

## OPENING ADDRESS EUCRC 2012

Kiev, Ukraine

Dear brothers and sisters,

You may consider yourselves to be more than welcome at this fourth European Conference of Reformed Churches. We met before in Soest in 2007 and 2008, The Netherlands. And there after in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2010 and now so in Kiev, Ukraine.

We have received ... registrations for this conference. But, before anything else, let me tell you that I'm missing one brother especially. From 2008 br. Theo Karelse has been a member of the convening committee of the ECRC. He managed finances very well indeed. After a period of being seriously ill, the Lord brought him home on 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2012. It was even more saddening for the children, when only a few weeks later, they also had to take leave of their mother. We remember Theo's commitment to the ECRC with great gratitude.

These days we are guests at a mission post of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). That is to say, they are working here in support of the Ukrainian Evangelical Reformed Churches with the aim of spreading the biblical faith in accordance with the reformed tradition in this part of the world. Will hear more of this work shortly. But in advance I want to express my heart-felt thanks to the brothers and sisters here for their hospitality and their work to prepare this conference. If it is possible we will give you some updated information about the concern in the Harryvan family during this conference. May the Lord be with Tobias, his parents, brothers and sisters.

The convening committee choose as the theme for this conference 'Marginal and missional'. Last year in the Netherlands a book was published called '*Marginaal en missionair*'. It got a lot of attention in our country. A fifth edition is announced and I think, it deserves to be translated into English. At this conference we are not so much concerned with that book in itself, but we will be dealing with the two parts of the title, and the way in which they are related.

To us it seems a striking characterisation of the reformed church in the 21st century Europe. By the way, the situation in Europe differs from one country to next. In The Netherlands reformed Christians 'gloom' quite a bit, but every time I visit a reformed church abroad, I realise how many possibilities Dutch Christians still have. And yet, there is no denying that throughout Europe biblical faith has become (a) marginal (thing). That is a fact, judging from the number of confessors, but also when we look at the influence on society. The author of this book I just mentioned sees this a judgment of God, one that should humble us.

At the same time, from the moment it comes to life, the church is missionary, and it stays missionary as long as it has life. That is not dependent on the room that is left or the expected receptiveness. Sometimes we believe to see that there is more receptiveness . A

contemporary version of Jesus' arrest, trial and execution, *The Passion*, was staged in the centre of Rotterdam and broadcasted on national television. This broadcast was watched by 1.3 million viewers. In order to achieve that, well-known secular singers had to be cast and appropriate secular pop songs about rejection, betrayal and pain needed to be incorporated. But from the Gospel of the crucified Jesus Christ was proclaimed. And by the way, one other thing I cannot fail to notice: how much in the reformed churches abroad the missionary calling is alive. Indeed, it is seen as part of being a church.

For the theme 'Marginal and missional' we meet at a hope-inspiring place. The Ukraine as a country and as a people know the christian faith above all in the Eastern orthodox way. Reformed Protestantism here has never been anything but marginal. During the time of the Russian rule reformed pastors had to flee because of the pressure of the atheistic communism. Some of them ended up in work camps in Siberia. You might say a divine smile reveals itself in the fact that after the collapse of communism, it was this very language, Russian, that served as a tool to spread the Gospel in Eastern Europe. As did once the Greek language of the emperor of Rome to spread the Gospel throughout the world. And before that Pharaoh's treasures were used in building God's tabernacle. Also during this conference you will hear brothers and sisters glorifying the living God in the Russian language. And that we can meet here now, not followed by the secret police (I hope), is proof of God's omnipotence (power). And it indeed is hope-inspiring with a theme 'Marginal and missional'.

A small explanation to the programme (you will find an updated version in your folder).

- We are grateful for the two main speakers of this conference, brs. Jos Colijn and Wim Verboom. Neil Macmillan had agreed to give a paper, but at a late moment it became clear to him that because of his workload he could not travel to Kiev. He was so kind to send his paper to us in writing. I hope you will find the time to read this paper *before* Thursday. Because we filled the opening in the schedule with three primary reaction from a Ukraine, a Belgian and a Scot. (no joke!)
- We have granted your wishes in the evaluation of the Edinburgh conference: the group-discussion returns. As this always precedes a plenary session, I *do* ask you to keep in mind the time, and to be in the right place in the right time. Another thing that was missed was a visit to the town of Edinburgh. To make up for this we will run along to the centre of Kiev tomorrow afternoon.
- Thursday is a so-called "Ukraine-day". We will welcome a number of Ukraine guests for the day and a number of Ukraine students will provide a workshop. Because not all of them speak English, several parts of the programme will be translated simultaneously. That may be a little bit tiring for those who speak English well, but love bears all things.

And then a few domestic announcements:

- I'd like to introduce the members of the convening committee to you: representing the RPCI prof. David McKay. Representing the FCS rev. James Maciver. And representing the GKV rev. Lucius de Graaff. He will be your slavedriver these days. Just to help you getting to the right time in the right place. I am rev. Han Schenau of the CGKN. The responsibility of the convening committee is primarily the content of the conference.

- Any questions or comments regarding your stay here, logistics and transport, please speak to rev. Jos Colijn and his wife Marlies, or to rev. Henk Drost and his wife Ria.
- Concerning administration I introduce to you sr. Gretie Enter. This past year she has been increasingly concerned about her health. And just a few weeks ago the Lord received her old mother into glory. We are grateful that sr. Gretie can be with us here and that she wants to serve us with her talents.
- Finally. We have been informed that rabies occurs in the Ukraine. So you do wise to refrain yourselves from behaviour which would tempt dogs to show their teeth or indeed to use them.

Rev. J.G. (Han) Schenau  
Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands