

Address of Br A Van Leeuwin to the 36th Anniversary Meeting and 31st Convocation of the College in Hamilton

Esteemed Board of Governors, Brothers and Sisters in the Lord.

It is a great honour and privilege to be in your midst once again and to extend greetings to you in the name of our Lord on behalf of Deputies Training for the Ministry for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. I was privileged to address you at the 26th Convocation 5 years ago. This was on the occasion of the opening of the Theological College's new Library.

You could easily ask the question, what is he then doing here again! Let me quickly explain. Rev C Bouwman was scheduled to be here this time, but since he accepted the call to the Canadian Reformed Church at Yarrow BC and thus has left the Australian Churches and consequently his role as Convener of Deputies, yours truly who was appointed to take his place.

Thank you for the warm welcome and the opportunity to be in your midst this evening.

As sister churches we share so much for reason of our common heritage, the history of the Church and the basis of our Reformed Confessions. We are members of the same household of faith, we as God's people belong to a church chosen to everlasting life. That is precisely what binds us together and that is why we feel at home with each other.

We are thankful for the Lord's rich blessings that we receive through your Theological College in our ministers of the Word. Yes, we do call some of your ministers away from Canada, but we also let some return to you. On the other hand, we are also thankful to see a good number of Australian students enter the doors of the Hamilton College.

The theological training of our students is very close to the heart of our Churches. Subsequent Synods have included in the mandate for Deputies to investigate "the long term possibility of setting up theological training in Australia, including the possibility of starting a theological library". Deputies submitted a comprehensive report to Synod 2003 in which a number of models were studied.

The conclusion based on this study was:

"To recognize that establishing an own seminary is out of reach for both the present time and the foreseeable future".

Synod decided to recognize that establishing our own seminary may be out of reach for the present time, but one does also need to look to the future in faith. The Lord teaches us not to despise the day of small things (Zech 4:10). Remember as Canadian Churches your humble beginnings of theological training during the sixties. The brothers acted in faith !

Consequently, the Australian deputies' new mandate included to "continue to investigate avenues to start up our own theological library and to do so if possible;

"continue to investigate the possibility to start up our own theological training for the ministry, including the possibilities of theological training by extension (IT).

In addition, Synod also decided for Deputies "to be as closely involved in the work of the Board of Governors of the Theological College in Hamilton as is practically possible"

When Deputies were conducting the investigations and deliberations concerning theological training in Australia, it was noted that the central concern was that the **churches** are called to be responsible for the training of their ministers. (Art 17 CO, FRCA). [This is Art 19 CanCO] With this in mind Deputies contacted the Board of Governors to request their views on having Australian representation on the Board.

The Board's Governance Committee sought legal advice regarding the involvement of changing the Theological College Act adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the province Ontario in 1981 to allow for persons not serving in the Can Ref Churches to be appointed to the BOG. As a result of this advice our Deputies have accepted the findings of this legal advice namely

"that the time and cost and energy required do not make it very feasible to pursue".

As an alternative suggestion, the Deputies have accepted the invitation of the Board to send a delegate to attend the September meeting. Hence my presence here and my attendance at the Board of Governors meeting last night have proven to be very valuable to Deputies as well as to the Board. We express our appreciation for this, but also the information that is provided by the Board to the Deputies throughout the year.

In this way we are informed and involved with all relevant material.

Presently there are 12 Churches in our federation served by 10 ministers of which 8 have graduated from the Hamilton College. There are two vacant congregations busy with their calling work. Ministers beware! In addition, the Church of Armadale conducts mission work in Lae PNG. Rev Ian Wildeboer has recently completed a post graduate advanced mission course here and in the Netherlands. He has returned and is presently about to commence his ministry in that mission field. The Church of Mount Nasura carries out mission work in Southern India. Br Jacob, an Indian Reformed Missionary is actively involved there in the gathering of God's people. The Church of Rockingham is involved in a mission field in Sumba.

So you see that the bond between the two Church federations is close. At the moment you have two Australian students, the brs Andrew VanderHeide and Cornelis Kleyn. Recently, another family has joined you as our brother Rodney Vermeulen will commence his first year at the College. Back home, as far as I am aware of, at least two other students are preparing for commencing studies here next year.

Brothers and Sisters, be assured that the College, Professors, Lecturers and Students are regularly remembered in the prayers during our worship services. We gladly continue to support the work of training for the ministry with our financial contribution. The Lord bestows His rich blessings upon us in many ways and we gladly share these with you.

From time to time we are privileged to have one of your professors in our midst. Fondly we remember the Australian visits of the late Prof and Mrs J Faber in 1990, Prof and Mrs C Van Dam in 1999 and the last who visited us was Prof. and Mrs J Geertsema in 2003. We treasured these visits to the Churches very much and the lectures and speeches were also well received. In this way too, the training for the ministry comes closer to the hearts of the church members.

Mr Chairman, in closing let me say that the strong bond between the Canadian and the Australian Churches can only remain strong if we both continue to walk on the path of faithful obedience to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. For this we need each other and especially the true preaching of the Gospel. May then the teaching at the College be instrumental to mould the students to become faithful preachers of the Cross, that glorious Gospel of Salvation. May He thereto endow the professors, lecturers and students with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Your sister churches in Australia greet you in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thank you for allowing me to address you on this Convocation and Anniversary Meeting.

A Van Leeuwen
9/09/05