HOW DOES WORKING TOGETHER STRENGTHEN THE MISSION OF YOUR CHURCH AND YOUR OWN FAITH?

PRAYER

Dear God, you created me. My beginning and my end, my origin and my purpose, are found in you. You created all of us, each one unique, but all of us in your image. Please teach me to recognize you in others and to accept them as parts of your body that complement myself.

And dear God, teach me to hear you as you call. The invitation to share in your mission can be daunting, and I am like Moses who stutters and Jonah who runs away. Empower me, Lord, to accept my part in your mission and perhaps to become like the young girl who found the love to witness to your healing and reconciling power even to her oppressor. Amen.

AUTHORS

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