

**REFORMED CHURCH  
OF HUNGARY**  
Discussion material for the fourth session  
of the 13<sup>th</sup> Synod cycle  
19-20 November 2009

**(Doc. Zs. 11.)**

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**2009–2014 WORK PLAN OF THE SYNOD OF THE REFORMED  
CHURCH IN HUNGARY**

# General Synod in 13<sup>th</sup> Cycle


## Working Paper


Proposal by Presidium of the General Synod

### *Preamble*

*"that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5: 19-20)*

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvin's birthday provides an excellent opportunity to recall the particularly Reformed thoughts of our church life and theology, the heritage and values which unfortunately have often faded in our everyday lives, but without which true and authentic witness is not possible even today. This heritage endows us with the responsibility of continued renewal, and loyalty to God's Word in our current situation. In this way we can take strength from the basic principles of the Calvinist Reformation, of which two are crucial in our Church's current position.

 The Church's wealth is its life in its congregations, and the community of those congregations "right down to the level of the Synod" makes for a living Church. As our future ministers learn in the first year of their studies: "the congregation is wholly church, but it is not the whole church".

 The other central Calvinist thought regards taking authentic social responsibility, the effort made for the benefit of the general public as an integral part of the Church's mission: "Where God is honoured, humanity is practised" (Ubi cognoscitur Deus, etiam colitur humanitas – Comm Jer 22,16)

The General Synod's key responsibility is to bring these thoughts to life by means of responsible decisions, and to do its utmost to strengthen the congregations, deepen our community and foster our social service.

The Reformed Church in Hungary needs to serve people in an environment of a decreasing population and fewer church members. Following the initial enthusiasm, disappointment has grown tangibly throughout society in the 20 years that have passed since the political changes in Hungary. We also have to admit that our Church currently fails to convey the everlasting message of joy to people and does not fully exploit its opportunities to shape public life. Many of us share the desire to continuously renew our Church. We would like a Church that is clearly aware of its limits, is consolidated in its mission and witness and is able to specify and execute its tasks, one which appreciates its service providers and witnesses God's love through its spiritual life and manifestations.

Our communities that live from the reviving power of the Holy Spirit as well as our committed Church members and institutions carrying out their tasks to a high standard provide the background even

today, which is both an opportunity and a task to make efforts to attain the goals that we have set jointly and responsibly. It is this very richness that obliges us to determine the path, to the best of our knowledge, discretion and with our gratitude to God, on which we intend to walk in years to come.

In Calvin's year we ought to bear in mind that our resource and primary task is to spread the word of God. "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." (1 Cor 1: 21). The renewal of our service of preaching is an essential precondition for us to recognise the tasks awaiting us and gain strength from "faith working through love" to implement them.

The draft below is intended to facilitate all this.

The following were taken as a basis for the proposal:

- what was said at the national dean-session clerk meeting held at the beginning of the cycle,
- the cycle-closing reports of the Synod's specialised committees and their work plans for the duration of the new cycle,
- the thoughts of the senior office-bearers in the Synod Office and the public church institutions.

### Structure of the proposal

First, we attempt to summarise the focal points of the coming period in a few concepts which we expect will appear during the course of the work of the Synod and the Church, and with which the Synod intends to facilitate and lead the life of the Reformed Church in Hungary throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> Synod cycle. These focal points are intended both to outline and concentrate our work.

As part of those focal points, specific and less specific objectives and priorities are formulated as regards the work of the General Synod. The committee proposals outline the plans and expectations of the given areas in more detail. Naturally, the General Synod may at any time decide on the launch of programmes/projects that are not connected to these focal points. The objective of the summary proposal is to outline the cycle work plan of the General Synod.

## ***Focal Points***

To facilitate the Church's mission, the 13<sup>th</sup> General Synod organises its work in harmony with the following aspects and focal points:

### **1. Building and working on unity,**

*As a consequence of proclaiming the Hungarian reformed church unity, the prevailing common thinking needs to be supported and launched in new areas. Parallel to experiencing the unity in the Carpathian Basin, further steps are necessary to live and present unity within the Reformed Church of Hungary. The credibility of the Church, the efficiency of its mission and rationalisation of its operations all depend on us realising our unity.*

### **2. Strengthening the communities of the Church**

*The life of our Reformed Christian communities – primarily our congregations but our institutions too – as well as the manifestation of our lives say more than words and are more to-the-point than any communication or special effort. Our communities must feel and experience that the main decision-making body of the Church is also dealing with this central issue. Support for the Reformed communities and the consideration of new structures are one of the main tasks for the cycle to fulfil the Church's basic mission. The Church lives through its living communities.*

### **3. Enforcement and strengthening of the Synod-Presbyterian governance principle**

*External impacts forced upon us as well as internal weaknesses led to the damage of our reformed church structure. Accomplishing the service of the Church may only be realised with the joint responsibility of lay and pastoral colleagues and office bearers. In both the non-pastoral and pastoral community paying attention to and accepting one another as colleagues, church discipline can also be ensured in order that everything runs neatly and in an*

*organised way.*

Presenting the focal points in the tasks below and improving the Church's service are inconceivable without *intensifying work regarding theological and social issues*. Only by means of consolidating study-related discipline and furnishing relevant biblical guidance in issues preoccupying our communities and believers can we fight external and internal processes, i.e. relativism, that weaken and unsettle our Church.

The Synod work of the cycle focuses on these three aspects. Tasks, objectives and projects may only be set in the context of the three points above. Tasks of the General Synod which are related to more than one point at the same time are given priority.

### **Tasks<sup>1</sup>**

Within the framework of the focal points mentioned above, the Synod intends to carry out and realise the following main tasks in the 13<sup>th</sup> cycle. The committee work plans will summarise the details and sectoral breakdown of particular tasks.

- Preparation of (church-sociological) surveys in order to confront our standing and resolve tasks that await us (religious education, financial status, socio-economic changes, etc.). *We must get to know the measurable changes of the world around us and their impact on our Church. Our church life has gone through a number of changes with measurable components in the past 20 years, which need to be recognised to shape and implement the concept of a better organised and more focused church service.*
- Compilation and publishing of the Hungarian reformed church hymn book. *The two main objectives of the renewed hymn book of the Carpathian Basin – or in an even wider context, the Diaspora – are to provide congregations with hymns that are suitable for both community (mission) occasions and church services. On the one hand, the hymn book contains well-known and widely sung songs, while on the other hand, it should preserve the link to songs that bear the faith of Hungarian reformers and believers right back to the Reformation.*
- Re-thinking and strengthening the reformed public education system and, in relation thereto, reviewing reformed higher education too. *Formed and largely consolidated in the past few years, there are several concepts aimed at improving the reformed public education system and integrating it more efficiently into the Church. Strengthening our Church, improving our educational institutions and making educational work more church-like are processes that support each other. We consciously need to think over and develop our educational system in the forthcoming period.*
- Review of the operations and running of parishes (e.g. implementation of projects aimed at facilitating self-support) – and, in relation thereto, reconsidering the remuneration system of ministers and their supervision. *As part of the work that has already begun, the operations of our parishes need to be adjusted to the situation resulting from changes of the past 20 years. More specifically, their social embeddedness, legal status as well as their economic and financial standing must be reviewed. Fairly and with dignity we must prepare to close down work between shrinking communities whilst finding new momentum and new forms to shape a community of people in a new environment. The renewal and strengthening of our preaching of the Gospel plays a crucial part in all this.*
- Facilitating ways of cooperation within the Church and specifying aspects (e.g. when converting institutions) - *A decisive element of work done in recent years was to exploit opportunities inherent in various ways of cooperation in order to build our community and improve efficiency. All this needs to be developed further by appropriately dividing tasks awaiting the Church, but with regard to the whole of the Hungarian reformed community, and striving, for example, to have closer consultations with the Evangelical Church.*
- Exploring and taking the steps needed to strengthen the Reformed Church in Hungary – *a top priority of this work is to deepen cooperation between the various areas of church service and the different*

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<sup>1</sup> We only mention tasks which are a priority at the level of the Synod. Parallel to these, other important issues and tasks form part of the committee's proposals. Those proposals are also included in the Synod's work; however, they are rather the breakdown of the Synod's tasks listed below.

*specialised areas. At the same time, we need to pay attention to new concepts arising from unity in our own internal legislation and the various specific manifestations of our church life.*

- *Improvement of the volunteer service and ensuring related conditions – our Church has long-standing traditions in volunteer services arising from the gratitude to God and our spiritual urge, and it is important to pay attention more consciously to this treasure and power of our communities. It is also important that as many of us as possible regard the joy and responsibility of service as their own, and undertake tasks for the benefit of the community. In order to strengthen the ethos of volunteer service, the Church needs to provide appropriate conditions for those whom God calls in a spiritual sense, and they should also receive external calling for their service (addressing, appreciation, provision of the financial conditions for volunteering).*
- *Specifying the aspects of the service among the Roma and those living on the periphery of society, and describing the related tasks. Since the political changes we have not yet been able to develop an appropriate approach and work out solutions for an organised service among the Roma. Good ideas and practices sporadic in our Church must be collected, and new methods and proposals need to be elaborated by fully involving those concerned.*
- *Strengthening our international presence through improving our theological and study-related work. The role we play in the international church organisations, just like in the field of twinning and partnership relations, reflects not only our commitment to the ecumenical dialogue but also our self-image of being church. After the establishment of an explicit, synodal church-communion together with the Hungarian speaking reformed churches in the Carpathian basin, it is even the more a challenge to take over responsibility beyond our own borders – after all in the European area. In this respect, theological and social study must be strengthened. We have to respond the presence of the reformed voice after all in the European fellowship of churches in cooperation with our partner churches.*

## **Proposals**

The Synod decides, in dialogue with the Church's community, to work on the basis of the focal points outlined above to realise the detailed tasks in the 13<sup>th</sup> cycle.

The Synod is glad to recommend the above work plan to congregations and church organisations, asking for their opinion and feedback to support the work of the General Synod.

Furthermore, we recommend that the communities of our Church consider the scope of the work approved by the Synod and formulate their own plans and ideas for the coming years.

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## **Resolution**

- 1. The General Synod approves the proposed work plan.**
- 2. The Synod decides, in dialogue with the Church's community, to work on the basis of the focal points outlined above to realise the detailed tasks in the 13<sup>th</sup> cycle.**
- 3. The Synod is glad to recommend the above work plan to congregations and church organisations, asking for their opinion and feedback to support the work of the General Synod.**
- 3. The General Synod recommends that the communities of our Church formulate their own plans and programmes for the coming years based on the approved scope of the work.**

(Zs- /20.11.2009)

Balatonszárszó, 20 November 2009