



ÉGLISE RÉFORMÉE  
DE FRANCE

International relations  
Pastor Didier Crouzet.  
E-mail : [didier.crouzet@unacerf.org](mailto:didier.crouzet@unacerf.org)

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### To our sister Churches and international ecumenical organizations

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The theme of the 103<sup>rd</sup> national Synod of the Reformed Church of France, which was held from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May, was solidarity and social action (or "*diakonia*"). Against a background of recession and the negative effects of globalization, delegates considered how the Church could respond to new types of insecurity, and how to prepare for service to those suffering from social exclusion and for accompanying "life's wounded" on their spiritual journey.

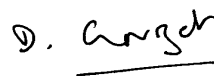
We enclose the text of the relevant decision adopted by the Synod. It is in three parts, intended for three different recipients: the local churches, the Protestant movements and organizations engaged in community work, and the National Council of the Reformed Church of France. The Synod also adopted a public statement (also enclosed).

The Synod adopted a number of recommendations. The Synod encourages local churches to extend a welcome to members of the congregation who come from abroad, and to make room for their culture and their special sensitivities. Where Protestant communities of immigrant origin establish their own churches alongside the local Reformed church, the Synod recommends setting up a partnership to ensure they do not become isolated.

The Synod also reacted to the new government Bill on the situation of foreigners in France. Addressing Members of Parliament, it expressed serious concern about the possible consequences of the application of this Bill on the lives of foreigners seeking protection or a better life in our country. The delegates affirm that all life is precious in the eyes of God; consequently, they cannot accept the ill-treatment and humiliation engendered by a Bill that they regard as liable seriously to restrict freedom and contrary to Protestant ethical values. The Synod requested the National Council to bring its concern to the attention of the Government, and exhorted the local churches to challenge their elected representatives on this matter.

Finally, the Synod appointed a new National Council for a three-year term. Pastor Laurent Schlumberger was elected President, succeeding Pastor Marcel Manoël, who is retiring after nine years in office. Laurent Schlumberger, 52, has been a minister in different local churches, and was president of the Western Region of the Reformed Church of France. He has written a number of books, the latest of which, *Sur le seuil*, (On the threshold) is an attempt to define ways and means of evangelization from a reformed perspective.

With brotherly greetings from the Reformed Church of France.



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International relations

**Decision 32 – 1: “SOLIDARITY IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST”  
RESOLUTION FOR THE LOCAL CHURCHES**

*(votes for : 80; votes against : 0)*

Moved by concern for all those whose lives are affected by insecurity, sickness or exclusion, whether material, psychological or spiritual, the national Synod meeting from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May at La Force expresses its gratitude for your solidarity with such people in the light of the Gospel.

- **“In the name of Jesus Christ”**: set free by the Gospel, each Christian is called by baptism to fulfil his or her vocation with a commitment to follow Christ in *“preaching good news to the poor [...] proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...”* (Luke 4, 18)

We urge you:

- to put into practice this message of freedom offered to all
- to be attentive to the ways in which our peers express their need for meaning
- in your commitment to diaconal service, to bear witness to your faith and hope, while respecting the convictions of others.

- **When a believer is called to diaconal service**: diaconal service has a spiritual dimension: it continually brings us face to face with our own vulnerability and our own poverty before God. Christians who know that they themselves benefit from God's commitment in their favour cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of others. A commitment to “life's wounded” is an opportunity for a special encounter with others, with oneself and with God. All parties, the helpers and the helped, can allow themselves to be changed and dignified in the eyes of the person opposite.

We ask all those carrying out diaconal service to live their commitment as a spiritual journey in search of the truth about our identity and our relation to God.

- **When the Church recognizes the call to diaconal service**: As Bonhoeffer wrote, the calling of the Church is to try to define a space in which God can act. The Church can be fully herself only if she makes space in her daily life for active concern for those whom Jesus called “the least of these my brethren.” Correspondingly, diaconal service is fully itself only when it is rooted in the life of the Church and supported by prayer.

We ask you to consider anew your plan for the life of your church, with special concern for:

- strengthening brotherly love within your congregations, as a witness to the love received from God;
- enhancing your awareness of new forms of insecurity, so as to become places of welcome, mutual help, listening and sharing;
- making a diaconal commitment through daily acts of solidarity or more organized actions in diaconal movements within the parish or on a wider scale;
- maintaining contact with the movements and organizations that make up the Church alongside your congregations;
- encouraging those of your members who are prepared to engage on a voluntary or a professional basis in work to help those in difficulty;
- giving a proper place to diaconal service in the liturgy, so that this aspect of faith can feed the life of your church;
- supporting those who provide a diaconal service, since their task is often heavy, and raising their profile by recognizing and establishing personal or collective diaconal ministries;
- establishing, in certain places and in accordance with clearly defined specifications, pastoral ministries with a diaconal emphasis to reflect the inseparability of the Word and service to one's neighbour;
- raising awareness of this aspect of Christian life among the young, through catechism, and encouraging them to answer a calling to diaconal service.

- **When the Church views its calling to diaconal service as an aspect of its prophetic role**: diaconal service, on the horizon of the Kingdom of Heaven, is both a free choice, and an obligation of righteousness. The commercialization of social relations, injustice between North and South, conflicts which intensify migratory flows, imbalance caused by undue exploitation of global resources – all these factors tend to aggravate situations of insecurity and abject poverty.

Faced with these developments, diaconal service cannot be confined to simply binding up the wounds of society. The practice of diaconal service must also be a force for protest, for challenge and for proposal addressed to individuals, society as a whole and the public authorities.

In view of the scale of the issues facing us, we are sometimes tempted, individually or collectively, to discouragement. Nevertheless, we believe that the Lord can use our weakness to give the world a sign of His Kingdom of justice and peace.

## **Decision 32 – 2 : for the Protestant organizations and movements**

*(votes for : 79 ; votes against : 0)*

The Synod of the Reformed Church of France, meeting from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May at La Force, expresses its deep gratitude for the way in which the organizations and movements in the Protestant tradition translate concern for one's neighbour into daily life, through caring, education, mutual support and solidarity.

Aware of the challenges facing associations nowadays (economic crisis, the commercialization of social action, competitiveness between associations, etc.) the Synod would encourage you to serve and defend the humanity of all aspects of each human being, and not to lose sight of the meaning of your action or your creative capacity. The Synod calls upon the local churches to encourage their members to volunteer to work with you, and is ready to help you raise issues with the public authorities.

Diaconal action finds balance and strength from the combination of the efforts of local churches and their diaconal services and of chaplaincies, and the efforts of other structures such as the organizations and movements within the *Fédération de l'Entraide protestante* (Federation of Protestant mutual support associations).

In the wake of the meetings held during preparations for the synods, we would urge those involved in diaconal service to communicate with each other, and to reinforce their collaboration.

We would especially urge you, the diaconal institutions, to enrich your links with the local churches:

- by keeping them informed of your actions,
- by asking for their collaboration,
- by drawing their attention to the situations you encounter,
- by becoming involved with the life of the churches and their witness, through actions or events organized in concertation with them.

For their part, the local churches are keen for partnership with you, to think about who you are and what you do, and to help you, as far as they are able, to provide spiritual support both to those giving and to those receiving assistance.

Local churches and diaconal institutions, anxious for Christian witness to have a recognisable face, each with our own objectives and constraints, together we form the Church. For we believe that your commitment to those whom Jesus called “the least of these my brethren” is a way of “making space for God to act” (D. Bonhoeffer) and proclaiming God's justice.

## **Decision 32 – 3 : To the National Council of the Reformed Church of France**

*(votes for : 80; votes against : 0)*

Recognizing that the Church and believers are called to diaconal service, the national Synod of the Reformed Church of France meeting from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May 2010 at La Force requests the National Council to take steps to express this calling fully and to raise its profile. In particular, the Synod asks the National Council:

- to ensure that the Church's calling to diaconal service is clearly affirmed in the constitutional charter of the future united church,
- to work out arrangements which, with due respect for their respective constitutions, would enable the organizations and movements to enhance the churches' awareness of the situations they encounter, and to take a greater part in the decisions of the institutional church,
- to inform the *Institut Protestant de Théologie* (Protestant Theological College) of its wish that the initial training of pastors should take full account of *diakonia*, so as to ensure that they are more aware of this basic aspect of their ministry,
- in collaboration with the theological colleges and the *Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante* (federation of Protestant mutual support associations) to promote specific training courses for church members and others, whether believers or not, working in a professional or a voluntary capacity in the field of diaconal services; the aim would be to offer further training as well as responding to expectations and queries in the ethical and theological spheres,
- to request the national Commission on Liturgy to suggest liturgical texts highlighting the diaconal aspects of worship,
- to work out a form of support for ministers sent to work in the organizations and movements,
- jointly with the EELF (Evangelical Lutheran Church of France) and in cooperation with the UEPAL (Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine), to continue consideration of the diaconal ministry, so as to define more clearly its place alongside other ministries, taking account of practical experience elsewhere and experimental approaches launched in the regions,
- to encourage the development of pastoral ministries with a strong diaconal aspect,
- in concertation with the French Protestant Federation, to continue to draw the attention of the public authorities to the issues surrounding the present tendency to interpret official texts concerning secularity in a simplistic way
- to call upon the Council of the French Protestant Federation to request amendment to the 1905 Act to make it easier for religious associations to undertake diaconal activity,
- to request the "Bible and creation" network to continue its thinking on the questions referred to in wish N° 6 (Decision N° 34).

The Synod would encourage the National Council to become, in concertation with the French Protestant Federation, a force to bring protests, challenges and proposals before the public authorities, so as to call attention to the requirement for justice which Christians find in the Gospel.