

Welcome to the WCRC on behalf of the Reformed Church of Zurich (zhref.ch)

Dear Sisters and Brothers: It is a great honor for me to welcome you on behalf of The Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich to this gathering of the European branch of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

We live in a time of tremendous challenges that demand our full attention and urgent action. These challenges are not only social and cultural around us – but also deeply theological within our Reformed Churches. We don't seem to be capable to express the core of our faith in an institutional and/or organizational way that touches the souls and the hearts of our people.

What is my contribution as a Zurich Reformed church official and local pastor? I would like to point out that the members of the Zurich Reformed Church have no written creed or Confession they can relate to.

What we have is this:

Church Order

Part 1: The Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich
Section I: Origin and confession – 1 Church

Article 1

1.1 [BIBLE] The Church is wherever God's word is proclaimed and heard on the basis of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is proclaimed and heard.

1.2 [TRINITY] The Church is everywhere where people recognize God as the Creator, where they recognize Jesus Christ as the head of the church and as the Lord and Reconciler of the world and where people are called to faith by the Holy Spirit and are thus united in a living community.

1.3 [MEMBERS] The church is everywhere where people confess, through faith, hope and love the kingdom of God in word and deed.

This historical fact that confessing people are in the Center and not a written Creed highlights the importance of communal discernment. A reformed identity today in Zurich as a church involves collective theological reflection: Diverse voices within the community contribute to a richer understanding of faith.

This has consequences: It is not just about the individual churches, but also about the individuals in the churches. We must encourage our congregations to engage in their own theological reflection and be in dialogue with them rather than relying solely on established formulations. We need a

Scriptural Identity: Emphasizing the Bible as the primary source of faith and doctrine rather than secondary creeds.

Liturgical Identity: The ways in which worship and liturgy are conducted reflect the individual theological beliefs, values, words, and symbols of our members. They are the church – with us. We officials are not the church – for them.

Ecclesiological Identity: The change of the church as a community, including its structure and governance. We must remember that the Communion of Jesus Christ was a Movement, not an institution.

That means: Just as the Zurich church's lack of a formal creed allows for adaptability, relevant Reformed Identity must remain responsive to contemporary challenges coming from the insights by its members. This is allowing us to react to changing circumstances and new understandings.

With a Lutheran German mother, a Waldensian Italian father, an adolescence in a Baptist church, and a scholarship from the WARC in the 1980s in Berkeley, I learned what that means: Our theological identities are personal and individual. And with a new member, former catholic, dedicated Yoga teacher in our Church, half Swiss, half Ghanan, I could imagine what we still must learn:

Not just from the Nicaea creed to Accra confession, but from confession to confessing, from Accra to wherever we are called to? «Wherever we are called to» is the expression in the Zurich church order today when speaking about Ordination. My tactile approach means: We are called and challenged to listen to all our members to know what to confess. Also, to the more than 90% of our members who do not attend our meetings or worship services...

This leads to a Contextual Identity: I learned this from Choan-Seng Song, notably the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) from 1995 to 2006. His emphasis on the importance of integrating cultural contexts into a Christian theology in Asia is important for Identities as Reformed Churches today as well. Song emphasizes that theology must be done within the context of the culture and the experiences of the people to be relevant and meaningful to the local population.

We must be attentive to the experiences of our members, *especially those who leave, ensuring that we do not lose sight of Christ (Matthew 25) in our community*. They might still be searching or longing for a reformed identity but are lacking means of identification. We need to ask them questions:

How do you imagine God?

How do you envision Jesus?

How do you experience the Spirit?

How could you enhance our community?

When and where?

- Young People who are at the End of their Confirmation Classes
- Parents who bring their Child for a Baptism
- Couples who want to get married
- Families who ask for a funeral

It is from there – with listening to the Answers to the essential Questions we start our Innovation.

Meetings like this provide us with a safe environment to admit our concerns and uncertainties. We must learn quickly from each other and from our members, especially those who leave us. I urge you to be radical in our identity-approach. It is not enough to make small, incremental changes. We must challenge the status quo and push for deep, systemic transformation.

Think of our Reformed Church like Swiss cheese – full of holes but holding together beautifully because of its unique structure. Those holes, gaps in our creeds and confessions, are where we find room for our members to grow and for us to adapt, to include everyone's voice in our collective faith development.

I hope you will have inspiring conversations, deep discussions. I hope for a new collective search for ways in which we, as Reformed Churches, can make a significant impact in Europe. I wish you all a successful and blessed assembly.

In the name of God, with the help of the Spirit, for the Sake of Christ – and all to ones who strive to have a reformed Christian identity. Thank you very much.