

CHURCH ORDER OF DORDRECHT

as revised by Synod 2003

of

THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

with the standing decisions made by their
respective synods up to and including Synod 2006

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ABBREVIATIONS

Art. =	Article
BC =	Belgic Confession of Faith
CO =	Church Order
CRC (or CanRC) =	Canadian Reformed Churches
CRC (or CRCNA) =	Christian Reformed Churches in North America
CRCA =	Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (formerly: Reformed Churches of Australia)
DE =	Dynamic Equivalent
Dp BBK =	Deputies for correspondence with foreign churches appointed by the Dutch sister churches (GKN)
DRCSL =	Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka
EPCA =	Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia
EPCI =	Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
ERCS =	Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore
FCS =	Free Church of Scotland
FRCA =	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
FRCP =	Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines
FSNS =	Fund for support of needy students
GKN =	De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
GKN(s) =	Synodical churches in The Netherlands, calling themselves also De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
GGMM =	Gereja Gereja Mahesi Musyafir (Reformed Churches of Timor, Savu); the same as:
GMMT =	Gereja Masehi Musyafir Church on Timor
GGRI =	Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia
ICRC =	International Conference of Reformed Churches
KJV =	King James Version
NGK =	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken
NIV =	New International Version
NKJV =	New King James Version
PCEA =	Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
PCK =	Presbyterian Church in Korea
PCU =	Presbyterian Church in Uganda
PRCA =	Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia
PRCNA=	Protestant Reformed Church in North America
RCA =	Reformed Churches of Australia
RCI =	Reformed Churches of Japan
RCN =	The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland)
RCNZ =	Reformed Churches in New Zealand
RCSTS=	Reformed Churches of Sumba-Timor-Savu
RCZ =	Reformed Churches of Zaire
REC =	Reformed Ecumenical Council
RES =	Reformed Ecumenical Synod
RPCI =	Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
RPCT =	Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan
RSV =	Revised Standard Version
TEC =	Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact
USA =	Unites States of America

INTRODUCTION

ARTICLE 1 – Purpose and division

For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ it is necessary to have:

- I offices and supervision of doctrine;**
- II assemblies;**
- III worship, sacraments and ceremonies;**
- IV discipline**

Federation

Synod decides to establish a federation of churches, consisting of the churches at Albany, Armadale, and Launceston.
(Armadale 1954, Article 7)

Foundation

The foundation of churches will be the Holy Scriptures as they are confessed in The Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.
(Armadale 1954, Article 8)

Synod decides:

1.
to adopt the text of the Three Forms of Unity and of these Liturgical Forms which were provisionally adopted by the 1985 Synod (Acts Article 59 c 2);
2.
to adopt the text of the Ecumenical Creeds with the exception of the word "Christian" in Article IX of the Apostles' Creed, in Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and wherever the text of the Creed is quoted in the Liturgical Forms and Prayers;
3.
to reinsert the words "only-begotten Son" in the places mentioned sub Observation.2.c. (Article 18 BC., the prayer of thanksgiving, the Forms for Baptism, and the Canons of Dort I Article 2 and II Article 4; Ed.)
(Albany 1987, Article 100)

Synod decides:

2.
 - a. To maintain our present text of the Apostles' Creed (which is identical to the text of the Book of Praise except for the omission of the word 'Christian' in the ninth article).
 - b. To accept the revised text of the Athanasian Creed.
 - c. To retain our present text of the Nicene Creed for the present, and appoint deputies to scrutinise the revisions which our Canadian sister churches will adopt at their next Synod and report back to synod with their recommendations.
(Byford 1994, Article 124)

Synod decides:

To adopt the same translation of the Nicene Creed as adopted by our Canadian sister churches and found in the *Book of Praise*.

Grounds:

The translation is faithful to the original, and an improvement on the present wording of

the creed.

It is desirable to retain the same translation of the creeds and confessions as The Canadian Reformed Churches, our only English speaking sister church, especially in light of the fact that we use their *Book of Praise* in which the Nicene Creed is found (cf. Acts 1994, Article 124, Ground 1c).

(West Albany 2000, Article 26)

Name

The churches shall, by correspondence, adopt a name for the federation of churches, if possible within three months.

(Armadale 1954, Article 11)

Church Order

Synod decides to adopt the Church Order of Dordrecht.

(Armadale 1954, Article 38)

Synod decides:

7. To delete the italicised words in the Church Order, as well as the indented sentence at the end of Article 41, and to amend the Ecclesiastical Documents where necessary (Acts 1996, Appendix N).

(West Albany 2000, Article 43).

Synod decides:

2. To accept the Church Order as (deputy) has presented it (2.1 of deputy's report), and have it published as an Appendix to these Acts.

3. Appoint a deputy to have the Church Order published in booklet form to fit in the Book of Praise.

4. To accept the Ecclesiastical Documents as (deputy) had revised them (3.1 of deputy's report), and appoint a deputy to have copies of these Ecclesiastical Documents prepared for use by churches and classes.

5. To have the Rules for Synods as amended by (deputy) (3.3. of deputy's report) printed in these Acts.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 90)

Decision not to change the name of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 81)

OFFICES AND SUPERVISION OF DOCTRINE

ARTICLE 2 - The offices

The offices are those of the minister of the Word, of the elder, and of the deacon.

See under Article 19 for decisions made by Synod Rockingham 2003.

ARTICLE 3: The calling to office

A. All office-bearers

No one shall take any office upon himself without having been lawfully called thereto.

The calling to office shall take place by the consistory with the deacons, with the cooperation of the congregation, after prayer, and in accordance with the local regulations adopted for that purpose.

Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for the approval on at least two consecutive Sundays. If no lawful objection is brought forward the ordination or installation shall take place with the use of the adopted Form.

B. Elders and deacons

The consistory with the deacons shall give the congregation the opportunity to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed suitable for the respective offices.

The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation at the most twice as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. From this number the congregation shall choose as many office-bearers as are needed.

Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons.

If necessary the consistory and the deacons may present to the congregation the same number of candidates as there are vacancies.

C. Ministers

Before a vacant church extends a call the advice of the counsellor shall be sought.

The approval of classis shall be required for a repeated call to the same minister for the same vacancy.

Voting rights for women

Material:

Agenda item 8.5 - The Church of Launceston proposes that "participation in the voting for the election of office bearers in the congregation of Christ should no longer be withheld from the communicant sisters".

Agenda item 8.10 - The Church of Kelmscott's response to this proposal.

Decision:

Synod decides not to adopt Launceston's proposal.

Grounds:

1. Seeing the complex nature of the issue of women voting in the church, there is insufficient material and Scriptural analysis in the submissions from the churches of Launceston and Kelmscott for synod to make a decision.
2. Adoption of the proposal will bind the churches to allow women to vote in the church. There are indications that the matter of women voting in the church does not live in the midst of most of the churches, and that adoption of the proposal would cause great concern and even division.

(Launceston 1998, Article 99)

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Decision:

1. To add the words "Encourage the congregation to" so that the charge to the deacons reads: "Encourage the congregation to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith".
2. To instruct Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches to inform the Canadian sister churches of this decision.

Grounds:

1. The deacons are office bearers in the church and have the task of working in it.
2. The believers have the task "to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith". It belongs to the task of the deacons to encourage and stimulate the congregation to fulfil its responsibilities in this regard (Ephesians 4:11, 12).
3. This formulation of the charge to the deacons reflects the description of the ministry of mercy earlier in the Form.
4. Though this is not a substantial change to our liturgical Forms (see Acts Synod 1992, Article 95, Recommendation 3, Number 7) it is wise to inform our Canadian sister churches since we jointly use one Book of Praise. (Kelmescott 1996, Article 89)

ARTICLE 4 - Bound to a church

No one shall serve in the ministry unless he is bound to a certain church.

ARTICLE 5 - Eligibility for the ministry**A. ELIGIBILITY**

Only those shall be called to the office of minister of the Word who:

- (1) have been declared eligible for call by the churches; or**
- (2) are already serving in that capacity in one of the churches; or**
- (3) have been declared eligible or are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship. The churches shall observe the general ecclesiastical ordinances for the eligibility of those ministers who have served in these sister-churches.**

B. DECLARED ELIGIBLE

Only those shall be declared eligible for call within the churches who

- (1) have passed a preparatory examination by the classis in which they live, which examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the necessary documents to prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches; or**
- (2) have satisfied the requirements of Article 8; or**
- (3) have satisfied the requirements of Article 9.**

Eligibility and examination of candidates

The following rules for the eligibility for call in our churches of Bachelors of Divinity are adopted:

I. Regarding Bachelors of Divinity who have been trained at the Theologische Hogeschool at Kampen or the Theological College at Hamilton, Canada, it is rules that they will be preparatorily examined by an ecclesiastical meeting of our churches. If there is a real possibility that the candidate concerned will be called by one of our churches this examination will have the standard and validity of the peremptory exam. In this case the preparatorily exam will also include the subjects of the peremptory exam.

The examination will be conducted by the examiners in a meeting in which two churches are proportionally represented by at least four delegates, while the third Church Council, after having received a written report, has to give approval.

II. Regarding Bachelors of Divinity who have not studied at the Theological Colleges of our sister churches the following rules are adopted:

- a. the value of their theological education and scientific ability will be examined by the Senate of one of the colleges of the sister churches.
- b. the candidate shall contact the Council of the Church of which he is a member, which Council informs the deputies-examiners, who make the necessary arrangements with the said Senate in Canada or The Netherlands for the examination.
- c. after the examiners have favourably reported the candidate is made eligible for call in our churches in accordance with the above mentioned rules.

III. As for Bachelors of Divinity who have been made eligible for call by this foreign sister churches after their preparatory examination, it is rules that they, if called by one of our Australian churches, will as yet be peremptorily examined by our churches in an ecclesiastical meeting.

(Launceston 1970, Art. 47)

See also Appendix I Forms 1 and 2

Synod decides:

to re-affirm and re-state the decision of Synod 1970 Article 47, whereby 'Classis' is replaced by 'Synod' for preparatory and peremptory examinations and to amend the Rules for the examinations accordingly.

Synod decides to supplement the decision of Synod 1970 as follows:

At the peremptory examination the Deputies of Synod or some of them (Article 5 C.O.) shall act in that capacity.

(Launceston 1985, Art. 81)

our churches in an ecclesiastical meeting.

(Launceston 1970, Art. 47)

See also Appendix I Form 1

Synod decides to re-affirm and re-state the decision of Synod 1970 Article 47, whereby 'Classis' is replaced by 'Synod' for preparatory and peremptory examinations, and to amend the Rules for the examination accordingly.

Synod decides to supplement the decision of Synod 1970 as follows:

At the peremptory examination the Deputies of Synod or some of them (Article 5 C.O.) shall act in the capacity.

(Launceston 1985, Art. 81)

ARTICLE 6 - Ordination and installation of ministers of the Word
A. Regarding those who have not served in the ministry before, the following

shall be observed:

1. They shall be ordained only after classis has approved the call. Classis shall approve the call a. upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the candidate, attested by the consistory of the church to which he belongs; and b. following a peremptory examination of the candidate with satisfactory results. This classis examination shall take place with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

2. For the ordination they shall also show to the consistory good testimonials concerning their doctrine and conduct from the church(es) to which they have belonged since their preparatory examination.

B. Regarding those who are serving in the ministry the following shall be observed:

They shall be installed after classis has approved the call.

1. For this approval as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration from the consistory with the deacons and from classis that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that church and classis, or from the church only in case he remains within the same classis.

2. For the approval of a call of those who are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship a colloquium shall be required which will deal especially with the doctrine and polity of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

C. The approval of a call shall require written certification by the calling church that the required announcements were made and that the congregation has approved the call.

Approval

For the approval of a call the following documents are required:

1. the letter of call.
2. the declaration of acceptance of the call.
3. formal declaration of departure from the church which the called minister last served.
4. formal declaration of departure from the classis in which the called minister last served.
5. a declaration from the calling church, that the necessary public announcements have taken place.

(Armada 1956, Art. 50)

See Appendix I Forms 2 and 3

ARTICLE 7 - From one church to another

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of classis. Likewise, no church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church and the classis where he served, or from the church only if he remains within the same classis.

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of the classis church. Likewise, no church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church he served.

Approval

For the approval of a call the following documents are required:

1. the letter of call.
2. the declaration of acceptance of the call.
3. a formal declaration of departure from the church which the called minister last served.
4. a formal declaration of departure from the classis in which the called minister last served.
5. a declaration from the calling church that the necessary public announcements have taken place.

(Armada 1956, Art. 50)

See Appendix I Forms 2 and 3

ARTICLE 8 - Exceptional gifts

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry, classis shall (with synod's prior approval) examine him, and upon a favourable outcome allow him, as candidate, to speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis for a set period of time. Thereafter the classis shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry the classis church shall seek to obtain this evidence by way of inquiry from the church to which he belongs, and from elsewhere if necessary. The examination shall take place in a synod (extraordinary if necessary). This synod shall set a period during which the person may, as candidate, speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis area. Thereafter the classis church, with the advice of deputies of synod, shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

See Appendix I Form 1

ARTICLE 9 - Admission of ministers who have recently joined the church

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time and carefully examined by the classis in whose area he lives. This classis examination shall be conducted with the cooperation of the deputies of synod.

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time and carefully examined by synod (extraordinary if necessary).

ARTICLE 10 - Officiating in another church

No one shall preach the Word or administer the sacraments in another church without the permission of the consistory of that church.

Pulpit exchanges

Considerations:

1.

It is still advantageous for the well-being of the bond of Churches to have pulpit exchanges particularly for those churches and ministers who reside in comparative geographic isolation.

2.

Seeing there is sufficient ministerial contact between the ministers of the Metro area and Albany it should no longer be necessary for Synod to arrange pulpit exchanges between them.

3.

Pulpit exchanges made by ministers of the West in the Tasmanian churches should be combined with church visitation.

4.

In light of Consideration 1 (above) it is advisable that the Tasmanian minister(s) have an annual pulpit exchange to the Metro area / Albany area.

Decision:

1.

To appoint a church to coordinate and monitor the roster of pulpit exchanges and church visitation listed below.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art. 51)

2. Costs for pulpit exchanges between the Metro area and Albany should be born by the church of the travelling minister.

Grounds:

1.

It is advantageous for the churches that the various congregations are familiar with the ministers of the bond of churches as well as the ministers of the bond being familiar with the various congregations.

2.

Pulpit exchanges between Albany and the Metro churches are presently locally arranged.

(Byford 1994, Art. 15)

Decision

2.

To appoint a church to coordinate and monitor the roster of pulpit exchange for the period 1996 – 1998.

3.

To accept the following schedule of pulpit exchange:

Minister of:	1996	1997	1998
Albany		Tasmania	
Armadale	Tasmania		
Launceston	Metro		Albany/Metro
Legana	Metro	Albany/Metro	
West Albany			Tasmania

Grounds:

As long as no classes have been formed, it is still advantageous for the well-being of the bond of Churches, to have pulpit exchange, particularly for those churches and ministers who reside in comparative geographic isolation.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art 72)

Material:

1. Agenda Item 11.8 Report of Deputies for Pulpit exchanges
2. Agenda Item 8.11 Letter from the Church of Legana.

Decision:

1. to thank deputies for their report and discharge them:
2. to grant the request of the Church of Legana as formulated hereunder;
3. to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a) to make arrangements, in addition to the regular pulpit exchange as proposed by deputies, for a visiting minister to serve the Church of Legana at least 6 times per year, two Sundays at a time;
 - b) to grant pulpit exchange as proposed by deputies should Legana receive its own minister;
 - c) to arrange the above in consultation with the churches and their ministers.
4. to Opay for travelling costs from the Synod Treasure.

Grounds:

1. It is profitable for the churches to have pulpit exchanges. During a vacancy the church concerned needs the help of other churches, and especially when that church is located in an isolated place. (Launceston 1998, Art. 36)

Declarations

B Observations:

5. The deputies received declarations for visiting ministers of sister churches. Declarations were given for our ministers who were visiting sister churches. In some cases, contrary to the adopted rules, no such declarations were received for visiting ministers who conducted worship services in our churches.

C Considerations.

4. The matter of declarations presented some problems since this rule was not always kept.. It will be good to reinstate this rule, namely that:
 - a. ministers visiting sister churches abroad request our deputies for such a declaration that they are ministers in good standing;
 - b. the deputies send such a declaration to the relevant deputies abroad so that they can publish it;
 - c. the deputies give the visiting ministers copies of this declaration;
 - d. and, vice versa, the same be required of visiting ministers from sister churches abroad.

D. Decision:

4. To instruct the deputies to stress and to clarify to the churches the requirement of declarations for visiting ministers (cf. Obs4 above). (Albany 1987, Art. 49)

ARTICLE 11 - Proper support

The consistory, with the deacons, on behalf of the congregation that it represents in this matter, shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s).

ARTICLE 12 - Call to an extraordinary task

If a minister accepts a call or an appointment to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis. Some ministers may be appointed for the training of students for the ministry, others may be called for mission work.

If a minister accepts a call or appointment to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis church. Some ministers may be appointed for the training of students for the ministry, others may be called for mission work.

ARTICLE 13 - Retirement of ministers

If a minister of the Word, by reason of age, sickness or otherwise, is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office he shall retain the honour and title of minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official bond with the church which he served last, and this church shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister's widow and orphans. See Appendix I Form 6

ARTICLE 14 - Dismissal

The consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without the approval and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 15 - Bound for life

A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life and therefore not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons. The decision of his consistory to relieve him of his office in order to enter upon another vocation shall receive the approval of classis, with the concurring advice of deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 16 - Task of ministers

The task of ministers is to faithfully lead in prayer, preach the Word and administer the sacraments. They shall watch over their fellow office-bearers and over the congregation. Together with the elders they shall exercise church discipline and see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

ARTICLE 17 - Training for the ministry

The churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to defend the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as they have been described above. The churches together are obliged to provide for the professors of theology and for their widows and orphans.

Deputies

Decision:

1. Synod thanks the deputies for the work done.
2. Synod decides to assess the churches \$ 40.00 per communicant member per year, for the maintenance of the Theological College in Hamilton as of 1 July 2000.
3. Synod decides to discharge deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) collect funds for 'Hamilton' and forward them to the College;
 - b) continue correspondence with both 'Hamilton' and 'Kampen' in order to maintain contact and obtain information;
 - c) ensure that relevant information is published concerning the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students;
 - d) continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required in accordance with Article 18 CO, and as agreed in Article 50 of Acts of Synod 1992;
 - e) make arrangements for a guest lecturer from 'Hamilton' once every four or five years;
 - f) to investigate the long-term possibility of setting up theological training in Australia, including the possibility of starting a theological library.

Ground:

In the past (Article 125 of the 1990 Acts) Synods have mandated deputies "to alert the churches to the requirements and the possibilities for an Australian based theological training in the light of changing circumstances" and "to appoint deputies to investigate the possibility of finding a facility to house some books". The 1992 Synod repeated this mandate (Article 50). However, the 1994 Synod did not renew this part of the mandate. It seems that support for Hamilton grew to the extent that this mandate was forgotten (cf. Article 78 of the 1996 Acts and Article 102 of the 1998 Acts). West Albany FRC however makes a strong plea to keep this matter alive. Article 17 CO obliges us "if possible, to maintain an institution for the training for the ministry".
(West Albany 2000, Article 25)

- 1 to forward the money collected thus far to the library fund of the Hamilton Theological College (Appeal 2);**
- 2 to recognise that establishing an own seminary is out of reach for both the present time and the foreseeable future (Ground 3.1);**
- 3 to recognise that establishing a library should occur simultaneously with the establishing of a seminary (Ground 3.2).**

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 16)

Decision:

1. To continue to request three full collections from the churches for our own theological library.
2. Request the churches to contribute A\$50 per communicant member per annum for theological training. Any expenses for theological training here in Australia will be taken out of this amount. The remainder goes to Hamilton.
3. Set aside \$3,500 for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of Deputies for Training for the Ministry to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors in September 2007, combining it with a visit to the next Synod of the Canadian Reformed Church (this coordination means that this time a deputy for training for the ministry goes to Canada in both capacities and next time a deputy for sister churches attends in both capacities).
4. Discharge Deputies and appoint new deputies, including a Minister of the Word, with the mandate to:
 - a. collect funds for "Hamilton" and forward them to the College;
 - b. correspond with "Hamilton", "South Africa", "Kampen" and "Korea" in order to maintain contact and obtain information;
 - c. collect funds for our own theological library and theological training;
 - d. continue with our own theological library and start obtaining basic materials;
 - e. continue to investigate the possibility to start up our own theological training for the ministry, including the possibilities of theological training by extension (IT);
 - f. ensure that relevant information is published concerning the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students;
 - g. continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required in accordance with Article 18 CO, and as agreed in Article 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Article 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;
 - h. make arrangements for a guest lecturer from one of the theological seminaries of our sister churches once every three years;
 - i. be as closely involved in the work of the Board of Governors of Hamilton as practically possible;
 - j. consider the practical implications of including the Australian churches in the Pastoral Training Program of the Hamilton College and report to the Australian Churches.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 17)

ARTICLE 18 - Students of theology

The churches shall strive to ensure that there are students of theology extending financial aid where necessary.

Financial aid

Synod decides:

2.

to adopt the "Regulations for the financial aid of students (Article 19 CO)" and the "Rules for Students Support Fund" as prepared by deputies and amended by synod. (Launceston 1987, Article 82)

For these Rules and Regulations, as amended by Synod Bedfordale 1992 and Synod West Albany 2000, see Appendix II

Synod considers:

2.

The FRCA support their students during the course of their study, stipulating that repayment of such cost is waived if students serve overseas sister-churches upon being ordained to the Ministry. (Armadale 1990, Article 86)

"Mother church"

Synod decides:

2.

Deputies for Training for the Ministry be given a mandate to clarify which is the "mother church" in regard to a student who has been a member of more than one congregation. (Byford 1994, Article 56)

Edifying word

Decision:

1. To grant permission to speak an edifying word/preaching consent in the churches to theological students who satisfy the following set conditions:

- a. the theological students shall present such a request to Classis,
- b. they shall have completed at least two years of theological studies at one of the theological colleges of our sister churches (not including the introductory year, that is, they still complete three years of training at the theological college). The faculty of the theological college shall give a certificate that they have successfully completed two years of theology proper (or three years),
- c. they shall present a good attestation from the church to which they belong,
- d. they shall deliver a sermon at Classis and shall be examined on reformed doctrine, and,

e. if the result is satisfactory Classis shall grant permission to speak an edifying word (sometimes called preaching consent) for a period not more than twelve months.

2. To accept the decision of classes of sister churches to grant theological students the right to speak an edifying word/preaching consent in the churches here and to allow these students to deliver an edifying word in the churches. They must present a certificate from the Classis of the sister church.

3. The student shall submit his sermons to a minister appointed by Deputies for the Training to the Ministry who in turn will give a report to the Professor of Diaconology at the theological college.

Grounds:

1. The reason for extending preaching consent to theological students is to give the students practical experience. More accent is placed on this today. Even as teachers and others are required to have practice in their fields, so also theological students undergo practical experience during or after their formal training. Thus far consistories can ask them to teach catechism classes, but preaching consent has not been offered.
2. The FRCA have decided to accept the preparatory classical examinations which theological students undergo in our sister churches. This would imply that the FRCA should also accept the classical examinations of our sister churches in which theological students are given permission to speak an edifying word in the churches. (Kelmescott 1996, Article 27, amended after Synod West Albany 2000's decision form classes, Acts Article 43)

ARTICLE 19 - Task of Missionaries

When ministers of the Word are sent out as missionaries, they shall in the specific region assigned to them proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments to those who have come to the profession of their faith, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded His church, and ordain elders and deacons when this appears feasible, according to the rules given in the Word of God.

Indigenous Missionary Ministers of the Word

Synod decides not to change the Church Order but to add the following rule to those adopted by Synod 1970, Article 47:

iv. Regarding indigenous men called to do mission work overseas, and who have not studied at the theological college of our sister churches, they shall be examined by the classis prior to ordination. Their calling and task as Minister of the Word shall be limited to the area to which they were indigenous.

Grounds:

Synod does not deem a change in the Church Order necessary in order to answer Mt Nasura's request about indigenous ministers.

Synod supports the ordination of indigenous ministers so that they can preach the Word and administer the sacraments subject to the successful completion of an examination following of the Church Order.

(West Albany 2000, Article 55)

Term Missionary

Synod decides:

To make a new ruling in the line of Article 55 Synod 2000:

1. As an exception, a person trained with a Diploma of Theological Studies (plus special missiological, language and cultural studies) can be ordained as a minister of the Word (missionary) for foreign mission work only.
2. That this person should undergo an examination by classis as agreed upon in the Church Order.
3. That upon completion of this missionary task he will be released from office by the sending church and the classis, at which time he will lose his ministerial status.

Grounds:

1. This task should be carried out by a minister of the Word (missionary) even though he may not have the full theological training.
2. At times there is a real lack of fully trained men who are able and willing to serve as missionary.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 36)

Synod decides:

1. To concur with the Church of Albany by deciding that as churches we do not recognize the position of "term missionary" as a fourth office among the churches.
2. To concur with the Church of Albany that someone may only become eligible for the ministry according the provisions of CO Article 5, but Synod decides to agree with Classis South's proposal that, as an exception, a person trained with a Diploma of Theological Studies (plus special missiological, language and cultural studies) can be ordained for foreign mission work only. Part of Classis South's

proposal is that this person should undergo an examination by classis as agreed upon in the Church Order.

3. When agreeing with Classis South to an exceptional ordination of a minister of the Word (missionary) for foreign mission work only, this includes an exception to CO Article 15 by which ministers are normally bound for life.

Word (missionary) for foreign mission work only, this includes an exception to CO Article

Article

Grounds:

1. The Church of Albany is correct that the Churches have agreed there are three offices (CO Article 2). This task should be carried out by a minister of the Word (missionary) even though he may not have the full theological training (CO Article 12).
2. As an exception, a person trained with a Diploma of Theological Studies (plus special missiological, language and cultural studies) can be ordained as a minister of the Word (missionary for foreign mission work only).
3. Since the ordained brother has only been prepared for the special work of foreign mission, his call does not continue when he is released by the sending church and classis.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 36).

ARTICLE 20 - Task of elders

The elders shall together with the ministers of the Word govern the congregation with pastoral care and discipline. For the upbuilding of the congregation they shall make home-visits as often as is profitable but at least once a year. They shall watch that their fellow office-bearers are faithful in carrying out their duties and ensure that in the congregation everything is done decently and in good order.

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

See under Article 3 of the Church Order for the decision made by Synod Kelmescott 1996, Article 89.

ARTICLE 21 - Task of deacons

The deacons shall perform the ministry of mercy. They shall acquaint themselves with difficulties; visit, help and encourage where there is need, and urge church members to render assistance where necessary. They shall collect and manage the gifts of the congregation, and, after mutual consultation, distribute them where there is need. The deacons shall give account of their policies and management to the consistory.

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

See under Article 3 of the Church Order for the decision made by Synod Kelmscott 1996, Article 89.

ARTICLE 22 - Equality of respective duties

In the local congregation equality shall be maintained among the ministers, among the elders, and among the deacons, regarding their respective duties, and in other matters, as much as possible.

ARTICLE 23 - Term of office

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The places of the retiring office-bearers shall be taken by others unless the consistory with the deacons judges that the circumstances and the well-being of the church render it advisable to call them into office again. In that case the rule of Article 3 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 24 - Subscription to the Confession by ministers and teaching staff

A minister of the Word and all teaching staff at the theological seminary shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia by signing the Form(s) adopted for that purpose. Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone who, being in office, refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and classis shall not receive him. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

For the Subscription Form, as adopted by Synod Kelmscott 1983 (Article 48) see Appendix I Form 4.

ARTICLE 25 - Subscription to the Confession by elders and deacons

Elders and deacons shall also subscribe to these Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form adopted for that purpose. Anyone being in office who refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

For the Subscription Form as adopted by Synod Kelmescott 1983 (Article 48) see Appendix I Form 5

ARTICLE 26 - False doctrine

To ward off false doctrines and errors the ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning and of admonition, in the ministry of the Word as well as in Christian teaching and family visiting.

ARTICLE 27 - Office-bearers and the government

The office-bearers shall impress upon the congregation its obligation to be obedient and show respect to the government, because God has instituted it. They must set a good example in this regard and by means of proper communication invoke the government to protect the ministry of the church.

Deputies

Synod decided not to appoint new deputies for correspondence with the government. It considered that the local church is in a better position to correspond with the State Government, and that, if there is a need to correspond with the Federal Government, the approach should be made through the local member of Federal Parliament, who can take it up on behalf of the local church.
(Kelmescott 1983, Article 113)

II ASSEMBLIES

ARTICLE 28 - The ecclesiastical assemblies

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis, and the synod.

ARTICLE 29 - Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 30 - Authority of the assemblies

These assemblies shall only deal with ecclesiastical matters and in an ecclesiastical manner. A major assembly shall deal only with matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its churches in common. A new matter may be put on its agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.

Instructions

Synod decides to remind the churches that, in accordance with Article 30 CO, matters which pertain to the churches in general should not be added to the Agenda by instruction.

(Launceston 1978, Art. 22)

While it may be true that the last sentence of Article 30 was inadvertently added to the Church Order without considering its impact, the way to remedy the situation is not to make a synod decision which overrides the Church Order.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 20)

A decision made by one synod (concerning the PCEA) does not oblige subsequent synods to make the same decision.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 22)

Late submissions are declared inadmissible.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 80)

ARTICLE 31 - Appeals

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly he shall have the right of appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

Major assemblies may appoint advisory committees to hear appellants and those appealed against when there is a dispute.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 18, summary of grounds)

When a synod makes a decision, that decision may be appealed to the next synod. In ordinary circumstances consistories are not obliged to render a verdict on decisions made by synod
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 19, summary of grounds).

A court of appeal (like an appeal church) which stands between classis and synod is not needed in our church federation.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 32)

Appeals are inadmissible if synod is not convinced that there are new grounds.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 62)

Appeals, whether from a church or an individual church member, are admissible if they deal with decisions of the previous synod.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 62)

Synod should judge certain appeals:
There is a widespread perception that Synod Rockingham made doctrinal decisions that were binding on all the churches. For the wellbeing of the churches it is necessary to deal with this appeal.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 111)

Decisions made by synod in response to appeals are not binding on the churches but concern only the people who appealed:
1. The statements on the forgiveness of sins were made by Synod Rockingham in response to an appeal related to a specific pastoral situation. It is therefore not binding on every local congregation or individual member of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. It "does not constitute a general pronouncement by which all the church members are bound (...) [but] concerns only the one who appealed to the major assembly" (WWJ Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, 154).
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 111)

It is unjust to revise a decision if none of the parties involved in an appeal request a revision of the decision:

2. The decisions made by Synod Rockingham were intended to give direction to the Kelmscott consistory and various appellants in the circumstances which they were in at the time of the appeal. Since none of those parties have requested revision of decisions which pertain to them, synod would do them injustice if we would now revise these decisions.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 111)

ARTICLE 32 - Credentials and voting

Delegates to a major assembly shall bring with them their credentials, signed by the minor assembly. They shall have a vote in all matters except those in which either they themselves or their churches are directly involved.

Voting

According to Article 32 CO delegates should refrain from voting if a matter concerns themselves personally or if it concerns a matter of their own local church.
(Albany 1987, Article 37)

ARTICLE 33 - Proposals

Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.

It is the duty of the appellants to demonstrate that there are new grounds.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 62, Proposal 5)

ARTICLE 34 - Chairman and clerk

In all assemblies there shall be a chairman and a clerk. The chairman's task is to present and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with and ensure that every one observes due order in speaking; he shall deny the floor to those who argue about minor things or who let themselves be carried away and cannot control their emotions, and discipline those who refuse to listen. His task shall cease when the assembly ends. The clerk shall keep an accurate record of all things worthy of being recorded.

A committee will be instructed to maintain indices of synod decisions.
(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 25)

ARTICLE 35 - Jurisdiction

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the synod has over the classis.

ARTICLE 36 - Consistory

In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders. It shall meet regularly and be chaired by the minister. If a church is served by more than one minister they shall chair in turn. The consistory shall also meet regularly with the deacons to deal with those matters as described for that purpose by the Church Order, and further with all things which the consistory considers necessary for general management, including the material affairs of the church.

ARTICLE 37 - Consistory and the deacons

Where the number of elders and deacons is small the deacons may be added to the consistory by local arrangement. This shall invariably be done where there are less than three elders and less than three deacons. In these circumstances matters pertaining to supervision and discipline shall be handled with the advice of the deacons and matters pertaining to the office of deacons with the advice of the elders.

ARTICLE 38 - Constitution of a consistory

If a consistory is to be instituted for the first time or anew, the advice of classis shall be sought.

ARTICLE 39 - Places without a consistory

Places where as yet no consistory can be instituted shall be assigned by classis to the care of a neighbouring consistory.

Work among the 'scattered'

Synod, considering

1.

that only the consistories are able to judge whether or not one is justified in intending to live in 'the diaspora' in view of the establishing of the Church of the Lord;

2.

that only the consistories have to decide whom they shall take under their supervision; decides:

1. to alter the decision of Synod 1954, Article 20 sub 2, regarding the official care for the scattered brothers and sisters;

2. and not to advise the consistories concerning the ecclesiastical position of the scattered.

(Albany 1959, Article 27).

ARTICLE 40 - Meetings of deacons

The deacons shall meet regularly to deal with the matters pertaining to their office. Their meetings shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 41 - Classis

Neighbouring churches shall come together in a classis by delegating a minister and an elder, or if a church has no minister, two elders. Classis shall convene at least once every six months in person. The ministers shall be chairman in rotation, or one shall be chosen to be chairman; however the same minister shall not be chairman twice in succession. The chairman shall ask whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church. Every classis shall determine where and when the churches shall meet again. The last classis before synod shall choose delegates to that synod.

Classes

Synod decides:

2. To establish two classes instead of one.

Grounds:

1. Offer a two stage appeal process (Classis and Synod);
2. Allow for fewer delegates to Classis, giving more time for discussion and personal contact to the delegates;
3. Operate at a lower cost;
4. Giving greater variety of persons delegated to Synod than the one classis model;
5. Will not quickly take on its agenda matters that belong to the churches as a whole, and properly dealt with at Synod.

3. To change Article 41 Church Order so that it reads "*Classis shall convene at least once every six months in person ...*"

Ground:

The great distances that lie between many of the churches and the high cost of travel discourages a classical meeting every three months.

4. To establish a boundary for the division of classes in the Metro area, and appoint the Tasmanian churches to Classis North, and the churches of Albany to the Classis South.

From west to east, the border could run along Forrest Road, which runs into Armadale Road as far as the Albany Highway Junction. All churches established north or south of this line would belong to Classis North and South respectively. At this point of time, Armadale, Byford and Rockingham would be joined to the Albany churches, while Kelmscott, Mt Nasura and West Kelmscott would be joined to the Tasmanian churches.

5. As long as there are two classes each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders.

Ground:

Owing to the smallness of the bond of churches a synod shall have a minimum of sixteen members.

6. Concerning travelling cost if necessary classes can ask for reimbursement from the synodical treasury.

Ground:

A cost sharing arrangement may be necessary because otherwise Classis North

would have to bear the burden of travel costs between Tasmania and Perth on its own.

7. To delete the italicised words in the Church Order, as well as the indented sentence at the end of Article 41, and to amend the Ecclesiastical Documents where necessary (*Acts 1996*, Appendix N).

8. Ground:

With the introduction of classes, it is necessary to update the Church Order and the Ecclesiastical Documents to reflect our new situation.

(West Albany 2000, Article 43)

Needy churches

Decision:

To thank the deputies for their work done and to discharge them.

To pass the report of deputies on to the classes.

Grounds:

Since classes have been formed by this Synod, and since this is a matter for classes, it is proper that this report with all the work done be passed on to classes for their benefit.

(West Albany 2000, Article 44)

ARTICLE 42 - Ministers who are not delegated to a classis

If two or more ministers are serving the same church, those who have not been delegated shall have the right to attend classis in an advisory capacity.

ARTICLE 43 - Counsellors

Each vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counsellor the minister it desires as such, to the end that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order and especially may lend his aid in the matter of the calling of a minister; he shall sign the letter of call.

ARTICLE 44 - Church visitors

Each year classis shall authorise at least two of the more experienced and able ministers to visit the churches in that year. If necessary the classis may authorise a capable elder to carry out this task together with a minister. It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the Church Order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in any thing, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's church. They shall submit written reports of their visits to classis.

See Appendix III

ARTICLE 45 - Synod

The synod shall be held every three years. As long as there are two classes each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders.

At the close of synod the time and place for the next synod shall be determined and a church shall be appointed to convene it. A synod shall be convened before the appointed time if according to the judgment of at least two classes this appears necessary. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod, subject to the approval of its classis.

Delegates

Synod decides:

As long as there are two classes each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders.

(West Albany 2000, Article 41)

Executive Committee

Synod decides:

To continue with two clerks in the Executive Committee

(Rockingham 2003, Article 105)

Synod decides:

To appoint Br M.Pot as Web site assistant under the General Secretary for Relations with Other Churches.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 108)

Rules for Synods

Synod adopts "Rules for the Synods of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia".

(Armadale 1956, Article 7)

See Appendix IV for these Rules

Synod decides:

2.

To request deputies for the revision of Synod Procedures and Rules to investigate more thoroughly this matter of receiving submissions from individual members (cf. 5.6 of Kelmscott's Draft Regulations for Conduct of Synod).

Grounds:

1.

The current Rules for Synods do not prohibit submissions from individual members.

3.

Deputies should study this matter, because until Synod 1994 it was the custom to receive submissions from individual members, whereas Synod 1994 decided (Articles 37 and 60) that submissions from individual church members are inadmissible because such submissions are *"an attempt to participate in Synod discussion. That is*

not the prerogative of individual church members, but only of the delegates to Synod. Submissions from individual church members should come via their consistories". It is not clear what conclusions we can draw from Article 30 Church Order in this matter.
(Kelmescott 1996, Article 29)

Synod decides:

To amend Rule 1.6 of the Rules for Synods as follows:

Arrange meeting accommodation for synod and its committees; any necessary sound amplification; all administrative support facilities; and refreshments and meals. Also, recommend to Synod a qualified administrative assistant to the Clerk (see Rule 3.2).

(Rockingham 2003, Article 12)

Synod decides:

1. the following instruction be inserted between the Regulations 1.3 and 1.4 (with subsequent numbering altered):

1.4 As soon as classes have appointed delegates to Synod. Forward to each of the delegates and each of the alternates one unbound and unfolded copy of the Provisional Draft Agenda. As further material becomes available, forward one unbound and unfolded copy to each of the delegates and alternates.

2. Rule 1.5 (currently 1.4) be altered to read:

Confidential matters must be sent to delegates and alternates only.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 91)

Synod decides:

To continue with two clerks in the Executive committee

(Rockingham 2003, Article 105)

Non-delegated office-bearers

Non-delegated office-bearers are urgently requested to attend the sessions of Synod as much as possible.

(Albany 1962, Article 42)

Acts of Synods

The Acts of Synod should be printed within six weeks of closure.

(Launceston 1978, Article 12)

Synod decides to write Acts of Closed Sessions only for the purpose of recording confidential matters.

(Launceston 1998, Article 16)

Synodical decisions

Synod decides to:

delete the use of the word "unanimously" when recording decisions, unless Synod decides to the contrary in a specific case.

(Armadale 1990, Article 19)

Rules for Synod Treasury

Synod decides:

to adopt the proposed "Rules for Synod Treasury".

(Armadale 1990, Article 48)

See Appendix V for these Rules

Delegates from other churches

1.

Synod adopts a fourfold distinction of delegates from other churches, namely,

- a) Delegates from sister churches;
- b) Delegates from churches with whom we have TEC (temporary ecclesiastical contact, Editor)
- c) Delegates from churches with whom the FRCA have entered official contact;
- d) Delegates from churches which want to come into contact with the FRCA.

2.

Synod specifies the privileges of these delegates as follows:

- a. Delegates from sister churches:
 - They will be given the privilege to address Synod to pass on greetings and relevant information about our sister relations;
 - They will sit as advisory members of Synod. As such they will be permitted to give advice when they request or are requested to do so. This applies both to the floor of Synod and the advisory committees;
 - They will offered normal Christian hospitality, i.e. lodging and meals.
- b. Delegates from churches with whom we have TEC:
 - They will be given the privilege to address Synod to pass on greetings and relevant information about our TEC;
 - They will be permitted to speak when they request or are requested to do so, but only on matters specifically pertaining to the relations between the two bonds of churches. This applies both to the floor of Synod and the advisory committees.
 - They will offered normal Christian hospitality, i.e. lodging and meals.
- c. Delegates from churches with whom the FRCA have entered official contact:
 - They will be given the privilege to address Synod to pass on greetings and relevant information about our contacts;
 - They will offered normal Christian hospitality, i.e. lodging and meals.
- d. Delegates from churches which want to come into contact with the FRCA:
 - They are invited to attend Synod, yet without any other privileges;
 - They will offered normal Christian hospitality, i.e. lodging and meals.

(Bedfordale 1992, Article 19)

Technical equipment

Synod decides:

6.

To appoint a 'sound-man' to care for the audio equipment of Synod.

(Kelmescott 1996, Article 107)

Decision:

To thank brothers E 'tHart and A.van der Wal for the construction of a special sound system for the benefit of synod sessions, for storing and maintaining it and for operating it at this Synod.

To discharge the brothers and to appoint new deputies to take care of the sound system equipment for Synod.

Ground:

The brothers have done an admirable job and have served Synod very well.

(West Albany 2000, Article 98)

Synod decides:

1. To thank brothers E. 'tHart and A. van der Wal for the construction of a special sound system and the computer infrastructure for the benefit of synod sessions, for storing and maintaining it and for operating it at this Synod.
2. To extend the mandate of the deputies to include the provision of a network and IT infrastructure for the next Synod.
3. To discharge the brothers and to appoint new deputies to take care of the technical equipment for Synod.

Grounds:

1. The brothers have done an admirable job and have served Synod very well.
2. The ability to use email and have access to a printer from all delegates' laptops was very well received.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 104)

Internet

A proposal from the executive to place the Acts of Synod also on the Internet is adopted, on the proviso that matters of personal nature are excluded, Also, any decision relating to other churches will not be uploaded until after these churches have been informed.

(Launceston 1998, Article 7)

A proposal from the Executive to place Acts of Synod also on the Internet is adopted, on the proviso that the matters of personal nature are excluded. Also in matters relating to other churches, discretion will be used.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 11)

ARTICLE 46 - Relationship with other churches

The relationship with other churches shall be regulated by synod. With churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible. On non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice other churches shall not be rejected.

Sections:

- A. Deputies
- B. Recognition of other churches
- C. Sister churches
 - a. rules etc.
 - b. relations
- D. Contact churches
 - a. rules
 - b. general
 - c. contacts
- E. ICRC

A . DEPUTIES

Deputies

Synod decides

to change the name of deputies from 'Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Sister Churches' to 'Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad'.
(Launceston 1985, Article 74 sub I)

All Deputies will work under one umbrella. The various Deputies will do their own work and are responsible for their own report to Synod. The three deputyships (for Sister Churches, Other Churches [Reformed], and Other Churches [Presbyterian] respectively, Ed.) will meet together as needed to inform and consult with each other regarding their work. Deputies shall present their final Report for interaction and consultation by the full deputyship before sending them to Synod.

The duties of the general secretary are:

- a. to take care of the central post office box,
- b. to distribute the mail,
- c. to act as recording clerk for the combined meetings, and
- d. to acknowledge correspondence not applicable to Deputies, and if necessary to pass it on to the churches,

(Launceston 1998, Articles 125, 6 and 6.3)

Synod decides:

We recommend that synod insert "at least once per year" in the general mandate for all deputies so that the third sentence reads: *All the deputyships will meet together at least once per year and as needed to inform and consult with each other regarding their work.*

Grounds:

1. The deputies need to keep in touch with each other. Consultation and sharing of information can be done outside of these jumbo meetings, but the jumbo meetings ensure that it is done.
2. The overlap in tasks demands that the various sections of deputies come together regularly.
3. The need for consistency demands that all the deputies keep in contact. Such

meetings ensure that.

4. This ensures that deputies do not work totally independently. (Rockingham 2003, Article 95)

Synod decides:

To adopt the proposed changes to the Guidelines for Support:

1. There shall be good consultation and as much cooperation as possible with churches in our own bond and sister churches who offer support to the same churches. Such consultation and cooperation should also extend to aid organisations (from within our churches/sister churches) who offer support to these churches. Care should be taken not to duplicate support that may already be given by other organizations.
2. Each request for support must as much as possible be channelled via the respective deputies of their churches. Support will be sent as much as possible via these deputies. Our deputies are responsible for proper distribution of funds.
3. Each project must build up the biblical, reformed character of church-life, or help overcome impediments in church-life.
4. Each request for support should be well documented and include:
 - i. What initiative and responsibility the requesting party takes;
 - ii. What purpose the project has;
 - iii. What length of time it will take;
 - iv. And the expected goal of the project.
5. Support given must keep in mind certain practical principles:
 - i. Support shall be directed as a matter of preference to the whole bond of churches rather than to specific churches or to individuals;
 - ii. Support should occur only if the supporting church(es) cannot reasonably be expected to do it, and if the support is essential or important for building up church-life;
 - iii. Support should respect and maintain the responsibility of the churches supported;
 - iv. Support should help to activate churches rather than make them inactive;
 - v. Support should aim to make itself superfluous, i.e. not become permanent;
 - vi. Support must not engender jealousies, i.e. it must be given evenly and consistent with that offered to other parties;
 - vii. Support should be aimed at the spiritual level of those supported;
 - viii. Support should be in agreement with the laws of the country, unless those laws conflict with the Word of God;
 - ix. And support should be supervised, and an accounting including an evaluation of its effectiveness should be given.
6. The deputies at home shall keep the churches, which offer this support informed so that support can also be accompanied with prayer for these churches. Such information should be offered at the start of a project, during the time a project is in progress and at its completion. At its completion an evaluation of the project can be given.
7. The deputies shall report to the next synod about any support given.
8. The deputies will have an independent, competent third party audit its books and this audit will be passed on to the churches.

Grounds:

1. There shall be consultation and as much cooperation as possible between deputies and all others involved in providing support in these churches. This prevents duplication of support; the unequal distribution of support (causing envy, jealousy, etc.); and enables support to be given in a more effective manner.
2. While recognising the difficulties of communication, education, and travel, it is nevertheless important to as much as possible channel support via the deputies of these churches. Since there are difficulties in holding their deputies accountable, the onus for accountability must fall on our deputies.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 86)

B. RECOGNITION OF OTHER CHURCHES

Synod declares:

that our recognition of another church as being "true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ"

1.

means that both our churches and that recognized church stand on the foundations as expressed in Article 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession;

2.

has a direct consequence that a sister church relationship can be established, without disregarding the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying in the road to a practical realization of unity;

3.

and that our church members join that church, and vice versa, in the case that such church is their nearest church, in accordance with Article 28 of the Belgic Confession.

(Launceston 1985, Article 67)

No new rule is constructed for the purpose of preventing sister-church relations with churches that permit guest ministers of non-sister churches to proclaim God's Word or to permit guests of such churches to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

(West Kelmscott 2006 Art. 21, summary)

The rule of Synod Launceston (1985; Art. 67), that declaring another church federation as 'true church' must necessarily imply a sister-church relationship, is maintained.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 59)

C. SISTER CHURCHES

a. Rules etc.

Rules for sister relations

Synod decides:

3.

to adopt the rules recommended by deputies (and amended) for sister relations as follows:

RULES FOR EXERCISING SISTER RELATIONS

1.

Sister relations shall be used mutually to assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world.

2.

The churches shall mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.

3.

The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible in translation).

4.

The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties.

5.

The churches shall accept one another's attestations, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of these attestations.

6.

The churches shall in principle open their pulpits to each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted by the respective church federations. Also the churches agree in principle to the possibility of calling each other's ministers, while the churches reserve for themselves the right to maintain their own rules in connection with the extension and approval of calls.

7.

In cases of substantial changes or additions to the confession, church order or liturgical forms this intention shall be brought to the special attention of the sister churches, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.

8.

The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible.

(Bedfordale 1992, Article 95 sub 3)

Double correspondence

Synod declares that it is desirable that foreign sister churches, when they enter into correspondence with other churches, urge the latter to try - as a consequence of this new correspondence - to contact those sister churches in the world that are living in a relation of correspondence with the first mentioned churches.

(Launceston 1970, Article 35)

Delegates to synods of sister churches

Synod decides to add an instruction in the mandate of the deputies to be appointed for the correspondence with foreign churches, wherein they, as soon as they receive an invitation or announcement of a coming synod in a foreign sister church, inform the churches so that they can determine whether one of the office-bearers can represent the churches.

(Armadale 1972, Article 18)

b . Relations

Sister churches

Synod decided to enter into the relationship of correspondence with the following foreign churches:

- a. De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands).
- b. The Canadian Reformed Churches.
- c. Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (The Free Reformed Churches in South-Africa).
- d. De Gereformeerde Kerken in Indonesië (The Reformed Churches in Indonesia)

(Armadale 1954, Article 14)

Synod decides:

1. to enter in principle into full correspondence with The Presbyterian Church of Korea as sister churches.

(Albany 1975, Article 82)

Canada

The Canadian Reformed Churches

Decision:

1. To continue sister relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to the established rules.
2. To monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to our rules.
3. To authorise deputies (in cooperation with the Deputies for Training for the Ministry) to send one delegate to the next General Synod (2007 in Smithers).

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 85)

Indonesia:

Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia

A. Regarding GGRI:

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules;
2. To continue to visit the synods and conferences of the GGRI subject to available finance;
3. To support the GGRI in a well-considered and responsible way with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches;
4. To continue the financial support of the church at Kataka for the support of Rev. Pila Njuka and to reconsider this support after the theological seminary has been established;
5. To support the plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba and make funds available for this cause;
6. To financially support evangelist Benyamin Rohi to come to Australia to study English and to familiarize himself with the Australian churches for three months subject to a financial arrangements with the Dutch deputies and subject to available funding from the churches and if possible Rev. Yawan Bunda of the GGRC;
7. To provide limited support to ensure that effective communication continues;
8. To monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. Where possible, to encourage these churches to fully practise the unity they already recognize;
9. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies 4,5,6,7 above.

B. Regarding GGRC:

1. To continue contact with the GGRC;
2. To continue to visit the synods of the GGRC subject to available finance;
3. To support the GGRC in a well-considered and responsible way with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches. This will include giving instructions through yearly seminars if finances are available;
4. To monitor and report on developments regarding the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. Where possible, to encourage these churches to fully put into practice the unity which they already recognise. This includes urging them to be united in theological training which also includes encouraging them to utilize the study Rev. Yonson Dethan completed at the Theological College in Hamilton;

5. To financially support Rev Yawan Bundi of GGRC to study English in Australia and familiarize himself with reformed church life for three months, but not in the same year as others students. This will be done according to the financial agreement with our Dutch sister churches and is subject to available funding from the churches;
6. To provide limited support to ensure that effective communication continues;
7. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies as mentioned in 3, 5 and 6 above.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 58)

Korea :

The Presbyterian Church in Korea

Synod decides:

To continue sister relations with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) according to the established rules.

Ground:

No evidence has arisen suggesting that The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) has departed from the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions or the Church Order.

(West Albany 2000, Article 32)

1. To continue sister relations with the PCK in accordance with the established rules and to publish the fruit of these relations for the churches.
2. To express thanks that visits to the PCK have resulted in improved lines of communications as well as a visit from a delegation of our Korean sisters.
3. To accept the assessment of deputies that since there is agreement for better communications, there is also reason to be more optimistic about the viability of continued sister relations.
4. To authorise deputies to send one delegate to visit the PCK once in the next three years subject to available funds.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 40)

South Africa

Decision:

To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) according to the established rules.

To agree that it is desirable for deputies to aim to visit alternate Synods of the FRCSA.

Grounds:

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confession and Church Order.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the FRCSA are both small bonds of churches confronted by very real challenges in this modern world. Their recent visit to us and our recent visit to them have shown that we can support one another, as well as learn from each other.

Synod 1990 decided "to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us" (Acts, Article 58). Of our historic sister churches, South Africa is certainly the closest to us geographically.

(West Albany 2000, Article 31).

The Netherlands

Decision:

To continue sister-relations with The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations;

To discharge deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

Exercise sister-relations with the RCN according to the adopted rules;

According to the rules, discuss with the RCN deputies some concerns as to the developments within the RCN;

Authorise deputies to attend the next general Synod of the RCN;

Report to next Synod;

To expand the deputyship by one additional minister.

Grounds:

The RCN give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.

Deputies have pointed out and given some evidence about some specific concerns.

These should be addressed, according to the rules.

Personal visits (to Synods) are more helpful than correspondence from a distance. It also improves relations.

The number of items to be studied and discussed increases, and they require exegetical skills. Thus the request for an additional minister is understandable.

(West Albany 2000, Article 87)

Relations with The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)**I. Fourth Commandment and Sunday****Decision:**

1. To acknowledge with thanks that the mandates to stay informed about developments and decisions in the RCN about the Sabbath/Sunday issue and to continue the discussions with the RCN on this matter have been amply fulfilled.

2. To accept Amersfoort's decision as largely allaying our concerns.

3. To have deputies monitor the application of this decision, seeing there are still concerns about its application and clarity of *Sunday, Lordly Day. A Pastoral Guideline*.

Grounds:

a. The deputies have had to study long reports from the Dutch deputies and interacted with intensive discussions, both by letters and by personal meetings, with our Dutch sister churches on this issue

b. In distinction from synods Leusden and Zuidhorn, Synod Amersfoort took the view that "no matter how you approach Sunday rest, both lines take their starting point in a commandment to rest on Sundays". This means that the RCN have come to the conclusion that the New Testament Church's obligation to cease working on Sunday is based on God's command.

c. General Synod Amersfoort acknowledged the need "to endeavour, while looking upward in prayer to God, to come to renewed conviction regarding the celebration of the Sunday and its place within a Christian style of life as a whole" (Decision 3). This gives the impression that our Dutch sister churches are determined to insist – on the basis of God's Word – that church members should not work on Sunday.

d. According to the adopted rules for Sister Relations it is our task to "assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world".

II. Divorce and Remarriage**Decision:**

1. To express thankfulness that our Dutch sister churches could take a strong Scriptural stance regarding God's teachings against divorce and remarriage.

2. To express regret that, while the issue regarding the approval of divorces for

reasons beyond the Scriptural reasons of adultery and wilful desertion was not endorsed by synod and thus implicitly excluded, synod did not explicitly state this.

Grounds:

- a. Synod Amersfoort in the “Principles and Guidelines” that it approved, gives strong Scriptural guidance showing how divorce and subsequent remarriage are a serious evil and must be so dealt with by consistories.
- b. Synod Amersfoort gave no explicit guidance regarding the danger of moving in a direction that allows divorce for reasons beyond adultery and wilful desertion (Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7).

III. Liturgy and Hymns

Decision:

1. To express appreciation for not developing a separate order of worship on the basis of the *Ordinarium* texts.
2. To express appreciation for not releasing for use in the churches the order of worship for the “leerdienst” (teaching-service) as presented by the deputies.
3. To express concerns about the continuing proliferation and the contents of the hymns from the “liedboek voor de kerken”, and to continue to suggest more time be spent on the Psalms and on songs based directly on Scripture.
4. To keep monitoring RCN’s decisions in accordance with our Rule b (to mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in liturgy) and to become more acquainted, in a selective manner, with the hymns that are approved and are being approved.

Grounds:

- a. Although GS Amersfoort stated that GS Zuidhorn has added to GS Leusden that a hymn should not be in conflict with the Reformed Confession, GS Zuidhorn decided not to change Leusden’s criterium into “a good hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and Confession”.
- b. The contents of hymns should be unambiguously biblical and reformed. There are too many hymns in “Liedboek voor de kerken” which are not unambiguously biblical and reformed.
- c. Deputies have asked that the Psalms, the Book of Praise in the Bible, receive more attention. Without replacing the present rhymings and tunes of the Psalms, to work on new rhymings which are more Christ-centred and on tunes other than Genevan ones. Thus more attention can be given to the Psalms.
- d. More than once Deputies have asked the RCN, in line with John Calvin, to put to rhyme Bible texts and passages. It is better to spend time and energy in composing hymns directly derived from Scriptures than in dealing with appeal upon appeal to unbiblical thoughts that have crept into the hymns. And probably those hymns can be sung if the congregations, by singing, every time translate the ambiguous sentences in a reformed way, but always those hymns shall be found inferior to the faithful Cantica which are based on God’s own reliable Word.

IV. Sacraments in Military Situations

Decision:

To express our concerns to the Dutch sister churches that GS Amersfoort’s decision regarding the administration of both sacraments for military personnel goes beyond the common consent of the Church Order and leads to the danger of interdenominational (against Article 28, B.C.) administration of sacraments.

Grounds:

- a. GS Amersfoort has not alleviated our concerns that were sent to deputies. We are still not convinced that there is no danger in making exceptions to the commonly agreed

regulations of the Church Order and then apply them in exceptional circumstances within the military environment.

b. GS Amersfoort should have referred to Belgic Confession, Article 28, where we confess that it is everyone's duty to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.

c. The possibility of administering the Lord's Supper, under certain conditions, to those who are not members of the RCN (or sister churches) has been expanded to the sacrament of baptism (again under certain conditions). Baptising children of believing servicemen who are not members of the RCN (or sister churches) is now also possible.

d. The exceptional situations, which previously referred to "war zones" and "areas of crisis" have now been broadened to include all military zones where the RCN servicemen are isolated for lengthy periods of time.

V. Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) and Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) (Refer to Article 66)

Regarding CGK:

1. To encourage our sister-churches in their pursuit of unity with the CGK to do so on the proven basis of God's Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and as practiced by the Church Order of Dort.

2. To monitor further developments and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

a. These churches have the same basis. The Union of 1892 should have seen both within one federation. Though this did not occur then, the mandate of our Lord and His prayer to be one obliges us to seek this unity.

b. Since these developments are ongoing, it is good to keep the churches posted.

Regarding RCN:

1. To encourage the RCN in their contacts with the NGK to continue to insist on the need within the NGK for binding to God's Word as confessed in The Three Forms of Unity, and also to insist on the proper place of the Church Order to counteract independentism.

2. To express thanks that the RCN carefully assessed the request to reconsider the decisions of GS Amersfoort-West (1967) and Hoogetveen (1969/70).

3. To encourage the RCN to pursue the recent developments in the NGK for justifying women as elders and ministers, since this is a barrier to unity.

4. To keep in close contact with the Dutch Deputies and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

a. The binding to the Scriptures and confessions as well as the proper place of the Church Order for the bond of churches are the crucial points of division. We should encourage our sister churches in these matters.

b. The subject of the split in the 1960s has been carefully investigated. It was decided that it is not necessary to change the decisions of previous General Synods.

c. The declaration of the NGK to justify women in the offices of minister and elder indeed sets a barrier to unity. Our sister churches need to address this with the NGK.

VI. Overall Recommendations (RCN)

Decision:

1. To continue sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations.

2. To express our thankfulness to the RCN churches regarding the openness and frankness in which their deputies and ours could be engaged in concerns and discussions.

3. To urge the RCN to engage in meaningful dialogue with the RCN(R) churches,

having a greater understanding of their concerns and grievances, and Scripturally and confessionally to address these concerns in humility and love.

4. To express our concerns regarding the directions being taken, particularly in regard to the manner in which Scripture and the commandments are interpreted and applied to today's circumstances, taking into account decisions made by our synods.

5. To discharge Deputies and to appoint new Deputies with the mandate to:

- a. exercise sister-relations with the RCN according to the adopted rules;
- b. discuss with the RCN the nature and cause underlying the directions being taken by their churches as expressed above;
- c. discuss with the RCN Deputies the concerns as to the developments within the RCN, including:
 - i. those that deputies have already been busy with, and the decisions already made by Synod West Kelmscott 2006, so that this work does not need to be done all over again;
 - ii. the RCN dealings with views on hermeneutics, work of the Holy Spirit and the application of church discipline;
 - iii. the influence of the charismatic movement on the RCN;
- d. implement decision 3;
- e. report to next Synod;
- f. send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCN.

Grounds:

- a. The RCN give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
- b. Our deputies have been able to correspond with Dutch deputies in a good and brotherly way, and their deputies have brought our concerns to their Synod table. This is in the spirit of the rules for sister church relations to which both our church bonds have committed themselves.
- c. FRCA deputies express concern about a subjective interpretation of Scripture in relation to the RCN considerations about marriage and divorce that was not expressly denied by the RCN synod. Via books, the media and websites, members from within the RCN have raised matters of concern including the work of the Spirit and the application of church discipline. These matters of concern need to be investigated.
- d. Synod has made decisions on fourth commandment, divorce and remarriage, sacraments in military situations, liturgy and hymns.
- e. In order to pave the way towards reconciliation, it is important that the RCN be urged to work towards reconciliation with the RCN(R) on the basis of truth, love and humility.
- f. Deputies need to continue to address the concerns in accordance with the rules of sister church relations.
- g. Personal visits to synods are often more helpful than correspondence from a distance. Delegates should use the opportunity to visit the RCN(R) as well.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 94)

D . CONTACT CHURCHES

a . Rules

Temporary contact

Synod decides:

as there should be only one form of permanent ecclesiastical fellowship between sister

churches and this under the mutually accepted rules for correspondence, that any rules for temporary ecclesiastical contact should make clear that the contact has as its ultimate aim the establishment of sister church relationship.
(Launceston 1985, Article 74 sub II)

Synod decides:

5. to discontinue offering "temporary ecclesiastical contact" and to ask deputies to work towards sister relations with those churches with whom we presently have temporary ecclesiastical contact.
(Bedfordale 1992, Article 95)

Contacts and relations

Synod instructs deputies for correspondence with foreign sister churches:

6. to be diligent in seeking contact with those churches which are faithful to the Scriptures, and to see if we can enter into correspondence with them.
(Armadale 1972, Article 53)

Closer contacts with geographically close churches will be developed wherever possible. Sumba, Sri Lanka and Taiwan are mentioned in this context.
(Armadale 1980, Article 53)

Synod observes:

that there are possibilities to seek new contacts with other churches;

considers:

the command of the Lord to seek unity with faithful churches;

decides:

to instruct deputies to investigate those possibilities in close contact with deputies from our sister churches, especially with those of The Netherlands, and report to Synod.
(Kelmescott 1983, Article 77)

Synod decides to follow the policy with respect to the mandates for deputies for relations with other churches:

- a) to limit the requirements of the relative mandates to a manageable level;
- b) to limit present contacts and relations with churches which are geographically close to our sister churches abroad and with churches which we have recognised as true and faithful to the minimum level necessary for us to remain acquainted with their situation and to fulfil our obligations made to them;
- c) to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have a greater responsibility;
- d) to phase out contact with churches with whom we appear to be making no progress.
(Armadale 1990, Article 58)

Synod decides:

5.

In meeting the member churches of the ICRC to maintain the decision of the 1990 Synod, Article 58.
(Byford 1994, Article 83)

Past decisions

Synod decides:

1.

that the decisions recorded in Articles 72 and 75 of the Acts of Synod 1983 were taken with undue haste and without due consideration.

2.

that in the future suchlike decisions be not made on the basis of oral information supplied to Synod.

3.

that the Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Sister Churches appointed by Synod 1985 be instructed to thoroughly investigate the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and The Free Church of Scotland, and submit comprehensive reports to the churches and to the next Synod, paying particular attention to the marks of the true Church and the question of Church government.

4.

Until the next Synod has dealt with the above mentioned study, contact with these churches shall be maintained at the present level.

(Launceston 1985, Article 43)

Synod decides:

1.

to acknowledge with past Synods that there have been inconsistencies and ambiguities in past decisions which have led to disquiet and division in the churches.

2.

to express that future Synods should give mandates which are consistent with one another.

(Armadale 1990, Article 59)

b. General

Presbyterian churches

Synod decides:

2.

to appoint new deputies with the mandate:

2.1 to study/discuss the matter of contacts/relations with Presbyterian churches, addressing the following questions:

a. what weight the FRCA should give to the areas of concern;

b. whether or not all areas of concern must be cleared before the FRCA can progress with contacts/relations;

c. how in a manageable and responsible way the FRCA can fulfil their obligations towards churches geographically/culturally far away;

2.2 to authorise deputies to organise a conference for the churches to discuss the contact with Presbyterian churches as broadly as possible;

2.3 to report back to the churches when the mandate is finished;

2.4 to continue contact/relations with the PCEA, FCS, EPCI and RPCI at a low level (passing on Acts and greetings, etc.), leaving the discussions in abeyance.

Grounds:

1.

Amongst ourselves we are not of one mind on the matter of contacts/ relations with Presbyterian churches.

2.

To phase out contact with the RPCI, as proposed by the majority of Deputies for Relations with Presbyterian Churches would not be justified until the study is finished. To break off relations with the EPCI and the FCS can only be done if these churches are found to be unfaithful.

3.

Past synods have never explicitly indicated what weight the areas of concern should have in the development of our contact/relations with Presbyterian churches.

4.

In line with the decision of Synod Armadale, 1990 (Acts, Article 58) it is important to define more clearly what is needed to fulfil our obligations towards churches geographically far away.
(Byford 1994, Article 111)

Decision:

1. To renew the same mandate as given by Synod 1994 and to encourage deputies to fulfil their mandate for the next Synod.
2. To mandate the deputies to incorporate in their study the progress there has been in the synod reports and decisions by our sister churches.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have only started their task. Though one could have expected more, Synod 1994 did not expect them to finish their mandate by this Synod.
2. For the benefit of the churches and our contacts, the study of these concerns should be finalised by the next Synod.
3. The sister churches in The Netherlands, South Africa and Canada have studied and assessed these "areas of concern". Our sister-relations should be exercised "mutually to assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world" (Rule 1, Rules for Exercising Sister Relations). It is thus proper to incorporate these studies in their deputies' mandate.
(Kelmscott 1996, Article 96)

Decision:

To assess the areas of concern with respect to the contacts which The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have with the Free Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.
(These areas of concern are: the Supervision of the Lord's Table, the Supervision of the Pulpit, the position of children in the Covenant, Covenanting and purity of worship.)

This assessment should include:

- a. in what way the statements referred to in Decision affect our relations/contacts with these churches; (See for the text of Decision 1 under "Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia", Ed.).
- b. how in a manageable and responsible way The Free Reformed Churches of Australia can fulfil their obligations towards these churches since they are geographically/culturally far away (Cf. *Acts 1994*, Article 111).

Grounds:

1. Our method of approach to the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia will affect our approach to other Presbyterian churches.
2. Deputies were not able to complete their mandate regarding the Free Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, given by the previous Synod.
(Launceston 1998, Art.93)

Decision:

To discharge deputies and appoint new deputies with the following mandate:

To study/discuss the outstanding areas of concern with FCR, EPCI and RPCI, addressing the following questions:

What weight the FRCA should give to the remaining areas of concern;
Whether or not all areas of concern must be cleared before the FRCA can progress with contact/relations;

How in a manageable and responsible way the FRCA can fulfil their obligations towards churches geographically/culturally far away;

and In what way the statements with respect to our contact with the PCEA as adopted by Synod 1998 will affect our approach towards the FCR, EPCI and RPCI.

Ground:

Deputies appointed by Synod 1998 came with a recommendation to phase out

contacts/relations with the FCS, EPCI and RPCI, yet they did not adhere to the mandate given by Synod and thus this unfinished mandate should still be completed. (West Albany 2000, Art.73)

See under: Australia, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

c . Contacts

Australia :

Australian Council of Reformed Churches

The text of our reply to the letter from the "Australian Council of Reformed Churches" - compare Article 15 of these Acts - is determined. This reply will be added to these Acts as Appendix 2.

(Albany 1968, Art.66)

(Editor's note: This letter ends as follows:

"Considering these matters, we must conclude that your council in its composition and course does not offer sufficient guarantee for a co-operation, which must be based on the truth of God and in obedience to the Word of God.

If your council bypasses these serious objections and prohibitive facts, and leaves them for what they are, we must conclude that it cannot commence its primary task, namely the seeking of the true unity of faithful believers in Christ, but that the council itself forms an obstacle to unity.

Synod brings these matters to your attention, because on the one hand she rejects an aspiration towards an unholy and self-willed isolation, but on the other hand she rejects a co-operation which indeed suggests a unity but without sufficient guarantees of its Scriptural truth.

Synod expresses the hope that you will consider these matters seriously, and wishes you God's blessing in this.")

Australia:

(Christian) Reformed Churches of Australia

A response will be sent to the deputies appointed by Synod Dandenong of The Reformed Churches of Australia. Synod decides to insert this letter as an Appendix into the Acts.

(Albany 1959, Art.44)

It is decided to include only the latest correspondence with The Reformed Churches of Australia in the Acts.

(Armadale 1966, Art.58)

(Editor's note: The letter sent to the RCA by Synod 1966 ends with the following sentence:

"As long as you continue to sidestep a serious answer to these things we must remain in concluding that your desire for unity is not Scriptural and true and that therefore you are guilty of blocking the way which can lead to the Scriptural unity".)

Synod decides:

to appoint deputies with the mandate to engage in dialogue as stipulated in Considerations 2, 4, 5.

Considerations:

2.

(partly, Ed.) Thus the RCA has definitely broken with the GKN(S) and has

correspondence, i.e. writes letters, only to keep the channels of communication open. Also, the RCA family sees that its association with the GKN(S) through the REC needs to be undone. These developments are strong evidence that a reconsideration for personal contact with the RCA is warranted.

4.

The agenda for such dialogue should be pre-set in accordance with past decisions of the FRCA Synods. The impediments toward unity between the FRCA and the RCA have been clearly spelled out by past Synods (cf. the 1959 and 1962 Synods which approved letters to the RCA, letters which are appended to the Acts of those Synods). The 1962 RCA Synod authorised its deputies to answer the correspondence. In the latter they themselves spell out the FRCA's conditions 'sine qua non' for reunion:

- a. "the recognition from our side (RCA) of the Liberation as an unmistakable work of God;" and
- b. "the breaking of all correspondence (i.e.sister-relations) with the GKN(S)" (quoted from the 1964 Acts, p.23; translation is ours).

5.

The present generation ought to be made aware of past (sinful) decisions taken by their Synods. It is a scriptural principle that "the LORD visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" and that as much as possible the past should be undone by not maintaining the past wrongs and by steering a new course in their relations.

(Armadale 1990, Art.102)

Synod decides:

1.

To thank deputies for the immense amount of work done in making available in the English language the documents relevant to the Liberation of 1944 and the contacts between the FRCA and the RCA.

3.

To appoint new deputies with the mandate to observe what the next Synod of the RCA will do with the report which their deputies for dialogue with the FRCA will submit, and to report to the next Synod of the FRCA with their recommendations as to whether and how to proceed.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.78)

1.

Synod decides not to accept the request of the RCA to send an official observer to the forthcoming synod of the RCA.

2.

Deputies are given the mandate to inform the RCA of synod's decision incorporating as reason: Recommendation 3 of Article 38, Synod Armadale 1990, but noting also the developments signalled in Article 102. Deputies are free to request attendance at the RCA Synod on an individual title.

Grounds:

1.

Synod Armadale decided that "it is premature to speak about any real progress in contacts until the obstacle which separated us in the past and which our past synods have addressed is removed. The FRCA continues to be grieved because of the issues that divide us. These must be addressed before we can receive a representative of your churches" (Recommendation 3, Article 38).

2.

Synod Armadale 1990 also decided to establish a dialogue committee with the RCA to discuss the matters that divide us and the positive response of the RCA deputies should also be acknowledged but until this is dealt with by the RCA Synod it does in itself not remove the obstacles mentioned in Article 38.

3.

Synod Armadale has mandated deputies for dialogue with RCA and these deputies

reported to Synod Bedfordale but synod has yet to be advised how the RCA will deal with the matter.

(Byford 1994, Art.118)

Decision:

1.

To accept the decision of the 1994 RCA Synod that their sister relations with the GKN(S) seen in the historical light of the doctrinal and church-political controversies and the subsequent Liberation of 1944, were unjust, inconsequential and the express cause for lack of unity; this ends the discussion concerning the events of the fifties and sixties.

Grounds:

A.

All the doctrinal and church-political matters leading to the Liberation have been acknowledged.

B.

They thus consider the Liberation 'legitimate'. This acknowledgement allows them to understand our objections against their sister relations with the GKN(S)

C.

They acknowledge their neglect of Biblical justice and their inconsequential manner of dealing with the important matter of sister relations, and that they placed 'serious obstacles in the way of union with the FRCA'.

2.

Not to enter official contact (which has sister relations or union as its aim) with the RCA at this time.

Grounds:

A.

The current trends in the RCA, which have been in part imported by their past sister relations with the GKN(S), give alarm, and show that they and we travel in a different direction (the decisions by the RCNZ confirm this). Further contact would thus not be meaningful but frustrating for both parties.

3.

To authorise deputies to send a letter of appeal to the 1997 RCA Synod and to all their sessions, appealing to them to return to a distinctively reformed direction so that future contact may become possible and can be meaningful.

Grounds:

A.

The gains made thus far should be used and not wasted.

B.

Synod has not given a mandate thus far to address the current trends in the RCA. To write such a letter of appeal requires a mandate from Synod.

C.

A letter of appeal, rather than official contacts which already mean we are working towards the goal of sister relations or union, seems the best route at this stage.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.71)

Decision:

1. To thank the Deputies for their work and discharge them.

2. To appoint new Deputies with the mandate to convey our concerns and appeal by a few face-to-face meetings.

3. To report back to the next synod.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have not completed the mandate given by Synod 1996. The appeal did not reach their synod on time, and has not been dealt with by their synod.

2. The request to have our concerns and appeal conveyed by a few face-to-face

meetings is reasonable. Correspondence has been laborious and tedious. Dialogue took place between 1990 and 1992. In 1992 our synod dealt with the common report of dialogue. In 1994 the RCA synod dealt with it. Since no more dialogue occurred, we waited until 1996 to react to their 1994 decisions. We would send an appeal which we were late in sending, and it will now take until 2000 before the RCA can deal with it. This is a cumbersome process.

3. Face-to-face meetings have proven beneficial in the past. It prevents misunderstanding, which arise more easily in correspondence alone.

4. The RCA requests it, and they have appointed Deputies for it so that they can respond to the concerns in our appeal.

(Launceston 1998, Art.78)

Decision:

1. To thank deputies for the completion of their mandate.

2. To reappoint deputies and given them this mandate:

a) To receive the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia's anticipated appeal to the FRCA, to seek clarification regarding this appeal if necessary, and to forward the CRCA's appeal to our next Synod with a recommended response.

b) To address the CRCA Synod about recent decisions of the CRCA regarding women in the office of deacon, children at the Lord's Supper, their amendment of the CO restricting the binding character of the CO, and the decision of Classis Tasmania of the CRCA to allow Rev.FJ van Hulst to preach in that classical resort, explaining why these decisions are in error.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have had "a few face-to-face" meeting to convey the FRCA appeal to the CRCA sessions and synod.

2. Extracts from the Acts of the CRCA indicate that the CRCA intend to submit an appeal to us.

3. Recent decisions of the CRCA Synod regarding women in the office of deacon, children at the Lord's Table, the change in the CO and the dealings of Classis Tasmania of the CRCA with respect to Rev.FJ van Hulst, a minister recently deposed from one of our churches on the grounds that his teachings were contrary to Scripture show that the CRCA churches continue to travel down the path of deformation.

(West Albany 2000, Art.72)

Australia :

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia

B. Observations:

1.

The Synod of these churches sends its greetings to our synod and seeks from us information on our churches' polity on contact with other reformed churches.

2.

It includes a list of its official contacts with other churches.

3.

It informs us that it is also seeking information from the P.C.E.A., and that it is considering an application for membership in the I.C.R.C.

Synod decides:

1.

to instruct the deputies for contact with the P.C.E.A. to comply with the request for information from the E.P.C.A.

2.

If the E.P.C.A. seeks membership in the I.C.R.C., Synod instructs these deputies to investigate the E.P.C.A. and provide the deputies responsible for the I.C.R.C. with information about these churches.

(Albany 1987, Art.20)

Synod decides:

3.

If the E.P.C.A. seeks membership in the I.C.R.C., Synod instructs deputies to investigate the E.P.C.A.

(Armadale 1990, Art.118)

Considerations:

2.

The deputies report that the E.P.C.A. has not sought membership in the I.C.R.C. thus far. Thus the deputies did not need to investigate the E.P.C.A.

Synod decides:

2.

not to appoint new deputies but to leave contacts to the local churches.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.102)

Australia :

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

A letter came in from the Inter-Church Relation Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, with christian greetings and with the invitation to indicate what relationship we, as Free Reformed Churches, would desire to sustain to the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

The letter was discussed.

Synod appoints deputies for further contact with this church.

(Launceston 1978, Art.24)

Synod observes:

B.

that churches have been recognized as true and faithful churches when they are:

1. faithful in the ministry of the Word, of the sacraments, and of church discipline;
2. have proven in their own church history obedience to the command of the Lord to separate themselves from apostate churches;
3. have terminated their membership of the R.E.S. because of the fact that apostate churches are tolerated in that organization causing disunity of faith;
4. have expressed their willingness and desire to have fellowship in unity of faith with other faithful churches in the world;

considers:

A.

1. that the Catholic church of Christ is spread and dispersed over the whole world and yet is joined and united in one and the same Spirit and in the unity of the true faith by preserving the true doctrine and administration of the sacraments and the discipline in accordance with the ordinances of Jesus Christ as the only Head. This is so according to the Word of God (John 17:11, 20, 21; Ephesians 3:14-4:16; 22 Timothy 3:15, 16) and the confessional documents based on the Word of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, and Belgic Confession, Artt.27-29);
2. that it is the calling of the true believers and of the true churches to strive for unity in every place and every country with those who profess the same faith and maintain the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the pure exercise of church discipline;
3. that true believers and true churches ought diligently and circumspectly to discuss

from the Word of God which is the true church so to practise unity of faith and ecclesiastical fellowship with churches which publicly and continuously dispise (should be: despose, Ed.) the Word of God and the true faith;

4. that churches ought to consider that the Lord Jesus congregates His church in other countries along other roads of historical progress to that differences become manifest in the way other churches profess their faith and practise ecclesiastical fellowship, e.g. as to liturgy and church government whereas they do not deviate from the Word of God and maintain the true doctrine;

B.

3. that the P.C.E.A. are based on the Westminster Standards as is the Free Church of Scotland;

4. that the P.C.E.A. have separated themselves from the apostate Presbyterian Church in 1846 whereby they did not adopt the authority of the government over the churches;

5. that those churches have terminated their membership of the R.E.S. some months before the Free Church of Scotland so acted in 1981 because of the membership of the Synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands;

decides:

to instruct deputies to further investigate whether those churches can be acknowledged as true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ and report their findings to the next Synod so that this contact can be clarified, if possible, before the establishing of the International Conference in 1985.

(Kelmescott 1983, Art.96)

2.

Synod expresses its joy that between The Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia there is indeed a mutual desire to serve God according to His Word.

3.

Synod instructs new deputies to work further towards reaching sister relations with the P.C.E.A. Rules for such sister relations should be mutually discussed and accepted before the establishment of sister relations.

4.

Synod instructs deputies to continue, for the mutual benefit of both federations of churches, the discussion about areas of concern mentioned in Consideration 8, e.g.:

a. the fencing of the Lord's Table.

b. pulpit exchanges.

c. children in the covenant.

d. the problem of adherents.

(Albany 1987, Art.115)

Synod appoints new deputies with the following mandate:

to work towards a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and in the light of this goal:

a. to continue to study and discuss further with the P.C.E.A. the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987 viz, the supervision of the Lord's Table, the practice of pulpit exchange and the position of children in the covenant.

In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding the 'pluriformity of the church'. All this should be done in the light of God's Word giving heed to the complete doctrine of salvation.

c. to use the current rules for sister churches in the discussion leading towards mutual recognition as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Armadale 1990, Art.77)

Observations:

- I. Deputies report that they could not complete their mandate. They
- A. do not report on the FCS, EPCI and the RPCI.
 - B. do not deal with the concerns of covenanting and the purity of worship.
- II. Deputies have gone beyond their mandate and on their own initiative have proposed that if the PCEA will agree to prepared statements regarding the fencing of the Lord's Table and the supervision of the pulpit, Synod will acknowledge the PCEA as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ and offer sister church relations.
- III. Deputies have included in their report to Synod three papers which served the deputies in coming to their recommendations.
- A. As far as the matter of children in the covenant is concerned, deputies conclude that *"Although there is the possibility that there are differences of accent, the deputies have no indication that in the preaching or publications other (unscriptural) opinions about the position of the children in the covenant are taught or allowed to be taught."*
Therefore the deputies state that they *"do not consider this issue as being an impediment to recognising the PCEA."*
 - B. As far as the matter of fencing the Lord's Table, the position paper states, *"Inasmuch as the PCEA has not furnished us with more definite information concerning their practice of fencing the Table, we are not in a position to make any concrete evaluation whether we can progress with our contacts. In this report we have seen that there might be some serious inadequacies in the policies of the PCEA regarding the admission of guests from other evangelical churches. This is a serious matter since it touches upon the purity of the Lord's Supper, which is one of the marks of the true church. We have also expressed the concern that the doctrinal barriers which prevent official recognition and unity of churches are overlooked when determining participation at the Lord's Table. This gives reason for further investigation whether the PCEA embraces the notion of interdenominationalism. This, too, is a serious matter, since it touches on the purity of doctrine, which is the second mark of the true church."*
Deputies state: *"the elders do not discharge their office sufficiently by an oral warning from the pulpit. ... We may conclude that only those guests should be admitted to the Lord's Table who the session/consistory are satisfied, on the basis of an authentic intimation from the minister or elder of his congregation, are members of good standing of another true church."*
 - C. As far as the matter of the supervision of the pulpit is concerned, the position paper concludes: *'The PCEA open pulpit practice leaves open the door to preaching that is not "the whole council of God" and "doctrine of the Confession of Faith". It does not safeguard the congregation from preaching that renounces "all doctrines, tenets or opinions whatsoever contrary to or inconsistent with the said doctrine."* The PCEA practice of opening the pulpit to ministers of churches with which it has no fraternal relations is therefore a serious area of concern and carries such weight that the PCEA can only be recognised as a *"true and faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ"* when the PCEA adequately fences its pulpits.
The deputies state: *"It is the recognition of another church as a true church that lays the basis for opening the pulpit to guest preachers. When a church is recognised as a true church its Gospel preaching is accepted as true and consequently its ministers can be recognised as faithful servants of God. After recognising a church it should be possible that ministers from that church are invited to preach. Therefore only guest preachers from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship (sister church relations/fraternal relations) should be invited to preach."*
- IV. Regarding what weight the FRCA should give to the areas of concern and whether all areas of concern must be cleared before the FRCA can progress with contacts/relations, the deputies state that the PCEA's manner of supervising the Lord's Supper Table and their supervision of the pulpit *"are two areas of concern, which are of such weight that they need to be dealt with before the FRCA enter into sister relations with the PCEA."*
- V. The church of Kelmscott has responded to the deputies' report, giving reasons why

they do not agree with the deputies who do not consider the PCEA's view of children in the covenant as an impediment to recognising the PCEA.

A. The Larger Catechism (Q/A 31) states: *"With whom was the covenant of grace made? The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed."*

B. The PCEA's practice of occasional pulpit exchange with Baptist ministers leads the Church of Kelmscott to *"seriously question the effective significance of both baptism and the covenant within the PCEA."*

Decision 1:

I. To adopt the statement which deputies have drafted concerning the supervision of the Lord's Supper Table with this emendation: that the phrase *"another true church of Christ"* found in the last line of the statement, is to read *"... another church of Christ which displays the three marks of the Church."*

II. To adopt the statement which deputies have drafted concerning supervision of the pulpit with this emendation that the last sentence *"Therefore only guest preachers ... invited to preach"* should be exchanged for the following: *Therefore no one should be invited to preach except ministers or licentiates who have undergone the proper ecclesiastical examinations according to the rules of our respective churches.*

III. To acknowledge that the doctrine of the Church, as mentioned in mandates to deputies by Synod 1990, 1992 and 1994 is implicitly addressed in the statements on fencing the Lord's Table and supervision of the pulpit.

IV. To add and adopt a third statement regarding the position of children in the covenant which follows below:

Statement regarding Children in the Covenant

When God established His covenant with Abraham, the father of all believers, He said, *"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you"* (Gen 17:7). Peter confirmed this when he said, *"For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"* (Acts 2:39). From this we conclude that God establishes His covenant, not only with believers and their elect children, but with believers and all their children.

When speaking about the children of believers, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that they *"as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit Who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults. Therefore, by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian Church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers"* (Q/A 74). The Belgic Confession speaks in the same vein when it says, *"We believe that these children [of believers] ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises which are now made to our children. Indeed, Christ shed His blood to wash the children of believers just as much as He shed it for adults"* (Art 34).

The Westminster Confession of Faith states: *"Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be to him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, or remission of sins. ...Not only those that actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized"* (Cp 28). Similar thoughts are expressed in the Larger Catechism: *"Unto whom is baptism to be administered? ...Infants descended from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized"* (Q/A 166). The form 'Of the Administration of the Sacraments' in the 'Directory for the Public Worship of God' states: *"Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use and ends of this sacrament, showing ... that the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that*

the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it..."

The Larger Catechism asks and answers the following: *"With whom is the covenant of grace made? The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed"* (Q/A 31). As proof text, reference is made primarily to Galatians 3:16, *"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed.' who is Christ"* (Gal.3:16). In this context, Paul affirmed that salvation comes, not through the good works of all Abraham's descendants, but through the good works of one of Abraham's descendants, namely Jesus Christ. Although the promise was made with Abraham and all his seed, yet the promise focused upon the one descendant, Christ. With a few of Christ's mediatorial work, God established the covenant of grace with Abraham and his posterity. Apart from Christ the promise would be void. Contrary to the thoughts of the Judaizers, against whom Paul contended, the introduction of the Law four hundred and thirty years later did not annul that covenant promise of salvation through faith alone.

When the Larger Catechism (Q/A 31) states that the covenant is made with the elect, it does not deny what it expressly professes elsewhere (Q/A 166), namely, that all the children of believers are included in the covenant of grace. Neither do the words of Paul in Galatians 3:16 deny that all the children of believers are included in the covenant.

While the promise is sincerely made to all the children of believers, only those who through faith are grafted into Christ receive what is promised. (We are not speaking here of those children of believers who die in infancy). For Paul says that *"they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed"* (Rom.9:6-8). Paul goes on to speak about God's electing love. In this context, it becomes evident that only the elect who are grafted into Christ by faith *"are counted as [Abraham's] seed"* (Rom.9:8).

Inasmuch as all the children of believers are included in the covenant of grace, and therefore belong to the Church of Christ (Heid Cat Q/A 74), the Church must exhort and assist parents in fulfilling their duty to instruct their children in the doctrine of the Old and New Testament as soon as they are able to understand, and to have them instructed therein to the utmost of their power (cf. Form for the Baptism of Infants). Or as stated elsewhere, the parents are to *"bring up these children in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion, and in the nurture and admonitions of the Lord"* (Directory for the Public Worship of God, Of the Administration of the Sacraments, and first, of Baptism).

Grounds:

- a) The statements regarding the supervision of the Lord's Supper Table and the fencing of the pulpit are based on Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.
- b) In light of the statement in the Larger Catechism (Q/A 31) together with the occasional pulpit exchange with Baptist ministers it would be prudent to address this matter by means of a statement as well.
- c) These statements resolve the problems associated with these areas of concern in a Scriptural and responsible manner.

Decision 2:

To offer the PCEA sister church relations as a first step toward full unity if they can agree to the above mentioned statements about the supervision of the Lord's Supper Table, the supervision of the pulpit, and the place of children in the covenant. This

decision to enter into sister church relations is to be confirmed by the FRCA synod upon agreement and implementation of the above mentioned statements.

Grounds:

- I. Apart from the three areas of concern, the PCEA give evidence of faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed confession.
- II. The PCEA's agreement with the proposed statements takes away the concerns we have expressed.
- III. The 1990 Synod considered *"where two federations of sister churches are found in the same country there is the demand of God that 'brothers dwell in unity' (Ps. 133:1). However, because of the different cultural and historical background between the two bonds of churches, such an eventual organic unity, although a goal, cannot be expected to be achieved quickly and may need to develop slowly"* (Acts 1990, Art.77, Cons 23).

Decision 3:

To appoint new deputies with the following task:

- I. to personally communicate Synod's decision about the statements mentioned in Decisions 1 & 2 to the PCEA.
- II. to indicate to the PCEA that deputies are willing to discuss these statements with them if the PCEA so desires.
- III. to allow deputies to attend a PCEA synod if an invitation is received.
- IV. to assess the response of the PCEA to the three adopted statements and come with recommendations to Synod.

Grounds:

- I. It is good to communicate Synod's decision regarding the PCEA in a personal way to avoid misunderstanding.
- II. Although Synod is convinced that it expresses in the statements the Scriptural position regarding these three matters of concern, we are open to a dialogue with them about these matters on the basis of Scripture and Confession.

Decision 4:

I. to assess the areas of concern with respect to the contacts which the FRCA have with the FCS, the EPCI and the RPCI. (These areas of concern are: the supervision of the Lord's Table, the supervision of the pulpit, the position of children in the covenant, covenanting and purity of worship.) This assessment should include:

- A. In what way the statements referred to in Decision 1 affect our relations/contact with these churches.
- B. How in a manageable and responsible way the FRCA can fulfil their obligations towards these churches since they are geographically/culturally far away (cf Acts 1994, Art 111).

Grounds:

- I. Our method of approach to the PCEA will affect our approach to other Presbyterian churches.
- II. Deputies were not able to complete their mandate regarding the FCS, EPCI and the RPCI given by the previous synod. (Launceston 1998, Art.93).

Decision:

To discharge deputies and to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:

To convey to the PCEA our disappointment that they did not interact with the statements accepted by Launceston 1998.

To ascertain whether there is still a willingness with the PCEA to discuss these statements on the basis of Scripture and our mutual confessions.

If there is a willingness to discuss these statements, if possible via face to face meetings and in a forum which is deemed most suitable by deputies.

To assess the PCEA's final response and come with recommendations to Synod.

Grounds:

Although the Inter-church Relations Committee of the PCEA resolved that copies of the statements be referred to the lower courts for their possible consideration and asked them to report back to their committee, only one of the presbyteries responded, yet did not really interact with the statements.

Moreover, the Synod of the PCEA decided that there is no need for formal statements declaring our doctrinal and practical position beyond what is contained in our constitutional documents.

It seems there is some misunderstanding about the status of the statements. Deputies should try to remove this misunderstanding and so try to ascertain whether there still is room for further discussions.

In case deputies meet with willingness for further discussion, deputies should have the freedom to arrange a forum most suitable to bring these discussions to fruition.

(West Albany 2000, Art.64)

Decision:

To thank the PCEA for the discussions which our deputies could have with their deputies, but to regretfully inform them of our decision to discontinue contact with them.

Ground:

After more than a decade of discussions with the PCEA, no progress has been made in our discussions with them.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art 107)

See further under "Presbyterian Churches"

Australasia :

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Synod decides:

to instruct deputies to write to the next Synod of The Reformed Churches of New Zealand to point out to these churches that their sister church relationship with, for instance, The Reformed Churches of Australia, as well as their second level correspondence with the G.K.N.(Synodical) are impediments to continue the existing contact.

(Launceston 1985, Art.75)

Synod decides:

to convey its thanks to the R.C.N.Z. that it has terminated all ties with the G.K.N.(Syn.) and that it has decided to oppose very strongly the membership of the G.K.N.(Syn.) in the R.E.S. as well as to withdraw from the R.E.S. if the G.K.N.(Syn.) is not expelled.

Synod decides to instruct deputies to continue the contact with the R.C.N.Z., and specifically to call their attention to relations with other churches with which we have broken all ties.

(Albany 1987, Art.105)

Synod decides:

2.

to express its joy over the obedience granted to the RCNZ in withdrawing from the REC;

5.

to maintain the contact at the present level, in order that the FRCA may be a hand and a foot in the struggle by the RCNZ to preserve the Reformed faith in their churches, to address the obstacles that kept us apart in the past and to continue the discussions about their relations with third parties with whom we do not have any official relations such as the RCA (The Reformed Churches of Australia, Ed.) and the CRCNA (The Christian Reformed Churches of North America, Ed.) and the contacts with the NGK (The Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, Ed.), since if these contacts continue indefinitely they will be an impediment to continuing contacts between the FRCA and RCNZ;

6.

to adopt deputies' recommendations regarding more direct contacts with the RCNZ, and to permit the deputies to visit the RCNZ in order to clearly address the impediments mentioned in Recommendation 5;

7.

to consult with the Dutch deputies in order to coordinate our contacts. (Armadale 1990, Art.53).

Synod decides:

2.

to express its appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ deputies have responded to the issues raised by our deputies and for the invitation to be represented in their forthcoming Synod.

3.

to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:

a. to maintain contact at the present level and to assess the RCNZ's commitment towards resolving the issues that have kept us apart (cf. Acts 1990, Article 53, Recommendation 5);

b. to liaise with the deputies of the RCNZ, especially with regards to third parties. (Bedfordale 1992, Art.84)

Synod decides:

2.

to continue contacts with the RCNZ at the present level.

3.

to work towards a resolution about third parties, so that the way can be opened toward sister relations.

4.

how the relation of the RCNZ with the RCA should impact our relation with the RCNZ. (Byford 1994, Art.78).

Decision:

1.

Synod notes with thankfulness that the recent Synod of the RCNZ could acknowledge the FRCA as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2.

Synod declares its gratitude for the faithfulness which deputies have found in the RCNZ.

3.

Synod declares its appreciation for the principled approach which the RCNZ have shown in dealing with third parties by their encouragement and establishment of relations with faithful churches and by their admonition and if necessary breaking of ties with unfaithful churches.

4.

To strive for a sister church relation with the RCNZ.

5.

Synod mandates deputies to:

- a. encourage the RCNZ to continue with their admonitions to the RCA, and to terminate relations with the RCA if these admonitions continue to go unheeded,
- b. clearly explain to the RCNZ the reasons for this Synod's decisions, taking into account comments in paragraph 5.3 of Deputies report and the decision of Synod Launceston 1985 (Article 67).
- c. investigate the developments leading to the formation of the Geneva Free Reformed Church of Auckland,
- d. attend the next Synod of the RCNZ if invited, and
- e. invite delegates from the RCNZ to attend the next Synod of the FRCA as observers with the privileges mentioned in Acts Synod Bedfordale 1992, Article 19, Recommendation 2b.

Grounds:

1.

Deputies have indicated that in doctrine, worship and church government the RCNZ must be considered a true and faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2.

Seeing that the matter of how the relations of the RCNZ with the RCA should impact our relation with the RCNZ has not yet been resolved, it would be premature to offer a sister relation at this point of time.

3.

Deputies have reported on new relations which the RCNZ have entered into with faithful churches, and their willingness to suspend or break ties with churches which deviate from Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Although it cannot be expected that the RCNZ suddenly break ties with an errant sister without first exercising brotherly admonition, the deformation within the RCA has been evident for a considerable time, shown by their delay before finally breaking relations with the GKN(S) and their continuing membership of the REC. Deputies should encourage the RCNZ to act consequently if the admonitions of the RCNZ continue to go unheeded.

4.

Synod 1985 decided that our declaration of another church as being "true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ ... has as direct consequence that a sister-church relationship can be established without disregarding the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realisation of unity" (Article 67, Acts Synod 1985).

5.

Contacts with the RCNZ have proved fruitful and should be fostered by further visits to each others synods. Privileges given to RCNZ delegates should be similar to that extended to churches with which we have Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact.

6.

Deputies have received correspondence from the Geneva Free Reformed Church of Auckland requesting affiliation with the FRCA. The minister and members of this church were formerly members of the RCNZ. (KelmScott 1996, Art.53).

Decision:

1. To thank Deputies for the work they have done, and to discharge them.
2. To reaffirm its gratitude for the faithfulness which deputies have found in The Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
3. To mandate Deputies to strive for sister church relations with The Reformed Churches of New Zealand by:
 - (a) continuing dialogue with them in order to:
 - express our appreciation for the principled approach they have shown in dealing with The Reformed Churches of Australia, and to encourage them to continue to exercise sisterly admonitions over The Reformed Churches of Australia where needed.
 - explain to them by means of face-to-face meetings the difficulty that our churches

have in establishing sister relations with them because of their sister relations with The Reformed Churches of Australia.

b) authorising two delegates to attend the next synod of The Reformed Churches of New Zealand to be held DV in Wainuimata, New Zealand from 17th to 23rd October, 1998, in order to convey greetings and to take the opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest with the NZ deputies.

c) inviting delegates from The Reformed Churches of New Zealand to our next synod as observers with the privileges mentioned in Rule 6 of our Rules for Synods (Acts 1998, Appendix IV).

d) providing information to the membership of our churches about The Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Grounds:

1. As past synods have stated, "the relationship of The Reformed Churches of New Zealand and The Reformed Churches of Australia is an impediment for us to enter official relations with The Reformed Churches of New Zealand" (cf Deputies Report to Synod 1996, Acts, Appendix B3, 5.3, p.101). As the RCNZ Synodical and Correspondence Committee points out in a report to their Synod (Mangere, 1986), "Relationships must be true in all dimensions. ...This is being consistent with the principle of a true and faithful church and consequential thinking, as otherwise there would be a triangular problem when A and B establish close relationships while C who already has an intimate relationship with A still has principle objections to B. It will thus be quite obvious that the journey towards this goal for a mutually acceptable close relationship is going to be a long one where much patience and understanding is required."

2. Synod 1996 saw need to send a letter of appeal to The Reformed Churches of Australia in an effort to urge them to "return to a distinctly Reformed direction", and is thankful that The Reformed Churches of New Zealand do the same.

3. Contact between our churches and The Reformed Churches of New Zealand is necessary if we are to work towards sister relations.

4. Our church members should be informed about The Reformed Churches of New Zealand so that they are prepared for sister relations if and when such a relationship is established.

(Launceston 1998, Art.89).

Decision:

(The following decision refers to a proposal of the church of West Albany "to recognise The Reformed Churches of New Zealand as true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ", and "offer to enter into a fraternal relationship with the RCNZ" according to a number of rules, which proposal was defeated by Synod. Ed.)

To agree in principle to the proposal of West Albany, but to postpone the implementation of this decision until next Synod in order to give deputies the opportunity:

to see whether the RCNZ will enter into fraternal relationship with the FRCA;

to elicit and assess responses from the churches regarding this decision;

to consider what changes will need to be made to the CO (eg. Art.57)

and other ecclesiastical rules and regulations regarding the establishment of fraternal relations;

To appoint deputies with the new mandate:

Encourage the RCNZ to study the appeal sent to the CRCA in order to

understand why the FRCA has principle objections in establishing relations

with the CRCA and therefore this continues the impediment to forming sister relations with the RCNZ.

Continue to dialogue with the RCNZ on matters of common concern.

Authorise two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ.

Invite delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod.

Keep the churches informed of any developments in the RCNZ.

Grounds:

1. The delegate from the RCNZ has stated that the RCNZ do not have a second level of inter-church relations.
2. Although the proposal of West Albany is in accordance with previous Synod decisions which have seen the RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA as an impediment to sister church relations, and is in agreement with Art.67 of Acts 1985, the churches have not had a great deal of time to interact with West Albany's proposal since it was submitted to the churches just prior to the closing date for submissions to Synod.
3. Although the proposal of West Albany received the majority of support from the churches, it is the desire of Synod to work towards a greater consensus by ongoing discussions, according to the rules of Synod.

(West Albany 2000, Art.93)

To renew the mandate of deputies to strive for relations with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand by:

- a. Monitoring the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to continue to admonish the CRCA where necessary.
 - b. Authorising two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, in order to convey greetings and discuss matters of mutual interest.
 - c. Reassuring the RCNZ that it is our sincere desire to enter into a sister relationship with them but the matter of a triangular relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment.
 - d. Inviting delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod as observers with the privileges mentioned in rules 6 of our "Rules for Synods" (Acts 1998, Appendix 12).
 - e. Providing information to the membership of our churches about the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
3. To encourage consistories to take note, and act on, Synod's positive view towards the RCNZ in regard to practical support and interaction where these are not restricted to those between sister churches only, e.g. application of membership from former members of the RCNZ, matters pertaining to the mission field and theological and Christian education.
 4. To convey Synod's decisions to RCNZ.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 102)

Geneva Free Reformed Church

See under Reformed Churches of New Zealand, Kelmscott 1996, Art.53 Decision 5c and Ground 6.

Decision:

1. To note the information contained in the letter from the Geneva Free Reformed Church, and acknowledge their decision to withdraw their earlier request for possible future affiliation.

Ground:

1. The Geneva Free Reformed Church is not interested in pursuing possible future affiliation with the FRCA. In a letter dd 21 May 1996 they wrote:
"We are writing to express interest in establishing formal contact with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia... with a view of possible future affiliation."

In a letter dd 30 May 1998 they wrote:

"We believe it is not appropriate for the GFRC to pursue further involvement with the FRCA at this time. We hereby inform you of our consistory's decision to withdraw our former request of 21 May 1996."

(Launceston 1998, Art.81).

Indonesia :

Reformed Movement in Indonesia

Synod decides:

to gather information about the progress of the reformed activities of the Lembaga Reformed Injili Indonesia (the Reformed Movement in Indonesia, Ed.)

(Armada 1990, Art.114; Bedfordale 1992, Art.59)

Synod decides:

to discharge current deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate:

d. to continue to gather information regarding the Reformed Movement in Indonesia.

(Byford 1994, Art.102)

Indonesia

Reformed Churches of Timor, Savu

Synod decides:

to seek contact with the Gereja Masehi Musyafir Church on Timor to see whether we can recognise them as true and faithful churches according to our confessions.

(Armada 1990, Art.114)

Synod decides:

1.

to approve deputies' action to invite student Johnson Dethan from the Musyafir Churches in Timor and Reverend Doko from the RCSTS to visit Australia for orientation and training;

3.

to continue contact with the Musyafir churches by visit if possible;

4.

to instruct deputies to continue their search for information regarding the Musyafir Churches in Timor to see whether we can recognise them as true and faithful churches according our confession.

6.

to authorise deputies to give further support to student Johnson, enabling him to pursue his studies in Hamilton, provided deputies can recommend this after further investigation.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.59)

Synod decides:

to discharge current deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate:

a. to continue to support the theological training undertaken by Yonson Dethan;

e. to maintain the contacts with the GMMT to assist them in their desire to remain reformed and to report on progress towards an eventual recommendation to recognise the GMMT as sister churches.

(Byford 1994, Art.102)

Decision:

1.

To express thankfulness that a number of churches in the GGMM (Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir, Reformed Churches of Timor, Savu, Ed.) have decided to remain reformed in the face of hierarchy.

2.

To assist the GGMM in their continuing desire to remain reformed.

3.

To instruct deputies:

- a. to visit the GGMM as need and opportunity arise,
- b. to report on progress towards an eventual recommendation to recognize the GGMM as sister churches.
- c. to continue to support the theological training undertaken by Yonson Dethan, and
- d. to encourage the individual Free Reformed Churches and their members to provide the finance needed to support Decision 3c.

Grounds:

1.

Since the GGMM have just gone through a reformation, it is worthwhile to stand beside these churches in their struggle.

2.

The GGMM request assistance and contact.

3.

The FRCA have taken it upon themselves to support Yonson Dethan's training. This training should be completed.

4.

Supporting the GGMM is in line with the decision of the churches in Synod 1990, Article 58.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.67).

Decisions:

1. To continue to visit the synods of the GGMR subject to finance;
2. To support the GGMR in a well considered and responsible way with the intention of building up the Reformed character of these churches;
3. To monitor and report developments in the GGMR;
4. To provide limited support for Rev.Yonson Dethan to ensure continued effective communication with him;
5. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies as mentioned in 2 and 4 above.

Grounds:

The churches are in a position to help the GGMR develop in a Reformed manner and building up the congregations. For this reason, visits to the Gereja-Gereja Musyafir Reformasi are in place also.

The GGMR needs to be stabilised before recommendations regarding sister church relationships can be considered.

Rev.Yonson Dethan has in the past been supported by the FRCA for theological training and it is appropriate to continue the support in a limited but meaningful manner.

(West Albany 2000, Art.49)

Ireland :

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Synod, having heard the oral report of deputies regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Free Church of Scotland, observes:

1.

that these churches are based on the Reformed Westminster Standards of Faith;

2.

the information received:

- a. the written report of the deputies of Synod 1980;
- b. the reports on the Conference (C.A.) in Groningen 1982 from its own deputies;
- c. the official report of our Dutch sister churches, Acts Arnhem 1981;

decides:

1.

to confirm that those churches are faithful churches of the Lord;

2.

to instruct the deputies:

- a. to inform those churches of this decision;
- b. to intensify the correspondence with those churches with the aim to establish full sister relationship with them.

(Kelmescott 1983, Art.78)

2.

Synod decides to reconfirm the decision of the 1983 Synod that The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland are faithful churches of our Lord.

3.

Synod decides to offer to The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland the relation of temporary contact with the following rules:

- a. to invite delegates of each other's General Assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the assembly of synod but no vote.
- b. to exchange Minutes and Acts of each other's broadest assemblies as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, and to solicit comments on these documents.
- c. to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact to the purpose of reaching full correspondence (cf.the 1986 Acts of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Art.125).

4.

Synod decides that this temporary relation will be reassessed at the 1989 Synod.

5.

Synod decides to instruct the deputies to send two delegates to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland for a visit. This could be done in conjunction with the 1989 I.C.R.C.

(Albany 1987, Art.79)

Synod decides:

2.

- a. to express thankfulness to the EPCI for their acceptance of the relationship of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact;
- b. to use this contact to continue discussions and exchange of information with the purpose of improving understanding of each other and with the aim to be able to come to a recommendation to Synod to extend full sister relations.

(Armadale 1990, Art.124)

Synod decides:

2.

to appoint new deputies with the mandate to use the existing Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact to improve the quantity of discussions and exchange of information so that the two churches might get to know each other better.

In the discussions with the EPCI the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA are not to be overlooked.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.138)

See under 'Presbyterian churches': Byford 1994, Art.111; West Albany 2000, Art.73.

See under 'Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia': Launceston 1998, Art.93.

Ireland :

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Observations:

2.

Representatives of our deputies (...) visited this church in Ireland during their visit to the EPCI. Being reformed in doctrine and presbyterian in church government has given rise to their name, Reformed Presbyterian.

4.

Deputies recommend to investigate the RPCI "to see whether it should be recognised as a federation of churches which is true and faithful, as that is confessed in the Belgic Confession (Artt. 27-29) and the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 21)".

Synod decides:

2.

that deputies be given a mandate to study all the material received and the reports from our sister churches in The Netherlands. If necessary to ask the RPCI for more information in order to commence investigation to see whether the RPCI may be recognised as a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Armadale 1990, Art.124)

Considerations:

3.

The material available in deputies' report concerning what impact covenanting would have on future sister relations reveals that this distinctive would affect sister relations in as much as ministers accepting a call to that church will be bound beyond the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. Because a super-confessional binding is implicit for ministers who would go to the RPCI, it is worthwhile to investigate whether the practice of covenanting would bind one above Scripture.

4.

Deputies do not offer information on whether the matter of purity of worship would impact future sister relations. This ought, therefore, yet to be considered.

5.

In as much as there should be consistency in what we discuss with different churches, a study on the two points mentioned in Considerations 3 and 4 should not focus only on the RPCI, but should be of a more general nature.

Synod decides:

2.

to appoint new deputies with the mandate:

- a. to maintain contact with the RPCI at a low level until such time as we can conclude an investigation of the RPCA;
- b. to advise the RPCI of this decision;
- c. to study the matters of covenanting and purity of worship in line with Considerations 3, 4, and 5;
- d. for the sake of consistency, the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA ought not to be overlooked in any contact with the RPCI.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.157)

See under 'Presbyterian Churches': Byford 1994, Art.111; West Albany 2000, Art.73.

See under 'Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia': Launceston 1998, Art.93.

Japan :

Reformed Church of Japan

Synod decides to mandate deputies:

to investigate whether The Reformed Church of Japan and The Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka can be recognized as true and faithful churches.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.76)

Synod decides:

that deputies be instructed:

(a) to investigate whether or not The Reformed Church of Japan and The Presbyterian Church in Uganda can be recognized as true and faithful churches according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession with a view to the possible establishment of sister church relations;

(b) to urge The Reformed Church of Japan to break its ties with the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (R.E.S.).

(Launceston 1985, Art.76)

Considerations:

2.

Seeing that more contact with the R.C.J. and P.C.U. (The Reformed Church of Japan and The Presbyterian Church of Uganda respectively, Ed.) is needed, the mandate with respect to these churches should be renewed.

Synod decides:

3.

to renew the mandate (...) with respect to the R.C.J. and the P.C.U.

(Albany 1987, Art.92).

Considerations:

1.

Synod 1987 records that there was no response from the RCJ to our previous correspondence pertaining to the membership of the RES (now REC).

2.

Despite two letters have been sent, no response has been forthcoming.

3.

Acts 1990, Article 58 records:

a. to limit present contacts and relations with churches which are geographically close to our sister churches abroad (...) to the minimum level necessary for us to remain acquainted with their situation (...).

b. to phase out contact with churches with whom we appear to be making no progress.

4.

Japan is relatively close to the PCK (Presbyterian Church of Korea, Ed.)

Synod decides:

1. to cease further contacts with the RCJ.

2. to inform the PCK of this decision.

(Armadale 1990, Art.121)

Netherlands

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Restored)

1. To express grief that some members separated from the RCN and formed the RCN(R).

Grounds:

a. Such a separation always causes much grief as it divides believers who used to sit around the same Lord's table. It especially grieves our Lord who prayed fervently that the apostolic witness would build one, apostolic church.

b. It also means that brothers who all want to keep the church on a strongly reformed basis now stand divided. Some are in the RCN(R) and some in the RCN. This is both a pity and a grievous hurt.

2 To postpone a definitive judgment on the claims of the RCN(R) (as made in their letter dated 4 February 2005) and to request deputies to investigate further whether or not

the decision to “liberate” was lawful and to defend the honour and reputation of our Dutch sister Churches.

Grounds:

a. Although we understand that the RCN(R) have concerns with decisions and directions of the RCN, the information provided to us by the RCN(R) does not adequately explain why the liberation had to occur at this time (ie. 2003) and in the manner that it did. In this further investigation the extensive work done thus far by deputies should be used as well as the decisions of this synod. These can be used to investigate further the separation in 2003 and the developments after 2003.

b. Even though the liberation took place in 2003, subsequent events including that of Synod Amersfoort 2005 need to be discussed with the RCN(R) to ascertain whether or not their liberation is lawful. Now that our churches have made decisions about some of these crucial areas (refer Articles) we should place them before the RCN(R) and discuss these with the RCN(R).

c. It is a serious matter to allow deformation to go unchallenged, but it is also a serious matter to separate when it is not warranted. The injunctions to remain one in the Lord (e.g. John 17 and Eph 4) sometimes even when serious problems arose, as in Corinth, can be read repetitively in the Bible (cf Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians). The letters of Paul and the other apostles constantly remind us of this.

d. There is also the need for diligence in our sister relations with the RCN. Deputies in their submissions to the GS of Zuidhorn and Amersfoort have specified their concerns as they related to the reports about the fourth commandment, reports about marriage and divorce, the decision re the blessing as given by a non-elder, the liturgical changes and proposals about the same, including the proliferation of new hymns, as well as the decisions re the chaplaincy and celebration of the Lord’s Supper in war zones. We thus have registered our concerns as well. Such diligence will need to continue, in accordance with the rules for sister relations.

e. Deputies have shown that diligence in discussing developments and trends in the RCN churches has led to some good results. This should be continued. For there continue to be some trends within our Dutch sister churches that do cause concern. The matter of church discipline and mutual discipline among the churches also requires further information since discipline from consistories and churches among themselves, will provide evidence of adherence to or deviation from the official statements of Synod.

f. Scripture teaches that a tree is known by its fruit and therefore the faithfulness of the RCN(R) and the RCN will become apparent over time. In the interim we must urge our brothers in the RCN(R) to leave justice to the Lord.

3. We cannot at this time positively respond to the request of the RCN(R) to acknowledge them as “the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands”.

Grounds:

As decided at Synod Rockingham 2003, we as FRCA acknowledge the RCN as giving “*evidence of continuing faithfulness*”. At the same time the FRCA want to “*discuss and to continue to discuss with the RCN deputies the concerns as to the development within the RCN and as outlined and recommended in the report of deputies*” (Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003, Article 41).

4. Not to accede to the request to enter sister relations with the RCN(R).

Ground:

Not being able to recognise them as the continuing RCN means that we cannot enter sister relations with them.

5. To maintain official contact with the RCN(R) so that we can work for reconciliation between them and the RCN, on the basis of truth and love.

Grounds:

- a. We hear in the voice of the brothers of the RCN(R) a strong desire to remain reformed. One cannot but appreciate this desire to remain reformed. Thus we need to continue to have contacts with them so that we can speak to them and continue to urge them, as well as our Dutch sister church, to work for reconciliation on the basis of truth and love.
 - b. Indeed, unwarranted separation is against Christ's prayer for unity, and we need to address this in these contacts.
 - c. Visits can be made to the RCN(R) at the same time as those to the general synods of our sister churches.
 - d. There are those in the RCN who share similar concerns and have openly and publicly indicated their concerns.
 - e. The RCN(R) seceded in 2003. Much has occurred since then. There is a need for up-to-date contacts, especially after the GS of Amersfoort and its decisions, including its attempts to re-open official contacts. Also, we must take into consideration the synod which the RCN(R) will hold (as yet) in 2005, D.V.
6. To have synod respond to the letter of the RCN(R).

Ground:

After a decision is made by synod, only then can an official response be sent. Synod should send such an official answer to the RCN(R) in accordance with this decision.

Philippines :

Free Reformed Churches of The Philippines

Observations:

2.

In a letter, The Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines (FRCP) send greetings and information about their churches.

It is noted that our sister churches in The Netherlands have established sister relations with the FRCP.

Considerations:

2.

(...) it is noted that the FRCP is relatively closer than some of our other relations and contacts.

3.

Article 30 specifies that new matters must arise from the churches and be placed on the agenda of major assemblies (Synod) only by way of preparation in the minor assembly (consistory). In light of the fact that the deputies of our sisterchurches in The Netherlands have obtained information about these churches, our deputies could translate this information and distribute it to the churches; and let the churches, if they deem it desirable and responsible, prepare it further and place it on the agenda of Synod.

Synod decides:

1.

to instruct the deputies to return the greetings to the (...) FRCP, and to explain to them that in light of the considerations stated above we cannot accede to their request of establishing relations with them at this time.

2.

to instruct new deputies to translate information about the (...) FRCP and send it to the churches a half year before next Synod.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.144)

Synod decides:

to instruct the deputies to continue to gather information regarding the FRCP e.g. received via Acts of Synod of our sister churches or correspondence received, with the aim of seeing whether official contacts should be opened with them.

Grounds:

1.

These churches have a sister relationship with our sister churches in The Netherlands, and are geographically close to us.

2.

These churches are young in the Reformed faith and would undoubtedly benefit from the heritage of churches long standing in the Reformed faith.

3.

Deputies find that having to translate material, pass it on to the churches and then wait and see if any church will bring it to the synod is cumbersome.

4.

It is a more orderly manner to mandate deputies to coordinate the relevant information. (Byford 1994, Art.123)

Decision:

To instruct deputies to continue to gather information regarding the FRCP e.g. received via Acts of Synod of our sister churches or via correspondence, with the aim of seeing whether official contacts should be opened with them.

Grounds:

These churches have a sister relationship with our sister churches in The Netherlands, and are geographically close to us.

2.

These churches are young in the reformed faith and would undoubtedly benefit from the heritage of churches long standing in the reformed faith.

3.

Three churches have asked to seek contact with the FRCP.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.68).

Material:

Agenda Item 11.5.4.5. - Deputies' Report, which proposes that correspondence be conducted with The Free Reformed Churches of The Philippines, for the purpose of becoming better acquainted, determine whether we could assist them, and work towards the goal of sister relations.

Decision:

1. To instruct deputies to correspond with The Free Reformed Churches of The Philippines fore the purpose of becoming better acquainted with each other, and see whether we can be of spiritual assistance to them.

2. To authorise deputies to pay a visit to these churches for the above purpose.

Grounds:

1. Our Dutch sister churches attest that these churches exhibit the marks of a true church;

2. These churches are a young, small and weak bond which has many problems and needs. We could possibly offer them help from our Reformed heritage;

3. These churches are geographically close, and should therefore receive more attention than (established) churches far away;

4. In the given situation it is premature to mention the goal of sister relations. This will also avoid raising unrealistic expectations in their mind.

(Launceston 1998, Art.94).

Decision:

To thank the deputies for the work that they have done and discharge them from their task.

To appoint new deputies with the following mandate:

To keep up-to-date with any new developments among the FRCP and RFCP;

To lend support to these churches, upon their request, by means of instructive literature that may help build up their Reformed character;

If funding permits, to make a visit to these churches;

To report to next Synod.

Grounds:

Although these churches show the desire to embrace the Reformed faith, much learning is needed for them to understand and apply it.

Only time will tell whether the FRCP and the RFCP are willing to follow the Scriptural and thus Reformed doctrine and practice.

The members of these churches have very limited resources and badly need true Reformed literature.

It would be beneficial to all, the FRCA and the FRCP and the RFCP to maintain some face-to-face contact.

There is enough evidence to show that the CRCP does not preserve Scriptures in doctrine and practice as maintained in the Reformed churches.

(West Albany 2000, Art.62)

Regarding Reformed Free Churches of the Philippines and the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines:

1. To discontinue attempts to contact both Reformed Churches of the Philippines;
2. To maintain deputies as an address so that if these churches are still interested in contact they can contact deputies.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 58)

Scotland :

Free Church of Scotland

Synod, having heard the oral report of deputies regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Free Church of Scotland, observes:

1. that these churches are based on the Reformed Westminster Standards of Faith;
2. the information received:

- a. the written report of the deputies of Synod 1980;
- b. the reports on the Conference (C.A.) in Groningen 1982 from its own deputies;
- c. the official report of our Dutch sister churches, Acts Arnhem 1981;

decides:

1. to confirm that those churches are faithful churches of the Lord;
2. to instruct the deputies:

- a. to inform those churches of this decision;
- b. to intensify the correspondence with those churches with the aim to establish full sister relationship with them.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.78).

2. Synod reaffirms the statement made by the 1983 Synod that the Free Church of Scotland is a faithful church of the Lord (Art.75).

3.

Synod instructs Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad to move in the direction of becoming sister churches with the F.C.S.

4.

Synod instructs its deputies not to implement sister church relations until mutually acceptable rules can be agreed upon;

5.

In the meantime, Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact is to be established with the F.C.S., with the following rules:

- a. to invite delegates to each other's General Assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the assembly or synod but no vote.
- b. to exchange Minutes or Acts of each other's broadest assemblies as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, specifically, the problem about the adherents, and to solicit comments on these documents.
- c. to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching a relation as sister churches, specifically, to work out a set of mutually acceptable rules for relations as sister churches.

6.

Synod authorises the deputies to send delegates to visit the F.C.S. to help implement the above mentioned decisions.

(Albany 1987, Art.82)

Synod decides:

3.

to appoint new deputies with the following instructions:

- a. to seek clarification whether or not our offer of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact, as well as the associated rules, have in fact been accepted by the FCS, and to ask the FCS to clarify their understanding of "fraternal association";
- b. to use the Rules for Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact to discuss issues of concern mentioned in the report of deputies;
- c. to move in the direction of becoming sister churches with the FCS while giving due heed to the concerns outstanding.

4.

To amend the rules for Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact as follows:

- a. to invite delegates to each other's Assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates the privilege of the floor to convey greetings and allow them to briefly address the Assembly/Synod (Synod 1987, Acts Article 82, Recommendation 5)
(Armadale 1990, Art.139)

Synod decides:

2.

to express our thanks for the receipt of the Acts of the 1990 and 1991 General Assemblies of the FCS but to express keen disappointment about the lack of communication from the FCS concerning the letter of our deputies (mentioned in Synod's Considerations, Ed.)

3.

to charge new deputies with the instruction:

- a. to ascertain whether or not the FCS has indeed accepted our offer of TEC (Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact, Ed.);
- b. to use the rules for TEC to improve our contacts, especially in the discussions about mutual areas of major concern and our concerns with the FCS (pulpit exchanges and certain views of the FCS regarding the ICRC), so that we can expect eventual sister relations to be fruitful. (Synod's decision then repeats the rules for TEC as formulated by Synod Albany 1987, Art.82, overlooking the amendment made by Synod Armadale 1990, Art.139, Ed.)
- c. if and when the above has been finished, to discuss with the FCS our decision to phase out TEC and to move in the direction of one relation between churches, i.e.

sister relations on the basis of our (revised and amended) rules.
(Bedforddale 1992, Art.150)

See under 'Presbyterian Churches': Byford 1994, Art.111; West Albany 2000, Art.73.
See under 'Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia': Launceston 1998, Art.93.

Relations with Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To instruct deputies to send one delegate to their next synod (2008).

Grounds:

- a. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
- b. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 97)

Singapore :

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

Synod decides:

2. to instruct the deputies to investigate thoroughly this church (The Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, Ed.) to discern whether or not this church is a true church according to Art.29 of the Belgic Confession. Special attention is to be given to the distinctiveness of Protestant Reformed doctrines (viz. covenant and free offer of the gospel) and to report to next Synod.
3. to investigate and evaluate the influence of the Protestant Reformed Church in the E.R.C.S.
4. to inform the church membership about this congregation in Singapore.
5. to authorize the deputies to send delegates to visit these churches en route to the E.P.C.I. and the F.C.S.
(Albany 1987, Art.106)

Synod decides:

2. to renew the mandate that deputies investigate thoroughly this church to ascertain whether it is a true and faithful church, according to our confessions.
3. to continue to discuss with them their sister relations with the PRCA, and any other relations/contacts with other third parties.
4. to prepare with the ERCS a paper on how we see the "covenant and election" together with the offer to discuss this with them.
5. to be prepared to develop the contacts by visits, and whatever other help requested so that the ERCS is encouraged to be and to remain reformed.
6. to discuss with the ERCS their views on coming to sister relations, or possibly, a type

of working-relation (cf. Consideration 7).

7. to ask the deputies to issue periodic updates about the ERCS.
(Armadale 1990, Art.107)

Synod decides:

2.

to express apologies via letter from the FRCA to the ERCS for permitting the printing of a report which contained information not edifying to the ERCS.

3.

to appoint deputies who shall:

a. further discuss the letter in a face to face meeting if the ERCS consider such a meeting desirable;

b. continue the contact so that the FRCA and the ERCS can come to know each other better.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.98)

Synod decides:

to discharge deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate to continue the contacts with ERCS so that the FRCA and the ERCS can come to know each other better.

(Byford 1994, Art.117)

Decision:

1.

To discontinue the contacts with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore.

2.

With regret to inform the ERCS that the contacts have not made progress towards mutual recognition and official relations.

Ground:

There is no improvement in contacts and there does not seem to be a desire from the ERCS to develop the contacts towards possible mutual recognition and relations with each other.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.61).

Sri Lanka :

The Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka

Synod decides to instruct deputies:

to investigate whether The Reformed Church of Japan and The Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka can be recognized as true and faithful churches.

(Kelmescott 1983, Artt.76 and 112)

Synod considers:

1.

since it seems impossible to initiate contact with the D.R.C.S.L., it is best to follow the deputies' proposal to cease this contact.

Synod decides:

2.

to cease attempts to initiate contact with the D.R.C.S.L.

(Albany 1987, Art.92)

(See further under Japan, Ed.)

Material:

Agenda Item 8.21 - letter from the church of West Albany regarding the Lanka Reformed Church.

Observations:

1. The church of West Albany proposes "that Synod instructs Deputies to reply to the Lanka Reformed Church that with regret The Free Reformed Churches of Australia at this juncture are not able to extend the help they request".
2. The church of West Albany gives as reasons lack of available resources owing to involvement in Mission work, and the extensive church contacts already in place.

Decision:

Synod adopts West Albany's proposal, without endorsing its reasons.

Grounds:

1. There is no proposal on synod's table to extend the requested help.
 2. Synod is unable to conclude from the available material that the churches lack the necessary resources.
 3. The letter from the Lanka Reformed Church needs to be answered.
- (Launceston 1998, Art.106)

a. It is not possible to enter into a sister church relationship with the Lanka Reformed Church since they are not a church according to Articles 1 and 36 CO.

b. Since this matter is one of mission work FRC Byford is at liberty to continue and expand the work there if it so desires.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 34)

Taiwan :

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan

Synod decides:

to recognize the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan as a true and faithful church.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.72)

and to make every effort to intensify the contacts with this church which does not yet belong to sister churches in order to come to full correspondence.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.112 e)

Synod decides:

2.

not to be able at this time to accede to the proposal of the deputies to reconfirm the decision of the 1983 Synod, Art. 72, and to offer sister churches relations.

3.

to instruct deputies:

a. to carry out a more detailed investigation of the R.P.C.T. with regard to the marks of the true church and church polity.

b. to establish a good base for correspondence in English with the **R.P.C.T. and** so improve the contacts with them.

c. to investigate and evaluate the division in the presbyteries there.

(Albany 1987, Art.91)

Observations:

1.

Deputies have had no communication from the RPCT. Previous contact has also been scarce.

2.

Deputies report that DpBBK (Deputies for correspondence with Foreign Churches, appointed by the General Synod of the Dutch sister churches, Ed.) "are investigating those churches as well as the division between the presbyteries.

It would be wise to consult with them and to await their report so that we do not duplicate our efforts".

Considerations:

1.

DpBBK propose to visit Taiwan in 1990/91.

2.

Duplication of effort is undesirable (Acts 1990, Article 58).

Synod decides:

2.

to instruct new deputies to consult with DpBBK and to await their report.

(Armadale 1990, Art.135)

(Editor's note: The Acts of Synods 1992 and 1994 do not contain any decisions regarding 'Taiwan')

Uganda :

The Presbyterian Church in Uganda

Synod decides:

that deputies be instructed:

(a) to investigate whether or not The Reformed Church of Japan and The Presbyterian Church in Uganda can be recognized as true and faithful churches according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession with a view to the possible establishment of sister church relations.

(Launceston 1985, Art.76)

Synod decides to renew the mandate (...) with respect to the R.C.J. and the P.C.U.

(Albany 1987, Art.92)

(See further under Japan, Ed.)

Considerations:

1.

Synod 1987 records that no contact with PCU occurred.

2.

Acts 1990 Article 58 records a decision to phase out contacts with churches with whom we appear to be making no progress.

Synod decides to cease further contact with the PCU.

(Armadale 1990, Art.120)

Zaire :

The Reformed Church of Zaire

Observations:

1.

In a letter, the Reformed Church of Zaire (RCZ) has given information about their reformed confessions and churches. It requests sister relations with us. The deputies point out that our sister churches in The Netherlands decided at their 1990 General Synod to establish sister relations with the RCZ.

Synod decides:

1.

to instruct the deputies to return the greetings of the RCZ (...) and to explain to them that in light of the considerations stated above we cannot accede to their request of establishing relations with them at this time.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.144)

(Editor's note: for these considerations see under 'Philippines')

Decision:

To discharge deputies and thank them for their work.

Grounds:

1.

Article 144 of Acts 1992 gives three reasons why contact with the Reformed Church of Zaire should not be cultivated. So deputies need no mandate.

2.

Deputies report that the Dutch sister churches have sister relations with a different church than had earlier approached us.

(Byford 1994, Art.119)

E. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (I.C.R.C.)

Synod decides:

1.

To terminate our membership of the ICRC.

3.

To immediately inform all member churches of the ICRC of this decision, indicating our withdrawal of the proposed constitutional amendment and apologise for any inconvenience caused.

4.

Not to appoint new deputies for the ICRC.

Grounds:

1.

a. The membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches. This is evident in the divided deputy reports and the repeated appeals to Synod.

b. Synod has not been able to reach a consensus on whether or not Scripture forbids participation in the ICRC, and

c. The Church of Rockingham asks Synod not to bind and compel the conscience of those churches who believe that their participation in and support of the ICRC is contrary to Scripture. The churches of Bedfordale and Byford have expressed the same belief that participation in the ICRC is contrary to Scripture, Confession and Church Order.

2.

The appeals of Bedfordale and Byford request Synod to terminate membership in the ICRC. Thus there is no need for Synod to deal further with these appeals.

3.

In the light of the past history it would be unrealistic of Synod to expect deputies to come forward with an agreed conclusion or recommendation.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.95).

Decision:

1.

To thank and discharge deputies.

2.

To note the Report of Deputies for ICRC.

3.

Not to accede to the request of the church of Albany concerning the organisation of regional conferences of the ICRC.

Ground:

In a previous decision Synod terminated membership of the ICRC, and so no action is required on Deputies' Report and the request from Albany.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.106)

Material:

Agenda Item 8.1: the church of West Albany appeals Article 95 of Synod Acts 1996.

Agenda Item 8.2: the church of Albany corresponds about Article 95 of Synod Acts 1996.

Agenda Item 8.13: the church of Byford corresponds about Article 95 of Synod Acts 1998.

Observations:

The church of West Albany appeals Article 95 of Synod Acts 1996., not because of its disagreement with the decision, but with the way in which the decision was reached.

They argue that, as agreed upon in Article 31 of the Church Order, synod should have made a decision on our ICRC membership on the basis of the appeals of Bedfordale and Byford.

The churches of Albany and Byford do not appeal, but write to synod for its information.

Decision:

1. to grant the appeal of the church of West Albany that synod 1996 did not complete its task as agreed upon in Article 31 of the Church Order when it did not answer the appeals of the churches of Bedfordale and Byford.

2. to receive the encouragement from the Church of Albany that "the present Synod as well as future Synods deal correctly with all appeals presented to them."

3. to receive as information that the church of Byford "will resubmit its appeal should it ever become necessary to defend our position in remaining a non-member of the ICRC."

Grounds:

1. Article 31 of the Church Order gives anyone who has been wronged by a decision of a minor assembly the right to appeal to the major assembly.

2. As a previous synod has erred, an encouragement to alertness is in place.

3. The information from Byford is received because the appeals of the churches of Bedfordale and Byford to synod 1996 were not dealt with.

(Launceston 1998, Art.48)

ARTICLE 47 - Censure in classis and synod

At the close of the major assemblies censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of reproof.

ARTICLE 48 - Deputies of major assemblies

Each synod shall appoint deputies who are to assist the classes in all matters provided for in the Church Order. A classis may request these deputies to assist in cases of special difficulties. Each synod shall also appoint deputies to carry out its own decisions. Different deputies shall be appointed as much as possible for separate matters. All deputies shall keep proper record of their work and submit a written report.

See the "Rules for Synods", Appendix IV

ARTICLE 49 - Archives

The assemblies shall ensure that proper care is taken of the archives.

Instructions for the archivist

1.
The church council of the church keeping the Archives is in charge of the Archives of Synod.
2.
The church council will appoint an archivist.
3.
The archivist reports to the church council on the contents and condition of the Archives; and who has received or seen items and the items involved.
4.
The church council reports to Synod.
5.
The archivist shall carefully store everything, using files which will be placed in the filing cabinet, taking care that everything is clearly catalogued.
6.
Access to items in the general archives requires permission of the church keeping the archives. Access to items in the secret archives requires permission of two churches, or of Synod.
7.
Original documents shall not be lent out, but the archivist shall supply photo copies instead. The name of the inquirer the title of the document and the date shall be recorded.
(Albany 1975, Art.53; re-stated Kelmscott 1983, Artt.114 and 112; amended Bedfordale 1992, Art.52).

Acts of Synods

Synod decides that the Acts of the Synods of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia are to be kept in the Archives of Synod.
(Armadale 1980, Art.26)

Documents regarding Closed Sessions

See the Instructions for the archivist, sub 6.

All matters pertaining to the secret sessions shall be segregated from the general archives and be placed in a separate section of the archives.
(Kelmscott 1983, Art.106 sub 2)

See below: Archives and Library, Launceston 1985, Art.33

Deputies documents

Synod decides:

- 3.

to urge the respective synodical deputies, after they have obtained their discharge from Synod, to hand over to the Archives of Synod any documents that are in their keeping, as far as their contents have been dealt with.

(Armadale 1956, Art.48b sub 3)

Una Sancta

The Church of Armadale is authorized to take a subscription to 'Una Sancta' for the Archives because of the articles of church historical significance it contains.

(Albany 1959, Art.24).

The president announces that the copies of 'Una Sancta' which are in the Archives, will be transferred to a Library in which also the Acts of The Christian Reformed Church will be kept.

(Albany 1975, Art.56)

Library

(See above, Albany 1975, Art.56)

Synod decides that reports and books from abroad will be kept by the librarian and that the transfer will take place immediately after the next Synod from date of receipt.

(Armadale 1980, Art.27)

Synod decides:

1.

that the Library will be transferred to the care of Kelmscott, which will appoint a librarian in the same manner as for the Archives of Synod.

(See above, Albany 1975, Art.53, Ed.)

Replace the word "Archives" with "Library".

2.

that the Library will be housed in the church building of Kelmscott together with the Archives.

3.

that a suitable cupboard be purchased.

4.

that the church of Kelmscott, on behalf of the bond of churches, purchases relevant materials to bring and keep the Library up to date and functional.

5.

that relevant materials such as out of date books are discarded when new ones arrive.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.114)

Archives and Library

The following recommendations are adopted:

a) to give a guideline to the consistory of Kelmscott regarding what belongs to the Closed Sessions;

b) to give permission to the consistory of Kelmscott to obtain another metal cupboard for storing material of the Closed Sessions;

c) to decide what belongs to the Archives and what belongs to the Library;

d) to compile a general list of the contents of both the Archives and the Library which is to include all relevant and separate items;

e) to appoint deputies who will also check the Library;

f) to do everything possible to recover the missing minutes of the Closed Sessions;
 g) to express its appreciation for the manner in which the consistory of Kelmscott has reorganised the Archives and also its appreciation for the way in which they manage them.

(Launceston 1985, Art.33)

Synod decides:

b. to instruct the deputies appointed for the inspection of the Archives and Library of Synods to insert the Archives' documents in large, appropriate labeled envelopes and to seal them after having inspected the Archives;

c. to instruct deputies appointed for the care of the Archives and Library of Synods:

1. to investigate the cost of putting the Archives' documents on to microfilm and of buying a microfilm projector;

2. to compile a subject/keyword index of the Archives' contents.

(Armadale 1990, Art.126)

Synod decides:

to instruct deputies appointed for the care of the Archives and Library of Synod to:

a. preserve all faint and flimsy documents by photocopying;

b. make and maintain a microfilm record of the Archives;

c. acquire all the correspondence and other relevant material from past deputies, and
 d. ensure that borrowers of documents are given photocopies, so that the originals remain in the Archives.

(Bedfordale 1992, Art.52)

Synod decides:

2.

to thank the church of Bedfordale for the care of the Archives and Library and to discharge them.

3.

to renew the mandate given by Synod Bedfordale 1992 (Acts Article 52) to deputies appointed with the proviso to make a microfilm record of the Archives on a selective basis in accordance with the recommendations of the report of the church in charge of synod Archives.

(Byford 1994, Art.34)

Decision:

1.

To receive the report of the deputies for the archives and library of synods, as well as the report of the deputies for the inspection of the archives of synods.

2.

To thank the church of Bedfordale for the care of the archives and library and to discharge them.

3.

To accept deputies' reasons for:

a. not photocopying flimsy documents, and

b. not microfilming documents.

4.

To urge the respective Synod deputies to forward copies of the Acts of synods of sister churches to the Archivist.

5.

To appoint new deputies to care for the archives and library of synods according to the current instructions for the Archivist (Appendix K, Acts Synod 1992), with the added instruction to endeavour to acquire the minutes of closed sessions of Synods 1990 and 1994.

Grounds:

1.

Deputies report that the expense of microfilming most of the documents is not justified for the following reasons:

a. the few documents that would warrant such preservation are still legible and in good condition. Some documents are flimsy because of the poor quality of paper used at the time, but on the whole they are still intact and very legible. In cases of illegibility it is more because the print was light or the quality of photocopying poor at the time. Re-photocopying them today would make little improvement.

b. the documents contained in the archives do not show signs of aging. They receive minimal handling, are safely stored in a fire-proof cabinet and are well protected from the elements, and

c. deputies question whether microfilm is still an acceptable long term storage medium.

2.

Deputies report that copies of Acts of Sister Churches have not been forwarded to the Archivist whereas past Synods have urged the respective synod deputies to pass on the documents that are in their keeping (cf. Article 27, Acts Synod 1980, Article 52, Acts Synod 1992).

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.26)

Decisions:

1.

To receive the report of the deputies for the Archives and Library of synods, as well as the report of the deputies for the inspection of the Archives and Library of synod;

2.

To thank the church of Mt Nasura for the care of the Archives and Library, as well as the church of Byford for the inspection, and discharge them;

3.

To thank the Librarian sister J VanderPlas, for the work done;

4.

To accept that Acts of the Closed Sessions of Synods 1992 and 1994 are lost;

5.

To prepare an electronic version of the Index of Synod's Archives, to be available from the Librarian upon request;

6.

To ask Deputies for Relations with other Church to register with the Librarian, any unregistered Acts of Synods of other Churches that they may have in their possession as well as any Acts of Synods they may receive;

7.

To add to the Instructions for the Archivist (Appendix K, Acts Synod 1992) the instruction to show in future reports to Synod only those items that were added since their previous report;

8.

To include in the Acts a listing of only those items that were added to the Archives and Library since the 1996 report;

9.

To include the amended Instructions for the Archivist as an Appendix to the Acts;

10.

To re-appoint the church at Mt Nasura as Archivist, and the church of Byford for the inspection of Archives and Library.

Ground:

The listing supplied in the Archivist's report is voluminous and consumes significant resources both in its distribution to the churches and in reprinting in the Acts.

(Launceston 1998, Art.115)

Decisions:

To accept the report from the FRC Mt Nasura responsible for the Synod Archives and Library;

To purchase another new cabinet to house future archives;

To receive gratefully the report of the inspection of the Synod Archives and Library;

To thank the Deputies for their work and discharge them.

Grounds:

The archives and library were well cared for.

A new cabinet is needed.

(West Albany 2000, Art.23)

ARTICLE 50 - Mission

The churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. In doing so they shall observe the provisions of this Church Order. When churches cooperate in mission work they shall as much as possible observe the division into classes.

Papua New Guinea

Synod decides:

to advise the churches to fully support the work in Papua New Guinea, organised by the cooperating churches.

(Launceston 1985, Art.60)

See under Article 19

III WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS AND CEREMONIES

ARTICLE 51 - Administration of sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered only in a church service by a minister of the Word with the use of the adopted Forms, and under the supervision of the elders.

ARTICLE 52 - Baptism of infants

The consistory shall ensure that the covenant of God is sealed by baptism to the children of believers as soon as feasible.

Adopted children

Synod,
considering that holy Scripture

1.
in Genesis 17, the institution of the sign and seal of the covenant, clearly teaches that circumcision was not only for Abraham and his children (in verse 12 are especially mentioned those "which are not of thy seed");
 2.
that this institution of the circumcision was to be kept throughout their generations;
 3.
that all those, who belonged to the household of Abraham were partakers of the promise and demands of the covenant (Genesis 17:14; 18:19; 35:2; Exodus 12:44);
 4.
that in the Old Testament Abraham and his household were separated from the world, as a circumcised community, as was later on the Old Testament church, Israel;
 5.
that in the New Testament the believing parents with all who belong to them (with their children) are in connection with the church, separated from the world as a baptismal community, because baptism came in the place of circumcision;
- decides:
that children, adopted by believing parents, on the ground of Genesis 17, should be baptized.
(Albany 1975, Art.92)

ARTICLE 53 - Baptismal promise and education

The consistory shall make sure that the parents honour their vows to instruct their children, to the utmost of their power, in the doctrine of the Scriptures as summarised in the confession, and to have them instructed in the same by the instruction provided by the consistory.

In accordance with the same vow, the consistory shall see to it that the parents, to the best of their ability, and with the cooperation of the communion of saints, give their children education (as stipulated by the civil government) which is based on Scripture and Confession.

ARTICLE 54 - Public profession of faith

Those who desire to publicly profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory on their motivation and knowledge of the doctrine of God's Word. The public profession shall take place in a church service, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 55 - Baptism of adults

Adults who have not been baptised shall be grafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

ARTICLE 56 - Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

ARTICLE 57 - Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the basis of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.

ARTICLE 58 - Church records

The consistory shall maintain church records in which the names of the members and the dates of their birth, baptism, public profession of faith, marriage, and departure or death are properly recorded.

ARTICLE 59 - Attestations for communicant members

Communicant members who move to another congregation shall be given, following appropriate announcements to the congregation, an attestation regarding their doctrine and conduct, signed on behalf of the consistory by two authorised office-bearers. This attestation shall also record their children who have not yet made public profession of faith. The consistory of the congregation concerned shall be notified in due time.

Travel attestations

Synod decides that the so-called travel attestations shall not be valid for longer than six months.

(Armadale 1972, Art.20)

ARTICLE 60 - Attestations for non-communicant members.

An attestation for a non-communicant member shall be sent directly to the consistory of the church concerned with the request to take the member under its supervision and discipline.

ARTICLE 61 - Support after departure

When members depart to another congregation where they will be cared for in institutions, aged persons homes or nursing homes, they shall in respect of deacon support remain under the care of the church they are leaving. If this is not possible support will be arranged by consultation between the consistories and deacons concerned.

Support

(Re.a proposal to read: "they will be under the care of the receiving church in all respects. If this places too heavy a burden on a congregation the bond of churches can be approached", Ed.)

Synod decides:

not to adopt the changes proposed for Article 61 of the Church Order but to maintain the article in its present form.

Grounds:

1.

The Scriptural norm is that children have the responsibility to care for their parents when they need to be cared for in institutions. Deacon support is thus directed to the need of the children.

2.

The task of the church is to ensure that the children are faithful in carrying out their task.

3.

To make a church dependent on others because the institutions mentioned are located within its boundaries is undesirable.

4.

It is not good for a church to abdicate its financial responsibilities because the facilities to care for its members are located elsewhere.

(Launceston 1985, Art.28)

ARTICLE 62 - Church services

The consistory shall call the congregation together for church services twice on the Lord's Day.

Liturgy

Synod decides:
for the time being not to recommend an order for the church services.
(Albany 1959, Art.26)

Bible version

Synod decides:
to appoint deputies who will be charged to investigate which English version of the Bible is most preferable for the use in our church services.
Thereby they have to inform themselves about the results that have been gained by the churches in Canada, in order that in this respect there may be as much uniformity as possible in the churches in the English-speaking countries.
(Armada 1954, Art.16)

Synod decides:
2.
to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
b. use as criteria:
1. faithfulness to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.
2. readability and suitability for worship services for instruction and for memorization.
3. consistency in maintaining the unity of the Scriptures.
(Albany 1987, Art.109)

Synod decides:
3.
as regards the underlying text, to accept the premise that there is room for a careful eclectic method;
5.
to express caution over the DE (dynamic equivalent, Ed.) approach to translation.
(Armada 1990, Art.138)

Synod decides:
3.
to endorse the NKJV as a faithful and reliable translation for use in the churches, as well as for study, instruction and family purposes.
4.
to allow the NIV to be used in the church service, and for study, instruction and family purposes.
5.
to allow a period of transition for the churches to move away from the RSV in two years.
6.
to appoint new deputies with the following instruction:

- a. to inform the CanRC of this decision and remain in touch with the Canadian deputies about developments there;
 - b. to inform the churches of developments in the CanRC;
 - c. to monitor developments with respect to the NKJV and the NIV;
 - d. to solicit from the churches comments on possible improvements on these translations for a possible reprint and to send these comments to the respective publishers.
- (Byford 1994, Art.55)

Decision:

- 3.
To aim for one Bible translation in the Australian churches.
- 4.
To recommend the NKJV as the translation for use in the churches.
- 5.
To recognise the NIV as a faithful and reliable translation which may be used by churches which prefer this translation.
- 6.
To alert the churches to the uncertain future of the NIV, as regards an updated text to be some time after the turn of the century.
- published 7.
To instruct deputies for contact with sister churches to inform the Canadian sister churches of this decision, together with the grounds.

Grounds:

- 1.
Past synods have judged the NKJV acceptable for use in the churches and endorsed this translation. Six churches are currently using the NKJV in the church services.
- 2.
Past synods have allowed use of (the present edition of) the NIV in church services. Deputies indicate in their report that the last Canadian Synod has judged the NIV to be a faithful and reliable translation. Currently two of our churches are using the NIV in the church services.
- 3.
Synod Byford expressed in its grounds for the Bible Translation decision that "it is highly desirable that all the churches in the bond use the same translation of the Bible. However, since the question of which Bible translation to use is not one of principle but rather one of preference, room should be left in the churches for a degree of variation" (Acts Synod 1994, Article 55, Ground 3).
- 4.
The church at Armadale requests this Synod to "aim for the recommendation of ONE Bible translation in our Australian Churches". Armadale brings forward a number of legitimate reasons for the use of a single translation in the churches. To wit:
 - a. the physical proximity of congregations, combined with the transience of the members, means that one Bible translation is highly desirable,
 - b. "Using one version builds unity whereas two or more versions can have the effect of dividing the churches",
 - c. the use of multiple versions in the churches complicates memory work amongst catechism students, and
 - d. the same version should be used in both the home and at school.
- 5.
A letter signed by the Executive Director of the NIV Translation Centre (dd 10th May, 1996) states that "it is true that some time after the turn of the century an updated text of the NIV will appear. It will use a balanced approach to inclusive language. Such language will not be applied to references to the three persons of the Trinity. Only the publishers can answer the question whether a non-inclusive NIV will be published

alongside the inclusive edition. The NIV will be updated about every 25 years." The NIV was initially published in complete form in 1978.

6.

It is not clear what the phrase "a balanced approach to 'inclusive language'" means and what implications this has for the reliability of the upcoming edition. However, it must be noted that the concept of 'inclusive language' is rooted in feminist theology.

7.

The current edition of the NIV has a short life span. As the proposed 'inclusive language' edition is not yet finalised, there is an element of uncertainty concerning the future of the NIV.

8.

It is not desirable that the churches change translations frequently. We have changed from the KJV to the RSV (1983), and again from the RSV to the NKJV or NIV (1994/5). It would not be desirable to be in a position wherein we may need to make another change within the foreseeable future.

(Kelmescott 1996, Art.59)

Church Service Book

Synod declares that The Free Reformed Churches of Australia adopt the liturgical writings of The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands as their own.

These writings are: Christian prayers, forms for infant baptism, for the baptism of adults, for the public profession of faith, for the Lord's Supper, for excommunication, for re-admission, for the ordination of ministers of the Word, for the ordination of elders and deacons, and for the confirmation of marriages.

(Albany 1959, Art.18)

Synod decides:

to adopt the following Liturgical Forms for use by the churches:

- (a) for Baptism of Infants;
- (b) for Baptism of Adults;
- (c) for the Public Profession of Faith;
- (d) for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper;
- (e) for the Excommunication of Communicant Members;
- (f) for the Readmission into the Church of Christ;
- (g) for the Ordination of Ministers of the Word;
- (h) for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons;
- (i) for the Solemnization of Marriage.

to provisionally adopt the following Liturgical Forms for use by the churches:

- (j) for the Excommunication of Non-Communicant Members;
- (k) for the Ordination of Missionaries;
- (l) Abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

(Launceston 1985, Art.59)

Synod decides:

to adopt the text of the Three Forms of Unity and of those Liturgical Forms which were provisionally adopted by the 1985 Synod (Acts Art.59c 2).

(Albany 1987, Art.110)

Decision:

To adopt the same translation of the Nicene Creed as adopted by our Canadian sister churches and found in the *Book of Praise*.

Grounds:

The translation is faithful to the original, and an improvement on the present wording of the creed.

It is desirable to retain the same translation of the creeds and confessions as The Canadian Reformed Churches, our only English speaking sister church, especially in light of the fact that we use their *Book of Praise* in which the Nicene Creed is found (cf. Acts 1994, Art.124, Ground 1c).

(West Albany 2000, Art.26)

ARTICLE 63 - Catechism preaching

The consistory shall ensure that as a rule every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarised in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed, preferably in the afternoon service.

ARTICLE 64 - Psalms and hymns

In the church services only the psalms and hymns approved by synod shall be sung.

Deputies

Synod decides to appoint deputies, and to charge them to investigate if and to what extent the existing metrical versions in English of the Psalms and the existing English translation of The Three Forms of Unity can be used in our church services.

Thereby they have to inform themselves about the results which have been gained by the churches in Canada, in order that in this respect there may be as much uniformity as possible in the churches in the English-speaking countries.

(Armada 1954, Art.17)

Synod decides:

a. again to appoint deputies for the compiling of or advising regarding a collection of Psalms and other songs from Scripture in the English language, according to the directives and conclusions of the deputies concerned appointed by Synod 1960.

b. to instruct these deputies:

1. to contact the deputies concerned appointed by Synod Homewood-Carman 1958 of The Canadian Reformed Churches.

2. if a responsible song book cannot be obtained in another way, to look out for persons who would be able and willing to take part in the work that has been started within The Canadian Reformed Churches.

3. to examine the results of this work as soon as possible and to pass on to the churches what could be used by our congregations in their church services in the English language.

c. to advise the churches to maintain today's situation for the time being by using the Psalm-versions from Psalter Hymnal of The Christian Reformed Church in the U.S.A. which are based on the Genevan tunes, and to add to them or to replace them by the versions mentioned under b 3, unless a responsible song book can be obtained in a different way.

(Armada 1959, Art.36)

Book of Praise

Synod decides:

2.

to express its gladness since the work for an English Psalter has made such a good progress that the publication of a provisional edition may be expected in the near future.

3.

to advise the churches to replace by this provisional edition the metrical Psalm-versions from the Psalter-Hymnal of The Christian Reformed Church in the U.S.A. which are based on the Genevan tunes, as mentioned in the advice concerned given by Synod 1959, Acts Art.36.

6.

to urge the churches to test the provisional edition with the help of the directives mentioned in the report of deputies appointed by Synod 1956, which was tabled at Synod 1959; and to pass on any possible results thereof to the deputies mentioned under 5.

7.

to declare, as also Synod 1959 has done, that it is our intention to limit the song book for the time being to a book containing a metrical version of 'the Book of Psalms' and of other songs from the Bible in the English language.
(Albany 1962, Art.40)

d. Deputies request Synod to declare again that in the preparation of a church book for the church services in the English language care must be taken not to move in a direction which may lead to a 'hymn-book' in the spirit of the 'Psalter-Hymnal' of The Christian Reformed Church of the U.S.A. The requested declaration is made.

f. Synod supports deputies in their disapproval of the inclusion in the Book of Praise of alternative melodies besides the Genevan melodies.

(Armadale 1966, Art.46)

Synod decides to accept the proposal of the committee "to advise the churches to put the Psalm section of the newly published Book of Praise into use as a proof-collection".

(Armadale 1972, Art.22)

Synod decides:

to advise the churches regarding the use of the hymn section of the Book of Praise to limit themselves to the hymns named under 6 and to regard these also as a proof-collection.

(Armadale 1972, Art.46)

It is decided:

e. to request the churches to examine and try out the six Bible Song which have been published by the deputies in 'Una Sancta' Vol.XXII, 11-12.

(Albany 1975, Art.44)

It is decided to adopt the recommendation of the deputies pertaining to the acceptable list of hymns to be sung in the church services.

(Kelmescott 1983, Art.31)

(Editor's note: Deputies recommended the use of a selection from the 1979 edition of the Book of Praise.)

It is decided to add Hymn 10 to the list of hymns acceptable for use in the church services.

(Kelmescott 1983, Art.32)

Synod decides:

to adopt the revisions to the Psalms and Prayer sections and the approved Hymns.

(Launceston 1985, Art.59 sub A1)

Synod decides:

to accept the complete hymn section of the Book of Praise for use in the worship services, so that in accordance with the decision of Synod Armadale 1954 there should be as much uniformity as possible amongst the sister-churches of the English-speaking world concerning the matter of a church book (Acts, Article 17).

(Armadale 1990, Art.65 sub 2)

Decision:

To accede to the request of Mt Nasura that deputies be appointed to look into the possibility of having an edition of the *Book of Praise* printed for the Australian churches. Such an edition would include the Bible references in the prose section from the New King James Version, the particulars of the Australian Churches in the confessions (e.g. the word *Christian*) in the Apostles' Creed and the wording of the *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons* as well as the *Australian Church Order*.

Grounds:

An Australian Synod (1996) endorsed the use of the New King James Version as the faithful and reliable translation for use in the churches.
 With today's use of computer technology in printing such a special edition of the *Book of Praise* may be well possible.
 (West Albany 2000, Art.54)

Decision:

1. to acknowledge the Churches' desire to publish an Australian Book of Praise;
2. to appoint deputies to come with more detailed recommendations on how to proceed with an Australian Book of Praise;
3. to present a report on the issues to the churches at least six months before Synod 2009 is due to start;
4. to appoint new deputies with the task to:
 - a. investigate if copyright holders can commit to long-term permission of copyright material also in the event that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia decide to publish their own version of the Book of Praise;
 - b. ascertain an up-to-date costing of printing an Australian Book of Praise, incorporating copyright and printing costs;
 - c. report to Synod 2009 with a more detailed plan/proposal incorporating the wishes of the churches;
 - d. stay informed about the developments with the Canadian Book of Praise and indicate how the Canadian work may be shared and impact on producing our Australian Book of Praise.

Grounds:

- 1 The majority of the churches have indicated a preference to publish our own Australian Book of Praise.
- 2 Since the churches indicate a desire to start our own Australian Book of Praise further work needs to be done.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 98)

ARTICLE 65 - Ecclesiastical feast days

On Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day, and at Pentecost the consistory shall call the congregation together for church services. The sacred events which the congregation commemorates in particular on these days shall therein be proclaimed.

Prayer and Thanksgiving

Synod decides to advise the churches to arrange an annual service for prayer and thanksgiving for harvest and labour on the third Sunday of the month of February.
(Armadale 1956, Art.20)

ARTICLE 66 - Days of prayer

In times of war, general calamities and other great afflictions the presence of which is felt throughout the churches a day of prayer may be proclaimed by the church appointed for that purpose by synod.

ARTICLE 67 - Marriage

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers - as authorised by the consistory - solemnise only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God. The solemnisation of a marriage shall take place in a private ceremony, with the use of the adopted Form.

Civil Registration

Decision:

To thank the deputies that they have completed their mandate in that The Free Reformed Church (sic) of Australia have now been registered as a recognised denomination for the purpose of the Marriage Acts 1961.

To discharge the deputies.

To appoint new deputies officially designated as the *Nominating Authorities* with the following mandate:

To carry out all the duties of *nominating authorities* as required under the Marriage Acts 1961,

To see to a correction of the registered church name from *Free Reformed Church of Australia* to *Free Reformed Churches of Australia*.

Grounds:

Deputies have carried out and completed their mandate given by Synod 1998.

The Marriage Acts of 1961 requires that there is an official appointment of Nominating Authorities.

Although the deputies submitted the correct name for the churches as a whole when making the application on behalf of the churches, the registrar did not register it correctly.

(West Albany 2000, Art.102)

ARTICLE 68 - Funerals

Church services shall not be conducted for funerals

IV CHURCH DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 69 - Aim of discipline

Church discipline shall be exercised in accordance with the Word of God and to His honour. Its aim is to reconcile the sinner with God and the neighbour, and to remove the offence from the church of Christ.

ARTICLE 70 - Mutual responsibility

If anyone departs from the pure doctrine or is delinquent in conduct and this is a secret matter which does not give rise to public offence, the rule which Christ clearly prescribes in Matthew 18 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 71 - Consistory involvement

The consistory shall not deal with any report of sin unless it has first ascertained that both private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of one or two witnesses have remained fruitless, or the sin committed is of a public character.

ARTICLE 72 - Repentance

When someone repents of a public sin or of a sin which had to be reported to the consistory, the latter shall not accept his confession of sin unless the member concerned shows real amendment. The consistory shall determine whether the congregation shall be informed afterwards.

ARTICLE 73 - Discipline in respect of communicant members

A communicant member who obstinately rejects the admonition by the consistory or who has committed a public or some other serious sin shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. If he continues to harden himself in sin, the consistory shall publicly announce this to the congregation so that the congregation may be engaged in prayer and admonition and the excommunication may not take place without its cooperation.

ARTICLE 74 - Announcements during the procedure

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement, which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained, the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned. In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place in accordance with the adopted Form. The time interval between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

ARTICLE 75 - Re-admission

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be again received into the communion of the church, the congregation shall be informed of this desire in order to see whether there are any lawful objections. The time between the public announcement and the re-admission of the sinner shall be not less than one month. If no lawful objection is raised the re-admission shall take place, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 76 - Suspension and deposition of office-bearers

If a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or otherwise gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions by the consistory, he shall be suspended from office by the judgment of his own consistory and of the consistory of a neighbouring congregation. In the case of a minister this neighbouring congregation shall be appointed by the classis. If he hardens himself in the sin, or if the sin committed is of such a nature that he can not continue in office, an elder or a deacon shall be deposed by the judgment of the above-mentioned consistories. Classis, with the advice of the deputies of synod, shall judge whether a minister is to be deposed

ARTICLE 77 - Serious and gross sins on the part of office-bearers

As serious and gross sins which are grounds for the suspension or deposition of office-bearers the following are to be mentioned particularly: False doctrine or heresy, public schisms, blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; and further all such sins and serious misdemeanours that rate as ground for excommunication with respect to other members of the church.

ARTICLE 78 - Christian censure

The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.

ARTICLE 79 - Discipline in respect of non-communicant members

A baptised member shall be admonished by the consistory when he as an adult fails to make public profession of faith or where in other respects he is not loyal to the calling to new obedience in God's covenant. If he obstinately rejects the admonition of the consistory and thereby clearly demonstrates that he is indifferent and averse to the covenant or is even hostile to the service of the Lord, the matter shall be made known to the congregation without mentioning the name of the sinner; and the congregation shall be urged to pray for him. If the member continues in sin and is unwilling to listen to the admonitions, then with the advice of the classis the consistory shall make a second public announcement, mentioning the name of the sinner and the term after which the excommunication shall take place. If he does not in the said term show any real repentance, the consistory shall in a church service exclude him from the communion of the church, using the adopted Form. If he, after this excommunication, comes to repentance and desires to rejoin the communion of the church, he shall be admitted by way of his public profession of faith after the consistory has made his repentance known to the congregation.

CONCLUDING ARTICLES

ARTICLE 80 - No lording over others

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.

ARTICLE 81 - Observance and revision of the Church Order

These articles, which regard the lawful order of the church, have been adopted with common accord. If the interest of the churches demands such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented or diminished. However no consistory or classis shall be permitted to do so, but they shall endeavour diligently to observe the provisions of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by synod.