

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 2015

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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
DGK =	De Gereformeerde Kerken
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
OPC =	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
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 =	Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (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:

- 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 124:2)

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

1. The translation is faithful to the original, and an improvement on the present wording of the creed.
2. 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.

(Armada 1954, Article 11)

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

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 81)

Admissibility Decision:

Not to deal with the submission from the FRC Busselton which requests that synod appoints deputies to study the possible name change of our bond of churches.

Grounds:

1. Synod 1985 which dealt with the same kind of request from one of the churches, decided to reject that submission on the basis that:
 - a. the task to conduct a study of this nature which does not contain clearly formulated proposals does not belong to the synod;
 - b. a study of this nature can be undertaken by the Church at any time, which can then submit its report containing specific proposals to a synod.

(Southern River 2012, Article 60)

Church Order

Synod decides to adopt the Church Order of Dordrecht.

(Armada 1954, Article 38)

Decision

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).

Decision

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)

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

Synod is of the opinion that the church in which this matter is an issue should table definitive proposals to Synod
(*Armada 1972, Article 21*)

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.

(Kelmscott 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 preparatory 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)

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*)

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*)

Term Missionary

Decision:

1. To concur with the Church of Albany by deciding that as churches we do not recognize the position of "term missionary" as a 4th 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 as a minister of the Word (missionary) 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.

Grounds:

1. The Church of Albany is correct that the Churches have agreed there are 3 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 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:

- 1. They shall be installed after classis has approved the call.**
- 2. 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.**
- 3. 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)

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.

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)

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.

Request in relation to Article 8 of the CO

Synod votes and decides to deal with this matter in closed session as per Synod Rule 7.6. After voting, synod decides to make an exception to the rule to allow foreign delegates and servicing office bearers to be present.

(Armada 2012, Art. 16)

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.

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.
 1. (*Bedforddale 1992, Art. 51*)
 2. Costs for pulpit exchanges between the Metro area and Albany should be borne 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

1. To appoint a church to coordinate and monitor the roster of pulpit exchange for the period 1996 – 1998.
2. 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.

(*Kelmscott 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 pay for travelling costs from the Synod Treasure.

Grounds:

- 1. It is profitable for the churches to have pulpit exchanges.
- 2. 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:
 - c. ministers visiting sister churches abroad request our deputies for such a declaration that they are ministers in good standing;
 - d. the deputies send such a declaration to the relevant deputies abroad so that they can publish it;
 - e. the deputies give the visiting ministers copies of this declaration;
 - f. 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.

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

ARTICLE 13 - Retirement of ministers

If a minister of the Word retires by reason of age, or because he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office on account of sickness or otherwise, 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. The retirement of ministers shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons and with the concurring advice of classis and the deputies of Synod.

(See Appendix I, Form 6)

Decision 1

The FRC Kelmscott proposes that synod emend Article 13 of the Church Order as follows:

If a minister of the Word retires by reason of age, or because he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office on account of sickness or otherwise, 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.

Ground

The current wording of CO Article 13 implies that a minister can only retire on account of age if he is deemed incapable of performing the duties of his office. Whilst this was the intention of the original CO of Dordt, this is no longer the practice within our churches or our sister churches.

Decision 2

To reject the addition of the words "The level of honourable support is the responsibility of the consistory" to Article 13 CO as proposed by Free Reformed Church of Mount Nasura (FRCMN).

Grounds

1. FRCMN supplies no grounds to support this change to the church order.
2. While it is true that the consistory has the responsibility to give honourable support to their minister, it has been common practice that the classis has a role in ensuring that consistory lives up to its responsibilities:
 - a. The classical regulations state that the letter of call needs to be part of the documentation submitted to classis by the church calling a minister.
 - b. The church visitors ask annually whether the minister is adequately provided for. They then report on this back to the classis.
3. Since there is typically a new financial arrangement in place with a minister when he retires, it is good for this matter to be reviewed by the classis.

Decision 3

To accept the addition of the words "The retirement of ministers shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons and with the concurring advice of classis" to Art 13 CO as proposed by FRCMN.

Grounds

1. A minister may not independently decide to retire, but he needs the approval of his consistory with the deacons. The consistory is ultimately responsible for the care of both the congregation, and their minister.
2. Classis also needs to provide concurring advice for the retirement of a minister since a minister serves not only one congregation, but also within the classis and the whole bond.
3. Classis has the responsibility to ensure that consistory adequately provides for its minister.

Decision 4

To add the words "and the deputies of Synod" to Article 13 CO, so that it reads, "The retirement of ministers shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons and with the concurring advice of classis and the deputies of Synod".

Grounds

1. The Church of West Albany has requested Synod to change the Church Order, if necessary, to bring consistency between the Church Order and Ecclesiastical Documents.
2. Deputies of Synod should give their concurring advice for the retirement of ministers since a minister serves in the whole bond and not just one congregation.
3. In order to ensure that honourable care is provided to him, it is proper for the deputies of Synod to be involved to ensure everything is done well.
4. Despite past confusion, the deputies of Synod are expected to be present for the retirement of ministers according to past practice, the rules of classis, Ecclesiastical Form 6 and Synod 2012, Art 110.3, which states about this matter, "It is the task of the churches in common to see to it that all the Lord's servants receive support and care, that is honourable to Him and the bond of His churches."

The matter is put to the Advisory Committee for formal adoption.

An indication of support is given by the majority of delegates.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 103, 121)

ARTICLE 14 - Dismissal

The consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without the approval of classis 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 is 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.

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 made 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)

Decision

- 13.1 Request the churches to contribute A\$65 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of Hamilton as from 1 January 2009.
- 13.2 Set aside \$6,000 from general Synod funds for the costs of a visit to Australia by a guest lecturer from Hamilton or Kampen, together with his wife.
- 13.3 Set aside \$3,500 from general Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of Deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors in September 2009, being the 40th Anniversary of the Hamilton College.
- 13.4 Adopt the Australian adaptation of the guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program prepared by Deputies.
- 13.5 Discharge Deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. continue to collect funds for "Hamilton" and forward them to the College;
 - b. continue to correspond with "Hamilton", "South Africa", "Kampen" and "Korea" in order to maintain contact and obtain information, noting that the deputies' mandate to "maintain contact and obtain information" includes that information which may cause concern is reported to Synod; further, in view of the temporary appointment of a non-sister church lecturer, to remind the Canadian Churches that our support of the college is based on the fact that we agree with their foundation and by-laws so that their maintenance remains highly important to us.
 - c. continue to collect funds for theological training, but discontinue the collection of funds for our own theological library;
 - d. continue with our own theological library;
 - e. continue to 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;
 - f. continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required in accordance with Art 18 CO, and as agreed in Art 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Art 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;
 - g. continue to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from one of the theological seminaries of our sister churches once every three years;
 - h. continue to be as closely involved in the work of the Board of Governors of Hamilton as practically possible;
 - i. monitor the practical implications of including the Australian Churches in the Pastoral Training Program of the Hamilton College and collect and disburse funds for this purpose in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program;

- j. investigate the feasibility of offering a basis year of theology to the churches in Australia, for the purpose of establishing a Theological University in the future.
- k. investigate the possibilities of theological training by extension (IT).

(Legana 2009, Art. 17)

Decision

1. Request the churches to contribute A\$65 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of Hamilton as from 1 January 2013.
2. Set aside \$7,000 per trip (currently \$6,000) from General Synod funds for the costs of a visit to Australia by a guest lecturer from Hamilton or Kampen, together with his wife. Also, it is recommended to invite a guest lecturer once every two years, rather than every three years. This would mean two visits between this Synod 2012 and Synod 2015, but then only one visit between Synod 2015 and Synod 2018.
3. Set aside \$4,000 (currently \$3,000) from General Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of Deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors and the Convocation between Synod 2012 and Synod 2015.
4. Discharge Deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. continue to collect funds for "Hamilton" and forward them to the College;
 - b. continue to correspond with "Hamilton" in order to maintain contact and obtain information, and to send notification of new deputies for the purpose of communication with "South Africa", "Kampen" and "Korea";
 - c. continue to collect funds for theological training;
 - d. continue to oversee the Library Fund;
 - e. continue to 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;
 - f. continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required in accordance with Art 18 CO, and as agreed in Art 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Art 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;
 - g. continue to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from one of the theological seminaries of our sister churches once every two years;
 - h. continue to be as closely involved in the work of the Board of Governors of Hamilton as practically possible;
 - i. monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program of the Hamilton College within the Australian Churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program;
 - j. collect and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program; and
 - k. continue to investigate the feasibility of offering the Freshman (ie First) Year of theological study to the churches in Australia.

(Southern River 2012, Article 68)

Decision

- 12.1 a. Request the churches to contribute AU\$82 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary as from 1 January 2016.
- b. Deputies be mandated to, within their report to Synod 2018, report on the amount of contribution paid by our Canadian sisters and propose a level of contribution that matches (as close as possible) such contribution.

Grounds

- a. Synod Legana (Act 2009 at Article 17.m, Ground 4) accepted that the FRCA are responsible to ensure that the ministry of the gospel be maintained and ought to take full financial responsibility for this.
- b. Until such time as the FRCA develop their own theological training, our support to the CRTS should be for the full amount required within their budget.
- c. Our Canadian sisters presently contribute an amount of CA\$82 per communicant member per annum, which equates to around AU\$82.
- d. The FRCA churches remain financially blessed and can be expected to bear the increased contribution amount.

- e. In the event that we do (at some time in the future) develop our own theological training, the CRTS contribution could be reduced to allow the FRCA to absorb the cost of our own training. This would coincide with our reduced use of CRTS.
- 12.2 In relation to the guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary:
- a. Set aside \$7,500 per trip (currently \$7,000) from General Synod funds for the costs of a visit to Australia by a guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary;
 - b. To invite a guest lecturer once every three years, rather than every two years.
- 12.3 To set aside \$4,000 from General Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors and the Convocation between Synod 2015 and Synod 2018.
- 12.4 Discharge deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
- a. Continue
to collect funds for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and forward them to the Seminary;
 - b. Continue
to correspond with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, in order to maintain contact and obtain information, and to send notification of new deputies for the purpose of communication with "South Africa", "the Netherlands" and "Korea";
 - c. Continue
to collect funds for theological training;
 - d. Continue
to 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;
 - e. Continue
to arrange the support of theological students whenever required, in accordance with Art 18 CO, and as agreed in Art 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Art 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;
 - f. Continue
to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary once every three years;
 - g. Continue
to be as closely involved, as practically as possible, in the work of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary;
 - h. Monitor
the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program;
 - i. Collect
and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program; and
 - j. To
investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:
 - i. The desire of the churches for such a seminary;
 - ii. The
potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary;
 - iii. The impact
the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS; and
 - iv. The
resources required for such a seminary, and the availability of such resources.
- Grounds
1. Having
only one theological training centre in the world does not prepare us well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason the CRTS becomes unavailable due to political, economic or other reasons.

2.

Article 17

of the CO states that the Churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry.

12.5 Continue to oversee the Library Fund.

12.6 To cease to investigate the feasibility of offering the freshman (i.e. first) year of theological studies to the churches in Australia and to cease to investigate possible distance education of theological studies to the churches in Australia.

Baldivis 2015, Article 93)

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*)

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.
(*Armada 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.

(*Kelmscott 1996, Article 27, amended after Synod West Albany 2000's decision form classes, Acts Article 43*)

III. Decision:

Synod decides:

To adopt the proposal of Classis North, as amended, as the way to deal with requests for extending permission to speak an edifying word (sometimes called preaching consent) and consider it as an extension of Synod 1996 decision Acts Article 27 as amended by Synod 2000 Article 43 as follows:
Regulations for extending the Permission to Speak an Edifying Word

1. Introduction:

1. These regulations apply only when permission to speak an edifying word has already been granted previously, either to:
 - a. Theological Students (according to the Acts of the 1996 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Article 27 and as amended by Synod 2000, Article 43);
 - b. Candidates for the Ministry of the Word (according to Article 5B of the Australian Church Order).
2. When a brother requests an extension to speak an edifying word he shall:
 - k. make his request in writing;
 - l. address his request to the classis of the church of which he is a member.
 - m. in his request (a) affirm that it is his definite intention to enter the Ministry of the Word in the Free Reformed Churches or one of our sister churches (b) indicate how he is presently working towards that goal; (c) explain how speaking an edifying word fits into that framework;
 - n. present to classis a certificate from the classis which originally granted him permission to speak an edifying word.
3. Classis will grant the extension if Classis is satisfied that granting the extension fits into the framework of Training for the Ministry.
4. In the case of Theological Students:
 - a. who have not been examined by a Classis in the preceding two years they will not be granted an extension without being examined by classis. This examination will consist of a Sermon Proposal and an Examination in Confessions and Creeds.
 - b. Classis shall appoint a minister for the theological student to take on a supervisory role similar to that described in Synod 1996; *"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."*
5. In the case of Candidates for the Ministry:
 - a. who have not been examined by a Classis in the preceding three years they will not be granted an extension without being examined by classis. This examination will consist of a Sermon Proposal and an Examination in Confessions and Creeds;
 - b. who have not received a call within a year can receive an extension to the permission to speak an edifying word and will be placed under the supervision of one of a minister in the same way as point 4.b above;
 - c. who coming from overseas with preaching consent from a sister-church shall apply for an extension to classis within twelve months regardless of the length of the period of consent previously given.
6. If classis grants an extension:
 - a. that extension shall be valid for no more than twelve months;
 - b. Classis shall provide the examinee with a certificate; and
 - c. Classis shall require of the examinee that he make a solemn promise to teach nothing that is contrary to Scripture or the Reformed Confessions.

Grounds:

1. Synod 1996 already made provision for granting permission for speaking an edifying word but gave no regulation for extending this permission.
2. Since this is a matter that concerns admission to the pulpit the churches should agree to be uniform in practice as to the procedure by which this should happen
(*Southern River 2012, Article 103*)

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.

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 building up 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 Kelmscott 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.

Subscription Form adopted by Synod Kelmscott 1983 (Article 48)

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.

Subscription Form as adopted by Synod Kelmescott 1983 (Article 48)

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.

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.

(Kelmscott 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.

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 a subsequent synod to follow the same path.

(*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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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).
5. 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*)

Synod takes note of the submission of Classis South and decides to amend the Rules for Synod 2 as follows: in the event that three Classes will be instituted, the delegation to Synod for each Classis will be three ministers and three elders.

(Legana 2009, Article 18)

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)

Appeal regarding the “scope of classis”

The FRC Busselton appeals a decision of Classis Southwest which it deems to have gone “beyond the scope of Classis; becomes binding upon all the Churches of Classis Southwest, and hence can result in Classis perhaps unwittingly ‘lording it over Consistories.’”

It requests us to review Article 11 of Classis Southwest, October 2013 and rule that:

1. *A major assembly should never take over the task which a minor assembly should do. In this case a classis took over the task which the minor assembly, the consistory, should do, or in the case of the appellants, should be asked to complete. This is based on the church orderly rule that a major assembly should never assume tasks which can and should be completed by the minor assembly (cf. Art 30 CO).*

2. *This decision of Classis is in fact not a judgement on a consistory decision, but an ethical ruling; and*

3. *Classis may not lord it over the churches, and in this decision Classis oversteps the boundaries of its jurisdiction, by doing something it was not allowed to do; making a binding statement on an ethical issue none of the churches had asked for.*

The FRC Busselton also wishes “to point out that the focus of concern for Busselton Consistory relates to the church political aspects of the situation that unfolded. An opinion about membership in unions is not so relevant to our thoughts, but the church political process in this case is important.”

Decision

To deny the appeal of Busselton.

Grounds

1. That “a major assembly should never take over the task which a minor assembly should do” is an accepted principle of our Church Order. However the documentation provided does not indicate that Classis Southwest has transgressed this principle. The FRC Busselton wrongly assumes that the four elders of West Albany only appeal the consistory’s decision to write a letter expressing concern to those who have joined the prison officer’s union, whereas both the body and the conclusion of their appeal make it clear that they are appealing the decision of the consistory of Albany to uphold no longer the previous decision of Albany consistory made in 1956 “that membership of a union is incompatible with church membership.” The elders write in their appeal to Classis:

This then brings us back to the main issue. On the basis of the above we, the undersigned, remain convinced that union membership (including membership of the WAPOU and WAPU) is incompatible with Church membership. If someone wants to be a member of the Church of the Lord then they cannot, in good conscience, be a member of a trade union. The inverse is also true: If someone (once they have all the information at hand) wants to be a union member then they cannot be a member of Christ’s church. Then what they confess on Sunday (about trusting in the Lord and about honouring authority) goes against what they say on Monday (using whatever means are necessary to protect my rights, conditions and privileges). The two are incompatible! We therefore humbly appeal to Classis to consider this issue prayerfully and Scripturally and to rule on the basis of God’s Word alone, for the sake of His church.

2. The statement that “*classis took over the task which the minor assembly, the consistory, should do, or in the case of the appellants, should be asked to complete*” cannot be sustained. The minutes of consistory meetings November 12th 2012 and August 22nd, 2013 indicate that the original decision of June 7th, 2012 was at least twice debated and twice upheld. The minutes of August 22nd 2013 indicate that the matter was finished as far as the consistory was concerned. The elders who dissented were told that they could appeal to Classis, which they did.
3. The statement that “*Classis oversteps the boundaries of its jurisdiction, by doing something it was not allowed to do; making a binding statement on an ethical issue none of the churches had asked for*” cannot be sustained. The FRC Busselton provides no evidence that the Church Order excludes ethical issues from the jurisdiction of Classis. In fact, Article 30 & 31 of the Church Order refer, without restriction, to “matters” and “decisions” that are dealt with and decided upon at a minor assembly, which indicates that all matters pertaining to doctrine and conduct dealt with and decided upon by a minor assembly can be dealt with by, or appealed to, a major assembly.
(*Baldivis 2015, Article 109*)

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.

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. In the event that there are three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three 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 for extraordinary reasons at the request of two classes. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod.

(This article was revised by Synod Legana 2009 and Synod Baldivis 2015)

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 Website assistant under the General Secretary for Relations with Other Churches.
(Rockingham 2003, Article 108)

Synod takes note of the submission of Classis South and decides to amend the Rules for Synod 2 as follows: in the event that three Classes will be instituted, the delegation to Synod for each Classis will be three ministers and three elders.

(Legana 2009, Article 18)

Consequent upon the decision to amend the Rules for Synods under Article 18 (Legana 2009) Synod decided to amend Article 45 Church Order as follows:

Article 45 – Synod

Synod agrees to the following change to Article 45.

"A Synod shall be convened before the appointed time at the request of a classis. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod."

Grounds:

1. Original wording in place in our church order is taken from the church order of a larger bond of churches with a larger number of classes.
2. Original wording would lead to the possibility of five churches in our bond wishing to hold an extraordinary synod while three churches all in one classis do not want this synod. This is not the intent of the church order.

(Rockingham 2003, Article 32)

Decision

The synod shall be held every three years. As long as there are two classes each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders. In the event that there are three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three 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 at the request of a classis. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod.

(Legana 2009, Article 34)

Proposal:

1. To thank the Deputies and discharge them.
2. To appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. provide and operate an audiovisual system which includes the ability for delegates and audience to follow the discussion clearly;
 - b. provide and maintain a computer system for delegates which includes but is not limited to:
 - i. central data storage
 - ii. convenient printing capability;
 - iii. secure internal email facilities;
 - iv. data backup;
 - c. liaise with convening committees and coordinate the audio-visual/computer matters of the Synod venue preparations;
 - d. be present and able to assist at all Synod sessions;
 - e. provide full computer and sound support;
 - f. provide a general logistical support role during Synod for delegates.
3. To make allowance on the budget for one deputy to attend the next Synod.

Grounds:

1. Synod must be able to do its work smoothly through the provision of technical equipment that allows:
 - a. delegates must be able to clearly understand each other;
 - b. the audience to be able to follow the discussion;
 - c. flexibility to expand as the number of delegates changes;
 - d. a computer system that can service Synod with:
 - i. email facilities
 - ii. central storage so that all delegates can access documents/reports they require;
 - iii. printing service to print documents and reports;
 - iv. central backup system.
2. This role has been of great benefit in enhancing the smooth preparation and operation of Synod
(Legana 2009, Article 90)

Decision

To change Article 45 Church Order to the following:

“The Synod shall be held every three years. As long as there are three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three 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 for extraordinary reasons at the request of two classes. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular Synod.”

(Baldivis 2015, Article 130)

Article 45 CO as it was prior to revision in 2003:

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.

Rules for Synods

Synod adopts "Rules for the Synods of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia".
(*Armada 1956, Article 7*)

See Appendix IV for these Rules

Decision

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.

(*Kelmscott 1996, Article 29*)

Decision

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*)

Decision

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*)

Decision

To continue with two clerks in the Executive committee.

(*Rockingham 2003, Article 105*)

Decision

To adopt the proposal of West Albany "that the Rules for Synod be amended as suggested by the Deputies for Synod Treasury, by adopting the changes in the draft proposal for amendment found in Appendix 3o in the Acts of Synod 2009" (pp 186-196).

Ground:

1. The suggested proposal found in Acts Legana 2009 does not include any grounds. The suggested changes are sensible and practical, and they will benefit the efficiency of the work of the Synod Treasurer.

(*Southern River 2012, Article 117*)

Non-delegated office-bearers

Decision

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

(Albany 1962, Article 42)

Acts of Synods

Decision

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

(Launceston 1978, Article 12)

Decision

To write Acts of Closed Sessions only for the purpose of recording confidential matters.

(Launceston 1998, Article 16)

Homepage on Internet

Decision

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

(Armada 2012, Article 13)

Synodical decisions

Decision

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

(Armada 1990, Article 19)

Rules for Synod Treasury

Decision

To adopt the proposed "Rules for Synod Treasury".

(Armada 1990, Article 48)

Decision

1. Accept the Synod Treasurer's Financial Report which comprises a Report, Statement of Receipts and Statement of Expenditure for 1 April 2009 to 30 April 2012.
2. That Deputies for Infrastructure/Venue may also place a claim for loss of wages.
3. Set the rate for reimbursement of motor vehicle travel at 45 cents per kilometre.
4. Set the rate for reimbursement of loss of income at \$210 per day.
5. Adopt the 2012-2015 Budget as amended by Synod.
6. Adopt the cost sharing arrangement for the churches as amended by Synod.
7. Thank the Treasurer for the work done, and discharge him from his mandate.

(Southern River 2012, Article 118)

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 be 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 be 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 be 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 be offered normal Christian hospitality, i.e. lodging and meals.

(Bedforddale 1992, Article 19)

Technical equipment

Decision

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

Decision

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)

Infrastructure and Venue.

Decision

1. To thank the deputies for the work done and discharge them.
2. To appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. provide and operate an audiovisual system which includes the ability for delegates and audience to follow the discussion clearly;
 - b. provide and maintain a computer system for delegates which includes but is not limited to:
 - i. central data storage
 - ii. convenient printing capability;

- iii. secure internal email facilities;
- iv. data backup;
- c. liaise with convening committees and coordinate the audio-visual/computer matters of the Synod venue preparations;
- d. be present and able to assist at all Synod sessions;
- e. provide full computer and sound support;
- f. Provide a general logistical support role during Synod for delegates.

Grounds

1. Synod must be able to do its work smoothly through the provision of technical equipment that allows that:
 - a. delegates must be able to clearly understand each other;
 - b. the audience to be able to follow the discussion;
 - c. flexibility to expand as the number of delegates changes;
 - d. a computer system that can service Synod with:
 - i. email facilities;
 - ii. central storage so that all delegates can access documents/reports they require;
 - iii. printing service to print documents and reports;
 - iv. central backup system.
2. This role has been of great benefit in enhancing the smooth preparation and operation of Synod. (*Southern River 2012, Article 119*)

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*)

The synod shall be held every three years. As long as there are two classes each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders. In the event that there are three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three 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 at the request of a classis. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod. (*Legana 2009, Article 34*)

A proposal from the executive to place Acts of synod on the Internet is adopted, on the proviso that the matters of personal nature are excluded and that in matters relating to other churches discretion will be used. (*Southern River 2012, Article 13*)

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

Decision

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)

Decision

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)

Decision

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)

Decision

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)

Decision in response to an appeal

The declaration regarding the meaning and implications of recognising a church as “true and faithful church” (Synod Launceston 1985, Article 67) is maintained.

(West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 59)

C. SISTER CHURCHES

a . Rules etc .

Rules for sister relations

Synod decides:

1. 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.

(Bedforddale 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.

(Armada 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)

(Armada 1954, Article 14)

Decision

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)

1. Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. Mandate Deputies to:
 - a) Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b) Stay informed on developments concerning the pending merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including the proposed revisions to the Church Order;
 - c) Seek clarification about and discuss the changing manner in which they deal with significant differences with other church federations in their unity discussions;
 - d) In the unity discussion between the CanRC and the URCNA, encourage the CanRC to maintain the principle that the churches maintain a theological college on the basis that we use their college for our Australian churches
 - e) Encourage the CanRC to continue supporting the FRCA as much as possible in our discussions with the RCNZ
 - f) Invite the CanRC to combine a visit to Australia with their planned visit to New Zealand in September
 - g) Send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod 2010 pending finances.

(Legana 2009, Article 40)

Decision

1. To continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayers Forms;
 - c. encourage the CanRC to support the FRCA as much as possible in our discussions with the RCNZ;
 - d. stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ); and
 - e. send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Carman West during 2013, pending finances.

(Southern River 2012, Article 49)

Decision

1. Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

- a. Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
- b. Stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayer Forms;
- c. Stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ);
- d. Send two (2) delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Dunnville, Ontario during 2016, pending finances; and
- e. To liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN.

Grounds

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters that our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.
3. Rules for sister relations state that "in cases of substantial changes or additions to the confessions, Church Order, or liturgical forms" our preference is that "as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached."
4. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the Synodical level reinforces our contact with them.
5. Since the FRCA have suspended our relationship with the RCN, it would be appropriate to monitor what our sister church is doing in this respect.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 96)

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)

Regarding the 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 support the plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba and make funds available for this cause. In light of the importance for the GGRI to maintain their own college to thoroughly train their ministers, deputies should encourage and work with the Dutch sister churches in this matter as much as possible. Also, to offer additional support of the FRCA deputies in the monumental task of upgrading both the educational level and the buildings of the theological college.
5. To financially support two students/ministers to come to Australia during the inter-synodical period to study English and to familiarize themselves with the Australian churches for three months subject to a financial arrangements with the Dutch deputies and subject to available funding from the churches.
6. To provide limited support to ensure that effective communication continues.
7. To monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. Where possible, to encourage these churches to achieve federal unity with the GGRC.
8. To keep in contact and share information with deputies of our Canadian sister churches regarding the Indonesian churches.
9. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies 4,5,6,7 above.

Regarding the GGRC

1. To continue contact with the GGRC, and assess whether the GGRC still desires and values continued contact with the FRCA, and whether there is still value for the FRCA to have contact with the GGRC.
2. To continue to visit the synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.
3. To encourage the GGRC to work towards federal unity with the GGRI, especially in view of the anticipated unification of the three federations of the GGRI. Also, to monitor and report on developments regarding developments in this area.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies as mentioned in 2 above.

(Legana 2009, Article 57)

Decision

1. To thankfully acknowledge the developments in the GGRI with respect to the establishment of a larger federation consisting of the three regional synods and to acknowledge the new federation as our sister in Christ and to carry out that relationship in accord with the established rules; to report to the churches with a clearer picture of the federation of churches in Papua and the federation of churches in Kalimantan Barat that have united and formed one federation with the GGRI-NTT in February 2012, confirming their Reformed character, and the implications of this union.
2. To visit the regional synods and conferences of the GGRI subject to available finance when invited.
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 to support the plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba and make funds available for this cause. In light of the importance for the GGRI to maintain their own college to thoroughly train their ministers, deputies should encourage and work with the Dutch and Canadian sister churches in this matter as much as possible. The deputies shall see to it

that there are no conflicts of interests among those involved. The deputies should offer additional support of the FRCA deputies in the monumental task of upgrading both the educational level and the buildings of the theological college.

5. To encourage the GGRI (via their deputies and the Board of the Theological College) to seek the help of those involved in the establishment of the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang (which is supported by the CanRC in Smithville).
6. To financially support two students/ministers to come to Australia during the inter-synodical period to study English and to familiarize themselves with the Australian churches for three months subject to a financial arrangement with the Dutch deputies and subject to available funding from the churches.
7. To see to it that effective communication with the people involved is possible and if necessary also to make limited financial support available.
8. To monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. Where possible, to bring this to the attention of the regional and general synods of the GGRI so that they are willing to actively seek this federal unity with the GGRC.
9. To keep in contact and share information with deputies of our Dutch and Canadian sister churches regarding the GGRI churches.
10. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in points 2-8.

(Southern River 2012, Article 86)

Regarding the GGRC

Decision:

1. To continue contact with the GGRC, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the reformed character of these churches by advice or other means such as seminars.
2. To continue to visit the synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.
3. To encourage the GGRC to strongly work towards federal unity with the GGRI and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRC Australia.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 2.

(Southern River 2012, Article 87)

Regarding GGRI

Decision

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules.
2. To continue to visit the national and regional Synods and conferences of the GGRI subject to available finance.
3. To support the GGRI with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches.
4. To continue to support the plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba and make funds available for this cause. To encourage the church at Mundijong to make their minister available for lectures at the seminary in Waimarangu, Sumba and to ask the other churches in our bond to assist the church of Mundijong in the pulpit supply during Rev A van Delden's absence. In light of the importance for the GGRI to maintain their own college, deputies should encourage and work with the Dutch and Canadian sister churches in this matter as much as possible. Given the fact that the Dutch churches are decreasing their financial contributions to the theological training in Sumba deputies receive the mandate to approach the Canadian churches for support.
5. To encourage the GGRI and their deputyship re the Theological Seminary to seek the expertise and help of the external adviser Rev Dr AJ Pol and – if necessary – to make some finances available for his task.
6. To contact the church of Smithville and the Canadian deputies re Indonesian churches to develop a common understanding regarding unity amongst the Indonesian churches and to continue to seek cooperation in the theological training of future ministers.
7. To support two students/ministers financially to come to Australia during the inter-Synodical period to study English and to familiarize themselves with the Australian churches for three months subject to financial arrangements with the Dutch deputies and subject to available funding from the churches.
8. To see to it that effective communication with the people involved is possible and if necessary also to make limited financial support available.

9. To consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the Canadian Reformed Churches to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and, to work together with all parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles, and to encourage the national and regional Synod of both the GGRI and GGRI-NTT respectively to plan and progress towards federal unity between themselves and the GGRC, and if possible, the mission work of Smithville in Timor.
10. To keep in contact and share information with deputies of our Dutch and Canadian sister churches regarding the GGRI churches.
11. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies 1-10 above mentioned.
12. To as yet report to the churches with a clearer picture of the GGRI Papua and the GGRI Kalimantan Barat that have united and formed one federation with the GGRI NTT in February 2012, confirming their Reformed character and the implications of this union.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 118)

Regarding GGRC

Decision

1. To continue contact with the GGRC, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the reformed character of these churches by advice or other means such as seminars.
2. To continue to visit the Synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.
3. To consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the Canadian Reformed Churches to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and, to work together with all parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles, and, to encourage the GGRC to plan and progress towards federal unity between themselves and the GGRI, and if possible, the mission work of Smithville in Timor.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 1-3.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 118)

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)

Decision

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 continued improved lines of communications.
3. To authorise deputies to send one delegate to visit the PCK once in the next three years subject to available funds.
4. To ask the deputies to stay informed about the IRCK + RCK + IRPK and to offer any help that is possible and practical through the sister relations with the PCK

(Legana 2009, Article 46)

Decision

1. To continue sister-church relations with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin).
2. To encourage the PCK (Kosin) in their resolve to maintain the unity of the Church.
3. To make the Churches within our bond aware of the Presbyterian Church (Kosin) Australia.
4. To honour the agreement with the RCN and CanRC by sending them a copy of this report as well as our decision regarding the Korean Presbyterian Church.
5. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. to maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. to keep contact with Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin) along with the RCN and the CanRC in the context of taking turns (once every three years) to send, upon available funds, one delegate to a General Assembly in 2013.

(Southern River 2012, Article 66)

Decision

1. To continue sister-church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK) according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates, including (if possible) one Korean speaking delegate, to the KPCK General Assembly in 2016;
 - c. further investigate the model and the mode of missionary work being undertaken by the KPCK in order to assist the local churches of the FRCA to determine whether and how they might cooperate together in their missionary calling.

Grounds

1. The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea as far as can be known, shows faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions.
2. The attendance of two delegates on official visits is preferable (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1). The inclusion of a Korean speaking delegate has proved beneficial.
3. It is helpful for us to have a clear understanding of the mission work undertaken by the KPCK for our instruction and to determine if and how cooperation is possible where we are working in the same geographical locations.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 71)

Netherlands

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)

Decision

1. To continue sister-relations with The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations;
2. 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. According to the rules, discuss with the RCN deputies some concerns as to the developments within the RCN;
 - c. Authorise deputies to attend the next general Synod of the RCN;
 - d. Report to next Synod;
3. To expand the deputyship by one additional minister.

Grounds

1. The RCN give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
2. Deputies have pointed out and given some evidence about some specific concerns. These should be addressed, according to the rules.
3. Personal visits (to Synods) are more helpful than correspondence from a distance. It also improves relations.
4. 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:

Decision

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:

Decision

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 Hoogeveen (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)

Decision

1. To take a comprehensive approach with regards to this Synod's decision about the sister church relationship with the RCN, instead of dealing separately and in detail with every agenda item relating to this sister church relationship.
2. Continue the sister church relations with the RCN under the adopted rules.
3. Express our thankfulness to the RCN regarding the openness and frankness in which their deputies and ours could be engaged in concerns and discussions.
4. Exhort the RCN with love and care to be faithful in their approach to hermeneutics and combating the influence of a post-modern 'spirit of the age' (Ground 3). As specific examples, we mention the following:
 - a. Our ongoing concerns about the position of our Dutch sister Churches on connecting the fourth commandment to the Lord's Day as a day of rest, as we confess in Q/A 103 of the HC.
 - b. Our concerns that the public comments of Dr. Harinck have not been retracted, even though he remains a professor in Kampen.
 - c. Our ongoing concerns regarding the administration of both sacraments for military personnel (refer art. 94, Acts of Synod West Kelmescott).
5. Express and discuss our concerns regarding trends towards unfaithfulness to Scripture, Confessions and Church Order mentioned in Grounds 3-5.
6. To discharge deputies and thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to use the adopted *Rules for Sister Church Relations* to discuss with the RCN deputies BBK:
 - a. Matters raised in Decisions 4, 5 and 7,
 - b. The concerns expressed in the Report of Rev M Nap of which Synod has pronounced to agree with the desire of further hermeneutic study,
 - c. The way deputies *Male/Female in the church* formulate and discuss within the RCN the framework in which men and women serve in pastoral and diaconal tasks,
 - d. Our ongoing concerns regarding the RCN decisions on Divorce and Remarriage (refer Art 94, Acts of Synod West Kelmescott 2006),
 - e. The continuing proliferation and the contents of new hymns,
 - f. The view of the RCN towards recent developments in the NGK for justifying women as elders and ministers, since this is a barrier to unity,
 - g. The need for the RCN to uphold the plain meaning of Scripture regarding Genesis 1-11,
 - h. The concern regarding the signs of independentism as mentioned in Ground 4.
7. To share with the RCN the observation that their current direction is placing tension on our sister church relationship.
8. Call on the FRCA to frequently remember the RCN in their prayers in view of the continuing tensions within the RCN and between the RCN and the FRCA.
9. To beseech the Lord by his grace and blessings to heal the ecclesiastical divisions between the RCN and RCNr.
10. Send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCN and provide a synopsis of synod decisions for the benefit of our Australian churches.

(Legana 2009, Article 71)

I. Decision

1. To present to the RCN an official admonition stating our concerns.
This admonition will be a statement of weighty objections with respect to the doctrine and practice of the RCN in line with the rules for sister church relations.
2. To appoint an advisory committee consisting of brothers chosen by synod to formulate the admonition paying special attention to items that have had deputies' special attention such as:
 - a. Hermeneutics
 - b. Ethics
 - c. Sacraments

- d. Ecclesiology
- e. Church government
- f. Liturgy

The committee is to take into account the responses already received from the RCN. This is to be done in consultation with the Canadian Reformed Church deputies CRCA according to Article 86, Synod Burlington 2010 and the DRCA of the FRCSA according to Article 19.4 of Synod Pretoria 2011.

3. The advisory committee is to report to synod delegates by 1 March 2013.
4. Synod is to reconvene on 22 April 2013 so that this official admonition can be tabled for adoption and so that synod can formulate its decision on how to proceed with our relationship with the RCN.

Grounds

1. Over time the FRCA synods and deputies have clearly expressed their concerns and called upon the RCN synods and deputies to remain faithful. The present deputies have presented evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the word of God.
2. The seriousness of these concerns requires an official admonition that will have consequences.
3. The RCN have clearly communicated to the FRCA:
 - a. that they don't recognize themselves in the image described in the Acts of Legana 2009;
 - b. that they request substantiated reasons supporting our concerns; and
 - c. that they are willing to listen to them.
4. Our rules for sister church relations require mutual assistance, encouragement, exhortation, and care. Although the deputies report as well as previous synod decisions and reports to synod have substantiated many of our concerns it is important to go the extra mile to ensure that our concerns are accurately and properly formulated and understood, particularly when our Dutch sister churches are requesting this.
5. The RCN have clearly communicated to us that they would like communication of official concerns to be addressed directly to their synod, as is the intent for the official admonition.
6. We need to ensure that our concerns are clearly and carefully formulated in the form of a weighty document, making use of the expertise in our churches, and existing work done.
7. Other sister churches share these concerns and have decided to work in consultation with us. (See article 86 of Synod Burlington 2010: Consideration 3.10 "The fraternal delegates of the FRCA and the OPC at Synod Burlington-Ebenezer requested that our deputies work together with theirs in reaching out to the RCN." Decision 4.4.5 "To work in consultation with the deputies of the FRCA and the OPC.")

II. Decision

(To only publish the headings in Item 2 in the Acts. Details under the headings to be forwarded to the Advisory Committee.)

(Southern River 2012, Article 116)

I. Final Decision: [re Letter of Admonition to Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN) (Refer Articles 29, 40, 43, 57, 76, 94, 114, 116, 141, 142)]

1. To present to the RCN an official admonition stating our concerns.

This admonition will be a statement of weighty objections with respect to the doctrine and practice of the RCN in line with the rules for sister church relations.

 - a. Deputies to arrange for a clear and accurate Dutch translation of the letter of admonition to the RCN to accompany the official English letter of admonition.
 - b. To include with the letter of admonition to the RCN all the material referred to in the footnotes, either in hard copy or soft copy.
2. To express our deep sadness at the lack of progress to resolve our concerns to date so that our relationship is strained.

3. To advise the consistories of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to exercise due care with respect to their responsibilities towards those coming from and going to the RCN.
4. To call on the FRCA to frequently remember the RCN in their prayers, in view of the continuing struggle for the truth within these churches.
5. To continue sister church relations with the RCN according to the established rules.
6. To discharge deputies, to thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. to interact with the deputies BBK;
 - b. to report to the next synod;
 - c. to discuss with the deputies BBK the matters contained in the Letter of Admonition as well as:
 - i. concerns regarding independentism;
 - ii. the formulation of the new church order;
 - d. to send two delegates to the next synod of the RCN; and
 - e. to instruct deputies, or two people delegated by them, to attend the conference on hermeneutics to be held in Hamilton Canada 2014.
7. The overtures from FRC Armadale, FRC Mt Nasura, FRC West Albany and FRC Darling Downs have been answered by these decisions.

Grounds:

1. While there are many brothers and sisters in the RCN who remain faithful to God's Word and the Confessions, there is also evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the Word of God. The seriousness of these concerns requires an official admonition.
 2. Because of the grave concerns we have for our sister in The Netherlands, the churches should bring this matter regularly in prayer before the LORD.
 3. The RCN response has been such that the Deputies expressed their great disappointment of little progress in their reports to our synods. This has resulted in a strained relationship between our churches.
 4. Our rules for sister church relations require mutual assistance, encouragement, exhortation, and care. Although the deputies report, as well as previous synod decisions and reports to synod, have substantiated many of our concerns it is important to go the extra mile to ensure that our concerns are accurately and properly formulated and understood, particularly when our Dutch sister churches are requesting this.
 5. The RCN have clearly communicated to us that they would like communication of official concerns to be addressed directly to their synod, as is the intent for the official admonition.
 6. To deal with the concerns that we have, in the most effective way, it is important to also be represented at the next synod of the RCN.
 7. The relations with other churches are governed by General Synod. Within the relationship, there is the practice of issuing and accepting attestations, as well as being able to preach on each other's pulpit. The synod is not able to affirm in all things that the RCN is faithful to the word of God and the confessions. For this reason, the synod has determined that an urgent appeal be made to the RCN. In this situation, synod also has to make clear to the FRCA that because of the concerns expressed in the letter of admonition to the RCN, due care is needed with respect to their responsibilities towards those coming from and going to the RCN.
 8.
 - a. The points raised in the overture of FRC Armadale have all been addressed in this decision.
 - b. Synod cannot decide now to terminate the sister church relationship with the RCN since we first need to know what the response of the RCN will be. This answers the submissions of FRC West Albany, FRC Darling Downs and FRC Mt Nasura.
 - c. Synod cannot address all the individual churches in the bond of the RCN by letter as proposed by FRC Darling Downs because their synod is considering our admonition.
- (Southern River 2012, Second Session, Article 142)*

Re RCNr

VII. Decision

1. To beseech the Lord by His grace and blessings to grant true ecclesiastical unity based on His Word and as maintained in the confessions among the various Reformed churches and groups in the Netherlands.
2. To acknowledge that the RCNr's relationship with the Liberated Church of Abbotsford may be an impediment to a future sister church relationship.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. to keep contact with the RCNr and be receptive to contact from other churches (like the Voorlopig Kerkverband) who have split off from the RCN and the RCNr, and report on further developments in this regard; and
 - b. to work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments.

Grounds:

1. There have been other groups, ministers and churches that have left the RCN but have not joined the RCNr.
2. The RCNr has made it clear that further meaningful contact will only be possible once the FRCA break their sister church relationship with the RCN.
3. Synod 2012 maintains the position of Synods 2006 and 2009: "We hear in the voice of the brother of the RCNr a strong desire to remain reformed" (Synod 2006 Acts 92.III.5.a).
4. The RCNr in their evaluation of the legitimacy of the Abbotsford group's separation from the CanRC, by inference appear to have judged the CanRC as no longer being true according to God's Word as maintained in the confessions.

(Southern River 2012, Article 99)

Decision

1. To suspend our relationship with the RCN. This suspension applies to the rules of our sister church relationship agreement:
 - a. "Rule e) 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." To accept attestations only from those members of the RCN whom the consistory is convinced are faithful in doctrine and conduct, and to issue attestations to the RCN with due care.
 - b. "Rule f) The churches shall in principle open their pulpits to each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted by the respective church federations." To deny ministers from the RCN the privilege of preaching in our federation, or to be called to serve in the FRCA unless the call is approved by Classis.
 - c. "Rule h) The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible." Delegates from the RCN will be invited to attend our next Synod and be accorded the privileges as per rules for Synod 6.2.
2. To send to the next RCN Synod a second letter:
 - a. to express our deep sadness at the response of Synod Ede to our letter of admonition sent by Synod Armadale and advise of the suspension of our sister church relationship;
 - b. to declare that the FRCA's sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next Synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the Synod of Ede 2014.
3. To encourage the FRCA congregations to pray that the Lord grant the RCN to uprightly uphold and defend the Scriptural truth as maintained in the three forms of unity.
4. To discharge deputies, to thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. to interact with the deputies BBK;

- b. to monitor and analyse responses by the RCN;
- c. to interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice with respect to the role of men and women in the church, and present the clear biblical teaching on this matter;
- d. to send to the consistories of the RCN, a copy of the first and second letter sent to the next Synod of the RCN in 2017;
- e. to send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCN;
- f. to report to the next Synod.

Grounds

1. The RCN acknowledge that they have changed (see decision in response to admonitions 2.a.3.), but deny any Scriptural or Confessional deviation, and consequently feel no need for repentance and return.
2. There is ample evidence of the toleration of the use of a hermeneutic among them which allows man to transgress God's commandments and invalidates the Word of God.
3. As sister churches we have promised to 'exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world... and to mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.' (Rules for sister churches).
4. The RCN have clearly communicated to us that concerns and objections are to be addressed directly to their Synod. Synod Ede has asked that objections are to be addressed directly to their Synod. Synod Ede has specifically asked for advice from sister churches regarding the role of men and women in the church.
5. By suspending the sister church relationship, our call for obedience and submission to the clear meaning of Scripture may yet be heard and acted upon by many in the RCN.
6. Because of the grave concerns we have for our sister in The Netherlands, the churches should bring this matter regularly in prayer before the LORD.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 75)

South Africa

Decision

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) according to the established rules.
2. To agree that it is desirable for deputies to aim to visit alternate Synods of the FRCSA.

Grounds

1. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confession and Church Order.
2. 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.
3. 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).

Decision

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)

Decision

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To instruct deputies to send one delegate to their next synod (2011).
3. To mandate deputies to coordinate responses to any requests received, and to involve the churches and/or other deputies as appropriate.
4. Synod mandates the Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches to coordinate the support for needy churches in South Africa, and give opportunity for the Australian churches to take on particular "projects" in order to involve the congregations beyond simply finances in the support for our South African sisters. This could include continuing the support for the manse in Bethal, supporting a minister in Bethal, and/or supporting further needy church projects.

(Legana 2009, Article 45)

Decision:

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To appoint an auditor for the financial records of the support provided.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. coordinate responses to any requests for support received from the Deputies for Needy Churches in South Africa, and to involve the Australian churches as appropriate;
 - b. keep the Australian churches informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta;
 - c. send two delegates to their next synod and, if possible, to visit the church(es) where support is provided.

(Southern River 2012, Article 67)

Decision

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To appoint the Deputies Auditor for Synod Treasurer to audit the financial records of the support provided and report to the next Synod.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. coordinate responses to any requests for support received from the Deputies for Needy Churches in South Africa, and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate;
 - c. keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta;
 - d. send two delegates to the next FRCSA Synod in 2017.
4. Synod appreciates the clarification given by the delegates from the FRCSA and the DGK that the DGK did not require the FRSCA to sever the relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches as a precondition for closer relations.

Grounds

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

2. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

3. Our South African sister churches request ongoing financial support. Such support should be coordinated and the churches kept informed. Financial accountability of the support provided is important.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 128)

D . CONTACT CHURCHES

Decision

As there should be only one form of permanent ecclesiastical fellowship between sister churches, and this under the mutually accepted rules for correspondence, any rules for temporary ecclesiastical contact should make clear that the contact has as its ultimate aim the establishment of a sister-church relationship.

(Launceston 1985, Article 74 sub II)

Decision

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)

Decision

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.

(Armada 1972, Article 53)

Closer contacts with geographically close churches will be developed wherever possible. Sumba, Sri Lanka and Taiwan are mentioned in this context.

(Armada 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.

(Kelmscott 1983, Article 77)

Decision

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)

Decision

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)

Decision

- 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)

Decision

- 5. In meeting the member churches of the ICRC to maintain the decision of the 1990 Synod, Article 58.

(Byford 1994, Article 83)

Presbyterian churches

Decision

- 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:

1. To study/discuss the outstanding areas of concern with FCR, EPCI and RPCI, addressing the following questions:
 - a. What weight the FRCA should give to the remaining areas of concern;
 - b. Whether or not all areas of concern must be cleared before the FRCA can progress with contact/relations;
 - c. How in a manageable and responsible way the FRCA can fulfil their obligations towards churches geographically/culturally far away;
 - d. 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

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.")

(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.

(*Armada 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.

(*Armada 1990, Art.102*)

Decision

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.

(Bedforddale 1992, Art.78)

Decision

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 Bedforddale 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.

(Kelmscott 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)

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.

(Armada 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.

Decision

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

(Bedforddale 1992, Art.102)

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

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 despise 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.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.96)

1. 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)

Decision

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 Judaisers, 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"

Brazil

Reformed Churches in Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil – IRB)

Decision

To accept the recommendation of West Albany to thank the deputies for their work and not renew the mandate, with the amended grounds.

Grounds

1. As a small federation of churches it is important and practical for us to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have greater responsibility (see Acts of Synod 1990, Art.58).
2. A sister church relationship is not required to give theological, academic or financial support to the IRB.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 129)

Canada

Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford

Decision

Not to agree to the request of the FRC Armadale, FRC Kelmscott or FRC Mt Nasura to investigate the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford and to accept the deputies grounds.

Southern River 2012, Article 59)

Indonesia :

Reformed Movement in Indonesia

Decision

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

(Armadale 1990, Art.114; Bedforddale 1992, Art.59)

Decision

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

Decision

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.

(Armadale 1990, Art.114)

Decision

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.

(Bedforddale 1992, Art.59)

Decision

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.

(Kelmscott 1996, Art.67).

Decision

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.

(Kelmscott 1983, Art.78)

Decision

1. Synod decides to reconfirm the decision of the 1983 Synod that The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland are faithful churches of our Lord.
2. 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).
3. Synod decides that this temporary relation will be reassessed at the 1989 Synod.
 4. 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)*

Decision

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)*

Decision

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.

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)".

Decision

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.

Decision

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.

(Bedforddale 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

Decision

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)

Decision

(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.

Decision

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.)

Decision

1. to cease further contacts with the RCJ.

2. to inform the PCK of this decision.

(Armada 1990, Art.121)

Netherlands

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Restored)

Decision

1. Not to accept the RCN_r request to acknowledge them as sister churches.
2. To acknowledge the RCN_r desire to remain reformed.
3. To beseech the Lord by His grace and blessings to heal the ecclesiastical divisions between the RCN and RCN_r.
4. To thank the deputies for their work and mandate new deputies to:
 - a. Remain informed about developments in the RCN_r,
 - b. Continue contact and encourage the RCN_r to discuss the issues and struggles of concern with the RCN in humility and love.

Grounds

1. Synod 2009 has already decided to continue the FRCA's sister church relationship with the RCN.
2. Synod 2009 maintains the position of Synod 2006: "not being able to recognise them (at that time Synod 2006 Acts 92.III.3]) as the continuing RCN means that we cannot enter sister relations with them" (Synod 2006 Acts 92.III.4).
3. Synod 2009 maintains the position of Synod 2006: "We hear in the voice of the brothers of the RCN_r a strong desire to remain reformed" (Synod 2006 Acts 92.III.5.a).
4. It is a serious matter to separate and may never be done hastily nor without exhausting every effort to maintain the unity of the faith. The injunction 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. The encouragements to discuss the issues and struggles need to continue because it is very difficult for the FRCA to determine whether all efforts to maintain the unity have been exhausted.

(Legana 2009, Article 75)

Decision

- a. Not to act on the proposals of FRC Byford and FRC Mundijong at this time and await further developments.
- b. To maintain contact with both the DGK and GKN and to be receptive to future contact with those who have already, or who do withdraw from the RCN and report on further developments in this regard.
- c. To await recommendations from among the churches on how to proceed with these contacts.
- d. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and GKN;
 - to work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments;
 - to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith;
 - to maintain contact; and
 - to report back to the next Synod.

Grounds

1. To recognise the situation in the Netherlands is in a state of flux.
2. There are members, ministers and churches within the RCN who continue to express serious objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them, and still need time to consider how to respond.
3. The DGK and the GKN both recognised the need to separate themselves from the false teachings and subsequent practices in the RCN. Given our own concerns with developments within the RCN it is wise to monitor developments in these church federations.
4. Any proposal for continuing contact with these newly formed churches should follow the normal church orderly route, that is by way of the minor assembly (CO art 30).
5. The deputies' report makes it clear that for the GKN, a formal relationship with the FRCA is presently not feasible.
6. Synod 2012 and the deputies' report notes that the DGK have decided not to entertain sister church relations with the FRCA, whilst the FRCA have sister church relations with the RCN.
7. This is consistent with the mandate to the deputies in 2012.
8. We decided in Article 96 re: CanRC 2.e. to liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN.
9. The LORD calls us to pursue unity with all faithful believers.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 115)

New Zealand
Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)

Decision

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)

Decision

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)

Decision

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.

(Armada 1990, Art.53).

Decision

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)

Decision

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.

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:

- a. to see whether the RCNZ will enter into fraternal relationship with the FRCA;
- b. to elicit and assess responses from the churches regarding this decision;
- c. 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;
- d. To appoint deputies with the new mandate:
 - I. 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.
 - II. Continue to dialogue with the RCNZ on matters of common concern.
 - III. Authorise two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ.
 - IV. Invite delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod.
 - V. 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*)

Decision:

1. Not to proceed with the decision in principle to offer fraternal relations

2. To confirm what the 2000 Synod said in principle, namely, to recognise that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ,
3. To ask the RCNZ for time and patience so that we can discuss the matter of third parties and the implications of an offer of sister relation with them, and that we can offer sister relations with unity and joy
4. To recognise that the only remaining difficulty with entering into a relationship with the RCNZ is the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCA
5. To assess the situation with respect to this relation at an upcoming synod to see if this remains a difficulty to entering into full sister-church relations or not
6. To appoint deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. to convey these decisions to the RCNZ
 - b. to assess to what extent the triangular relationship needs to be an impediment for entering into full sister-church relations and to report back to the churches on this six months before the next synod
 - c. to intensify dialogue with the RCNZ on matters of common concern and interest, also by inter-synodical visits, if the synodical budget allows
 - d. to invite the RCNZ to send delegate(s) to our next synod, and to authorise deputies to send two delegates to the next synod of the RCNZ
 - e. to keep the churches informed of any developments in the RCNZ and to encourage the churches to become better acquainted with the RCNZ by way of literature and visits

Grounds:

1. From the responses of the churches to the decision of the 2000 Synod and from the appeals of the churches it becomes clear that the offer of fraternal relations does not find general acceptance. The RCNZ have rejected this offer as well.
2. All the reports of the deputies have informed us that the RCNZ has the three marks of the true church and thus the decision in principle should now be confirmed.
3. The triangular relationship with the CRCA continues to be a point of division among the FRCA, although we note that the RCNZ maintain this relationship in a Scriptural manner. In order to build consensus among ourselves to what extent the triangular relations should be an impediment, it is best to take time before we offer sister relations, so that it can be done with unity and joy. Hopefully the RCNZ can accept that desire.

(Rockingham, 2003, Article 72)

2. 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)

Decision

2. To confirm what was said by Synod 2003, namely to recognise that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. To note that no substantial progress has been made in the understanding between the FRCA and RCNZ on the matter of the importance of the impediment which prevents the FRCA from entering into a sister relationship with the RCNZ.
4. To affirm that Synod's positive view towards the RCNZ has consequences in practical support and interaction. e.g. working together on the PNG mission field and supporting the theological training at the Bible College in PNG.
5. To renew the mandate of deputies to strive for sister-relations with the RCNZ by:
 - a. Monitoring the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA;
 - b. Encouraging the RCNZ to continue to admonish the CRCA and be consequential in this relationship.
 - c. To discuss with the RCNZ their decision made at Synod Hasting 2008, which says that the RCNZ "cannot accept that their sister-church relationship with the CRCA should be an impediment to the FRCA accepting their offer of sister-church relations".
 - d. Authorising two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, in order to convey greetings and discuss matters of mutual interest.
 - e. Reassuring the RCNZ that it is our sincere desire to enter into a sister relationship with them but the matter of their sister relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment.
 - f. 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).
 - g. Providing information about the RCNZ to the membership of our churches.
6. To deny the overture of FRC Mt Nasura.
7. To decline the invitation of the RCNZ that we attend as observers at the meeting of the ICRC to be held DV in September 2009 in Christchurch.

(Legana 2009, Article 63)

Decision

1. To confirm what was said by Synod 2000 (Acts Article 93), namely, to recognize that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to express our continued resolve to work towards the goal of a sister church relationship, and thereby bring our unity in faith to practical and visible expression.
2. To continue to encourage our local churches to exercise practical support and interaction wherever possible in areas that are not reserved for relationships between sister churches.
3. To acknowledge that the RCNZ decided to change its relationship with the CRCA (Minutes of the Acts RCNZ Synod 2011, Art. 93 pp1-24) "... 3. To discontinue the sister church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship."
4. Not to accept the deputies proposal to enter into fraternal relations with the RCNZ.
5. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide to the RCNZ a copy of the Acts of Synod Armadale 2012;
 - b. observe and report on the continuing faithfulness of the RCNZ in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy;
 - c. determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA differs from their previous sister church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods;
 - d. encourage the RCNZ to continue to be consequential in their relationship with the CRCA;
 - e. invite delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod;
 - f. upon invitation attend the next Synod of the RCNZ with two deputies and endeavour to meet with the inter-church relations committee of the RCNZ at least twice within the inter-synodical period, in order to stay well-informed about the RCNZ (pending budget constraints);
 - g. provide information about the RCNZ to the membership of our churches and keep the churches informed about the decisions of the RCNZ and the work of the deputies.
6. That these decisions adequately address submissions from FRC Byford, FRC Darling Downs and FRC Mt Nasura.

Grounds

1. There is no reason to question the continuing faithfulness of RCNZ.
2. In our continuing recognition of the RCNZ as a true church it is important for deputies to provide details of ongoing faithfulness as would normally be done in a sister church relationship.
3. Synod West Kelmscott 2006 (Art 102) decided: "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, eg application of membership from former members of the RCNZ, matters pertaining to the mission field and theological and Christian education" and this is being implemented.
4. Synod Rockingham 2003 (Art 72) decided "not to proceed with the decision in principle to offer fraternal relations" on the grounds that "From the responses of the churches to the decision of the 2000 Synod and from the appeals of the churches it becomes clear that the offer of fraternal relations does not find general acceptance. The RCNZ have rejected this offer as well." The recommendation of deputies to offer fraternal relations has not sufficiently demonstrated that these grounds are no longer valid.
5. Synod cannot determine at this time whether the RCNZ's new relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCA remains an impediment to enter into a sister church relation since the RCNZ rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship have not yet been finalised. Synod RCNZ 2011 (Art 93.2) "decided to adopt provisionally the proposed Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as the rules for this new relationship".
6. It is beneficial to meet together to convey greetings, discuss matters and come to understand each other and to develop regular contacts.
7. Synod 1990 decided to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches which are geographically closer to us (Art 58), which requires allocating a certain measure of priority and resources to our growing relationship with the RCNZ.
8. Synod 1996 (Acts, Art 53.4) observed that "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). Therefore there is urgency to remedy the present anomaly of recognising a church to be true and faithful without a sister church relationship.

(Southern River, 2012, Article 89)

Decision

To accept Recommendations 1-5, together with the grounds, of the deputies report:

1. Express thankfulness for the faithfulness deputies have observed in the RCNZ and in their decision to discontinue a sister church relationship with the CRCA.
2. To offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship.
3. To invite delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod.
4. To authorise two delegates to visit (if invited) the next Synod of the RCNZ.
5. To discharge deputies and thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - b. To convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide them with a copy of the Acts as well as the 'Rules for Sister Church Relations';
 - c. to continue to monitor the impact of the Ecumenical Fellowship relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod 2015;
 - d. to promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers where opportunity arises as well as exchange of publication of articles;
 - e. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established 'Rules for Sister Church Relations' and keep the churches informed;
 - f. to report to next Synod along with recommendations.

Grounds

1. The final impediment identified by previous Synods to becoming sisters, being the sister relationship between RCNZ and CRCA, has now been removed.

2. The RCNZ has placed safeguards in place in the new "Rules for Ecumenical Fellowship" in an effort to maintain the purity of the preaching and the sanctity of the Lord's table.
3. The RCNZ is showing in many ways and in many areas to be a faithful church of the Lord
4. Jesus Christ.
5. For a sister relationship to function in a meaningful way, it is important for the membership to become acquainted.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 38)

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)

North America

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

Decision

Synod mandates deputies for relations with churches abroad to provide the URCNA with information about our churches in response to their letter to us, to take up contact with them, and to report to the next Synod with:

- a. information about these churches;
- b. a recommendation about how to proceed.

Grounds

1. The URCNA are an English-speaking confessionally-Reformed federation of churches with a history, principles, and practices similar to our own.
2. Our sister churches in Canada are in a close relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches and pursuing federative unity with them. The CanRC Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity strongly encourage us to establish this contact, noting that "it will also jibe wonderfully with the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in which the CanRC and URCNA are engaged."
3. There are people from the URCNA who visit our churches and members of our churches who visit them.
4. The URCNA produce numerous resources and also have experience in church planting that we could potentially benefit from.
5. The URCNA is involved in mission work in the Asia region, notably the Philippines.
6. Due to the fact that we share a common language and similar culture, should a sister church relationship develop this would mutually benefit our federations in the areas of mission work, the calling of ministers from our respective federations and the use of sermons in our respective services.
7. While Synod 1990 art. 58 decided to concentrate on relations and contact with churches that are geographically closer to us, the above grounds are compelling reasons to pursue this relationship.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 39)

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 sister churches 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.

1. 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 for 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:

1. To thank the deputies for the work that they have done and discharge them from their task.
2. To appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. To keep up-to-date with any new developments among the FRCP and RFCP;
 - b. To lend support to these churches, upon their request, by means of instructive literature that may help build up their Reformed character;
 - c. If funding permits, to make a visit to these churches;
 - d. To report to next Synod.
3. Advise the Dutch sister churches that these churches *not* be directed to come under the influence of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Philippines (CRCP).

Grounds:

1. Although these churches show the desire to embrace the Reformed faith, much learning is needed for them to understand and apply it.
2. Only time will tell whether the FRCP and the RFCP are willing to follow the Scriptural and thus Reformed doctrine and practice.
3. The members of these churches have very limited resources and badly need true Reformed literature.
4. It would be beneficial to all, the FRCA and the FRCP and the RFCP to maintain some face-to-face contact.
5. 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)

(Armada 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
- c. rules for TEC as formulated by Synod Albany 1987, Art.82, overlooking the amendment made by Synod Armadale 1990, Art.139, Ed.)
- d. 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.

Singapore :

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

Synod decides:

2. to instruct the deputies to investigate thoroughly this church 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.

(Armada 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.

(Bedforddale 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.

(Kelmscott 1996, Art.61).

Decision

That Synod appoint deputies with a mandate to take up contact with the FERCS on behalf of the FRCA, and to make a careful investigation of this church according to BCF Art 29, exploring the feasibility of a sister church relationship, and presenting a detailed report and accompanying recommendations to Synod 2015.

(Southern River 2012, Art. 22)

Decision

1. Synod recognises the First Evangelical Reformed Church (FERC) of Singapore as a true and faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Synod extends an offer of a sister church relationship with the FERC of Singapore, according to the adopted rules of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA).
3. Should the FERC of Singapore accept the offer of a sister church relationship, this relationship is to take effect from the date of such written acceptance by the FERC of Singapore.
4. The current deputies be discharged from their appointment, and that Synod appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Contact the FERC of Singapore with the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015.
 - b. Work through the practical issues that arise from having a sister church relationship with a single church, such as those arising from Rules c and h of our Rules for Exercising Sister Relations.
 - c. Visit the FERC of Singapore two times in the next three years to learn more about them and strengthen our relationship.
 - d. Give timely reports concerning the FERC of Singapore to members of the FRCA.
 - e. Offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where requested and feasible.
 - f. Report to the next Synod the results of their work.
 - g. Invite delegates from the FERC of Singapore to our next Synod.

Grounds

1. Deputies have sufficiently demonstrated that the FERC of Singapore shows the marks of the true church of the Lord according to Art 29 of the Belgic Confession.
2. Deputies have shown that there are tangible benefits for both the FERC of Singapore and the FRCA from a sister church relationship.
3. Appointing new deputies will ensure that the decision is followed up and carried out. Furthermore, there needs to be a liaising body between the FRCA and the FERC of Singapore.
4. The existing Rules for Exercising Sister Relations do not prohibit a sister church relationship with a single church.
5. Since the FERC of Singapore has no official bond with another church they may require assistance from time to time and could benefit from the resources the Lord has given us.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 58)

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.)

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*)

Decision

- 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.
(*Armada 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.

(*Armada 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*)

Reformed Churches of Brazil (RCB)

1. Synod ensure that a deputyship be mandated to take up contact with these churches "to investigate whether meaningful sister church relations are possible".

2. Synod respond to the RCB in writing, informing them of our decision.

(*Legana 2009, Article 21*)

Decision:

Synod decides to re-appoint as part of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad, deputies specifically for the Reformed Churches in Brazil with the mandate to approach the Reformed Churches of Brazil again in order to ascertain if a meaningful sister church relationship can be established.

(Southern River 2012, Article 48)

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 Bedforddale and Byford have expressed the same belief that participation in the ICRC is contrary to Scripture, Confession and Church Order.

2.

The appeals of Bedforddale 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.

(Kelmscott 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.

(Kelmscott 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 Bedforddale 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 Bedforddale 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.

Overture:

Mt Nasura asks Synod

1. to ensure that deputies' mandates are clear and concise and that deputies are held properly accountable for the manner in which they have executed their task;
2. to use clear language in its recorded decisions and
3. to explicitly record that deputies' reports have no formal status.

Decision

Synod takes note of Mt Nasura's overture and decides that this overture needs no formal decision since deputies' reports are exactly what they are, working documents of synod (Rule 10 of Rules for Synod).

(Legana 2009, Article 16)

Decision

The terms of deputies who are reappointed will, as a rule, be limited to a maximum of 9 years unless Synod decides that there are good reasons to reappoint (e.g. to maintain continuity, expertise, etc.).

(Legana 2009, Article 21)

Decision

3. Release deputies from their task and appoint new deputies in the following manner:

- a. appoint one deputy and one alternate from each classical region; and
- b. decide that when a classic region requires the advice of deputies article 48, it request one deputy from each of the other classical regions (thus, when Classis Central request these deputies, the deputy of Classis South West and the deputy of Classis North attend. When Classis South West requires these deputies then those of Classis Central and Classis North attend and if Classis North require them then a deputy of Classis Central and Classis South West attend).

(Southern River 2012, Article 110)

Decision

1. That:
 - a. consistories be advised to visually examine declarations as confirmation of their ministerial status and faithfulness when inviting ministers from sister churches to their pulpits;
 - b. advising consistories, upon request, to grant ministers of the Word a declaration as confirmation of their ministerial status and faithfulness when intending to serve on the pulpits of sister churches.
2. That the treasurer be instructed to, as yet, pay the \$1,500.00 expense for the trip to Synod Ede in May 2014.
3. That from now on deputies continue to use the allocation of its funds as a guideline, but be permitted to use its overall budgeted funds as they see fit within possible changing circumstances.

Grounds

1. From previous, as well as this present, deputies' reports to Synod it is evident that the present system of declarations to assure that only faithful ministers in good standing of sister-churches are invited to the pulpits is not functioning. This is an important matter that should be remedied. The proposed change puts the onus on the churches to guard their own pulpits.
2. While recognising that sending a deputy to Synod Ede for a second session is an anomaly, (could not have been foreseen by Synod Armadale) in view of the circumstances, i.e. Synod Ede, dealing with the FRCA (among others) admonitions, Synod endorses the deputies' decision to send someone to be present and therefore will not leave the deputies out of pocket.
3. In view of decision 2 above, and with the realisation that there may be unforeseen circumstances where it would be wise for deputies to travel in ways that vary from precise Synod decisions, to grant deputies discretion to allocate funds as they see fit so long as the allocations are kept as a guideline and the expenses remain within budget.

(Baldivis 2015, Article 40)

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.

(Armada 1980, Art.27)

Decision

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

Decision

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)

Decision

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.

(Armada 1990, Art.126)

Decision

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.

(Bedforddale 1992, Art.52)

Decision

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

3. to renew the mandate given by Synod Bedforddale 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 Bedforddale 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).
(*Kelmscott 1996, Art.26*)

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 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*)

Decision

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

2. To purchase another new cabinet to house future archives;
3. To receive gratefully the report of the inspection of the Synod Archives and Library;
4. To thank the Deputies for their work and discharge them.

Grounds:

1. The archives and library were well cared for.
2. A new cabinet is needed.

(West Albany 2000, Art.23)

Decision

1. To accept the report of the deputies and thank them for their work.
2. That in the next edition of the Synod rules, the rules of the archivist will be appended.

(Southern River 2012, Article 100)

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.
(Armada 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)

VII. Decision:

1. Synod appoint deputies to monitor developments with respect to the NKJV and the NIV.
2. a. Synod decide, in the interim, that specifically the NIV 2011 edition be disallowed for use in the church services.
- b. Synod charge the deputies with an evaluation of the NIV 2011 edition, with particular focus on its feminist leanings so that synod 2015 can come with a definitive decision.
3. Synod charge deputies to evaluate the ESV with a view to allowing the ESV to be used in the church services.

Grounds:

1. The NIV has changed dangerously and the danger is always there also for the NKJV.
2. The ESV has received a positive evaluation from many in reformed churches and it would be worthwhile to properly evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.
(Southern River 2012, Article 91)

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.

(Armada 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 Songs 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.
(*Kelmscott 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.
(*Kelmscott 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*)

- 2. That although there is a desire for an Australian Book of Praise, at present the Canadian Book of Praise sufficiently meets our needs.
- 3. To appoint deputies with the mandate to
 - a. Monitor developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.
 - b. Resume investigations regarding copyright, printing costs and feasibility of producing an Australian Book of Praise only if the Canadian Book of Praise is substantially altered such that it is no longer suitable for use by the Australian churches.
 - c. Keep the churches informed of, and elicit responses from the churches regarding developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.
- 4. To permit the 2008 interim Book of Praise with NIV prose section for use in the churches.
(*Legana 2009, Article 25*)

- 1. To invite the churches to scrutinize and test that portion of the 28 additional hymns to be adopted at the CanRC Synod 2010 outside the church services so that a following synod can determine whether to adopt them.
- 2. To extend the mandate of the Deputies for the Book of Praise to include the following:
 - a. To scrutinise the revised sections of the Book of Praise, especially the completely revised Psalter, and that portion of the 28 additional hymns to be adopted at the CanRC Synod 2010.
 - b. To invite comments from the churches on these revisions.
 - c. To receive and assess comments from the churches about that portion of the 28 additional hymns to be adopted at the CanRC Synod 2010.
 - d. To pass on the findings to the Standing Committee of Book of Praise so that the Standing Committee of Book of Praise can use them.
 - e. To report to our next synod so that it can decide on the above matters.
 - f. To give account to synod of the principles and guidelines used to scrutinize these hymns.
(*Legana 2009, Article 42*)

Synod decides:

- 1. To discharge the deputies and thank them for their work.
- 2. To adopt provisionally the 150 Psalms as revised in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010) for use in the churches.
- 3. To adopt provisionally the 65 Hymns which we have in the current Book of Praise (2004 edition) with the changes made in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010) for use in the churches.
- 4. Not to adopt the 19 additional Hymns as provisionally adopted by Synod Burlington 2010.
- 5. To inform the churches that the 19 additional Hymns may not be used in the worship services.
- 6. That it is not desirable, nor in line with the Church Order (Article 30) to be tied to the new hymns being adopted or considered by the CanRC, in accordance with the overtures of Byford, Darling Downs, Kelmscott and West Albany.
- 7. To endorse the guidelines listed under Appendix 1 as a starting point in the evaluation of proposed hymns.
- 8. To appoint deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Monitor developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.
 - b. Interact with the Canadian SCBP to ensure that Australian input is taken into consideration.
 - c. Keep the churches informed of developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.

- d. To submit relevant material already received from the churches to the Canadian SCBP for consideration.
- e. To study the use of capitalization for personal pronouns referring to God.
- f. To invite input from the churches regarding the desirability of having an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.
- g. Recommence investigations regarding copyright, printing costs and feasibility of producing an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise, in the event that a future Synod will decide to go that way, which would include:
 - i. 150 psalms as printed in the Canadian Provisional Book of Praise 2010.
 - ii. The 65 hymns as found in the current Book of Praise (edition 2004) with the changes made in the Provisional Book of Praise 2010.
 - iii. The Ecumenical Creeds as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the deletion of the word "Christian" from the Apostles Creed.
 - iv. The Three Forms of Unity as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the changes authorized by FRCA Synods over the years.
 - v. Orders of Worship as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise.
 - vi. Liturgical Forms as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the changes authorized by FRCA Synods over the years.
 - vii. The Church Order as adopted by the Australian Churches.

Grounds:

1. The Deputies concluded that the revisions to the 150 Psalms and the 65 Hymns in the Provisional Book of Praise are an improvement on the present version in the Book of Praise 2008.
2. The CanRC has not made a final decision regarding the 19 'new' Hymns in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010).
3. Although, in 2009, some churches indicated that they wanted to stay in line with the Canadian Book of Praise, it has not been shown that the actual desire to have more hymns is alive in the churches.
4. The FRCA should only be obliged to consider new hymns if and when these are put forward by the Australian churches.
5. It can be argued that, in practice, Synod 2009 (Article 24) restricted the decision of future Synods to consider an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.
6. Deputies recommend that Synod adopt the "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church as used by the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) of the Canadian Reformed Churches", in line with the mandate given to them by Synod 2009 (Article 42.2.f).
7. Some churches questioned the lack of capitalization of personal pronouns referring to God.
8. It is prudent to invite input from the churches regarding an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.

(Southern River 2012, Article 106)

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.

(Armada 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.

To thank the Church at Launceston for their work as deputies for 'Days of Prayer' and accept their report as the completion of the mandate, and to discharge deputies.

Grounds:

The deputies have carried out their duties in accordance with Article 66 of the Church Order. Their report notes that a national Day of Prayer was proclaimed for Sunday 15th February 2009, in view of the Victorian bushfire disaster of February 2009.

(Legana 2009, Article 77)

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)

Decision:

To appoint new deputies officially designated as the Nominating Authorities to discharge duties under the Marriage Act 1961

(Southern River 2012, Art. 74)

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.