



17 December 2018

Dear sisters and brothers,

We greet you in the name of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, in particular from our President, Rev. Najla Kassab, and from our General Secretary, Rev. Chris Ferguson. The World Communion of Reformed Churches comprises 233 member churches in more than 105 countries, numbering some 100 million individuals. The majority of these churches deal very intensively with issues of migration. A few weeks ago, we visited Indonesia and discussed the churches' response to the difficult circumstances of domestic workers and construction workers from Indonesia that work in Asian countries and the Middle East. In many cases, the working conditions are horrible. Sexual abuse and violence are widespread. When people return they are often alienated from their families. Some weeks later, we learned about the situations of the refugees from Myanmar in Thailand. In January, we will participate in a worship service at the US-Mexican border that will mark the continuing arrival of refugees from Central America.

The increasing number of people that are forced to leave their countries of origin does not only indicate a humanitarian challenge. It is a sign of a deeper crisis in a world where governments and the economic and political system are less and less able, and often even also are not willing, to provide basic protection to human beings and create the condition that would allow a life in safety and dignity.

For Christians this failure of the institutions constitutes also a spiritual and theological crisis. For generations, particularly Reformed Christians put enormous efforts in the formation and the reformation of the authorities to shape the state in a way that would guarantee basic tenets of God's will for its citizens. Today more and more Christians have doubts if governments and state structures can still provide the conditions for the flourishing of life. Many religious people feel this experience as a challenge of their faith. They ask how a world that is more and more marked by death, violence, abuse and oppression can still be seen as the creation that God saw and said it was very good.

Under these conditions, the continuous worship service that safeguards the sanctuary for the Tamrazyan family is a very important sign and a confession to God's goodness. In a situation where it is difficult to believe that the institutions of the government will protect the wellbeing and the livelihood of children and their families, the continuous worship is a strong witness of God's presence in a scandalous world.

This faith, which for more than seven weeks convinces people to gather, pray and worship day and night, reminds us also of an often forgotten stream of our Reformed tradition. Many people identify the Reformed churches by their close connection with the authorities of the state and the economic order. And this view is supported by the founding stories in Zurich and Geneva and in the history of churches in several countries, particularly also in the Netherlands.

But this closeness to governments only characterizes one part of the Reformed story. It conceals that through large periods of our history the Reformed Christians had to live as refugees and migrants under precarious circumstances. In this experience, governments did not offer protection but curtailed religious freedom and threatened death and severe execution.

Under these conditions, it was difficult to maintain the faith in God's faithfulness. If Christians wanted to keep their belief in a God who looks upon God's people with favour, the idea of God's sovereignty had to be thought through much more deeply. In the face of oppression, faith had to comprehend the notion that God had to be found under the experience of violence. In these circumstances, worship became an expression of a deep-rooted faith that witnessed God and God's sovereignty in a scandalous world.

Your continuous worship here is also an expression of faith that turns to God in a situation where God's goodness seems less visible. Your gathering, praying and sharing is an expression of your faith that God is present in this world. Your insistence that unjust actions of governments and courts must not have the last word on the well-being of human beings makes your worship in its deep spirituality become very political. In the best tradition of our Reformed Church, you testify that also in a secular society the institutions of the state are under God's will. In the experience of persecution and migration, our churches have learned that governments pursue what is good, when they protect the weak and safeguard the livelihood of those who are not protected by citizenship. This witness is as relevant today as it was when it was first expressed in the history of our church.

We therefore want to express our profound gratitude on behalf of the whole of the World Communion of Reformed Churches for the care that you give to the Tamrazyan family and the testimony that you give to the world. We are with you with our prayers and with our solidarity. Your witness is an encouragement for the many uprooted people in our communion and for the many members of our churches that are working for a world in which migrants are safe and can live a life in dignity. We thank you.