

Elsiesrivier Statement

The three Rhenish Churches, Rhenish Church in South Africa (RCSA), Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland (EKiR), Chinese Rhenish Church Hongkong (CRC HK), together with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, Cape Provinces (URCSA) and United Evangelical Mission (UEM) met in Elsie'srivier, Capetown, South Africa, for a conference on 27 - 28 October 2015 with the theme:

In conversation with our Heritage.

Respite and Prospice (Looking Back and Looking Forward)

The host of this meeting was RCSA, a church of about 2000 members and 10 congregations which traces its history back to the very beginning of the Rhenish mission in 1829. The conference started with worship on Sunday morning and a pilgrimage to Wupperthal, North of Cape Town, the first Mission Station of Rhenish Mission Society (RMS), founded in 1829, with a church consecrated in 1834. They learned from the local people the history of this place which belongs since 1965 to the Moravian Church.

1) The Conference participants and church representatives expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to meet and to share and to clarify how to go forward within the Rhenish Family.

2) Coming from different continents (Africa, Asia, Europe) and contexts, and sharing stimulating interaction, we reviewed the Rhenish Heritage in South Africa together. We received new perspectives from one another, recognised the same attachment to the Rhenish tradition in the other family members; and resolved together to strive for revitalizing this tradition in our respective countries. We saw the need to journey together through the process of mourning and discovering the creative moments of remembrance and envisioning the future.

3) We agreed to initiate a research process on the history of the Rhenish Mission Congregations in South Africa, starting on a low but immediate level to preserve the oral history that the elderly has carried and who might not be with us for long. This would be done through recording or reporting conversations during home visits or conversations in the congregations by pastors or elders. The process of oral history research will be followed by an academic research by one PhD student in Germany, covering the archive material (based at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel, and supervised by Prof. Zschoch) and two master students in South Africa, one RCSA, one URCSA. They will cover the local oral and written sources and be registered at Stellenbosch or the University of the Western Cape. A supervising professor will be appointed.

The research process, as CRC HK proposes, could be continued with a related analytical research on the impact on and consequential development of the Rhenish Church in China, particular the Hong Kong Synod, upon the unplanned departure of Rhenish missionaries in 1914 due to World War I and their subsequent return and support.

4) The churches involved in the research process as well as UEM will take a formal decision in their governing bodies that they will join this process of research. The outcome, as far as possible, will be presented in Germany and South Africa in 2019.

Together with the research presentation there will be a ceremony in Germany and South

Africa by which the shared memories will be brought before God who has never forsaken us and led us together through this conference and to the forthcoming process.

"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." Gen 50:20