

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
of the 'Action Plan'
- final proposal - submitted by the Church Revision Committee
to the Synod of RCH on 12. November 2014.

About the aim and the way towards it

“Heaven and earth will pass away”, but “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” The question of the future of the church is therefore whether it is and remains in Christ. All of our good decisions come from the knowledge of God and the obedience to the Holy Spirit. We regard “*Missio Dei*” (God’s mission) as the most decisive theological concept and perception for the church’s future. It includes the recognition that God’s nature is characterized by the existence in mission. The Father sends the Son, and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The role of the church is no other than to join God’s saving mission for the world.

The vision formulated by the Church Revision Committee (CRC) [1] is the application of this theological insight. This material is incomplete in nature. It is incomplete because the church can only find and fulfil its mission in the presence of the Holy Spirit. And this cannot be substituted by institutional reconfiguration and restructuring even if they are supported sociological studies, economic analysis, psychological support and expertise. Turning to the future, we profess together with Moses: “Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here!" (Exodus 33:15) Therefore this material is shared with the notice that those who read it shall spend as much time with prayer before God in search of the renewal of the church as much they spend on reading this study and thinking it through. If we who are from the Reformed Church and take responsible leadership positions are not open to embrace God’s renewing work, and thus to face the present situation sincerely, then any letter we write down or read is fruitless.

The life of our church shows a colourful picture. There are light and joyful colours in it – we have many reasons to be grateful for God’s blessings, faithfulness and mercy. The faithful service, persistence and exemplary work of many, as well as the good initiatives and practices have inspired our work. In this respect our efforts were headed towards making all of these public and part of the church’s richness. The life of our church, however, is also shadowed by darker tones – these threatening tendencies are the ones that motivated the Synod to bring our committee to life. If the CRC does not formulate fundamental and essential questions in connection with the life of our church, then it has not fulfilled its task.

Therefore, the Committee has interpreted its mandate as being called into existence by the Synod for the initiation of an open dialogue about the future on the basis of the facing of the present in sincerity. As such, this document has come to life following the results of a national dialogue [2] as well as a consultation series among experts convened together with the Synod Mission Committee. In order to make the instances of the planning work going on in our Church at present be mutually empowering, we endeavoured to direct them into one channel. The two most important aspects of this channel were named right at the beginning of our work: firstly that the church lives in its congregations, and secondly that the church has to interpret itself from the perspective of its mission. This document contains only recommendations that could fit into and follow this channel. We attempted to create a document with a unified principle.

But, not only was the coherence of the material important for us, but its feasibility and practicability as well. We wanted to formulate a vision which not only derives from the mission

of the church, but one that is organically connected to our present situation as well; it contains an action plan which has multiple stages, can be scheduled and thus can have perceptible and verifiable results. In this respect we did not manage to create a unified material. There are some chapters in which we arrived at concrete suggestions, while in others we only formulated the need for further and deeper analysis.

Overview of content

The focus of the vision is the testimony of the congregations. In order to ensure that the members of our church and our office-bearers are strengthened in their consciousness and that our congregations fulfil their mission tasks, there is need for practical support, common forming, trainings and the provision of supporting resources and materials, and related to this, for research and analysis. To make all of these available and to help the RCH become a missionary church, there is need for institutional assistance as well. From an organisational aspect this means the creation of the **Congregational Resource Centre**, an organisation of the national church uniting and supporting the already operating initiatives on Church District and Presbytery levels. This centre can only reach its aims and support continuous dialogue, if it can hold together theological work and practice, national interests and local needs. (Chapter 3.2.)

The primary role of the congregations necessitates the rethinking and reconfiguration of the organisational structure and financial management of the church. In this field the most urgent task is to ensure the clarity and transparency as to the fields of tasks and operation. The church organisation can serve congregations if it takes administrative burdens upon itself and if it supplements its supervising and controlling roles with professional support as well. Therefore, connected to the Synod Office also including the Congregational Resource Centre we recommend the establishment of **Support Centres** on a Presbytery/regional level which could offer assistance to congregations in the areas of congregation building, gypsy ministry, child and youth ministry, pastoral care (counselling) of pastors, internal organisational communication, legal issues, project-development, real estate and facility management. This at the same time means that the rethinking of the allocation of tasks, powers and sources available among the levels of the church organisation, including the regrouping of tasks from the church districts to the presbyteries in the spirit of subsidiarity. An indispensable condition of the recommended organisational changes is a more precise overview of the present financing and economic system as well as the description of the principles and operation of a new management serving the mission church. This shall be based on a comprehensive situation analysis and would entail, for example the decision whether our church should be self-supporting. For the fulfilment of this task we recommend the establishment of an **ad hoc expert committee**. (Chapter 3.3.)

With the vision of a missionary church comes a social and public presence much more intensive than that of present. The key concept of this is not producing declarations but giving testimony. The revival of witness – both in word and deed, individually and as community – necessitates intensive theological and social analysis as well. Thus according to our recommendation there is a need for an institute researching social issues which at the same time is closely connected to the community of local congregations. The strengthening unity, the coordination of the network of congregations and church members with expertise could be adequately implemented by a Synod Commission (Church and Society Committee). (Chapter 3.4.)

The church, which consciously builds upon the service of its members and social presence and at the same time regards its unity and the solidarity a witness, cannot exist without effective

communication. This is partly a technical question, but mainly an issue of attitude, confidence and learning process. Therefore there is need to renew the culture of communication from the congregational level to the national level, including of course the organisational network of our church as well. The main basis of this could be the national network of the Support Centres working on Presbytery (or regional) level. The role of this is to ensure indirect and at the same time effective relation between all the members of the church and to be present at all organisational levels of our church and take account of the message entrusted to us in the information society. (Chapter 3.5.)

Within the service of the congregations two fields deserve special attention; the spiritual health of pastors and the service among children and young people. According to our recommendation, in the support of the manifold service of the pastors, the academic progress shall be ensured by the **Reformed National Continuing Education Institute**, while the continuous renewal of their spirituality and spiritual health shall be facilitated by the **National Vocational Counselling Service**. The organisation and operation of the latter belongs to the tasks of the Congregational Resource Centre. In the continuous academic trainings the aim is mission training and the shaping of attitude among the already existing frames. In terms of professional assistance, the goal is to provide opportunities (mentor relations, small-group workshops, anonymous help, and retreat serving spiritual renewal) which pastors can make use of, depending on their needs. (Chapter 5.1.)

In terms of the work in connection with children and the youth, many developments have taken place in our church in the recent years. The vision emphasises the need to allocate means to Support Centres in the presbyteries in order to make the good practice taking place in our congregations a service everywhere approachable. In this aspect the task of the Congregational Resource Centre uniting the Support Centres is to connect the children and youth organisations together and to the schools, to harmonize their work with the service of the congregations and to effectively support the efforts of the congregations for the strengthening of families. (Chapter 3.6.2.)

The service of our congregations is decisively determined by the tasks taken over from the state, usually in an organisational form. This is evident on the basis of a data as well, which reveals that on a national average the costs of the congregations can be covered only up to 30% from the offering of the members in form of yearly church contributions, donations and Sunday collections. In this situation our church is heavily dependent in every aspect of its life upon the institutions directly or indirectly involved in its operation. The maintenance of institutions is many times argued for by the mission task of the church. The theological grounding of this, however, has not been formulated by our church yet and the evaluation of the past 25 years from a mission perspective has not yet been done either. Therefore it is necessary to work out the mission and theological bases of the founding and management of institutions as well as operate a monitoring system which is able to ensure that our institutions can support and complete the mission of the congregations and thereby can give witness of God's Kingdom and can proclaim the Gospel. (Chapter 3.6.3.)

The CRC recommends this middle-term vision to be discussed in the largest circles of the church.

[1] “The basis of the Church's existence and mission is that the redeeming will of God has become manifest in Christ. The Church, therefore, is both a partaker and an instrument in God's mission. The community of the Church is called to be a sign, foretaste and servant of the Kingdom of God in the world through its congregations and church members, who proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world both with words and deeds. The organization of the Church, the structure that provides the framework for the community of the congregations, must be a tool and medium of the communication of the Gospel creating values, identity and community.”

[2] The 16% participation ratio itself holds an appalling mirror to us about the unity of our church and the willingness to have an open dialogue about ourselves.