

Opening of Synod

By God's good providence and care, the 25th synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia could be convened by the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, also the convening church of the very first synod in 1954. As part of the opening of synod, the chairman of the Armadale consistory, elder A.M.C. Bruning, invited a full auditorium to join in singing psalms and hymns of praise to God, in this way acknowledging the sovereign power of our Triune God, and praising Him for His grace and care over His church. In prayer of intercession, thanksgiving was expressed to the Lord for the many blessings He had provided the churches, and supplication for God's blessing over the work of synod in particular. In his opening remarks of welcome, br. Bruning expressed gratitude to the Lord for the continued growth in the churches, and in particular for the provision of ministers of the gospel during the inter-synodical period. He also exhorted and encouraged all present with a meditation based on Romans 15:5-6.

Delegates and Officers

The examination of credentials confirmed that 18 delegates were lawfully present, delegated from three classes as follows:

Classis North: Rev P.K.A. de Boer, Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze, Rev E. Rupke, Elder M. Hoogerdijk, Elder G. Spyker, and Elder J. Wielstra.

Classis Central: Rev. A. VanDelden, Rev. W. VanderJagt, Rev. C. Vermeulen, Elder W. Amoraal, Elder E. Heerema, Elder A. Wagenaar

Classis South-West: Rev S. `t Hart, Rev. R.E. Pot, Rev. T. VanSpronsen, Elder G. `t Hart, Elder J. Plug, Elder W. VanderVen

The election of officers to serve synod resulted in Rev. A. VanDelden serving as chairman, Rev. R.E. Pot as vice-chairman, Elder W. VanderVen as first clerk, and Rev P.K.A. deBoer as second clerk. Sr. K. VanDuyn was appointed as an administrative assistant, and capably served synod in this capacity to assist the first clerk. After the constitution of synod, the delegates rose to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, after which synod adjourned for delegates and visitors to enjoy fellowship over coffee.

Foreign delegates

Relations with foreign churches featured prominently on synod's agenda, and in that connection various representatives from sister churches of the FRCA could also be welcomed at synod. These included delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches (Rev. A. Souman, Rev. W. Wielenga), the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (Rev. J.A. Breytenbach), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Br. J.H. deJonge, Rev P.K. Meijer, Prof. K. Wezeman), and the Reformed Churches in Indonesia [GGRI] (Rev. M. Biha). A letter of greeting was received from another sister church, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin). Also welcomed were several representatives on behalf of churches in ecclesiastical contact, including the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (Rev. P. Archbald), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Restored (Br. J. Houweling, Br. A. VanderNet), and the Calvinist Reformed Churches in NTT Indonesia [GGRC] (Rev. Y.G. Dethan, Evangelist R.Y. Rehyard). These visitors also received opportunity to address synod as fraternal delegates in the course of synod. As part of this, synod was even treated to the rare opportunity of hearing a moving vocal rendition of Psalm 23 sung in Indonesian!

During the first week, amongst other things synod dealt with the following items:

First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERCS)

From Classis South-West came a proposal that originated from the church of Busselton, with a detailed report concerning the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERCS). Busselton's submission gave sufficient reason to conclude that the FERCS wants to be a faithful Reformed church, that ecclesiastical ties between the FERCS and FRCA would be of mutual benefit, and that the FERCS is interested in developing such ties. Synod subsequently accepted a recommendation to appoint deputies with a mandate to take up contact with the FERCS, "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."

Reformed Churches of Brazil

Deputies will be appointed to approach the Reformed Churches of Brazil, in order to ascertain if a meaningful sister church relationship can be established. The churches want to abide by a previous synod decision to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches that are in geographical proximity. But because this young federation is the result of mission work of our sister churches in Canada and the Netherlands, we want to determine whether or not a meaningful ecclesiastical relationship is possible at this stage.

Canadian Reformed Churches

A sister church relationship with Canadian Reformed Churches was continued. In the report presented by deputies, special mention was made of the ongoing sister church relationship that the Canadian Reformed Churches enjoy with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), a federation which primarily came into existence as a result of churches leaving the Christian Reformed Churches of North America. The Canadian Reformed Churches are still committed to the goal of federative unity with the URCNA, although numerous obstacles to this goal remain. Deputies will be appointed with the mandate to continue to stay informed on these developments.

Presbyterian Church of Korea

It was decided to continue sister-church relations with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin). Synod also decided to make our churches aware of what the deputies reported, namely that in the context of visiting our sister churches in Korea, they were made aware of the Korean Presbyterian Church (Kosin) in Australia, including Perth. This church consists of more recent immigrants from the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea, but are a separate bond from our sister church with their own presbyteries and general assembly.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Since our last synod, our churches have responded positively and in various ways to requests for financial support from the Deputies for Needy Churches in South Africa.

Deputies will be appointed to continue sister church relations and coordinate ongoing financial support.

Training for the Ministry

Synod received a report from the deputies for Training for the Ministry. Deputies will be appointed and mandated amongst other things to continue to collect and forward funds to the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton, and to arrange the support of theological students as per our adopted rules. In future cases where theological students work in Australia as part of the Pastoral Training Program, the churches will share the cost of this by way of assessment, according to the rules adopted by Synod 2009. The feasibility of offering the first year of study in Australia or by extension will continue to be investigated by the deputies. The deputies' recommendation to invite a guest lecturer to Australia from the seminary every two years rather than every three years was also adopted.

Advisory Committees

For the most part Synod has been able to work in open session. Several rounds of discussion have been held about the Book of Praise, the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and advisory committees have been working on developing proposals on these items.

Please continue to remember the work of synod before the Lord in prayer, that this work may be done in submission to His Word, and serve His churches by seeking the glory of His Name.

On behalf of Synod Armadale 2012
R.E. Pot