

# Vision and Values of the UNEPREF

*(National Union of French Protestant Reformed Evangelical Churches)*



(left to right: President: Jean-Raymond Stauffacher, Rev. Jeff Kim, GA Moderator- Guy Maillard)

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# History and Development:

In France, at the beginning of the 20th century, two large church denominations constituted what we know as the Reformed Church:

The Union of Reformed Churches with roughly 150 churches and the National Union of Reformed Evangelical Churches with approximately 450 churches. World War I (1914-1918) created large-scale disaster that brought these two church groups together along with the army chaplains which constituted a change of mentality for these two distinct church groups.

Following this war-time period came a growth, not only in theology but also in ecumenicalism since these were very difficult economic times. The unification of these two particular church denominations seemed almost imminent in the eyes of many. It is for this reason that in 1938 the ERF (The Reformed Church of France) was born from much discussion regrouping a large number of Free Evangelical and Methodist Churches.

Several church communities desirous to manifest the unity of the body of Christ, renounced, in the name of an evangelical and Calvinist orthodoxy, to take part in the formation of the Reformed Church of France. They decided to maintain at the center of their theology “the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures, that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, died for our sins and resurrected for our justification.” These communities gave birth to the National Union of Independent Evangelical Reformed Churches (EREI).<sup>1</sup>

In 2003, the EREI modified their name to the UNEPREF (National Union of French Protestant Reformed Evangelical Churches).

Today, the UNEPREF across France represents 3,500 members with 48 churches and 34 pastors serving in specific parishes across the southern portion of France all the way to the southwest of France up to Bordeaux, along with the region of Paris. 10 pastors serve as chaplains in prisons or hospitals or abroad in overseas mission projects. There are 280 elders that serve within these 48 churches. There are 20 different cultural associations across France that represent different outreaches in the community along with 4 vacation centers that welcome children and families for camps and Christian training.

All UNEPREF churches express a real sensitivity to the reformed history and traditions of France. On a local level each church follows a presbyterian form of government

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uncpref.com/presentation-uncpref/identite-uncpref/histoire.html>

where each church elects their elders and deacons in a democratic, representative form of government. Each church is represented by its pastor and elders on a national level at the annual National Synod. The desire of each church is to have relationships of trust and confidence with all UNEPREF churches in France, as well as reformed churches in Europe and throughout the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup>

## Beliefs:

We are Evangelical Reformed Churches which signify that we receive the Bible as the Word of God desirous to live our lives in conformity with our faith. We recognize that the key confessions such as the Nicene Creed and the Confessions of the Rochelle 1872 are the actual expressions of our faith. We call all men and women to faith and repentance recognizing the love of God manifested through Jesus Christ. We believe that each member should live in community with others in each respective church that represents a certain discipline and theological orientation which underlines our Reformed identity.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Reformed Evangelical Churches desirous to affirm their spiritual heritage and vocation of the 15th century Reformation and of the revivals of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century from which they came, renewed their testimony in society through projects of evangelism, diaconate, and mission.

The specificity of UNEPREF churches throughout protestantism in particular, characterized themselves by being Reformed and Evangelical. UNEPREF church members are Protestants, heirs of the Reformers who in the 16th century proclaimed the unique authority of the Bible and that salvation is by faith alone. The term Reformed shows the historic as well as theologic link with the origins of the French Reformation with the discovery of the thoughts of the French Reformer, John Calvin, as well as the place of the confession of faith of The Rochelle in the way of governing the life of this particular church union.

The UNEPREF is an evangelical denomination, they believe that the Bible remains the unique and authoritative testimony of the infallible revelation of God and they allow themselves to be transformed by the message of the Gospel such as it is expressed in the Bible. It is by the living and personal faith in Jesus do they share their faith that is shared in the Gospel as expressed in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unepref.com/presentation-unepref.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://prolambesc.free.fr/quisommesnous/index.html>

## Vision:

The churches that belong to the UNEPREF exist to glorify God by contributing to the growth of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ helping men and women develop holistically. These churches seek the direction of the Holy Spirit as they desire to grow in authentic adoration maintaining faithfulness to the word of God, growing in authentic worship, developing enthusiastic evangelism, practicing acts of compassion, as they seek to be caretakers of creation. In order to concretely work out this vision statement the member churches of the UNEPREF engage in three different areas:

1. Being disciples of Christ who desire to be sensitive to God's Word. As they hear God's Word do they allow it to continually transform their lives in order to live a holy life before the Lord. It is from this process of transformation that flows the presence and power of God in our lives.
2. Being on mission for God means considering the urgency of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that we encourage the members of our churches to share their faith with those around them in order to welcome and edify those that God calls to himself.
3. Celebrating God together being welcoming, joyful congregations describes who we are. Also, allowing each member of our churches to grow and develop their spiritual gifts for the service of the Church and brotherly communion is an important key.

Through this vision, the UNEPREF expresses its values and perspectives which are shared by each one of the communities that it composes. This gives priority and direction to our denomination. This vision is developed and amended at times during our General Assembly to better reflect the churches that are represented. Each church must then receive and seek to implement the way in which they desire to adapt this vision to their particular context. The goal is for each church, large or small, rural or urban to put into practice their own method of applying this vision in order to respond to the call of God in their own church community.<sup>4</sup>

## Church Organization:

Since 1948, UNEPREF churches are members of the Protestant French Federation. They are also members of the National Council of French Evangelicals (CNEF).

Internationally, the denomination is organized and participates actively with several church and mission organizations notably the CMER, DEFAP, CEVAA, and MTW.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unepref.com/presentation-unepref/vision-unepref.html>

The UNEPREF is organised according to the presbyterian model. Each church belongs to one of the three regional presbyteries (synods) (South-West, Languedoc-Cévennes, or Gardonnenque-Provence) and sends representatives to the General Assembly (national synod), held annually in March.<sup>[10]</sup> Once every three years, the General Assembly convenes and elects its president (currently pastor Jean-Raymond Stauffacher).

The church has strong links with the theological seminary Faculté Jean Calvin (formerly: Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée) in Aix-en-Provence. The majority of its pastors are educated here.

Within France, UNEPREF participates in the Protestant Federation of France,<sup>[11]</sup> the Protestant Missionary Service,<sup>[12]</sup> the Protestant Lutheran-Reformed communion (affiliation only),<sup>[13]</sup> and the French national council of evangelicals.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Denominational Missions Projects:

Since the Toulouse General Assembly in 2011, the UNEPREF adopted a common missionary project. The UNEPREF seeks to help its churches to live out its vision and respond to the call of Christ in the Great Commission of Mt. 28:18-20. Its objective is very clear: We share the passion of God for His world, we love all that God has created, we rejoice in the providence and justice of God in all his creation. We proclaim the Gospel to all creation and the nations, and long for the day when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the depths of the seas.” (Le cap 2010)

In order to accomplish this mission, the UNEPREF engages in several key areas through evangelism, service (the diaconate), and chaplaincy. Through church-planting strategies the UNEPREF seeks to plant new churches as well. Also, through fraternal relations with all Christian churches in France and with Reformed churches throughout the world. Currently, there are 34 MBB (Muslim Background Believers) throughout the different churches of the UNEPREF. The UNEPREF is open to the growth and development of evangelism projects toward Muslims and all alike. For several years the UNEPREF supports the numerous missionary projects of the DEFAP. In parallel, certain churches have ongoing projects in Haïti, Conakry, Guinea, and Romania.<sup>5</sup>

## Potential EPC Projects:

Jean-Raymond, what do you think would be important to put here?

1. Outreach to muslims in certain cities that would be a strength to help church evangelization and church-planting. This is a key area that World Outreach (EPC missions agency) would like to develop. How could this more concretely develop itself within the UNEPREF?

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unepref.com/presentation-unepref/vision-unepref/projet-missionnaire-commun.html>

2. JR, you also mentioned collaborating on several other levels: consulting, theological projects, relations with women in the church, etc...

## Partners:

1. French Protestants: [www.protestants.org](http://www.protestants.org)
2. National Council of French Evangelicals (CNEF) [www.lecnef.org](http://www.lecnef.org)
3. Protestant Service Mission [www.defap.fr](http://www.defap.fr)
4. World Communion of Reformed Churches <http://wcrch.ch/members><sup>6</sup>
5. Mission To The World. (PCA) [www.mtw.org](http://www.mtw.org)

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unepref.com/presentation-unepref/organisation-unepref/partenaires-institutionnels.html>