

A WORLDWIDE FAMILY OF 75 MILLION



The universe created by God is big, but the world created by Christianity is small. The world of peoples and nations is vibrant and diverse. The world of Christianity, despite its many confessions and traditions, is much narrower. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches is a fellowship of more than 200 hundred churches with 75 million members. We are not small, but compared to a world population of 6 billion, we are a modest number.

How can we become a community full of life, making a difference in the world like yeast that leavens the flour (Mt 13.33) despite our limitations? This has a lot to do with our self-understanding as Reformed churches, as members of the Christian community and as part of the world of nations and peoples.

YOUNDE GOES TO TOWN

Once in the country of Akim, in the hills far back from the coast in Africa, there was a man named Younde. He was a simple man who had never been far from home. He had often heard about the big town of Accra by the ocean and all the wonderful things to be found there, but he had never seen it. One day Younde had to go to Accra. He walked for many days. The road was hot and dusty.

As he came close to Accra, he saw a little boy herding cows. He asked him, "Who is the owner of all these cattle?" But the boy didn't understand Younde, because Younde's language was Akim, while in Accra they spoke Ga. "Minu," he replied, which meant "I don't understand." "Minu!" said Younde. "What a rich man he must be to own so many cows!". Younde came to the market and saw women selling things that were rare in his village. "Where do all these things come from?" he asked a little girl. She smiled and replied, "Minu." Younde was silent. Everything was Minu. Minu was everywhere.

He stopped an old man with a drum under his arm. "So many people all at one time!" he exclaimed. "What makes so many people come to Accra?" "Minu," the old man said. Younde was overwhelmed. What influence that Minu had! People came to Accra in great crowds just because of him. He went out of the market down to the ocean's edge. Lying in the water were many fishing boats with sails. "Wow! To whom do all these boats belong?" he asked a fisherman. "Minu," the fisherman replied. Younde was overcome. Minu was indeed a great man. He owned everything. "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it," Younde said, "they ought to call Accra Minu's Town."

When he came to the edge of the town, he came across a funeral procession. He asked one of the mourners: "Who is this person who has died?" And the mourner re-plied sadly, "Minu." "What! The great Minu is dead?" Younde said. "Oh, poor Minu! He has died just like an ordinary person!" "Poor Minu!" he said over and over again. "Poor Minu!"

(Younde's story is a well-known Ghanaian folktale. This version is abridged from "Younde Goes To Town" in *Best-Loved Folktales of the World* edited by Joanna Cole, Anchor Books, New York, 1983.)

DO WE REALLY UNDERSTAND? (MARK 8.14-21)

In a boat, on the Sea of Galilee, returning from an exhausting ministry among the great crowds that gathered around Jesus, the disciples realized that they had forgotten to bring any food. All that remained was one loaf of bread. This worried them.

Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And seven for the four thousand, and how many baskets full of



broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The disciples were overwhelmed by the crowd. They saw the crowd, but they did not understand what the crowd meant to Jesus or what Jesus meant to the crowd. They were so absorbed by their task, distributing and collecting bread, that they failed to understand what was happening. The bread represented the fullness of God's love – abundant and plentiful – and offered to all.

Jesus' disciples heard what Jesus said and saw what he did, but most of the time they did not understand him. Younde too was overwhelmed – by Accra. He was too busy painting his own picture of sights and sounds to realize that the people he met did not understand his language and that he did not understand theirs. He went to Accra a stranger and he left a stranger. Are we any better than the disciples – than Younde?

Have we ever thought that other Christians might not understand who we claim to be as Reformed churches? Have we considered that people who are not Christian might find it difficult to understand our aim to bring about love, justice and peace in the community? For that matter, are we, members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches from different cultural and social backgrounds, any less strange to one another in our common search for life in fullness?

Delegates from churches around the world will go to Accra. We will arrive as strangers, but let us not leave as strangers to one another, to our Ghanaian hosts, to the people of Africa, to the world or to God's creation. May God send us home understanding one another and being understood. This is what it means to be Reformed and ecumenical, to be Christians in the world of diverse cultures and religions.

QUESTIONS

1. HOW DOES THE GOSPEL PASSAGE HELP US TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE REFORMED CHRISTIANS?
2. HOW CAN THE WORLD AROUND US TEACH US TO BE BETTER CHRISTIANS?
3. HOW CAN WE WORK WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST?
4. WHAT CAN WE DO TO FOSTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS WHO ARE NOT CHRISTIAN?
5. WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO GIVE UP IN ORDER TO SHARE LIFE IN FULLNESS WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS?

PRAYER

God of wisdom, enlighten our minds so that we may understand what we see and what we hear. Deliver us from our small preoccupations, and open our minds to the world with all its joys and sufferings. Deliver us from our self-concern, and open our hearts in love and compassion to our neighbours, be they Christians of other traditions, people of other faiths, or women, men and children with whom we share the world you have created. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

AUTHOR

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