

The Establishment of the CFW - symbol of church unity and hope -

On 8 November 1991, the Commission for Witness in the Western Cape was officially constituted in Cape Town. All four former denominations of the DRC family were involved with the establishment / foundation of this symbol of church unity.

It was preceded by tedious and painful reflections about our understanding of being and witnessing as church (ecclesiology) – in the late 70s and early 80s between the Synodical Commission for Public Witness (SCPW) of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and ministries of the former Synod Commission for Congregational Ministry and Evangelism (CME) of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Western Cape (DRCSA).

Factors such as the Belhar confession that was promulgated in 1982 by the DRMC and investigations by the Institute for Scientific Research on Mission (ISWEN) about the DRC's unfinished missionary task, lead to the pivotal workshop, "What is Mission?" It took place in Bellville from 1-3 April 1986 through the initiative of the SCPW and the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape, in collaboration with all DRC Mission Offices in SA, and was attended by representatives of domestic and foreign members of the DRC family.

At this important event **A Working Definition for Mission** was formulated, explaining in essence the call for visible church unity as essential for the credibility of its mission in the world.

In October 1986, this **Working Definition** was adopted by the DRMC Synod and approved as guide to the SCPW. In addition, during November of 1986, the Synodical Mission Board (SMB) of the DRCSA requested the SCPW of the DRMC to jointly reflect on "*our missionary work*" because they said, "*we cannot do it on our own*". The SCPW responded positively to this request.

In 1987, the executive committees of the SMB and the SCPW agreed that the Working Definition for Mission (1986), the Confession of Belhar (1986)

and the church unity decisions of the DRCSA (1987) will be considered as a principled basis for cooperation and for uniting the various ministry activities. On 27 November 1987 the executive committees of the SCPW and the SMB accepted the proposal for *one commission in order to minister to our Muslim neighbours as well as for other witness activities*. At this point it was recommended that only one Commission for Witness should be established between the churches.

On 9 November 1988 the full SCPW, the SMB's Executive Committee and observer members of the other DR Family Churches had a meeting to finalise the negotiations for a joint commission. It took place at Belhar with 24 members present. The name, *The Commission for Witness* (KGA/CFW) was agreed upon to start working in and from the Western Cape, later changed to the Cape region.

Between late 1988 and October 1990, the DRC united the CME and the SMB. Together with the other stakeholders they agreed on the foundation, guidelines and regulations, as well as on the process of establishing the united CFW. The unification was undertaken by the involved ministries through three successive "Simonsberg workshops", outside Stellenbosch.

In September 1990 the DRMC Synod approved the CFW. Hereafter it was approved by the DRCSA Synod in October 1991 as well. The basis for the unified CFW was firmly established.

On 8 November 1991, the "united Commission for Witness of the DRC family in the Western Cape" (CFW) was officially constituted in Cape Town, with members of the former Cape DRC in Africa and the RCA synods as official observers.

In 1992 the CFW with its foundation and agenda, was also finally approved by these two synods. From then on the CFW operated with the full support of the whole family.

This is how the CFW was born during the stormy years of the 1980s – as a symbol of church unity and hope.