

DEPUTIES REPORTS

(as mandated by Synod Armadale 2012)

to the

2015 Synod

Of the

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

To be held at

Baldivis, Western Australia

June 2015

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General Secretary's Report

1. Mandate.

Synod Armadale 2012 gave the following mandate to the General Secretary Deputies:

- a. take care of the central post office box
- b. distribute the mail, Acts of Synod
- c. be responsible for and regularly update the website of the FRCA
- d. acknowledge correspondence not applicable to deputies, and if necessary to pass it on to the churches and
- e. collate all deputies reports (apart from that of the Treasurer) and have them printed in a bound format similar to that for the Acts. Deputies' reports are to be submitted in an appropriate format six months prior to the next synod so that they can be printed and distributed to the churches as per the Rules of Synod.

2. Activities

Two item of correspondence received which fell outside of the responsibility of the appointed deputies was forwarded to the churches.

- 2.1 Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations Orthodox Presbyterian Church received September 21, 2012. It included amongst other matters: the recommendation that was submitted by the CEIR and approved by the 79th General Assembly:
That the 79th General Assembly (2012) authorize the Committee to invite the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) to send a fraternal observer to a future General Assembly.
- 2.2 Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) United Reformed Churches in North America. In their correspondence, the CECCA informs the deputies of their decision 'to explore the possibility of entering into Ecclesiastic Contact with a view to entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship' with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

3. Deputies Reports to Synod

All deputies reports received (apart from that of the treasurer) have been collated and printed in a bound volume. The churches were requested to indicate the number of copies required and informed they would be asked to pay for extra copies for members. A number of copies of the bound volume of the reports have been made available to the Free Reformed bookshops for sale at cost.

4. FRCA Web Site

The web site of the FRCA has been the responsibility of the General Deputies since 2003. Br M. Pot has been an able and diligent webmaster who has maintained the site. The website continues to be a central portal for a significant number of churches and church organisations and new material is added as required. Investigations will continue into possible improvements.

5. Central Post Box

The central post box, PO Box 191, Armadale has in recent years been rarely used. It receives at most 2 or 3 items of correspondence per year, usually synod Acts from overseas churches. Deputies appointed by Synod use their own addresses for correspondence. Due to its lack of use, the PO Box number was unfortunately re-allocated. After unsuccessful efforts to have it returned, it was decided to use an existing post box address belonging to one of the churches as the central post box.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Synod Baldvis discharges current deputies and reappoints new deputies with a renewed mandate:
 - a. take care of the central post office box;
 - b. distribute the mail;
 - c. be responsible for the website of the FRCA
 - d. acknowledge correspondence not applicable to deputies, and if necessary to pass it on to the churches
 - e. collate all deputies reports (apart from that of the Treasurer) and have them printed in a bound format similar to that for the Acts. Deputies' reports are to be submitted in an appropriate format six months prior to the next synod so that they can be printed and distributed to the churches as per the Rules of Synod.

J.L. van Burgel
J den Boer
M. Pot
General Secretary Deputies

Report of Deputies Relation Churches Abroad

Report of Deputies for Sister Church Relations

To Synod Baldivis, July 2015

With thankfulness to the Lord we could do our work as deputies unhindered by sickness or troubles. As deputies we met at least twelve times. Our task included some travelling and the Lord protected us well on our ways.

In the course of the last three years several ministers travelled overseas and were granted declaration of ministerial status to gain permission for proclaiming God's Word in sister-churches. Such certificates were granted to Rev. W. Huizinga, Rev. Anderson, Rev. Sikkema and Rev. PKA de Boer with a view to travels to Canada and the Netherlands.

Concerning these declarations, we may further report that they are not really functioning. We are aware of several overseas ministers preaching in various FRCA churches without deputies receiving a copy of such a declaration. From those Australian ministers travelling to overseas sister-churches, these declarations have not necessarily been used. Ministers have preached in overseas churches without handing in or using them in any way.

Regarding this matter, and because it was not functioning, our sister churches in Canada made the following decision; *[1.] The practice of issuing declarations by the CRCA (i.e. Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad) to ministers who will be preaching in sister churches shall be discontinued; [2.] Ministers who need such a declaration should request one from their own consistory.* (Synod Carman Acts Article 175). The practical expectation of this decision is that when consistories invite ministers from foreign churches onto their pulpits; they are expected to locally affirm that the minister whom they invite has such a certificate (declaration) of authenticity and faithfulness. Likewise, as deputies we suggest, that should a minister travel overseas, he from now on requests his own consistory for such a declaration. We trust that by way of this report and eventual Synod dealing with it, both the Australian Churches and their ministers are made aware of this matter.

As evident from the following reports two deputies visited the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, two to the Synod of the Vrije Gereformeerde Kerke of South Africa, one, along with a brother, to the General Assembly of the Kosin Presbyterian Churches of Korea and, as agreed by Synod Armadale, two deputies were sent to the Hermeneutics Conference in Hamilton. Two deputies attended the foreign delegates week of our sister-churches in the Netherlands. Seeing that the RCN Synod decided to deal with sister-church admonition (including that of the FRCA), at a different

time, and not, as expected, within the foreign delegates week, and seeing the importance of this matter, it was decided to send a delegate also to this session of Synod (please see the attached report for further information).

The deputies were able to stay well within its total allocated budget of \$23.000 (please see the attachment for details of budgeted and actual expenses). Of note is that Synod had not provided anything specifically for travel to the hermeneutics conference in Hamilton. Synod treasurer recognising this anomaly, and seeing that we were well within our overall budget, agreed to pay for this expense. However, Synod treasurer declined to pay for the second trip of one deputy to Synod Ede because the amount allocated for work in the Netherlands was over its budgeted allocation. Please note that if the treasurer had paid this additional amount the overall expenses are still significantly under budget. Our request to Synod is therefore that: 1) the treasurer be instructed to, as yet, pay the \$1500.00 expense for this trip. 2) 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.

Here now follow our humble submission of reports and recommendations regarding our various sister-churches. It has been our heartfelt desire to serve the FRCA Churches well. We prayer that Synod now find these reports helpful for its work and that the Lord will bless the subsequent decisions that may be made. For us, while there is sadness especially in view of the recommendations regarding the RCN, there is also thankfulness for how we as deputies were privileged to be busy in the context of the Lord's world-wide church gathering work. To Him be all praise! Knowing and witnessing how the churches in the age constantly remains under threat we can only increase our prayers; "*Maranatha* come Lord Jesus. Come quickly."

Recommendations:

Synod decide:

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 \$1500.00 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 recognizing 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 the precise Synod decision to grant deputies dealing with churches abroad various so long as the allocations are kept as a guideline and the expenses remains within budget.

Deputies:

R.D. Anderson (deputy since 2012)

PKA de Boer (deputy since 2006)

S. 't Hart (deputy since 2012)

W. Pleiter (deputy since 2009)

W. Spyker (deputy since 2009)

W. VanderVen (deputy since 2009)

Relations Churches Abroad

Budget compared to Actual

	Budgeted	Actual
Canada	8000.00	5295.78
S. Africa	5000.00	2926.24
Korea	2500.00	1273.72
Netherlands	7500.00	9119.26
		18615.00
Unpaid expense		1500.00
Totals	23000.00	20115.00

Abbreviations

CanRC Canadian Reformed Churches

DGK De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

FRCA Free Reformed Churches of Australia

FRCSA Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

GGRC Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvin

GGRI Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia

GKN Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (translated; Reformed Churches Netherlands) formerly Voorlopig Kerkverband (split from RCN)

NGK Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken

OPC Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA)

PCK Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Kosin)

RCB Reformed Churches in Brazil

RCN Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

RCNr Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (restored) Now known as DGK

RCNZ Reformed Churches of New Zealand

URCNA United Reformed Churches of North America

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Mandate

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 67) continued sister-church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) and mandated deputies to:

1. 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;
2. keep the Australian churches informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta;
3. send two delegates to their next synod and, if possible, to visit the church(es) where support is provided.

Activities

Mandate (1) – Needy churches support

Deputies have continued to coordinate requests for support received from the Deputies Needy Churches (DNC) in South Africa. During the calendar years 2012 and 2013, such requests were for ZAR 420,000 per annum. At Synod Bethal 2014, we were advised that there has been a reduction in the amount requested. The amount requested for the calendar year 2014 (and subsequently for 2015 and 2016) is ZAR 380,000. On present exchange rates this equates to around AUD 40,000.

Deputies have communicated these requests by way of various letters circulated to all FRCA Consistories. Most FRCA congregations have provided funds in response to the requests for support to our South African sister-churches. As a result, there have been sufficient funds to meet the requests. Payments are remitted 6 monthly.

By way of reminder as to the direction of these funds, we quote from one of our letters to the FRCA consistories: *Although these funds were initially collected in our churches as “support for Bethal”, because of the present structure of how needy churches are supported in South Africa it would be more accurate to call these collections “Support for needy sister churches in South Africa”. Presently there are 5 congregations within the FRCSA who receive support via their Deputies for Needy Churches. Although our support does equate the present support given to Bethal, it is ultimately the Deputies for Needy Churches in South Africa, and not us, who determine how these funds are allocated.*

Various communications from our South African sister-churches have

expressed sincere gratitude for the support received from the FRCA. One such email stated: *"Please accept and pass our sincere thanks to all involved as the financial contributions from Australia have a significant impact on our needy churches."*

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 67.II.2) decided to appoint an auditor for the financial records of the support provided. Since it appeared that no such auditor was separately appointed, Deputies requested the books to be audited by the FRC Kelmscott, who are the appointed Auditors for the Synod Treasurer. An interim audit was carried out in November 2013. It is anticipated that a final audit will be carried out in late 2014 and will be reported by the auditors directly to Synod Baldivis.

The bank balance as at 30 June 2014 was \$64,181.53. Given that the South African Deputies for Needy Churches now request a reduced amount, and further given the favourable exchange rates, deputies request that the amount contributed across the FRCA be around \$10/communicant member/year.

Mandate (2) – keep churches informed

By way of various letters to Consistories, Deputies have kept the churches informed of the requests for support and of the amount of support requested. Such requests have been responded to generously by the FRCA.

Deputies have also published in Una Sancta the official press release of Synod Bethal, and a report of their visit to Synod Bethal.

Mandate (3) – Synod Bethal 2014

Deputies sent Rev S 'tHart and br W Spyker to attend Synod of the FRCA held from 28 April to 1 May 2014 in Bethal, South Africa. The Synod was addressed, with the speech being **Attachment 1**. A detailed report of the visit is found at **Attachment 2**.

During the visit, Deputies also visited and/or had contact with some of the churches where support is provided. Such contact was informal and included meeting members of the Bethal congregation (both during and after Synod) and also visiting the church of Shoshanguve. A visit was also made to the Mukhanyo Theological College. The Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) is one of the colleges that the FRCSA have used for the training of students of theology. It presents itself as a multi-denominational institution that is Reformed in theology. Although they raised some concerns about this college the FRCSA curators reported to their Synod that this college "cherishes Biblically faithful theological training, focuses on the African context, and offers an integrated course with regard to

theological training, languages and practice.” There are opportunities for Reformed churches, including the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, to support this college. From the FRCSA Rev. Breytenbach, minister of Bethal, has been appointed to work with and strengthen the MTC.

Conclusion

Deputies are thankful for the mutual support and encouragement that we could receive by way of contact with our South Africa sister churches during the past 3 years. The FRCA's prayerful and financial support has been well received. Further, our attendance at and contribution to the FRCSA Synod was appreciated. The FRCSA are a bond of churches to whom we presently have the opportunity to provide assistance, encouragement and support. Yet, they are also a bond of churches from whom we may learn much. As is evident from the attached visit report, they demonstrate a love for the Lord and His Word, and strive to faithfully fulfil their task where they are placed within God's kingdom. They exhibit the marks of the true church as we confess these in BC art 29. Deputies recommend that sister-church relations be maintained and that assistance continue to be provided to the extent requested.

Recommendations for Synod Baldivis:

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.

Grounds:

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

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

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.

Attachment 1

FRCA Speech for FRCSA Synod

Mr Chairman,
Delegates and overseas visitors to this Synod
Brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ

Greetings from your sister, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Galatians 1:3-5)

We thank the LORD our God that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, gathers, defends and preserves for Himself a church chosen to everlasting life – and that we may be a part of this and experience this both in Australia and in South Africa.

We see Christ gathering His people by his Spirit and Word, and it is a blessing that we may share in this church gathering work of our Saviour. We may be joined in the unity of the true faith, and build each other up in that faith as we glorify our God and Father.

Close contact

For many decades we have enjoyed a sister-relationship with you. Since the year 2000, our relationship has been strengthened with the regular attendance at one another's Synods. In this way we could pass on greetings, enjoy fellowship, yet even more we could encourage one another and offer assistance also in time of need, standing beside one another as churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, united in the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Most recently in 2012, we could welcome your Rev Breytenbach as your

delegate to Synod Armadale. We were thankful for his advice that the official language at your Synod is English, since our mastery of Afrikaans (and Sotho) is somewhat limited. Rev Breytenbach could share with us some of your joys and challenges as federation in this country. He could also reflect on our growing interaction over the past decade.

Our churches have truly been blessed by the influx of South African migrants during this time. There is probably no FR congregation that does not have a number of families who enjoy biltong boerewors, and a braai. Indeed, the connections run so close that for the first time we have sent a delegate who is married to a South African. Also, for the first time our Synod decided to send two (2) delegates to your Synod, noting that our visits to South Africa and your visits to Australia have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

Brothers, we can only thank the Lord that our relationship has grown and strengthened over the years, as we truly need each other as reformed churches in this world.

Church Life

Allow us a few words about developments in the FRCA over the past 3 years.

Numerically we continue to experience a steady growth, for which we give thanks to our Heavenly Father. Earlier this year one new congregation was instituted in Melville, a location closer to the centre of Perth from our other congregations. This brings our federation to a total of 16 churches, spread over 3 distinct classical regions.

Mission work continues in Papua New Guinea, Sumba and China. Other opportunities are being considered within the region, including the Philippines. There has also been a renewed focus on mission and outreach opportunities that may exist within our own country, and in this regard we remain inspired by the mission activity that you are engaged in. It is wonderful to see your involvement and passion, and the Lord's blessing on this work.

We continue to experience movement in the ministerial ranks. In the past 3 years we have experienced the retirement of Revs Veldman and de Boer, both of whom had served the FRCA for many years. Meanwhile, we could receive 3 ministers from Canada, being Rev van Spronsen in Busselton, Rev Alkema in Albany and Rev Poppe in Southern River, together with 2 ministers from Holland, being Rev Anderson in Rockingham and Rev Hagg in Armadale. Rev Hagg you of course know well, with him having been theologically trained by your churches. For this we are thankful, and this can only serve to continue to strengthen the bond between us.

Our churches presently experience 3 vacancies, and with a further minister reaching retirement age next year we continue to pray that the Lord may provide faithful men for the ministry of the gospel. In this regard we continue to support the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, both financially and by way of encouraging our young men to attend there for the purposes of training for the ministry.

Needy Churches

Over the past 3 years we have enjoyed regular contact with your deputies for needy churches, who have kept us well informed of the financial struggles within your federation. We sympathise with you as a small and shrinking bond of churches. Our 2012 Synod Armadale again mandated our deputies to coordinate responses to any requests for support received from your deputies for needy churches. Our churches have happily responded to such requests and we have willingly assisted you, recognising the Lord's abundant blessings and, indeed, we have only given what comes from His hand and belongs to Him.

We respect your desire to be a self-sufficient federation that does not have a long term dependency on overseas funds. Yet rest assured of our churches' willingness to help to the extent that we are called upon by you.

Sister-churches

Our last Synod did not enter into any new relationships. It did, however, appoint deputies to take up contact with the First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, to make a careful investigation of this church and explore the feasibility of a sister church relationship. Synod also resolved to continue to work towards the goal of a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, which we recognize as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our ongoing impediment has been the RCNZ's relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, which has now changed to one of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Synod Armadale has mandated our deputies to determine the practical implications of this change and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment.

We continue to maintain sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). It is fair to say that the relationship with our Dutch sister churches took up the most time at our last Synod, to the point where Synod had to reconvene a second time to deal with this issue.

Already in 2009 our Synod Legana decided to *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'*. Seeing that there was no response to this exhortation, Synod Armadale 2012 considered this

matter serious enough to decide to send a letter of admonition stating our concerns. Synod appointed an advisory committee to formulate this letter and then reconvened in April of 2013 to complete its work. The official admonition expresses as main concern that the RCN *tolerates an approach to hermeneutics that does not uphold the authority and plain meaning of Scripture for exegesis*. There are various examples given, including upholding *the sufficiency of Scripture for ethics* and also the study into whether Scripture allows for women to fill the offices of deacon, elder and minister. Our sister church relations with the RCN continue, yet Synod expressed *deep sadness at the lack of progress to resolve our concerns to date, so that our relationship is strained*. In view of all this Synod also decided to advise local consistories *to exercise due care with respect to their responsibilities towards those coming from and going to the RCN, and to call the FRCA to frequently remember the RCN in their prayers, in view of the continuing struggle for the truth within these churches*.

We note that this matter is also on your agenda, with both a majority and minority report. Brothers, we wish you wisdom and patience as you discuss this matter, that you may find each other in a spirit of humility and make a decision that is for the benefit our mutual sister church in the Netherlands, and promotes the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the church.

Conclusion

Brothers, it is good to be here to share warm greetings from your sister across the ocean. We thank the LORD our God for you, and for the unity we can express in our Sovereign Lord and King. Brothers, may the kingdom work that you do here at Synod Bethal be blessed, and be a blessing to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. May the LORD our God of all Grace continue to gather, defend and preserve His churches here in South Africa and throughout this world.

With Christian greetings,

Rev S 'tHart and Br. W Spyker

Delegates from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Attachment 2

Report on visit to South Africa

April/May 2014

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 67) continued sister-church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) and mandated deputies to send two delegates to their next General Synod. This decision was grounded on the observation that our visits to South Africa, and their visit to us, have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

To this end, the undersigned attended Synod Bethal, which was held over 4 days from Mon, 28 April to Thu, 1 May 2014.

Fellowship

Both prior to and after Synod, we had opportunity to enjoy fellowship with our South African brothers and sisters in the Pretoria region. This included attendance at an office bearers' conference which was held between the 2 congregations in Pretoria, together with 3 local congregations of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. Talks by Rev J Drijfhout, Rev P Boon and Rev J Howell focussed on the topic of church discipline, and the discussions revealed the similarity of issues that we face in this difficult and sensitive aspect of church life.

Fellowship also included attendance at the worship services in Pretoria and a mission congregation in Shoshanguve, together with a visit to the Mukhanyo Theological College.

Bethal

Synod was convened in Bethal, some 2 hours south-east of Pretoria. It commenced at 11am with a prayer service led by Rev H Breytenbach. His meditation was based on Matthew 22:15-22: *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*

Delegates then moved to the grounds of a local school with boarding facilities. The majority of the delegates lodged at the grounds for the entirety of the Synod, allowing for much interaction throughout the days of Synod.

Elected as moderamen were Rev P Boon as chairman, Rev C Kleyn as vice-chairman, and Br E Bijker as clerk.

In attendance as foreign delegates were Rev T Lodder and Dr A de Visser from the CanRC and Rev S 'tHart and br W Spyker from the FRCA. We were given opportunity to present greetings on behalf of the FRCA, which are attached as Attachment 1. Rev Breytenbach spoke some words in

response, expressing particular thanks for the growing contact between our two federation and also for the financial support that the FRCA have provided over the past years, which has allowed for the ongoing ministry of the gospel in South Africa.

Letters of greeting were read from the Reformed Church of Bethal, and also from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (lib).

Contact with the RCSA

Welcomed at Synod were Rev Kurpershoek (Middelburg) and Rev Venter (Pretoria), who attended as deputies from the Reformed Churches in South Africa (also known as the Doppe churches). They delivered greetings on behalf of the RCSA. It was apparent that there had been limited mutual contact in the past 3 years on a federational level, although on a local level, especially in the Pretoria area, there was not only a growing contact but also a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. These 5 churches comprise the FRC of Pretoria and Pretoria-Marana, and the RC of Kandelaa, Totiusdal and Oost Moot. This does, however, create some tension in that these RC congregations remain within a bond of churches which includes a large variation at the local level.

In answer to our question to the RCSA, it was clarified that women in the office of deacon is permissible. Since 1988, the RCSA has discussed the issue of women in the office of elder and minister. At present these offices have not been opened to women, although it awaits a further decision in 2015. The matter remains one of great tension within the bond, as some churches have introduced it anyway. The RCSA struggle with the question of unity in diversity, ie. in what areas must we have unity and in what areas of church life can the churches be diverse, yet still function as a united church federation?

The RCSA delegates pleaded for help from the FRCSA as they continue to struggle with the hermeneutical questions within their federation. They recognised that their federation is of more than more than one modality, and indicated that assistance was sought by those within their federation who seek to maintain Scripture. It was stated during discussion that at some point the question may be asked of the FRCSA (as was asked to the CanRC by the URCNA): Why weren't you there in our struggles?

Synod resolved to continue contact with the RCSA on a national level, but also to stimulate the churches to explore contact on a local level in order to support those within the RCSA who wish to preserve the Reformed doctrine.

Bible translation

Synod gave consideration to a new Afrikaans Bible translation. At present the churches continue to utilise a translation from 1953, which is now somewhat dated in its language use. The new translation appeared to be an improvement but remains a work in progress so deputies will continue to monitor the translation work and also have input into the translation process.

It was further observed that members of the FRCSA range across a range of languages, including English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Sepedi and Zulu. Various Bible translations are available in each of these languages, and consideration needs to be given to having approved translations for use in the churches in these various languages in addition to Afrikaans.

Our life in Australia is certainly less complicated with one uniform language across all the churches.

Contact with Foreign churches

Sister relations were continued with the FRCA and the CanRC.

In relation to the RCN(I), Synod Bethal had been served by both a majority and minority report. The majority report highlighted concerns particularly in relation to the matter of hermeneutics and guarding the reformed doctrine at the Theological University in Kampen, the matter of women in office, and also ongoing church unity discussions with the NGK. Synod resolved to send a letter of concern to Synod Ede, a draft of which was available and, after revision, adopted during Synod. The sister church relationship was continued, and the churches were called upon to frequently remember before the Lord in prayer the problematic ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands.

As to the RCNr (now known as DGK), Synod decided not to proceed with preparations to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with them. As ground for this decision, the FRCSA resolved that it cannot accede to the demand of the DGK to sever its relationship with the CanRC, which was put forward by the DGK as a precondition.

As to the Voorlopig Kerkverband (also known as GKN), Synod mandated deputies to continue investigating this group of churches. In the meantime, Synod decided that in case of members from this federation (or the RCNr) coming to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests to the Lord's Supper, would they make this request, only after conversation with them.

As to other church contacts, Synod resolved to maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level exchanging information. Whilst recognising that

its limited manpower should be focused on its own region, for the sake of immigration to New Zealand it was deemed wise to remain informed of developments in the RCNZ.

Membership was continued with the ICRC, on the grounds that it is an organisation that adheres to its Reformed basis and provides a platform to maintain contacts with Reformed churches all around the world. Especially relevant would be future attendance at regional mission conferences in Africa. Synod decided to delegate one missionary to the next Africa Regional ICRC conference and to send 2 delegates to the next ICRC conference in Hamilton, Canada in 2017.

Finally, Synod instructed deputies to keep the booklet “Introducing the FRCSA” up to date and publish it electronically through the FRCSA website.

Sustainability

For some years, the FRCSA have grappled with the question of sustainability. A main focus was the question of financial dependency upon overseas churches, both as federation with needy churches and for mission work. The question of manpower in the churches was also raised. A special Synod was held in 2012 to discuss and take steps to address the financial sustainability of the FRCSA. Deputies had then been appointed to study the matter.

Deputies Sustainability served Synod with a comprehensive report that sought to approach, in a principled way, the responsibilities and obligations of the FRCSA as a church federation. How can they be independent and self-sustaining, and use God’s gifts as faithful stewards? Also addressed was the characteristic of diversity in being a multi-cultural and multi-lingual federation. One component of this remains a vast economic disparity, with the average income of members in some congregations being estimated to exceed that of others by as much as a factor of 6.

It was noted that federational work within the churches remained of a low profile. This was exemplified in various ways, such as Synod deputy reports often late and therefore not given due consideration by the local churches or members, few submissions from the churches at Synod, and local churches failing to honour their financial contributions towards the Synod budget.

As foreign delegates, we emphasised that foreign aid did not have to be seen as a negative thing, and we (as CanRC and FRCA) considered it a privilege to share with our sister churches of the Lord’s abundant blessings to us.

Deputies Sustainability had proposed that the churches hold an *indaba*, the traditional Zulu word for “discussion forum”, in each inter-Synodical period, in order to allow non-decision making discussions. These meetings could be in the nature of a think tank, to face up to and consider the issues that face the FRCSA, and also allow the various deputyships and consistories to have a unified vision and approach.

Synod agreed to organise an *indaba*, inviting all deputies and local churches, on the grounds that *indabas* can help to prevent or solve misunderstandings, help deputies to make a more accurate assessment of situations and to formulate more effective recommendations to synods. Synod also agreed to a variable contribution model that reflected the economic disparity, and was linked to average household income within each local congregation rather than a flat fee per member across the federation.

Mission

The mission work within South Africa also came under the consideration of Synod. This was somewhat unique for us, since the FRCA do not coordinate any aspect of mission via General Synod. The purpose of Mission Deputies is to coordinate the mission work as it is conducted at the 7 mission posts, both with respect to financial contribution and information flows to those who provide the funds. These deputies liaise and coordinate between the various sending churches and mission boards, and also with the churches in the Netherlands, from where the majority (some 95%) of the mission funds are provided.

It was noted that the financial situation with respect to mission had improved considerably over the past 3 years by reason of various missionary movements (Revs Breytenbach, de Boer and Boon) having accepted calls to local churches, together with a vastly improved exchange rate with the Euro (by reason of the weakening Rand).

Whilst the overall structure of the mission work in South Africa required ongoing consideration, we could see with thankfulness that the spreading of the gospel, resulting in the conversion of people to the Christian faith for salvation together with the planting of churches, may continue in many places within South Africa. This may be an inspiration for us as FRCA to consider whether there are opportunities for mission within our own country of Australia.

Needy Churches

Particularly relevant to the FRCA was the position of the needy churches. It was noted that 5 of the 8 congregations within the FRCSA remain needy churches. In line with the report on sustainability, the trend for the next

3 years was to be less dependent on foreign support. In this regard, the expected funds from Australia was budgeted to decrease by some 10% per year for the next 3 years. This, coupled with a falling Rand, means that the FRCA contributions will reduce into the future.

Deep gratitude was expressed for the ongoing support of needy churches by the FRCA (and also by the CanRC). Deputies needy churches emphasised the rigorous process by which all congregations are required to be financially responsible and accountable. Further, assistance was only provided to those churches who contribute to ability, on the ground that also the poor have to pay tithes. We were encouraged by this emphasis, since it showed a clear accountability for the funds that we contribute from the FRCA.

Theological training

With respect to theological training, the FRCSA continues to utilise the CRTS in Hamilton, together with the Mukhanyo Theological College and George Whitfield College in South Africa. Support had been granted to the MTC both financially and by way of providing lecturers, primarily via the services of Rev Breytenbach.

A number of theological training initiatives were considered. Curators were appointed to assess prospective theological students and also to mentor them through their theological studies. Further, they were instructed to present on an annual basis an office bearers' training opportunity, a mens' conference and a pastors' seminar from for the churches. Further, curators are to enable all ministers to attend a conference once per year and/or to enable ministers to follow post graduate studies.

Other items

Various other items of interest included:

1. Internet Deputies. Synod adopted a policy for website development to allow for a main landing page which contains general information about the structure of the bond of churches, and links to the various pages of the individual churches.
2. Deputies for correspondence with government, who noted that they seek to inform and stimulate the congregations for an active approach to government, particularly in reacting to government measures that compromise the protection of the preaching of the gospel and transgress the law of God. This is not a matter that the FRCA addresses via Synod but is rather the focus of initiatives such as ARPA (Association for Reformed Political Action).
3. In relation to liturgical forms and prayers, Synod adopted an

alternative form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Deputies reported that this form, developed within the RCSA, included the accents of John Calvin and emphasised our communion with Christ. Deputies were reappointed with the mandate to continue to study the liturgical forms in order to establish whether they can be improved, and also to look at revising the form prayers found in their Book of Praise.

4. It was noted that amongst the ministerial ranks, the FRCSA have faced some challenging years. Two black ministers were suspended from office and the minister of Capetown released from his call. We see how the churches are under continual attack from Satan, especially as they seek to remain faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. The next Synod will be held in Shoshanguve North, with as alternative Pretoria-Maranata, in August 2017.

Synod was closed by Rev C Kleyn with a meditation on Acts 15. He noted how the church in Antioch was strengthened and encouraged by the presence of men from Jerusalem, who delivered a letter from the Jerusalem Council (vs. 30-32). He thanked the foreign churches for their presence and involvement, noting that, as in the early church, we are unified in that *"we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved"* (vs.11).

General observations

The style of the Synod was more in the nature of an *indaba*, the traditional Zulu word for "discussion forum". There was a mixture of question/answer conversation and formal decision making. All matters were resolved by way of consensus rather than by vote. Indeed, it was remarkable that the only voting that was required was to choose the moderamen, and not for any other agenda item. Although many matters required discussion, a brotherly spirit of working together was evident.

The agenda was also completed efficiently, with all agenda items completed within 4 days. It was perhaps remarkable that the only agenda items at Synod were deputy reports. There were no submissions from the churches, and also no interaction from the churches with any reports. Further, during Synod there were no church members at any time in audience. Perhaps this was because the Synod was held at a somewhat remote location, being at a boarding school in Bethal. Nonetheless, the challenge remains for federational work (including that of Synod) to maintain a greater link so that there is no disconnect between its work and the local churches and members.

Many deputy reports revealed struggles with manpower issues and the completion of mandates. This has been an ongoing issue within our South African sister churches for some years. It is perhaps a symptom of the struggles that our sister churches face as various ministers have left the bond in the past 3 years (one accepting a call overseas, one being released from office and one being deposed). Finding deputies with sufficient time and motivation to devote to federational work appears to be an ongoing challenge.

There are also extreme complexities and sensitivities within a bond of churches that includes congregations that function in such diverse cultures, languages and socio-economic circumstances. While on the one hand diversity within a federation of churches beautifully exemplifies the diversity of the catholic church of Christ, on the other hand it can be challenging to promote and maintain this unity on the local level. The report of the deputies for sustainability highlighted this challenge well. Noting that long established churches that share the same language and culture express their unity in matters such as adopting rules concerning the order of worship services or which songs should be sung in the services. Reflecting on this in connection to the situation in the FRCSA, they wrote: "A feeling of unity, however, is not the same as a required characteristic of unity. Specifically in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual federation of churches such as the FRCSA, such regulations could even create a feeling of disunity. Your [Deputies for Sustainability] therefore would like to suggest that our major assemblies should be very careful with regulations and rules about how certain things should be done and such rules should be limited to matters which are clearly related to real characteristics of unity such as doctrine, church discipline or matters related to the marks of a true church as described in our BC art. 29. Such an approach implies that differences in our ways of worshipping within our bond of churches should be allowed as long as those different ways are all aimed at proclaiming the true Word of God and as long as they promote the unity of true believers as the one body of Christ."

Further, South Africa sees the first world colliding with the third world as thriving cities coexist side by side with squatter settlements. Difficult issues as to parity of living standards are perhaps similar to situations that we may face on the mission field, where the living circumstances and support that is commensurate to a western missionary family is not necessarily identical with that required by an indigenous missionary. These are truly complex issues that are faced on various levels within the FRCSA.

In certain respects this leads to a somewhat fragile bond of churches. Yet at the same time it is one that relies upon the grace of God for its strength,

Report - Deputies for Sister Church Relations

that the building of the church is His work and not the work of man, and that His people are united in the power of the cross which extends across languages and cultures.

It was a blessing to share in the ongoing church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ in this place.

Respectfully submitted

W Spyker

S 'tHart

Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

DECISION AND MANDATE

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 49) decided the following with respect to the CanRC:

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. a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. 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. c. encourage the CanRC to support the FRCA as much as possible in our discussions with the RCNZ;
 - d. d. stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ); and
 - e. e. send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Carman West during 2013, pending finances.

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 the continuing support of the CanRC in regards to our

discussions with the RCNZ.

5. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the synodical level reinforces our contact with them.

DEPUTIES' REPORT

Introduction

The primary work done by the Deputies was completed during the presence of our deputies at Synod Carman 2013. Being in attendance for over a week of Synod's duration allowed for extensive interaction and discussion with the delegates to Synod Carman 2013. During this time our deputies were given the opportunity to participate during the plenary sessions as well as among the various Synod committees. The matters of interest and concern of Synod Armadale 2012 were clearly addressed during the FRCA's address to Synod Carman 2013 and could be elaborated upon during formal and informal discussions with the delegates.

Opportunity for direct input and involvement in the discussions at Synod Carman 2013, both in the plenary sessions and during sub-committee work, was provided to the deputies, and can be recognised in the final decision of Synod Carman 2013 regarding the FRCA:

Synod Carman 2013 adopted the following decision:

- 4.1.To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules;
- 4.2.To express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA's ongoing support for and interest in the Theological Seminary, including their generous financial support;
- 4.3.To assure the FRCA of our continued attention to the nature and direction of the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCAustralia;
- 4.4.To maintain close contact with the various deputyships of the FRCA in matters of relations with sister churches abroad and informing the FRCA of changes or developments in third party relationships;
- 4.5.To invite the various deputyships of the FRCA to seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committees (e.g., our SCBP, subcommittee RCN, our committee in charge of reviewing the liturgical forms, Committee for Bible Translation and perhaps others) in areas of mutual interest where the CRCA's mandate does not apply;

4.6. To send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCA in 2015.

(Article 123, pages 122-125)

During our time at Synod Carman 2013 deputies had the opportunity to meet with the sister-churches that we share in common with the CanRC (i.e. RCN, PCK, FRCSA). These meetings were informal but helpful, providing valuable insights into various ecclesiastical matters of mutual concern.

Deputies could also meet informally with several church federations with whom we have no formal relations (i.e. URCNA, OPC, RCUS), but are sister-churches of the CanRC. Learning about these various federations provided insight how the sister-church relationships functions with the CanRC. It continues to be evident that these sister-church relationships in North America enjoy the tangible benefits of being united as sister churches, as they spoke of the their joint activities done at the local level, work done in joint committees as well as in the active involvement in each others ecclesiastical meetings and assemblies. It is also apparent that these federations are also becoming increasing aware of the FRCA, with the OPC and URCNA delegates personally expressing deep appreciation for our strong stance in regard to the FRCA letter of admonition to the RCN. As the OPC delegate mentioned in conversation; 'the more we hear of the FRCA, the more we want to get to know you.'

As deputies, we appreciated the level of involvement granted to us during the work of Synod, allowing us to be more then observers, but participants in the discussions of Synod. This was extremely helpful for example during several discussions including the Psalm Book, RCN, NAPARC, RCNZ and sister church relations. For example, during Synod's discussion on the Indonesian churches (GGRI), Synod Carman 2013 went against the recommendation of their CRCA deputies, based on the feedback of the FRCA deputies. Another example relates to the opportunity to contribute to the discussions during the synod committee deliberations regarding the RCN. It was clear that the CanRC value and appreciate the contribution of their sisters down under, and are willing to work with our input.

Deputies also appreciated the warm fellowship that we could experience during our stay in Carman, Manitoba. Working with the brothers at Synod, also presented opportunities for the CanRC to get to know the FRCA in a more meaningful way. They could learn more about our work in our Australian context, about our mission works, and about the future needs within our bond of churches (particularly as it related to retiring ministers).

Specific Mandate

As it relates to the specific mandate provide by Synod Armadale 2012, the

deputies can report on the following:

1. Developments within the CanRC

- a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed

There are many aspects to the work of Synod Carman 2013 that are also significant to the FRCA, particularly as it relates to the Book of Praise as well as the Theological Seminary in Hamilton. While the deputies for the Book of Praise will cover the specific aspects of the CanRC decision, it is significant to note that Synod Carman 2013 genuinely recognised the lack of opportunity provided to the FRCA in be involved in the revision of the Book of Praise. Initially Synod Carman 2013 wanted to delay the completion of the Book of Praise, due to the number of requests of the local churches, but also because it would give the FRCA greater opportunity to have input. During the course of the Synod, the final direction of the decision changed, as there was concern that the Book of Praise would become a perpetual project, and Synod Carman 2013 considered it best for the churches to proceed with a finalised edition. As a consequence, Synod Carman, in a separate article at the end of the Acts, expressed *“its regret to the FRCA that due to circumstances listed above, the degree of cooperation and consultant re: the work on the Book of Praise was limited”* Art 196 page 284).

Another significant decision by Synod Carman 2013 was with the appointment Dr. Theodore Van Raalte, as the fifth permanent professor to the faculty at the Hamilton Theological Seminary. Deputies could express how close to our hearts the work of the Seminary is, and could pass on congratulations on behalf of the FRCA on this new development.

Synod Carman 2013 also made a noteworthy judgement by overturning of Synod Burlington 2010 to leave the matter of women's voting in the freedom of the churches. Synod Carman 2013 decided 'that the churches should return to the voting practise as it officially was before 2010, namely, male communicant members only voting.' (Art 110, Recommendations 4.3 page 118). This decision is sure to have an impact on the churches as several churches had already implemented the practice of women participation in voting, with likely appeals to follow.

2. URNCA Potential Merger

- 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;

The CanRC have enjoyed a sisterchurch relationship with the URCNA since Synod Neerlandia 2001. Reaching the milestone of Ecclesiastical fellowship (sister-churches) with the URCNA was step two in a three-step process that was to culminate in a joining together of two federation of churches into one combined federation. In order to work toward this unification, numerous joint committees were formed to address joint issues such as songbook, liturgical forms and confessions, church order and theological education. However, most of this committee work had come to a stand still due to the URCNA Synod decision in 2010 not renewing the mandates for its members of the joint committees with the CanRC.

As a result of this, there was no real progress to report. Its not that the door to unification with the URCNA has been closed, but that the unification process is on hold, so to say. However it is clear from the Acts of Synod Carman, that the practical aspects of unity appear to be alive and well. It noted that *"in many locales in Canada there has been excellent cooperation and fellowship among the CanRC and URCNA (e.g pulpit exchanges, joint church services, combined council meetings, bible studies, ministerials, support of Christian schooling, joint church news.)"* (Art 129, Consideration 3.2, page 160). Synod Carman 2013 did mandate its deputies to:

4.2.1 To discuss with CERCU the areas of concern or fear in the URCNA that seem to be hindering progress toward a merger with the CanRC;

4.2.2. To seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local level, as well as visiting churches and classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States;

4.2.3. To mandate the coordinators to discuss with CERCU how to make preparations for Phase 3, such as through the reappointment of the subcommittees for theological education, liturgical forms and confessions and a common songbook;

4.2.4. To seek clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods and to encourage the URCNA to refrain from making further statements of this nature;

4.3. To continue EF (Phase 2) with the URCNA under the adopted rules.

(Art 129, Recommendations 4.2, page 161)

Despite the lack of progress with the other joint CanRC / URCNA subcommittees, one committee could complete its task. The joint Church Order subcommittee presented Synod Carman 2013 with its final report

and recommendation. Numerous churches engaged with the content (both with major issues and minor corrections), as did Synod, interacting with the major issues of the Church Order and by making revisions for the committee to work with. In the end, Synod Carman 2013 reappointed the committee to make further changes to the Proposed Joint Church Order, Forms of Discipline and Incorporation Report. This work is to be done with the joint committee with the URCNA. It is important to note that these documents have no formal status in the CanRC, and will only function once the two federations merge. However it is still important that the FRCA become familiar with these reports and their content. The documentation for the Proposed Joint Church Order can be found on the website: <http://www.canrc.org/?committee=9>

So while the official status is that the PJCO does not function, it should be noted that there are already proposed changes to the Church Order being presented at the classical level in the CanRC, which are the same articles that are in the PJCO.

Other than the lack of progress in building unity between the CanRC and URCNA, it is interesting to note one issue that the CanRC have addressed the URCNA on. It is not uncommon for the URCNA Synods to make statements regarding various issues, be it doctrinal or pastoral. Synod Carman 2013 stated that clarification is required as to determine the authoritative nature of these various statements, expressing the concern that they become 'extra-confessional' statements.

3. RCNZ

- c. encourage the CanRC to support the FRCA as much as possible in our discussions with the RCNZ;

Synod Carman 2013 recognised the changing nature of the relationship that the RCNZ has with the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia (CRCAus), but also understood the need for clarity as to what this change will mean and how it will function. Synod Carman 2013 shared the concerns of the FRCA, stating that, moving forward, the RCNZ needs to be consequent in their relationship with the CRCAus. Additionally the CanRC Committee for Contact with Sister Churches Abroad (CRCA) was mandated to; *'To assure the FRCA of our continued attention to the nature and direction of the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCAus.'* (Article 123, Recommendation 2.3 [4] page 124). Synod considered that it was *'appropriate that, in our discussions with the RCNZ, we continue to give attention to the relationship that the RCNZ has with the CRCAus and that we support the FRCA in this matter. For the CRCA[CanRC deputies] to foster close contact between the various deputysips of the FRCA and corresponding CanRC committees is consistent with the adopted Rules for*

Ecclesiastical Fellowship” (Consider 3.3, page 124).

Like Synod Burlington in 2010, Synod Carman 2013 was also supportive to the FRCA as we address the impediment in our relationship with the RCNZ. Similar to Synod Armadale 2012, Synod Carman 2013 also noted that it is important to *‘get a better understanding of the practical changes entailed by the relationship of EF that was begun in 2007, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequent in their relationship with the CRCAus as they develop and finalise the rules for EF’* (Art 192 Rec 4.2.2. page 281).

It is clear from the above, that the CanRC not only recognise the need to support the FRCA in its concerns with the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCAus, but also realise that they too must become more acquainted with this situation, and to urge the RCNZ to be consequent in their dealing with the CRCAus.

4. Sister Church Developments

- d. stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ);

Synod Carman 2013 continued its relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (sister-churches) with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Reformed Churches of the United States (RCUS) and the Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ).

As deputies, we addressed the matter of how the differences between the CanRC and it's sister churches were being addressed. The perceived change related to allowing points of difference to be addressed after (and not prior) to entering into a sister church relationship. The deputies had addressed this matter at Synod Burlington 2010, by means of our official address, and in our work with the various synod committees. The specific concern related to a few matters, one of pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's Table, and confessional membership. This concern is not new, as it has the attention of various CanRC churches, who continue to keep each Synod committed to addressing these matters. At Synod Carman 2013, we touched upon these matters as the opportunity presented itself as we visited the various synod committees.

It is important to note that the various (deputies) reports to Synod Carman, as well as the considerations and recommendations of Synod Carman, that these matters are not being overlooked or set aside by. It is also evident, that unless a specific mandate to discuss a matter is recorded in the Acts of Synod, some churches appear to doubt that these matters would be addressed adequately under the general mandate outlined in the Rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (cf. Art 93 Consideration 3).

However, what we can note is that Synod Carman 2013 did interact with many of these issues. For example Synod Carman ensured that matters of Supervision of the Pulpit, Admission to the Lord's Table, and Women Deacons are 'subject to continued dialogue' between the respective committees of the ERQ and the CanRC (Art 21 page 24-27). Likewise, with the RCUS, Synod Carman 2013, mandated the deputies to 'discuss matters of mutual concern and edification, giving attention to the matters of Lord's Day observance and admission to the Lord's table.' (Art 93. page 89-91)

As to the OPC, Synod Carman 2013, restated that OPC and CanRC already have an agreement in place (as proposed to Synod Fergus in 1998 and accepted by Synod Neerlandia 2001) as it relates to the matters of Fencing of the Lord's table and Confessional Membership. Synod Carman 2013 urged the deputies to give 'particular attention...to the functioning of the 2001 agreement. (Art 43 Recommendation 4.3).

From the above it is clear that the CanRC are being faithful in their sister-church relationships in North America, and are do so by specifically addressing their differences, and by holding their sisters accountable to agreements that have been made in the past.

Another noteworthy point is that Synod Carman 2013 received a letter from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) requesting a 'reopening of discussions with the CanRC with a view to having fraternal relations. Synod Carman 2013 mandated their deputies to continue dialogue with the RPCNA while at meetings of NAPARC. (Art 76, page 60), however made no specific recommendation beyond that.

NAPARC

In our address to Synod Carman 2013, the matter of membership of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) was addressed (cf. appendix 1). Specifically we raised concern about the role of the CanRC Synod in voting to admit new member churches into NAPARC and how this process worked within the parameters of the CanRC Church Order. Synod Carman 2013 went to great lengths to provide clarity to the churches as to the advisory character of NAPARC and that voting in favour of admitting a new member church to NAPARC would not constitute a recognition of such a church as true and faithful, but would simply allow it to be admitted to NAPARC. Synod Carman 2013 also considered that *'the self-testimony required by NAPARC member churches is not sufficient basis for us to recognise them as true churches, but is sufficient basis for us to dialogue together with them at NAPARC as a discussion partner.'* (Art 77, Consideration 3.4, page 65) In many ways, Synod Carman 2013 equated their participation in NAPARC to that of their involvement in the ICRC (cf. Art

77, Consideration 3.4, page 65).

Further information on the involvement of the CanRC in NAPARC as well as a comprehensive overview of each of the member churches can be found in a series of articles also featured in the Clarion, starting February 28th 2014. It is the personal perspective of Rev. P. Holtvluwer, who is the convenor of the synod-appointed committee which has the mandate to attend NAPARC.

Conclusion:

The FRCA continue to enjoy a close sister-church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Aside from the rich Reformed heritage, we both share much in common; a similar language, a similar Book of Praise, a similar Church Order and the use of the same Theological Seminary. While there are changing circumstances to discuss, from both sides of the Pacific, there is great reason to continue to foster a strong relationship with the CanRC and be united in our witness to the world of the rich Reformed treasures where share.

As a result, the Deputies recommend the following to Synod Baldivis 2015:

Recommendation:

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 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 (2) delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Dunville, Ontario during 2016, pending finances.

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 the continuing support of the CanRC in regards to our discussions with the RCNZ.
5. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the synodical level reinforces our contact with them.

Appendix 1: Address to Synod Carman West 2013

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is always a pleasure to be with brothers, and so it is tonight, a pleasure to address you on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. Together with Rev Anderson, it is my distinct privilege to extend our greetings to you and it's our prayer that your Synod will be blessed in all its deliberations. In the past year the Free Reformed Churches in Australia could come together in its broadest assembly on two occasions – more about that later – and we could also welcome two visiting delegates from the CanRC, namely Rev Wielenga and Rev Souman. Not only was this visit well received by the FRCA, it was also very beneficial for Synod Armadale, for us deputies, and for our churches, to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the work in the Canadian churches, particularly in matters of Church Unity and Church Relations – and we trust that the feeling is mutual. May we be so bold as to suggest that we look forward to hosting you again during Synod Baldivis in midyear 2015!

I had the opportunity on behalf of Synod Armadale to respond to Rev Wielenga's speech – and the recurring refrain was the 'connect-ness' between our church federations. As I glance across the table of Synod Carman West, and consider our experiences during the fellowships, and in the warm hospitality shown to us, during our stay here in Carman, I am truly amazed at how many connections there are between our bond of churches – personal and spiritual connections alike. I think it would be safe to say, at least from our vantage point, that despite the distance between us, we remain very close sisters. Indeed – to paraphrase the words of your delegate to our synod - you are our favourite Canadian sister...!

Perhaps it would be good to share at this time, some of the changes within our bond of churches. So what has changed? – Numerically not a lot, but still there is a steady growth for which we give thanks to our Covenant Lord. Over the past three years, since our last visit, our bond of churches has grown over 6% in membership (to a total of 4131), as well as by adding one new congregation, which is located some two hours south of Perth in the coastal community of Busselton - faithfully served by Rev Ted VanSpronsen, a familiar name to you all. This brings our bond of churches to a total of 15 churches, which are now spread over 3 distinct classical regions.

The church at Armadale continues to care for a home congregation in Cairns, Queensland on the north east coast of Australia. This home-congregation has 53 members and recently received locally ordained office-bearers to care for the flock, which is a wonderful blessing for

this group. The FRC Southern River is currently our largest church with over 520 members, however that is unlikely to continue due to new developments that will see it become two churches – with the new church planted in the area of Melville – which makes it the closest church group to the capital city, Perth and the port city of Fremantle.

The area of outreach and church planting seems to be rather topical at this time, and has also been addressed in your midst. It is also being discussed in our churches – and is consistent with us being lights in this world and salt of the earth. And it's that same passion that has driven the FRCA's work in Missions. Currently our churches are active in three areas of Mission, in Papua New Guinea, in Sumba and in China. It is wonderful to see your involvement and support in these mission fields as well and it is encouraging to see that our sister church relation includes this kind of working together in a real living and active way – and this become more tangible when we are able to host Rev Dethan, Rev, Dong, Rev. J. Visscher and to discuss this work together.

In the ministerial ranks, we have recently received two new ministers from Canada, namely the Rev Alkema and Rev VanSpronsen in what we would say is a relatively fair trade since you have gained, or should we say (re) gained, the services of Rev Smith and Rev Eikelboom. Thankfully our churches were also blessed with two arrivals from the RCN – Rev Anderson (the dutchie with a kiwi accent) and Rev Hagg (another dutchie with a distinct South African accent) – and a last name that is extremely tough for us Aussies to pronounce. At this time the FRCA have three vacancies to fill, in Bunbury (where dolphins swim to your feet every morning at the beach), in Launceston (redolent in native forest), and in sizzling Southern River (a suburb close to the heart of the hubbub of the city of Perth). I hope your appetites have been whet... hint, hint!

In the next few years, there will be further ministerial vacancies, resulting from the retirements of two (more) ministers from active service – for a total of 4. Yet we are not alarmed by this for the Lord continues to show His love and faithfulness to our churches in Australia by providing faithful Ministers of the Word so that His people may continue to be fed, to be cared for and be instructed in the doctrines of the Church. Not only do we thank God for the provision of Ministers of the Word, we also thank Him for the training for the Ministry of the Word.

Theological Seminary

With that in mind we rejoice with you in the appointment of the new professor, Rev T VanRaalte the fifth professor for the Seminary, and the fifth time that the church at Surrey is now the Sorry church - sorry to lose yet another minister to the Seminary.

The work of the Hamilton Theological Seminary remains close to our hearts and also to our purses. Synod Armadale continued the tradition of financial support for the Seminary and re-affirmed our desire to continue to benefit from the wisdom of the Professors, by allotting funds for a guest lecturer to visit down under once every two years. Synod Armadale again mandated our deputies to 'continue to investigate the feasibility of the Freshman Year of Theological study to the churches in Australia.' Our churches are committed to pursuing this concept and it would be good for the Seminary and the Board of Governors to support it as well, as ultimately, the intent is to drive more students to the Seminary and that is a goal that will benefit both our federations.

Book of Praise

Both our federations also benefit from the Book of Praise. Synod Armadale provisionally adopted 'the 150 Psalms as revised in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010) for use in [our] churches' (Art 106 Dec 2). Great appreciation for this revision was expressed and we commend you brothers on this good work. Synod Armadale also adopted the 'Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church' 'as a starting point for the evaluation of proposed hymns' (Dec 7). The 19 additional Hymns adopted by Synod Burlington 2010, however were not adopted at this time, as Synod Armadale considered that 'the FRCA should only be obliged to consider new hymns if and when put forward by the Australian churches' (Art 106 Grds 4). Our deputies have been requested to do more work to determine the desirability of our churches for having an Australian version of the BoP.

Perhaps of interest to you is that Synod Armadale asked deputies 'to study the use of capitalization for personal pronouns referring to God.' Perhaps our churches are not the only ones questioning the lack of capitalization when referring to God and that this is a concern amongst your churches as well.

Deputies have also been asked to 'monitor developments with the Canadian BoP', and what we would appreciate and encourage is a closer working together between our federations in relation to the Book of Praise – we are the only other Federation of Churches that exclusively uses the Book of Praise – so perhaps a cooperative committee could be struck between our churches - In this digital age, surely this is a possibility!

NAPARC

Addressing our relationship with the CanRC, Synod Armadale has mandated that our deputies 'stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ)' on the grounds that 'we need to foster mutual understanding and support

regarding matters that our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America' (Art 49.d.). Of course this would include your involvement and participation in NAPARC – which seems to be a North American version of the ICRC. Yet, judging from the CRCA's supplementary report, the sensitivity surrounding membership comes to the fore once again - hence the informative report. Yet this time however, the membership issue appears to be different - now Synod Carman West is requested to do something, to affirm the decisions of the delegates of NAPARC. This seems to be a new development, and one that we would like to chat about, to get an understanding how this works with your church order and amongst your churches.

URCNA

The mention of joint committees ought to make you think of your work with the URCNA! And I would suggest that there has been a lot of work done by the various committees for the Church Order, Common Songbook and Theological College. Yet it appears from a distance that there is a bit of a stalemate. Synod Armadale has mandated our deputies to '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' (Art 49. Dec 2.b.) During our time here we hope to become more acquainted with this situation and learn about the latest developments.

In the meanwhile, we would urge Synod to note the recommendations of the your Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to ensure that the various Synod Committees keep the FRCA deputies informed on all the developments with the URCNA (as well as with other inter-church relationships). Not only is this consistent with the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, it will enable the FRCA to be informed and to be of assistance where required, and it will provide opportunities for us to learn from your work with your sister churches.

RCNZ

At this time, we have not yet been able to enter into an official sister church relation with the RCNZ. As you are aware, there remains one obstacle that hinders progress in this regard, and that is the sister relation that the RCNZ has with the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia. There has been a new development in this regard, with the proposed new relationship status between the RCNZ and the CRC of Australia. As explained to us by their fraternal delegate, from New Zealand's perspective the relationship was downgraded to ecclesiastical fellowship, however the deputies of the CRCA sold this to their synod more in terms of a renaming of the same relationship. In any case, the matter of the way this relationship is defined

and conducted will be back on the table of the next RCNZ synod.

From our perspective, Synod Armadale has mandated our deputies to 'determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRC of Australia differs from their previous sister church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods' (Acts 89 5c). It is clear from your reports that your deputies have also picked up on this change and we appreciate their recommendations in this regard. Our churches thank you for your understanding regarding our position with the RCNZ and again Synod Armadale requests that this support continues (Acts 49.d.) until this last obstacle is removed and we can finally 'remedy the present anomaly of recognizing the RCNZ to be true and faithful without entering into a sister church relationship.' (Synod Armadale Art 89 – Dec 1, Gr 8).

Indonesia

Regarding the churches in Indonesia the FRCA recognise with thankfulness that the CRC at Synod Burlington 2010 have established a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI(NTT). After your synod in 2010 we could notice a further development within the GGRI towards a closer unity between the churches located in the different provinces of Indonesia. This resulted in a combined general Synod of the GGRI in Sentani, Papua 2012 with delegates from the provinces Papua, Kalimantan Barat and NTT. Given the progress of the church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ in Indonesia it would be a set-back if the Canadian Reformed Churches would decide to discontinue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI as proposed by your deputies. Synod Armadale 2012 decided '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.' Given the fact that the churches in Australia had no dealings with the churches in the provinces Papua and Kalimantan Barat previously, Synod Armadale 2012 mandated the deputies for contact with the GGRI to give a clearer picture of the federation of churches in Papua and Kalimantan Barat. It would be helpful that our deputies can do this in close contact with the Canadian deputies.

RCN

At the beginning of this address I mentioned that Synod Armadale had meet twice over the past year. With one exceptional all the items on Synod's agenda could be completed when Synod convened in June last year. Just two weeks ago Synod Armadale reconvened to complete its work relating to our relationship with the RCN(lib). Our Synod 2009 decided

to *exhort the RCN with love and care to be faithful in their approach to hermeneutics and combating the influence of a post-modern* (Acts Synod Legana). Seeing that there was no response to this exhortation, Synod 2012 Armadale considered this matter serious enough to initially decide to send a letter of admonition. It appointed an advisory committee to formulate it and then reconvened in April of 2013 to complete its work. The official admonition includes how the RCN *tolerates an approach to hermeneutics that does not uphold the authority and plain meaning of Scripture for exegesis*. There are various examples given with attention given upholding *the sufficiency of Scripture for ethics* with references to how the decisions of the RCN *about marriage and divorce leave room for a subjective approach in understanding and applying the Biblical norms*. Sister church relations with the RCN are continued, yet there was an *expressed sadness at the lack of progress to resolve our concerns to date, so that our relationship is strained*. In view of all this Synod also decided *to advise local consistories to exercise due care with respect to their responsibilities towards those coming from and going to the RCN, and to call the FRCA to frequently remember the RCN in their prayers, in view of the continuing struggle for the truth within these churches* (NB: all italics quoted from the adopted Press Release of Synod Armadale 2012-13).

Brothers, you can imagine the difficulty in formulating and delivering such a Letter of Admonition to a dear sister - a sister whom we have received so very much from over the years. We do not claim to be without spot or sin – yet the letter had to be sent, in a spirit of humility, recognising that we all are compelled to rely all the more on God's grace in preserving His church and to be reaffirmed in our conviction to live godly and holy lives that glorify our Saviour.

Once again brothers, it is good to be here to share warm greetings from your sister down under. We thank the LORD our God for you, and for the unity we can express in our Sovereign Lord and King. Brothers, may the kingdom work that you do here at Synod Carman West be blessed, and be a blessing to the Canadian Reformed Churches. May the LORD our God of all Grace continue to gather, defend and preserve His churches here in Canada and throughout this world.

Thank-you.

Appendix 2: Report of Deputies Visit to Synod Carman West 2013

Published in the Una Santa

As on previous occasions our Australian churches also this year sent two delegates to represent them to the synod of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Br. Wayne Pleiter, a former Canadian resident and old hand at Canadian synods, arrived before Yours Truly to make it in time for the opening service on Monday evening 6th of May. The “true-blue” New Zealander (= NZer living in Australia) arrived the following day as he had to perform a wedding in Aussie the previous Friday. Due to this strange thing called “the international date line” he could leave Monday morning, travel more than 30 hours, and arrive Monday evening! This meant that both Wayne and I were reasonably prepped and ready for action Tuesday morning as the serious stuff began.

And a serious beginning it was. What to choose for breakfast. All 3 meals were taken at the church of Carman West where the synod was held. The synodical ladies did their very best to weigh down the delegates with heavy meals. And they succeeded. Wonderful home made porridge, thick as your best cement mixing mortar, and then home made oat bran, both washed down with genuine maple syrup – to mention just two of the goodies awaiting us every morning. But the delegates had to work hard for that. You were to turn up at the church at 8:00am and the earliest you got to leave every day was 9pm.

Most of the *real* work for synod was done in a number of smaller committees which prepared material for the plenary sessions (that is, when everyone gets together and things finally get voted on). Plenary sessions were chaired by the very capable hands of a minister well-known to many of us, Rev. Bouwman. Your Aussie delegates were given the privilege of the floor, meaning that they were permitted to stand on that floor and speak to any issue. They were also permitted to sit in and assist with the work of the committees as they saw fit. Your brothers attempted to choose committees dealing with issues most relevant to our Australian churches. Among the issues chosen were, for example, the Canadian response to the Dutch churches, the Book of Praise and the relationship with the Indonesian churches. Br. Pleiter was much appreciated for his expertise and knowledge of previous Canadian synods and Rev. Anderson was able to help a little with the discussions on the Dutch churches.

With respect to the *Book of Praise*, although the committee at first seemed to go in the direction of only a partial finalisation of the revised version, the plenary session in the end decided to go the whole hog and make the revised *Book of Praise* definitive. The synod had a very welcome desire

to prevent the BoP project from becoming a never ending and continually expanding mammoth songbook. Canadian churches no longer have access to the standing committee BoP committee and any proposals for major revisions to psalms or additional hymns must now be proposed via the deliberative cogs of due ecclesiastical process. Synod heard our appeal for a better way of allowing the Australian churches to give input into the BoP, and also informed synod of our last synod's decision to look into the feasibility of producing an Australian version of the BoP. Then it would truly Bee a BoP for Aussie (excuse the pun). Well, we can be very pleased with one of the final decisions made by the synod (in our absence, for we had long departed). It is worth quoting the considerations and adopted recommendations in full:

3. Considerations

- 3.1 The SCBP [= *Standing Committee for the Book of Praise*] did receive and review one significant document from the FRCA in connection with the revision of the *Book of Praise*. Thus, it appears that consultation with the FRCA on this matter has been limited. Both Fergus-Maranatha and Calgary are correct in noting that the degree of involvement has been inadequate.
- 3.2 It is regrettable that there is apparent inconsistency between Articles 115 and 121 of Synod Burlington 2010. This resulted in some frustration on the part of the FRCA, and disappointment on the part of the SCBP that the consultation was not as full as it could have been. Since Article 115 of Synod Burlington 2010 pertained specifically to cooperation with the FRCA, it might have been better for the SCBP to have applied Article 115 to the FRCA, rather than Article 121.
- 3.3 Australian fraternal delegates to Synod Carman 2013 noted, "Our deputies have been requested to do more work to determine the desirability of our churches for having an Australian version of the *Book of Praise* – essentially it means adapting your *Book of Praise* to make it our *Book of Praise*."
- 3.4 Whereas it is true that the contact with the Australian Deputies was minimal, the reality is that this project is near completion and ready for publication. Further, the process of receiving input from Canadian churches is complete, and it would not be prudent to delay the publication.

4. Recommendations

Synod decide:

- 4.1 To express its regret to the FRCA that due to the circumstances listed above, the degree of cooperation and consultation re: the work on the *Book of Praise* was limited.
- 4.2 To instruct the SCBP to continue contact with the Australian Deputies for the *Book of Praise* to assist in the FRCA's pursuit of a possible Australian version of the *Book of Praise*.
- 4.3 To inform the FRCA that Synod Carman 2013 has instructed the SCBP to publish the final edition of the *Book of Praise* as the authorized version for use in the churches.
- 4.4 To instruct the SCBP to report on its contacts with the FRCA to General Synod 2016.

I hope you can see that our Canadian and American sisters are trying to be as helpful as possible to us – even in our possible pursuit of a truly Aussie BoP. What a wonderful thing that would be. One little side note, that hopefully the Canadian readers will pick up on. I did notice that in several of the discussions regarding the wording of the Heidelberg Catechism, delegates tended to argue from the so-called “original German text”. How quickly we forget our church history! Shame, shame, shame. Our sister churches in Holland *never* adopted the *German* text of the catechism and it has no official standing in our churches at all and never has. The Synod of Dort 1618/19 officially adopted the *Dutch* text of the Heidelberg Catechism, which in several places made some *deliberate* modifications to the German. The German text is interesting background information, but can *never* function as a valid argument in and of itself respecting the translation from the official Dutch text to English. ... end of my little rant.

As far as the relationship with the *Dutch Churches* was concerned, the Canadian synod also decided to write a letter of admonition addressed to the next synod of our mutual Dutch sister churches. That the Canadians also take this matter very seriously can be seen from their “observation” 3.2:

The letter of BBK [= *the Dutch deputies*] emphasizes *the seriousness of the allegations* that are being made against them, and they suggest that – if these allegations are correct – *the grounds for [an ongoing] sister church relationship are shaky if not absent*. This indicates that our subcommittee and BBK agree on the seriousness of the allegations and they agree that – if Synod Carman 2013 agrees with the subcommittee – the very existence of our sister church relationship is under threat.

Words are not minced here. And the actual letter of admonition generally

follows similar lines to that of the Australian churches (albeit considerably shorter). *Una Sancta* may consider publishing this letter for its readers (that's a hint, by the way). Dear readers, instead of getting all righteously indignant at our Dutch sisters, let us remember to pray for our brothers and sisters in Holland! Let us pray that those going in a wrong direction or tolerating unscriptural trends may have the force of Holy Scripture opened up to them. And let us pray that the many concerned brothers and sisters in the churches may be granted strength and wisdom by our Lord to "hold fast to the traditions" (2 Thess. 2:15).

With respect to the Indonesian churches, the Canadians took a different line than we did. Traditionally we, just as the Canadians, had sister church relations with the GGRI churches in Sumba. Recently however, these churches have become one large federation of churches together with the Reformed churches established by the Dutch in Kalimantan Barat and also in Papua. Aussies, of course, don't like to make things difficult, so we just extended our sister church relationship to cover this new federation. This gives us new responsibilities to the churches in Kalimantan Barat and Papua too, although our main mission assistance will remain in Sumba. The Canadians were a little more cautious and only retained sister relations with the GGRI of Sumba (known as GGRI-NTT – don't you love playing with the alphabet?). This is like saying, we'll be sisters with one classis of a federation, but not with the other classes. A bit strange, but the Canadians will be investigating the churches in the other regions.

I should say that it was fine for both br. Pleiter and I to catch up with many old friends, acquaintances and (for me) former fellow-students at the theological seminary. The college also received a boost from this synod, which finally appointed the long awaited fifth professor in the person of Rev. Van Raalte. Synod expressed once again their enormous gratitude for our prayerful and financial support of the seminary.

Finally, of course, I should report on what Synod did with us 'Aussies'. Well they decided to continue to call us "sisters" (phew!). I'll close with their adopted decisions on the Aussie churches:

4. Recommendations

Synod decide:

- 4.1 to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules.
- 4.2. to express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA's ongoing support for and interest in the Theological Seminary, including their generous financial support.

- 4.3. to assure the FRCA of our continued attention to the nature and direction of the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCAustralia.
- 4.4 to maintain close contact with the various deputyships of the FRCA in matters of relations with sister churches abroad and informing the FRCA of changes or developments in third party relationships.
- 4.5. to invite the various deputyships of the FRCA to seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committees (e.g., our SCBP, sub-committee RCN, our committee in charge of reviewing the liturgical forms, Committee on Bible Translations, and perhaps others) in areas of mutual interest where the CRCA's mandate does not apply.
- 4.6. to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCA in 2015.

Rev. Dr. R. D. Anderson

(On behalf of br. Wayne Pleiter and myself)

Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea

Mandate

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 66) continued sister-church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK) and mandated deputies to:

1. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
2. 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.

Activities

Deputies sent br W Spyker to attend the General Assembly of the KPCK held from 24 - 26 September 2013 in CheonAhn, South Korea. Br DW Oh was also sent by deputies to accompany br Spyker on the grounds that his knowledge of language and the KPCK would be valuable. His attendance was at no cost to the Synod budget. The General Assembly was addressed, with the speech and reply being **Attachment 1**. A detailed report of the visit is found at **Attachment 2**.

In keeping with the decision of Synod Armadale (Art. 66.II 3&4), the speech and a report of the visit were published in the *Una Sancta*. Copies of the detailed report were also forwarded to the CanRC and RCN. No visit reports have been received from the CanRC or the RCN.

As may be noted in Appendix 2, whilst at the General Assembly deputies became somewhat more aware of the presence of the KPCK in Australia. This is a separate federation to our Korean sister churches. Rev TaeSoo Park, chairman of the GA of the KPCK in Oceania, informed us that this federation comprises 55 congregations, with some 25 in Australia, including 2 in Perth. Most congregations conduct Korean speaking services. Deputies did not pursue any further contact with these churches.

There have, however, been some practical expressions of our mutual sister-church relationship on a local level.

First, there has been ongoing contact with a KPCK missionary, Rev. Hun Chae Chung, who is based in Perth, WA. Rev. Chung made contact with the FRCA following our visit to the KPCK General Assembly in 2013. Rev. Chung and his family first came to Australia to learn English. He is currently engaged in missionary work amongst Aboriginal people and is also mandated to reach out to Koreans who come to Perth on short term visas. Rev. Chung is working somewhat independently; it is his stated desire to seek to work more closely with the FRCA.

Secondly, via our contact with Rev. Chung we have become better informed of the large number of Korean students and short term workers living in the Perth metropolitan area whom we may be well placed to direct outreach. Many of these are not practicing Christians and seek meaningful contact with English speaking Australians. Presently the congregations of Melville and Southern River are investigating the possibility of engaging in this work in consultation with Rev. Chung.

Thirdly, there is the possibility of liaison and sharing of information with respect to mission work in the Asia region. Upon request from one of the local FRCA congregations, Deputies have provided contact details of the Korea Mission Training Institute (MTI). It is hoped that the contact will allow sharing of information for the mutual benefit of the mission work.

Your deputies have noticed that there appears to be some differences of approach between us and the Kosin churches with respect to mission work. We observe this in the manner in which they send out their missionaries (from a central body, but with missionaries responsible for raising their own support). We also observe that, compared to us, they appear to engage themselves more with local churches and organizations in the countries to which they are sent. Your Deputies feel that a deeper understanding of Kosin missionary work and how it is undertaken is needed for our own instruction as well as to further explore possibilities to strengthen ties especially where we may be engaged in mission work in the same countries.

Conclusion

Deputies are thankful that contact with the KPCK, whilst remaining modest, do appear to have increased over the past 3 years. It was invaluable to attend the KPCK General Assembly with a Korean speaking delegate. This allowed for a greater appreciation of matters being discussed and decided within our sister-church, and showed evidence of our sister church taking a strong stand against Scripture critical theories.

We continue to enjoy close contact with Prof HaeMoo Yoo who remains on the KPCK Fraternal Committee. Further, we note that there appear to be increasing numbers of English speaking Korean brothers and sisters, some of whom have joined local FRCA congregations in the past years. This may enhance the mutual relationship. Finally, we have been blessed with establishing local contact with a KPCK missionary, Rev Chung.

Although our relationship with the KPCK remains somewhat limited by way of the language and cultural barrier, deputies consider that the last 3 years have seen positive developments in practical expression of the relationship. From what we have been able to discern, the KPCK demonstrate a love

for the Lord and His Word, and strive to faithfully fulfil their task where they are placed within God's kingdom. They exhibit the marks of the true church as we confess these in BC art 29. Deputies recommend that sister-church relations be maintained.

Recommendations for Synod Baldivis:

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 and Church Order.
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.

Attachment 1

FRCA Speech for KPCK General Assembly

Brother Chairman, delegates of this General Assembly, brothers and sisters:

Greetings from your sister, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Galatians 1:3-5)

We thank the LORD our God that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, gathers, defends and preserves for Himself a church chosen to everlasting life – and that we may be a part of this and experience this both in Australia and in South Korea.

We see Christ gathering His people by his Spirit and Word, and it is a blessing that we may share in this church gathering work of our Saviour. We may be joined in the unity of the true faith, and build each other up in that faith as we glorify our God and Father.

We cherish the sister-church relationship we have with you – a relationship that goes back all the way to 1976. Throughout those years we have exchanged greetings and visits and addressed one another at our synods and general assemblies. Over the years we have also had a few members of the Kosin Presbyterian Church join our churches in Australia. We are pleased to have one of those brothers, Dong Woo Oh, delegated to be one of the representatives from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to your General Assembly. We are eager not only to maintain but to deepen our relationship that we might know one another better and encourage one another more fruitfully. In this address to you, we humbly offer some suggestions where we can possibly grow and work together for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

1. Mission work. The Free Reformed Churches are actively involved in or investigating ways to be involved in the work of mission in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China and the Philippines. Although our churches have not been actively involved in the Asia-Pacific mission conferences of the ICRC, we do see great merit in working alongside our sister churches, particularly when we are engaged in mission work in the same country. We know that your churches have a long history of active mission work, and would love to learn from your experience and knowledge that you have gained over the years.
2. Reformed Education. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have been blessed by the Lord in the development of covenant, Reformed schooling for the children of our churches. The Lord has blessed us with a number of schools for children aged 4-18. The vast majority of our children attend these schools and there they receive an education that is consistent with what they are taught in their Christian homes

and in the church. We have experienced many blessed fruits from this, as each generation in turn is taught in the fear of the LORD. Much work has been done to develop a covenantal, reformed understanding of education. Perhaps the knowledge and insights that we have gained, as well as the expertise we have at hand, can be of benefit to you in your discussions about education.

3. We mutually share a sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). Although we have been greatly blessed in that sister church relationship for many years, we have also had to express various weighty concerns concerning the faithfulness of our sister churches in the Netherlands. Our last synod in 2012 was presented with evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the Word of God. In line with our rules for sister church relations, which require mutual assistance, encouragement, exhortation and care, our last synod decided that the seriousness of these concerns requires an official admonition to the RCN in the form of a statement of weighty objections with respect to the doctrine and practice of the RCN. This letter of admonition was concluded by our synod in April 2013. There is deep sadness and great concern in our churches over the direction that we see the RCN to be going in. May we urge you to also take note of our concerns and to evaluate them for yourselves so that you can assist us as we interact with our Dutch sister churches. Where you agree with our concerns we would ask you to share that with the RCN, and if at any place you feel we have been wrong in our approach, please share that with us. We pray that such help will be to the glory of God, and for the benefit of both us and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.
4. We cherish our sister church relationship with you and would therefore love to see more of you. We occasionally have professors from the seminaries of our sister-churches, or others, visit us in Australia to hold seminars and lectures. Perhaps we could also have a Korean brother, such as Prof. Dr. Yoo come to speak to us. Such face-to-face contact with the members of our churches will do much to strengthen our relationship. If you are able to send Dr. Yoo or another leader from your churches to visit us, we would welcome that warmly.

Even as we may enjoy unity across borders, our last Synod also resolved to encourage you to maintain the unity of the church within your borders of South Korea. As ground for this decision, our Synod noted that “The Lord clearly teaches in His Word that the church should be one and churches should be united. While the KPCK speaks about various *branches* of the

true church, unscriptural schism should not be considered acceptable.” May we humbly encourage you to remain committed to the unity of the church within your own country.

May we say again that we are very thankful for your invitation to attend at this General Assembly, for the opportunity to address you, for your warm hospitality and also for the fellowship that we may enjoy. May the Lord bless you and the decisions made at this General Assembly, that all things might be done to the praise of His glory and for the benefit of His holy church.

With Christian greetings,

Br. W Spyker & Br. DW Oh

Speech in reply by the KPCK Fraternal Committee

Beloved brothers Spyker and Oh,

We heartily welcome both of you! Your presence among us testifies clearly the church gathering work of our Heavenly Father. Especially, we witness that the church gathering work goes beyond the boundaries of the races. One brother is a Caucasian, Br. Spyker, and another brother is Asian, Br. Oh. Your combination is one clear example, which demonstrates that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is not bound to one nation or race. Our Triune God, whom we serve both in Korea and in Australia, is worthy of receiving glory and honor throughout the world.

You are the third team from the FRCA to visit our GA as well as our churches. Last time Rev. Huizinga and Rev. DeBoer visited us to exchange brotherly greetings and to strengthen our common faith in the Lord. From our churches, Rev. Jun went to attend your Synod in 2006. And I was privileged to serve as a delegate twice. It is our regret that we were not able to attend the last Synod of your churches in 2012. We hope to attend your next Synod.

Thank you for raising 4 important points to discuss. Even though we will be able to share our opinions on them in detail when you meet the members of our Fraternal Relationship Committee, I would like to mention these points briefly.

1. We are grateful for your suggestion regarding possible cooperation in mission work. As you mentioned, we are committed to foreign mission work. We have sent a number of missionaries to countries like Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China and the Philippines. Our Mission Committee and Mission Center is willing to talk with you about the possibility of cooperation. We hope that this discussion can make a beginning for further mutual assistance in these mission fields among

the missionaries of our two Churches.

2. We acknowledge that your churches have shown an eagerness to be faithful to the covenant promise by means of Reformed education. It is a great blessing in your churches that each generation in succession is taught in the fear of the LORD, who is jealous to be praised by his people from generation to generation. Unfortunately, Christian education based on the covenant is much less successfully developed among our churches. The reason would be that in the Presbyterian churches there has been less emphasis on training the younger generation by setting up the schools.

Thus it would be nice if you can share your wisdom concerning the Reformed education. Presently, the public education system in Korea is dramatically mistrusted and most Korean parents send their children to private educational institutes which are believed to have accumulated 'know-how' to train students to be accepted into higher ranking universities in Korea. In this situation, many Christians establish private schools for their children to have more time to learn the Bible and the Christian world view. I suspect that the ideological backbone of these schools is more Baptist than Reformed. In this respect, we can learn from the valuable experience and invincible enterprise of your churches. We would appreciate it if you take an interview with our Weekly Newspaper on this topic.

3. We share your concern about the issues in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). Like you, we also have been greatly blessed through the sister church relationship with the RCN for many years. It seems evident that our sister churches in the Netherlands recognize their difficult situation. For example, Dr. Oosterhuis, the General Secretary of the BBK writes in his Springletter, "Many church members show a lack of faithfulness. For instance when it comes to attending the Sunday(-afternoon) services or christian education in the family. Many show a lifestyle equal to that of the secularised world around us. Our churches experience also a decrease of financial contribution of the members for the sake of God's kingdom, which can only partly be explained as a result of the economic crisis in Europe. Our churches also suffer from the influence of the evangelical movement through which many members leave our churches and join evangelical and charismatic groups." We agree with you that it is our duty to admonish and encourage our Dutch sister churches together.
4. We are pleased to be invited by you to speak to you and would like to discuss this point in our Committee.
5. You encourage us to remain more committed to church unity in

Korea. We are thankful for this encouragement and take it to heart. As you know, we are eagerly engaged in a church unity program with the Hapsin Presby. Church and it is one of the hot issues of this GA. With the Independent Reformed Church we don't have any official but personal contacts. With the Reformed Churches in Korea we don't have any kind of contacts.

Brothers, the Apostle Paul says in Gal. 1:4, which you cite at the beginning of your address, that our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age. Our Saviour has saved us from the world in order that sin shall not have dominion over us. Nevertheless, we as churches are always threatened by sin and its power on every side. Let us be alert and ready to resist to the point of shedding blood in our striving against sin(Hebr. 12:4). Let us be prudent to take oil in flasks with our lamps, you in Australia and we here in Korea, in order to go forth to meet our bridegroom. For the time is near!

Brothers, once again, we are glad to have you in our midst. We hope that you feel at home and enjoy the fellowship with us. Please pass on our sincere Christian greetings to our brothers and sisters of the FRCA. We will remember you always in our prayers.

Thank you!

Prof. Dr. Haemoo Yoo

(Member of the Fraternal Relationship Committee of the KPCK)

Attachment 2

Report on visit to South Korea September 2013

Synod Armadale 2012 (Art. 66) continued sister-church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCCK) and mandated deputies to send one delegate to their 2013 General Assembly. On the grounds that his knowledge of language and the KPCCK would be valuable, deputies resolved to also delegate br DongWoo Oh, provided that his attendance would come at no cost to the Synod budget. Br Oh kindly agreed, and deputies are grateful for his attendance and input.

General Assembly

The 63rd General Assembly of the KPCCK was held at the Korea Theological Seminary (KTS) in CheonAhn, around 2 hours south of Seoul. It proceeded over 3 days from Tuesday, 24 September 2013 to Thursday, 26 September 2013. The General Assembly comprised 482 delegates from 37 presbyteries, with an even balance of ministers and elders. The chairman was Rev JunTae Ju.

On the morning of 24 Sept we were given opportunity to provide greetings on behalf of the FRCA. Prof Dr Haemoo Yoo, a member of the KPCCK Fraternal Committee, had kindly translated our speech into Korean and it was displayed on a large screen at the front of the auditorium, enabling all delegates to follow it.

Our speech was warmly received and responded to by Dr Yoo. Many delegates introduced themselves and thanked us for the greetings. A surprising number of Korean brothers were conversant in English and several indicated that they had studied overseas, including in North America and England.

Various other foreign churches were also in attendance and provided greetings, including the Reformed Churches in Japan, the Reformed Churches in Taiwan and the Reformed Churches in South Africa. In addition, representatives from the Kosin sister-federations in North America, Europe and Oceania gave greetings. There was also a presentation by a large group of Kosin foreign missionaries who were in attendance.

Having read of the famed Korean hospitality, we had opportunity to experience firsthand that it is not overrated. We were hosted by Dr Yoo and his wife. We experienced them and indeed all KPCCK members whom we met to be friendly, hospitable and willing to go the extra mile to ensure that our stay in Korea was enjoyable and fruitful.

GA agenda items

The theme of the General Assembly was “The Way of the Gospel; a warm company with the third generation.”

Some important decisions made by the GA were:

1. Release of a statement which denounced the World Council of Churches' movement. The decision was made since WCC held its assembly in October 2013 in Busan, South Korea.
2. To set up a committee to investigate a process through which one professor was hired to teach at the Kosin University (KU). This concerned Dr MyoungSoo Ji. In 2012 Dr Ji was appointed as a lecturer to teach at KU for two years. He had previously received his PhD in Dogmatics from Potchefstroom University in South Africa with the dissertation “Constructing a New Biblical Creationism as Solution to the Problem of the Relationship between Religion and Science”. Whilst Dr Ji is not a member of the Kosin churches (he is from the Hap-Dong churches), serious objections were raised to his appointment as his dissertation was viewed as not conforming to the Holy Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Whilst Dr Ji had already been discharged in February 2013 from his lecturing position, the GA nonetheless desired to know how such a person was able to teach at the Kosin University and how to prevent it in the future.
3. The person who was nominated to be the chairman of the Weekly Newspaper (Kosin churches' newspaper) was disapproved by the GA. Even though the chairman was chosen from the Board members by a vote, the selection needs an approval from the GA. There was unfortunately a controversy concerning the director's behaviour during the election in August. It had been revealed that the chosen Director used an illegal method during the election. The brother was found unsuitable for the job because of failing to show integrity.
4. To set up a committee which intends to study why the growth of the members in the federation has become stagnant. The committee is commissioned to find out the reason and the proper response for the decline in the number.
5. To request the Faculty of the Korea Theological Seminary to draft up a comprehensive plan for building up the Reformed Church.
6. To cooperate with the Korea Bible Society in order to translate the Bible into North Korean.
7. To continue the Committee for Union with the Hapsin Church.

8. To disapprove the government's move to put an income tax on the pastors.
9. To conduct a study on the issue whether the unmarried can become church officers.
10. To request the Faculty of the Korea Theological Seminary to study on the issue whether the son can succeed his father as senior pastor or son-in-law to his father-in-law.
11. To form a sister church relationship with the Reformed Church in Taiwan, which is a daughter church of the KPCK.
12. To pay contribution to the ICRC from the budget of the General Assembly, not from that of the Committee of the Fraternal Relations as paid till now.

Fraternal Committee

Contact with the Kosin Fraternal Relations Committee (KFRC) included an enjoyable lunch (attended by all foreign delegates) and a formal meeting. Present from the KFRC were Rev JongKi Son (chairman), Rev SungKyoo Byun (secretary), elder JongYoon Park (treasurer), Dr KyungHo Kwon, elder Si-Won Lee and Prof Dr Haemoo Yoo.

As discussion points for the meeting we had prepared the following, which again Prof Yoo had kindly translated for the benefit of the Committee:

1. We may share in the joy of the FRCA/KPCK ecclesiastical fellowship that has continued for more than 35 years (since 1976).
2. Where are the KCPK children educated? Does the KPCK operate its own reformed schools?
3. Does the KCPK catchise the youth of the church?
4. Does the KPCK do missions work in either of PNG, Indonesia, China or the Phillipines? If so, are there possibilities for liaison in missions work? In this regard:
 - a. Is the KCPC mission work organised at a local church or at a federation level?
 - b. What role does the MTI (Missionary Training Institute) play? Is it purely educational/training, or also organisational? Is there scope for participation by us in learning via the MTI?
5. Does the Fraternal Committee wish to respond to any of the suggestions in our speech regarding:
 - a. Mission work.
 - b. Reformed education.

- c. Concerns regarding the GKv.
 - d. Prof Dr Yoo to be guest speaker.
6. Does the KPCK continue to strive for unity with other churches within Korea? What is the status of contacts with the Hapsin churches, the IRCK or the RCK?
 7. Does the KPCK have any information regarding its Korean sister churches in Australia (ie. structure, contact details etc.)? We would love to establish contact with them.

As will be noted from Appendix 2, various of these items had already been addressed in Prof Yoo's responsive speech earlier in the day. During our meeting, the following matters were noted:

1. The FRCA were thanked for their past support of theological students at the KTS.
2. Various matters (such as reformed education, mission work and the presence of Kosin churches in Australia) would be addressed by others in separate meetings (as reported below).
3. Geographical closeness was expressed in that the son of the chairman (Rev JongKi Son) is presently the minister of a KPCK congregation in Perth, Australia.
4. Catechism instruction of youth is performed via Sunday school. The KPCK has an educational centre in Seoul that produces Sunday school material and also conducts training seminars for teachers.
5. The KPCK are presently experiencing static growth and is considering how this may be addressed.
6. The KPCK were aware of and concerned by the "women in office" deputy report in the GKv, and will raise this with our mutual Dutch sister churches.
7. Unity discussions, particularly with the Hapsin churches, have been ongoing for some time. It has not as yet progressed beyond discussion to actual unity.

Newspaper interview

In response to point 2 of our address, we were interviewed by the Kosin Weekly Newspaper (www.knews.or.kr) to discuss reformed education. As noted at point 2 of the responsive speech (Attachment 2), this is a live issue in Korea. We were able to describe the foundation for covenant education, and also give an account of the great blessing we receive from God by way of the John Calvin Schools.

Uniquely, whilst the KPCK recognise the importance of Scriptural education at the tertiary level via the Kosin University (www.kosin.ac.kr), this has received less emphasis and recognition at the primary and secondary levels. We encouraged them to transpose their reasoning for instituting a University to the primary/secondary level.

Visit to MTI

During the GA we met with 2 brothers (Rev HooSoo Nam and Rev JongGeon Lee) from the Mission Training Institute (MTI). Relevant to the FRCA, they mentioned that the Kosin are presently engaged in mission work in the Phillipines and also in Bali, Indonesia. We were invited to view the MTI buildings the following day.

We took that opportunity and travelled around an hour south to Daejeon City. The MTI is a large and well presented facility. Its primary focus is to provide both orientation and missionary training to KPCK missionaries.

Presently the KPCK has some 424 foreign missionaries, comprising 197 couples (families) and 30 singles. They are spread across 51 countries. Each are locally supported (in terms of finances), yet training and practical support is provided via the MTI. The present area of focus for mission work is among Moslem people in North Africa.

We were advised that mission work in the Phillipines is done in cooperation with other churches via the Presbyterian Church in the Phillipines. There is one missionary family in Bali where services are conducted in Indonesian.

KPCK in Australia

We met with Rev TaeSoo Park, chairman of the GA of the KPCK in Oceania. He explained that this federation comprises 55 congregations, with some 25 in Australia, including 2 in Perth. Most congregations conduct Korean speaking services. Rev Park himself was minister in Auckland.

We also met briefly with Rev SungKwang Oh, who is minister of the Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Sydney (www.sydneychurch.com).

Rev SG Hur and the RCK

Following completion of the GA, we travelled to the southern port city of Busan. We had been invited to meet with Rev Dr Hur, who provides assistance to the members of the Reformed Churches of Korea. Rev Hur himself is a member of the Kosin and at 80 years of age remains in remarkably good health and humour.

We enjoyed fellowship over lunch, and then met with Rev Hur and the RCK brothers on an informal basis. Present from the RCK were Rev DongSup Song, Rev SangHyun Park and Dr JongYeon Park. Having no mandate,

the meeting was arranged as a courtesy to their request. The RCK are a small federation of 4 churches and around 200 members, having commenced in 2005. They confess the 3 Forms of Unity and are hold to the church order of Dort. Their existence appears to be in reaction to a tendency to hierarchy within the presbyterial system of church government. They profess to hold to the Reformed confessions, church order and system of church government, in distinction to the presbyterian system.

The RCK brothers indicated that they made use of FRCA materials, having translated sermons of Rev Veldman and various books of Rev van Delden. They indicated a desire to visit Australia to learn from us. We encouraged the brothers to strive for the unity of the Lord's church in Korea, based upon John 17:21.

Sunday in Seoul

On Sunday we worshipped at the KPC in Seoul (www.seoulshimin.or.kr), a congregation of some 2,500 members. There are 5 services across the Sunday. The morning sermon was on 1 Samuel 26 and the afternoon service on Genesis 30. The sermon was presented in a passionate way and the congregation was attentive and responsive, with regular nodding and murmuring of assent. Our Korean speaking delegate could attest to the faithful and engaging preaching. A choir and organ/piano accompanied the singing. Bible reading was done aloud by the whole congregation. Collections were for the KTS.

Following the morning service we were given a brief opportunity to address the congregation and provide greetings. Fellowship was enjoyed over lunch that was served for all congregation members. Newcomers were taken to a newcomer room for one-on-one discussion. In the evening we enjoyed dinner with the Consistory, and also met with senior pastor, Rev John OhHun Kwon.

Pastor Kwon advised that each Wednesday there is a worship service where he preaches the Heidelberg Catechism. He also advised that whilst they maintain the lifetime elder, his congregation has adopted a policy whereby elders may only be active in the Consistory for a maximum of 12 years, in order to combat potential hierarchy. He is assisted in his congregation by 7 assistant pastors.

Observations

Previous deputies have observed that language, culture and history make it difficult to deepen our relationship with the KPCK. For example, in 1996 our deputies noted the advice of Prof Dr SG Hur, who commented on three aspects that we do well to bear in mind in our contacts with the KPCK (p.84, 1996 Synod Acts):

"In the first place, the PCK appoints new deputies for inter-church relations at each (annual) synod, and precedent dictates that appointments are normally restricted to those who have been delegated to the Synod. That in turn means that there isn't much continuity within the deputyship. It means further that there are very few English speaking brothers to choose from for the deputyship, a fact that hinders communication.

Besides these practical problems relating to continuity and language, Prof Dr Hur reminded us that the western way of "doing things" is different from the Asian. Western people approach issues and tasks in a very "business like" manner, while Asians do not. On a given issue troubling the churches, westerners expect and produce a detailed written report, but for Asians a short verbal report will do. It is not, then, that the Koreans are not as interested in us as we are in them; it is rather that they approach the task of being a brother's keeper with less rigidity than we do. They are content that our confessions, church order and liturgical forms are acceptable in the light of Scripture, and so trust that all is and continues to be OK (unless the contrary becomes apparent). They will pray for us (and others), but will not make a mountain of work out of looking after their ecclesiastical sisters. They are happy to hear from us (eg, our annual greeting to their Synod), but hearing from us is to the Korean mind sufficient.

A third aspect complicating the relation between ourselves and the PCK is, Prof Dr Hur indicated, the historical development of the PCK. While he found the first rule a very good one, especially in our liberal age, we had to be aware that many in the PCK do not understand this element of mutual supervision. In time past the PCK had close relations with the OPC (in America), but in practice this close relation was loose in the sense that it did not involve mutual responsibility to look after each other. We need therefore to be patient with the Korean brothers as they grow into this idea of being their brother's keeper in our secular world."

We consider that these observations remain apposite. Having said that, we may acknowledge progress over the years. Firstly, a growing number of Korean brothers are conversant in English. Further, our Korean sisters have agreed that it is their duty to admonish and encourage, for example as they approach the GKv (see Appendix 2). Finally, there appears to be a growing presence of the KPCK daughter church in Australia. Anecdotally, various Kosin members have visited or joined FRCA congregations in past years.

As to closeness in the mutual contacts, deputies make an additional observation, being that our respective federations are quite different in terms of dependence/sufficiency. As FRCA, we are a small and dependent

federation. We do not have our own institute for theological training, and therefore depend upon sister federations for the training of our young men, for the provision of ministers and, to a large degree, for Christian literature and theological articles/discussion/direction.

The KPCK, on the other hand, are a fully self-sufficient federation. They have all that is necessary for the above. Their rich church history has centred around their Theological College (KTS) and, more recently, Missionary Training Institute (MTI). They have large numbers of students and missionaries. They publish regularly. To that extent, it is our observation that whilst the KPCK acknowledge and maintain contact with foreign sister churches, these contacts do not form a critical part of their church life.

Accordingly, it may be up to us, as the “dependent federation”, to continue to stimulate efforts to intensify contact with our Korean sister churches. In doing so, we may learn much from them.

In this regard, we were most impressed with the KPCK’s focus on their own church history, emphasising how the Lord has preserved and blessed their churches over the years. Such history was accessible to visitors and the next generation by way of a beautifully presented and maintained Kosin History Museum (situated at the KTS) and also a Historical Museum of Missions in Korea (at the MTI). It detailed the martyrdom under Japanese rule, and the struggles for faithfulness and outreach over the years. The challenge for each generation is to tell the Lord’s wonderful works to the next (Psalm 78). A visually presented church history museum most certainly helps this cause.

It might also be relevant for us, as FRCA, to seek to intensify contact with the KPCK daughter churches in Oceania. To some degree, their development corresponds with the early FRCA history when church services were held in the migrant tongue (Dutch) and church culture remained somewhat Dutch. Yet over time this has changed and developed. Similarly, it might be expected that the KPCK sister denominations in New Zealand/Australia will, over time, conduct their worship services in English.

Deputies are thankful to the Lord for His travelling mercies, and that He allowed us to experience and participate in the church life of our Korean sister and enjoy fellowship with them. Whilst our mutual contact may be described as being at a modest level, we recommend that contacts with this sister federation be maintained.

Respectfully submitted
DongWoo Oh
Warnar Spyker

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (DGK)

Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)

This is the Report of Deputies, who were appointed by Synod Armadale 2012 – 13, given the following mandate as recorded in the Acts Article 99, VI, 3:

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.*

1. Names:

- a. The Churches previously known to us as the *Reformed Churches of the Netherlands – restored*; have now, in the Dutch language, officially adopted the name: *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* with the official abbreviation *DGK*. This official name and abbreviation is now taken up in the heading of this report.
- b. The Churches that were known to be the *Voorlopig Kerkverband* (translated; (the temporary church bond) has adopted the name; *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland* (translated; *Reformed Churches Netherlands*) with the official initials *GKN*. This name and abbreviation has now also been taken up in the heading of this report.

2. With regards to the mandate to *keep contact* deputies

- a. can report that the deputies appointed by Synod Legana 2009 had a meeting with the DGK deputies during the first session of Synod Armadale. At this meeting, among other things, some attention was given to:
 - i. the DGK accepting the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford as sister-churches.
 - ii. the DGK contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
 - iii. DGK decision to no longer consider sister-church

relations with the FRCA possible while the FRCA maintains sister-church relations with the RCN

- b. received notice that Rev. E. Heres (of Dalfsen) and a large portion of the congregation he served joined the DGK bond of Churches in December 2012.
- c. while attending the foreign delegates week of the RCN; our deputies visited with the deputies of the DGK. The minutes of this meeting as prepared by br. Van der Net of the DGK and approved by all present is attached as appendix one. From this meeting it may be noted;
 - i. as far as could be observed, these brothers diligently uphold God's Word as maintained in the Reformed Confessions
 - ii. the continuing turning from the truth of God's Word in the RCN, as evident in the m/w deputies report, only serves in the eyes of the DGK, to confirm the necessity of the 2003 liberation. Consequently there have been no official contacts with these churches. At times public meetings have been arranged with the desire to attract the truly concerned members among the whole spectrum of reformed churches. However, these meetings have not been attended very well.
 - iii. some questions of possible concern were raised regarding the FRCA maintenance of the fourth commandment.
 - iv. DGK decided not to entertain sister church relations with the FRCA while the FRCA have sister-church relations with the RCN.
 - v. They request us to read and consider their letter to the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held in Carman 2013. In this letter the DGK defended the acceptance of the Liberated Church of Abbotsford as a sister-church:
 - 1. because they object to the Canadian Reformed Churches relations with the URCNA; OPC and RCUS. – all churches who, according to them, do not sufficiently supervise the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
 - 2. because all appeals in relation to point "a" have

been rejected and there are no new grounds and therefore no further opportunity for appeals.

3. because the Canadian Churches consider DGK to be an illegitimate schism from the RCN, no point was seen in contacting these churches about this matter.

vi. As deputies we responded that;

1. In practice the FRCA have avoided sister-church relations with more than one church bond in a certain place and therefore, seeing that as sister churches the CanRC are recognised for their faithfulness, the DGK recognition of the LRCA may be an obstacle.
2. Further, noting that
 - a. the CanRC are discussing the differences as appropriate within the context of their sister-church relations
 - b. the FRCA also have sister-church relations with a bond which holds to the WCF
 - c. while understanding that there may be questions and even objections to certain teachings and practices in sister-churches, this does not necessarily require the breaking of these relations

thus, while FRCA has made no direct judgment regarding the LRCA its legitimacy is at best questionable.

- d. While in the Netherlands to attend the foreign delegates week of the RCN, our delegates also met with the GKN deputies.
 - i. as far as could be observed, these brothers diligently uphold God's Word as maintained in the Reformed Confessions. The minutes of this meeting approved by all present is attached as appendix two.
 - ii. The GKN and the DGK appear to have in common their concerns and objections to what is happening in the RCN.

- iii. The reason for the GKN not joining with DGK is that the DGK appears too “radical”, for example, in their insistence in recognising the “liberation of 2003” as “legitimate” and to recognise that the RCN has become a “false church”.
 - iv. Although nothing official, some members of the GKN are talking with members of the DGK. There is a certain acknowledgement that the unity of the church should be pursued. and maintained.
 - v. GKN make it clear that although a formal relationship is not feasible at this stage (eg due to their size and lack of manpower), they very much appreciate the informal contact.
3. Regarding the mandate to work in *close contact with the CanRC deputies*, deputies can report.
- a. that there has been close contact with the Can Reformed deputies for all our work related to the churches in the Netherlands. This included:
 - i. exchange of greeting speeches and reports in preparation for visit to Synod Ede.
 - ii. face-to-face meetings CanR deputies while visiting Synod Ede.
 - iii. open discussion about DGK and GKN with the CanR deputies .
 - iv. exchange of interim reports. See a copy of the CanR interim deputies report as appendix three.
4. Synods have given deputies the mandate to keep contact with the DGK and be receptive to others who have split off from RCN. While it seems good to have deputies report to the churches at Synod about further developments in this regard, there is no stated motivation or goal for this work. When looking back, we noticed that Synod Kelmscott West 2006 decided to: *To postpone a definitive judgment on the claims of the RCN (R) and to request deputies to investigate further whether or not the decision to “liberate” was lawful.* (Article 92). While this past decision implies a future *definitive judgement*, there appears to be no mechanism in place for a subsequent Synod to make such a decision. Seeing that, historically, among Reformed Churches all new initiatives come from the churches, we add a recommendation (b) so that the local churches are alerted to this

matter.

5. Recommendations:

- a. To keep contact with the DGK and GKN and be receptive to contact with others who split off from the RCN and report on further developments in this regard.
- b. To await recommendations from among the churches on how to proceed with these contacts.
- c. 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 and maintain informal contacts

6. Grounds:

- a. There are members, ministers and churches within the RCN that continue to express serious objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them who still need time in considering how to respond.
- b. The DGK and the GKN both recognise 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.
- c. 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. (C.O art. 30.)

DGK and GKN report Appendix One:

Minutes of Meeting (recorded by br. A. Van der Net of the DGK)

Of Deputies Relations Churches Abroad (BBK) of The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (DGK) with the Deputies Relations Churches Abroad of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, (FRCA) held on March 22, 2014 at 10:30 in Hasselt

Attending:

For BBK Br. W.J. Heeringa; Br. J. Houweling; Rev. S. De Marie; Br. A. Van der Net

For FRCA Rev. R.D. Anderson; Rev. PKA de Boer

1. Opening:

- a. Br. J. Houweling opens the meeting. He does so by reading 2 Peter 1:1-12 after which he requests the brothers to sing Psalm 40:2 and 7 and leads in prayer.
- b. It is agreed that the meeting will proceed in the Dutch language.
- c. It is agreed that br. A. Van der Net will record the minutes which will be sent around for approval by all those present.

Welcome:

- d. A hearty welcome is extended to all those present.
- e. To be sure that all present know each other, a round is given for personal introductions.

2. Agenda:

- a. The proposed agenda is adopted as presented.

3. Business:

a. General information and recent developments in the FRCA

After expressing gratitude for this opportunity to meet, Rev. de Boer gives the following information about the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Right now there are 16 churches, 3 Classical regions and a house congregation in Cairns (Queensland). A national Synod is held every three years. We are thankful for the continuing growth in the number of churches. We see this growth party due to how the Lord has blessed the Reformed schools.

At the recent General Synod of Armadale much time was spent concerning the FRCA relation with the GKV. During Synod a committee was appointed to draw up a proposed admonition which

was finalised at a continuing session of Synod held in April of 2013. This letter was sent to Synod Ede 2014. The concerns that the FRCA have for the direction seen in GKV have increased. Here mention can be made of their recent deputies Report about man/woman in the church. Further mention is made of the Hermeneutics Conference in Hamilton and some of the things that deputies heard there.

The FRCA are active in mission work including Lae-Papua New Guinea; China and Indonesia.

Concerning the *Book of Praise* the interim revised version (2010) of the Canadian Reformed Churches is presently being used by some of the churches, but not all. Synod decided that the 19 Hymns added by the Canadian Churches at their Synod 2010 are not to be used in Australia because none of the Australian Churches requested additional Hymns.

After this information is given, several questions are asked about the situation in Australia, including the secularisation in society. The DGK deputies ask how an article of Dr. F. Oosterhof about the Sabbath rest which defends the decision of Synod Zuidhorn could be published in *Una Sancta* (it can be viewed on the *Una Sancta* website). By way of reply assurance was given that there is no difference of opinion concerning the need to maintain the Sabbath rest. There may be some differences in the basis for coming to this conclusion. In the FRCA censure is maintained also with regards to the fourth commandment with respect to those who would do work besides that of necessity.

b. General information and recent developments in DGK

The DGK have as ground, the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity. There are nine churches and three house congregations. There are four ministers of the Word, namely Rev. P. van Gorp (emeritus minister); Rev. E. Heres; Rev. C. Koster and Rev. S. De Marie. There are also two theological students. The DGK have two Classical districts; North-West and South-East and a Synod is held every three years. Because there is no Regional Synod, initially a Synod was held every two years. This is no longer done. In the context of appeals, the other Classis has become the second appeal body. This is different from Australia where a Synod is held every three years and appellants have to wait that length of time. It is with much gratitude that the GK Dalfsen (dolerend) has joined the DGK at the beginning of 2013. It is a congregation of about 80 members. The DGK presently have about 1200 members

The DGK made a clear Synod decision to determine which sermons may be read. This decision was further specified in the Acts of Synod Emmen 2009 – 2010. There are lists of ministers' names whose sermons may be read. We like to have sermons read of ministers who could be on the DGK pulpit today (Art. 3 CO).

The most recent Synod of the DGK was held at Hasselt in 2011-12. The next Synod is scheduled to be convened DV in November 2014 in Groningen. The congregation at Opeinde have their own church building. The congregation at Berkel and Rodenrijs/Bergschenhoek have bought land for a church building.

Education for ministry of the Word is entirely done by the DGK. The ministers and a brother from the congregations do the teaching. It is no longer responsible to have men prepared for the ministry of the Word at the Theological University of the Christian Reformed Churches at Apeldoorn. Furthermore, we have a Bond of Reformed men- and women Bible study clubs. DGK has a sister-church relation with the liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford, B.C. Canada. There are also contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of S. Africa and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

The need for their own Reformed schools is felt more and more. There are presently some children who go to the Reformatorische Schools. In the mean time there is at a number of places a Bible school to which the children go once in three weeks. Furthermore, at various places a course is given for young married couples and (young) confessing members. With time more members of the GKV have joined the DGK but one cannot speak of a general reformation after 2003 (inclusive of Dalfsen 2010). Just the last number of months information evenings are organised for members of the GKV. These are advertised in local papers. Recently, at such a meeting in Berkel and Rodenrijs/Bergschenhoek, the ministers involved with *Gereformeerd Blijven* (Remaining Reformed) were invited. However, they all declined. There is still a lot of general resistance to be liberated. The Dutch daily (Nederlandse Dagblad) is certainly not a means to strengthen our voice. We are continually seen as radical people.

c. Letter of admonition to the GKV

We the DGK are happy with the Australian letter of admonition addressed to the GKV. The FRCA clearly see the course the GKV is taking, including the liberal way of Scripture interpretation. Attention is also given to what Dr. van Bekkum; Dr. de Bruijne; Dr.

Doedens; Dr. Harinck and Dr. Paas have written. Other things are also mentioned as items of concern and include; 1) the approach to divorce; 2) female office-bearers (Man/Woman Report); 3) the contacts and association with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (intermingling) 4) the participation in the Synod of Dort; 5) The multiplication of unscriptural hymns.

However in the letter of admonition the fourth commandment is not mentioned. Also Bible translation which is an important point is not mentioned. The NBV (New Translation) is definitely not a good translation.

In response the FRCA deputies give various possible reasons for why these matters are not included. When doing so they make clear they can only surmise. They are in the Netherlands to uphold the decisions of Synod Armadale 2012 and not their own opinions. They are delegates of the churches.

The DGK deputies ask why the Australian churches did not have understanding for their position earlier. Please notice our longing to find one another. Surely, the DGK have brought many matters to the attention of the FRCA? The main point is: How do we truly serve the Lord?

According to the FRCA deputies this has something to do with the distance. The points mentioned in the letter of admonition could have been more. A choice had to be made what to include. The DGK is reminded that the Australians never rejected the DGK. A decision was made not to make a decision about the DGK. First, more had to be done. The FRCA is still busy with the GKv including the warnings given earlier.

d. The Liberated Church at Abbotsford (LRCA)

The deputies did not yet have the opportunity to read the decisions and reports of the GS Emmen 2009-2010 regarding Abbotsford in a thorough way. The FRCA have good relations with the CanRC and are happy with it. They see them as faithful sister churches. Synod Armadale therefore decided that objections brought against them by LRCA will not be examined. This Synod further noted that the DGK acceptance of the LRCA as sister churches could be a hindrance for the FRCA when considering possible relations with the DGK. To explain why it may be a hindrance the deputies pointed out that the FRCA have also been careful to avoid having two separate sister churches side-by-side in the same country. As example, reference was made to how the FRCA have only taken up sister-churches relations with one of the church bonds in Indonesia.

There was further discussion about the background reason of the LRCA. The DGK understands how the LRCA came about after these former CanRC members had run to the end of the appeal route in the matter of the CanRC accepting various churches as sister churches while unresolved confessional matters remained.

DGK deputies add:

- that the fact that the CanRC are members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council means that they have entered upon ecumenical terrain whereby it is possible that they will be even more clearly influenced by pluriformity. In contrast the FRCA are no longer members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The FRCA have asked questions of the CanRC in relation to their membership of NAPARC, but have not indicated that this is a concern to them.
- The contacts between the CanRC and other churches have impacted the CanRC. The doctrine of the covenant is a principal point. According to the Westminster Confession (and the URCNA tend to affirm this too) the covenant is made only with the elect. This is heresy.
- There is a “lack of confessional membership” and a “lack of fencing the Lord’s Table” in the OPC. On the website of the OPC one can read that a Baptist is welcome if he would confess: “Jesus is my Saviour”.
- The Westminster Confession was rejected by the GKv in 1948 as a Reformed confession and yet in 1967 it was characterised as a Reformed confession. At the moment the deputies DGK are studying this confession.

In response the FRCA deputies reminded the DGK brothers that the CanRC still recognise these divergences and have decided to speak about them within the context of a sister-church relation. It is not as if the CanRC have taken over these divergences themselves. For this reason the FRCA deputies question the need for the LRCA. The FRCA themselves have sister relations with churches that have the Westminster Confession. Such churches work from the concept of the “system of doctrine” which gives the office-bearers the possibility – with the approval of Presbytery – of dissenting from certain details. The detailed nature of the Westminster Confession makes this approach necessary.

The DGK deputies add further that the openness in the GKv towards other church groups and towards the world is in accordance with

D. Bonhoeffer: "be there for the world". This openness produces tolerance with respect to all kinds of fundamental heresies. This, however, does not fit in with the Reformed Confessions. It can therefore not be accepted. The question remains: What does the Lord require of us and how do we stick to that?

The deputies FRCA respond that God's Word no longer functions adequately in the GKv and heresies are no longer opposed. They add that the CanRC at their last synod have once again taken away the right of women to vote at congregational meetings. They further ask whether the issues which played out in Abbotsford are issues which require secession? Were there really enough reasons to secede? The DGK deputies point to the report concerning these matters which they sent to the FRCA deputies.

The DGK deputies add that the impact of the cooperation with the OPC, URCNA and several others is that pulpits are open for wrong doctrine and that church members of these churches are admitted to the Lord's Supper of the CanRC, even though there is no binding to the Reformed Confession (see the remark above concerning the admission of baptists). When the Lord's table is no longer sanctified, you are held responsible as a congregation. For this reason (the practice in Abbotsford) members in Abbotsford were in a crisis situation (open Lord's Supper). They appealed on the basis of this wrong pluriformity.

The DGK delegates respond further by saying that there is no evidence that the CanRC are still dealing with these divergencies. Throughout the years admonition, appeal and criticism has been swept from the table concerning these issues. The letter of appeal from the DGK to Synod Carman was declared admissible but was not taken seriously.

The DGK desire that the FRCA no longer see Abbotsford as an impediment to a sister-church relationship with them. They request the FRCA to look critically at what happened. The CanRC have said to the DGK that they are schismatics since they seceded without having good grounds for liberation. Now in 2013 they also have not taken the letter from the DGK seriously.

e. Letter of DGK to The Canadian Reformed Synod of Carman 2013

The deputies of DGK want to bring the letter they sent to Synod Carman 2013 to the attention of the FRCA deputies and Synod along with the request that they look well into the CanRC ecumenical developments.

f. Temporary Church bond (now called Gerefomeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN))

These churches consist of: 1) former members of the DGK 2) members of the GKv Kampen that had ended up outside the bond; and 3) members of the GKv that have joined with them. They have not joined us because we are known as being “radical”.

At the moment there are some local orientating talks with them. It is not yet known what the outcome of such talks might be. The following points are evident among them; a deviating vision of the church; a toleration for the teachings of Kohlbrugge (regarding the relation of justification and sanctification) and other experiential tendencies; a more independent vision of church federation.

We consider the union with Dalfsen as the work of the Lord. We gladly acknowledge their liberation of 2010 as a work of the Lord.

In response to the question of a FRCA deputy whether the DGK see themselves as the only true church, the DGK deputies say that we may see ourselves as the true church of Christ in the Netherlands to which all believers are called: Come with us; but Christ's work is not yet finished. It continues on. There could be two (or several) true churches at a certain place at a certain time. That would be temporarily possible. But then there must be a working towards unity. Thus it happened that in 2013, with respect to unity with Dalfsen, great thankfulness and joy was experienced.

g. Discussion instructions of FRCA deputies

The FRCA still have sister-church relations with the GKv. The FRCA no longer asks the DGK to be reconciled with the GKv. It is no longer in the instructions given to deputies. The FRCA continue to keep contact with the DGK and also with others who have left the Gkv.

h. Discussion of instructions of DGK deputies

General Synod Hasselt instructed their deputies (BBK) with regards to the Australian Churches, upon noting the decisions of Synod Armadale 2012 to:

- a. maintain contact with the FRCA and to help and support the FRCA to reach a judgement regarding the GKv that is in accord with Scripture and the Confessions.
- b. serve the FRCA with information for the grounds and background of the sister-church relation of the DGK with the LRCA.
- c. voice disappointment that the FRCA has not yet acknowledged

the DGK as the legitimate continuation of the Church of Christ in the Netherlands.

- d. give information about the schisms that have led to the formation of the temporary church bond.
- e. for that purpose, use shall be made of the English versions of correspondence with the GKv.
- f. they shall, if necessary, set aside unjust allegations of others at the address of the churches.
- g. they shall pursue renewed attempts to eventually establish sister-churches with the FRCA only after the FRCA break their bond with the GKv.
- h. they shall carefully continue to monitor developments within the FRCA.

i. Questions from the FRCA deputies

The FRCA deputies ask if there are any contacts with the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (HHK). Answer; not anymore. Letters were exchanged in 2005 and 2008. Points into which the DGK ran; 1) regarding the Church Order; regarding binding to the Confessions; 2) passivity and experientialism 3) national church idea

They do have contact with the GKv.

j. Questions from the DGK deputies

None

4. General Question Period:

The FRCA deputies say that it was good to have spoken with the BBK of the DGK and that they have been given this opportunity. The deputies of the DGK similarly affirm it from their side. They add that it is reason for joy to see the Australian eyes opening with regard to the developments in the GKv. The desire is expressed that we may come closer to each other.

5. Closing:

Rev. Anderson leads in thanksgiving prayer after which the chairman closes the meeting and wishes all a good return home.

Joh. Houweling, chairman

A. Van der Net, secretary

Rev. R.D.Anderson

Rev. P.K.A. de Boer

DGK and GKN report Appendix Two:

Report of the meeting of the delegates of the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) and the deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) held on Monday 24 March 2014 in the Church building Elim at Ede. (as recorded by br J.M van Wijk)

Present:

FRCA:

Rev. R.D. Anderson (RDA)

Rev. P.K.A. de Boer (PdB)

GKN:

Rev.. L. Heres (LH)

Rev.. E. Hoogendoorn (EH)

Br. J. de Bruijne (KdB)

Br. J.M. van Wijk (JvW) (Notulen)

Absent (due to sickness): Rev. R. van der Wolf (GKN)

Rev. Hoogendoorn opens the meeting with reading from Isaiah 49:1 – 7 and prayer. Hereafter everyone is welcomed. An earlier similar meeting was held on 26 March 2011.

RDA clarifies the deputies mandate, namely

7. to keep contact with the RCN^r and be receptive to contact from other churches (like the Voorlopig Kerkverband) who have split off from the RCN and the RCN^r, and report on further developments in this regard; and
8. to work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments.

EH response to the question concerning the situation of the “provisional” church bond of the GKN. From the onset till now the GKN cannot implement everything in the Church Order, for example, the forming of Classes and Synods and matters related to these assemblies such as Church-visitation. That was the reason for using the term *provisional*. In hindsight it appears to have been a poor choice of word because the outside world perceives it as ‘temporary’. In the meantime the name of the church federation has been registered as the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN; translated; Reformed Churches Netherlands) and the term “provisional” is no longer used. The federation has 5 churches with 9 preaching posts and 700-800 members.

RDA What, according to you, is the reason Rev. E. Heres joined the DGK?

LH questions whether their opinion is helpful. We cannot look in his heart. EH tells about the many discussions there have been with the at that time “grieving congregation” of Dalfsen to which Rev. Heres is joined. Rev. Heres wanted to seek unity between the GKN and DGK. The DGK did not allow this and called the GKN schismatic.

RDA Does this have something to do with the vision of the GKV and the existing vision of the DGK concerning the “true Church?” That is difficult to answer. Rev. E. Heres did comment at that time: We have taken our leave from the GKV. In the “grieving church” of Dalfsen at that time there were two directions: One towards the GKN and the other towards the DGK.

RDA What are the differences between the GKN and the DGK? EH We notice a difference in the nuances of “false” church. Moreover, within the GKN (congregation at Dalfsen and Kampen) there are voting rights for women. The unity we find with the GKN and DGK is the difficulties we have with the GKV.

RDA Has the GKN not received brothers and sisters from the DGK without any conditions attached? LH Yes, that is true, but due to various developments it is understandable why these people joined the GKN.

RDA That appears strange to the FRCA. EH Some brothers and sisters of the DGK join the GKN because of the rigid position of the DGK (radicalism). Also, the GKN of Kampen never made a judicial declaration about the schism in Hardenberg when Kampen and Hardenberg together formed a church bond. The basis for joining together was: Scripture, the Reformed Confessions and the Reformed Church Order. LH The difference between Rev. E. Heres and the GKN is evident in the approach to church polity. In my opinion, the difference in church choice has a lot to do that we do and he does not leave the ecclesiastical course taken for each one’s own account. The foundation is “unity in Christ” and not the “Church Order”. Furthermore, the DGK hold onto 2003 as a “new reformation”.

At the moment there are no formal talks with concerned ministers or congregational members of the GKV. Individually this does take place (besides others, via the Study Group Middle of Netherlands, which regularly organises information evenings for concerned GKV members. <http://www.studiegroepmiddennederland.nl>). LH I am busy with the proclamation of the gospel, the relations with the GKV are of small importance. PdB And what about the *Eén in waarheid en Gereformeerd blijven* websites? LH No, there is no direct contact. To form an opinion of the GKN in the context of GKV is not always helpful: “difficulties and struggles”.

PdB Has the DGK changed since Rev. E. Heres joined? LH There is

change, but only a little bit. The congregation of Zwijndrecht have had talks with the DGK of Berkel but there is no positive news to report as of now.

PdB The situation in GKN Kampen was different. How does EH stand with respect to the GKv? EH The train keeps on moving. Two principled decisions have been made which lead to the widening of the gap. PdB What are they? EH Marriage and remarriage; homo relations and living together; changes in liturgy such as revival songs and special services. And, not to be overlooked, hermeneutics.

PdB Does the GKN agree the admonition of the FRCA? We have heard some rumblings about it not being accurate. EH We stand entirely behind it! Sometimes it is difficult to admonish; for example Harinck, who says "sorry" but then does not distance himself from the main content of what he has said. PdB Our task regarding the GKN (and DGK) has changed. Previously there was a call to return and reconcile with the GKv. That call is no longer made today.

PdB Is there any relation with the CGK and HHK? Answer: Not that we know of. Also within these churches there are various streams.

JvW What is the ecclesiastical situation in Australia? Do changes take place there? FRCA The church federation is very conservative.

JvW How does the FRCA deal with sister-church relations; if the end of the relations with the GKv approaches? We as GKN are in need of support/encouragement, not in the first place within a sister-church relation, but with the sense of; there is companionship, other churches understand our difficulties with the GKv. A sister-church relation would mean the ministers could preach in each other's churches and attestations could be exchanged.

RDA To enter into sister-church relations with the FRCA, one of the churches in the bond must make this request. This is not primarily a Synod matter. A request for relations can be sent via the deputies foreign churches who in turn send the request through to the local churches. But the FRCA is also (relatively) small and does not want to quickly be tied to "a" church relation which has no real mutual value.

After this discussion gratitude is exchanged for this opportunity and the openness with which we could speak with one another. We as GKN are encouraged by PdB.

In conclusion Rev. Anderson leads in prayer.

DGK and GKN report Appendix Three

Canadian Reformed Churches

INTERIM REPORT SUBCOMMITTEE FOR RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

SEPTEMBER, 2014

A. The Reformed Churches In The Netherlands (Liberated)

PREVIOUS TO SYNOD EDE 2014

As Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Liberated (RCN), we anticipated the work of Synod Ede 2014 with much interest. Synod Carman 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) had expressed deep concern about developments in the Netherlands, and had therefore addressed a letter of admonition to Synod Ede.¹ The letter expressed grave concern specifically in the areas of what was being taught and published at the Theological University of Kampen (TUK), the work of the Deputies Men/Women in the Church, and the direction of Deputies for Church Unity with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), churches which had placed themselves outside the federation of the RCN almost 50 years ago. The disquiet expressed in Synod Carman's letter in general focussed on the matter of Bible interpretation or hermeneutics. We first followed some developments which took place previous to Synod Ede.

On January 20, 2012, the TUK hosted a conference on homosexuality, which included speakers from the broader Reformed community in the Netherlands. The proceedings of this conference were published later on 2012 in a book entitled (English translation), *Open and Vulnerable: Christian Debate about Homosexuality*. This volume was number 11 in the "Bezinningsreeks," an official series published by the TUK. We were able to review this book early in 2014. We concluded that the speakers at this conference were obviously not all in agreement, but noted two striking general features from the published speeches. There is very little exegesis or asking what Scripture says and there is much talk of the current culture and the need for the church to accommodate as much as possible to homosexuals so they feel welcome in the church. It is of course a given that the church should welcome all who want to follow Christ, but the point here

1 Acts of General Synod 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Article 165, page 212.

is that unfortunately biblical norms were not at the forefront, but human perceptions and feelings.

The Hamilton Hermeneutics Conference was held in January 2014, also previous to Synod Ede. At this conference a number of RCN academics expressed their views, and this only heightened our worries. How we read the Bible is crucial to its present normativity in relation to, for instance, the role of women in the church and to how we as Reformed Christians are to respond to homosexual relationships in today's increasingly secular culture. The conference has been sufficiently covered in *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal*. There is general agreement among the North American churches that there is an obvious trend in the RCN to accommodate Biblical interpretation to modern geological, biological, archaeological and sociological theories by means of a hermeneutic which deviates from the traditional Reformed method of handling the Word of truth.

We wondered what the Deputies Men and Women in the Church would recommend to Synod Ede for the RCN churches. Their report² was a huge disappointment to us. It urged the RCN to declare that in the light of its new direction of Bible interpretation there is no Biblical reason why women cannot serve in all church offices. The introduction of this report put forward the issue as the deputies saw it: *How do we read the Bible? At the same time, this theological problem is partly engendered by social and cultural shifts, and by changes in the way church members think and live.*³ The report ascertained that church members in the RCN experience a growing tension between the opportunities available to women in society and the restrictions on the roles of women in church life. However, the Bible gives obvious directives about the relations between men and women in Genesis and the apostle Paul states in certain passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 that women are not to speak or have authority in church. How are we to read those passages? The report asserted that due to the current socio-cultural developments surrounding the role of women, there is "real uncertainty" as to how the Pauline statements about the role of women in the church must be read.⁴ The report then reviewed those passages and re-interpreted them in such a way that instead of giving normative prescriptions concerning the role of women for all times, they were read as a requirement for the church to adjust women's roles according to the prevailing culture. In other words,

2 RCN Reports available in English at <http://www.gkv.nl/kerkplein/english-materials/>

3 Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church for Synod Ede 2014, page 5

4 Report, page 8

those passages about women not speaking or having authority over men in church were not normative for today. Instead, the purpose of those apostolic statements would be to ensure that the church does not create an unnecessary hindrance to people of the prevailing culture to follow Christ, thus impeding the progress of God's Kingdom.⁵

This report, we believe, has put aside the Bible's plain, normative speaking about the roles of men and women in the church in favour of a contrived and complex new hermeneutical technique which emphasized socio-cultural factors which result in interpreting what the Bible says in such a way that it says the opposite of what it simply and naturally says. There was one dissenting deputy, brother D.A.C Slump, whose criticisms of the report were appended to it. We found ourselves in full agreement with his arguments. He pointed out that too much weight was given to the cultural context while insufficient weight was given to the creation ordinance concerning the place of men and women. More importantly, this deputy's also concluded that "the report does insufficient justice to the significance that the Word of God, including that spoken by the mouth of Paul, has for today."⁶ This matched our most serious criticism, namely how the report treated the Word of God. We do not believe that humans are the ultimate authors of the Bible passages discussed, but those words were inspired by the Holy Spirit who used people in their circumstances to write down what He wanted them to say for the "regulation, foundation and confirmation" of the faith for the church of all times and places (Articles 3, 5 and 7 of the Belgic Confession). The report, however, seems to have lost its hold on this truth in its complex process of interpretation in cultural contexts. Even without being adopted by Synod, it was quite disconcerting that deputies (who include TUK academics) would proffer such an approach to the clear directives of the Bible.

Another report published by deputies before Synod Ede concerned the Revised Church Order of the RCN. Synod Amersfoort 2005 already appointed a committee with the mandate to revise the Church Order. After a number of proposals were reviewed by subsequent synods, Synod Ede 2014 is expected to finalize it. The proposal to Synod Ede was a major overhaul of the Church Order of Dort which has functioned in the Reformed churches for hundreds of years. The overall impression of the Subcommittee was positive. This revision of the Church Order continued to reflect the essential principles of the old Church Order of Dort. The basic principles of the headship of Christ and the authority of the local consistory under Christ appear to be maintained, and hence also the autonomy of

5 Report, page 23

6 Report, page 41

the local church. This Church Order however, seemed to include more centralizing rules on the one hand with Synods facilitating changes, while on the other hand more flexibility with regulations which seemed to give room for local experiments. Though much has changed, the proposed Church Order continued to reflect the centuries-old principles of Reformed church polity. Synod 2014 could not fully finalize everything connected with this new church order, as the 'Regulations' were not yet added to it. It remains to be seen how the new church order will be practically applied in these 'Regulations.'

We were taken aback by how the concerns expressed in our subcommittee report to Synod Carman 2013 and Synod Carman's decisions and letter of admonition concerning the RCN were typified in the Report of Deputies Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK) to Synod Ede 2014. The report stated that "many of these objections have been based on personal observations within our churches, and not on the documents on the basis of which the churches have agreed to be mutually accountable."⁷ We had taken pains to base our extensive report to Synod Carman 2013 only on the official documents of the RCN Synods and the official publications of the TUK. In fact, when directly asked by the chairman of Synod Carman whether the facts of the subcommittee's report were accurate, the fraternal delegates of the RCN indicated that they were, though they disagreed with the interaction with those facts.⁸ We can only conclude that the decisions and admonition of our churches were lumped in with those of other churches. Unfortunately this would imply that the CanRC concerns were not taken as seriously by the BBK as we had hoped.

Finally, Dr. K. van Bakkum responded in a letter to the criticism of the CanRC and others of certain assertions made in his 2010 doctoral thesis at the TUK entitled "From Conquest to Coexistence." He stated that he had learned from the criticism, but he still felt misunderstood in that there has been little attention for the academic context of his thesis. He also holds that he has been misrepresented, for instance in his statements about the sun standing still in Joshua 10, and too harshly criticized as a result. We were disappointed that as far as we can understand he still maintains his thesis statements which still sound very much like Scripture critical statements.

7 Report of Deputies Relations with Churches Abroad, page 5.

8 Acts of General Synod Carman 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Article 148, 3.15, page 180.

Synod Ede opened on January 31st, 2014. Unlike our synods where delegates from sister churches are invited to attend and speak and also take part in discussions throughout the time synod convenes, the RCN organize a “Foreign Delegates Week” at which delegates of foreign sister churches and observers from other churches are invited to a few select sessions and invited to address Synod with words of greeting. Brother Gerard Nordeman attended the “Foreign Delegates Week” organized March 22-29, 2014. He has reported on his impressions in a previous issue of Clarion. In his address to Synod Ede He introduced the CanRC and expressed the concerns of the CanRC regarding the changes in the method of interpretation of the Bible in the RCN. He was not the only foreign delegate who expressed such concerns. Brother Nordeman seriously warned Synod Ede that if the report of the Deputies Men and Women in the Church was not rejected, the CanRC would not see their way to continue the relationship with the RCN.

As Subcommittee we were also invited to attend Synod Ede on May 16th and 17th. On the 16th the letter of admonitions sent by various foreign churches would be discussed, and delegates from those churches were told on that day that they had only 10 minutes to elaborate on their concerns. On the following day the plan was for Synod to discuss the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church, but there would be no opportunity for delegates to speak on it. Sadly, we felt that with these measures Synod Ede effectively reduced us simply to observer status.

On May 16th, Rev. J. De Gelder expressed gratitude for the opportunity given to elaborate on the concerns of the CanRC. He emphasized that our apprehensions do not simply revolve around the matter of women in office, but involve the matter of how the Bible is being interpreted. There is no denying that the RCN are in the process of adopting a method of interpreting which is different than the method used over the past centuries, and our concern is that the meaning of Scripture is being accommodated to conform to the pressures of an ever-more secular and post-modern society. Dr. C. Van Dam emphasized that the RCN have been the bearers of a rich, Reformed inheritance of Bible interpretation and it would be unfortunate if that legacy would now be polluted by changeable unbiblical theories.

Synod declared the letters of admonition from various churches admissible and lumped them together in its response. Synod stated that the concerns

9 Basic decisions of Synod Ede available at <http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/besluiten-gs-2014/>

of the sister churches are evidence of our involvement with the RCN in Christ, and that they wished to remain accountable to the binding to Scripture and confessions. However, they also remarked that it is without doubt that the RCN are no longer the same churches as they were 40 years ago. It was also indicated that the differences of opinion among authors or in reports should not be enlarged to become objections to the RCN. The churches are only accountable for decisions which are taken at assemblies. Hence the request in our letter of admonition to indicate that the views expressed by Dr. S. Paas in his dissertation are not in harmony with the Word of God were ignored. As well, our concern about Dr. K. van Bakkum's method of critical Bible interpretation in his TUK dissertation was not touched on at all. In summary, the actual content of the Synod Carman 2013 letter was not specifically referred to. We can only conclude that Synod Ede's response did not show much real consideration for the deep disquiet expressed by our churches.

We note with dismay that the concern expressed in Synod Carman's letter of admonition in regard to the matter of women in office in the RCN has not had much real impact on those developments. On May 17th, the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church was tabled. We observed that the approach of the report was deemed too radically different and too complex by many of the synod delegates. In spite of that sentiment, however, it was also expressed by some delegates to Synod Ede that it is culturally inevitable that women will in future also hold office in the churches and what is still needed is an interpretation which is acceptable to the general membership of the RCN.

The discussion concerning the role of women in the church was continued on May 20th and finally concluded on June 5th. Synod decided that it could not accept the argumentation of the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church. However, though the report was not accepted, the matter of whether women may serve in all church offices remained an open question. Synod saw two lines in Scripture: the line of equality between men and women and the line of differing tasks given to men and women. Those two lines need to be resolved. Synod decided to appoint Deputies Men and Women to do this by investigating (our translation):

1. how the offices can be structured so that in them women can be active for God's kingdom; thereby taking into account those two lines in Scripture;
2. what the consequences are of such a structure, relative to the current forms and the church order; and

3. what the opinions are within sister churches concerning the implementation of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon; this with a view toward maintaining the catholicity of the church.

The appointed deputies were also instructed to inform the sister churches, both nationally and internationally, concerning the third decision and to request their advice.

Synod Ede also decided to appoint another committee Men and Women in the Church to investigate working toward integration of Biblical education, the confessional norms, and the practice of the Reformed churches in connection with the roles and functions of women and men in their mutual relations, by (our translation):

1. describing actively how and on what ground in Reformed churches men and women in various situations use their talents in the congregation;
2. noting in connection to this strong points, best practices, but also difficulties and points of controversy, giving a first assessment of these matters, and communicate this to the churches;
3. entering and remaining in conversation about these observations and considerations with especially the employees of the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum;
4. stimulating and supporting the conversation about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the churches, with a view toward a practice that reflects the manifold message of the Scripture, with special attention to:
 - a. Scriptural and obedient reading of the Bible;
 - b. the influence of society on the thought and actions of Christians;
 - c. the special and complementary differences between man and woman.
5. and in all the aforementioned activity, specifically asking women about their various experiences and convictions.

This second committee was also given the task to investigate whether there are developments in the churches in this respect that converge sufficiently, so that it is responsible to make general decisions and to submit proposals

to the next general Synod. As well they are to communicate relevant proposals to sister churches, both national and international, through the Contact Committee. Unfortunately, all this appears to the Subcommittee as having decided on the conclusion before having come up with the Biblical basis for that conclusion.

That this is the case is confirmed by the decision of Synod Ede concerning unity discussions with the NRC. Synod Carman's letter to Synod Ede noted that these discussions have become warmer over time mainly due to the RCN having moved in the direction of the NRC in regards to the method of Bible interpretation and to the looser subscription to the confessions accepted in those churches. However, Synod Ede proceeded further with the relationship with the NRC. Two of the decisions of Synod Ede concerning the contact with the NRC are as follows (our translation):

to declare that due to the agreement in discussions concerning hermeneutics the hindrance which existed because of the opening of the offices to women in the NRC has been removed;

to continue the contact with the NRC and to proceed from talks to discussions with an eye to church unity.

What these decisions clearly showed us is that the hermeneutic utilized by the NRC to open all church offices to women has in principle been already accepted as valid by Synod Ede. Thus, we could say, the matter of women in office has already entered the RCN via the "Trojan horse" of decisions concerning unity talks with the NRC.

We remain concerned that the misgivings expressed in the Synod Carman letter of admonition about the dissertations of Dr. Paas and Dr. van Bakkum have not brought any change or action. Instead Dr. Paas has been appointed by Synod Ede as professor of Missiology at the TUK, and Dr. van Bakkum remains assistant professor of Old Testament there without either having retracted any of their Scripture critical statements.

Post Synod Reflection

Synod Carman 2013 stated that we present our concerns to Synod Ede of the RCN 2014 "in humility and with the heartfelt desire that you would take heed to the matters we bring before you. Our rules for ecclesiastical fellowship state that 'the churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy,' and shall be 'watchful for deviations.'

It is in this context of ecclesiastical accountability that we direct our exhortations to you.” At this point we have to conclude with sadness that thus far our exhortations have not been accepted in the spirit in which they were directed. We can only say at this point that this does not bode well for the CanRC relationship with the RCN.

B. The Reformed Churches (Restored) (Now Rcnr)

The subcommittee had opportunity to meet with 4 Deputies BBK of the RCN_r on May 15, 2014 in Hasselt, the Netherlands. A number of matters of concern by the respective churches had our attention at that meeting. We were able to speak about these somewhat difficult issues in a brotherly way. We questioned the brothers if the RCN_r still considers the CanRC a church on the wrong path and one which Reformed believers need to be concerned about. In response the RCN_r brothers expressed disappointment that Synod Carman 2013 did not respond to their letter to that body. At the same time they were happy to note that there is more understanding now for the RCN_r and its struggles leading to the liberation from the RCN. However, if the CanRC maintains its declaration that the RCN_r is not far from being schismatic, they would find it difficult to see any use having to defend and explain the grounds for their liberation in 2003. We were able to explain that the opinion of the Synod is mainly based on the fact that RCN_r has a sister-church relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church in Abbotsford. This matter received considerable attention but we could not come to a common understanding. As long as this matter in particular remains, there is little hope of the CanRC coming closer to the RCN_r.

Since our last meeting with the brothers of the RCN_r several developments have taken place. Rev. E. Heres and his congregation at Dalfsen (approx. 90 members) have joined the bond of the RCN_r churches. There is also a program of Training for the Ministry. Rev. C. Koster is now Minister of the Word. Br. M. Dijkstra has just graduated and has sustained his preparatory examinations. Br. M. Snee is continuing his theological studies. Currently the federation consists of 12 congregations with 4 ministers, 1 candidate, and 1 student. Efforts are continuing to reach out to others. In different places there are talks with the RCN_{vv}. Moreover, informative evenings are being organized for the concerned in the RCN.

C. The Reformed Churches Netherlands (Now Rcnvv)

The subcommittee also had an opportunity to meet with 4 Deputies BBK of the RCN_{vv} on May 14, 2014 in Ede. To help us become better acquainted

with this federation these deputies presented us with a *Presentation* in which they provide detailed information about the Biblical and Confessional foundation, composition and history of their churches. It is available on the federation's website (<http://www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl>) in Dutch. From it we quote: "The **Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland** (GKN), without the insert 'in' and without further postal or informal addition, is the name of the denomination as decided on November 26, 2009. A federation of local Reformed churches who, from the Protestant Reformation, through the secession of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834, the Doleantie in 1886, the Union in 1892 and the Liberation in 1944, 2003 and subsequent years want to live in 2013, only according to the Holy Scripture". Because of its small size and resulting limitations in the church order, the federation was initially called a provisional federation (voorlopig verband). Due to an incorrect association of the word 'provisional' with 'temporary' this term is obsolete and is no longer used. (In order to be able to differentiate the various reformed churches in the Netherlands we will continue to use the addition vv.)

Present on behalf of the RCNvv were Rev. E. Hoogendoorn, Rev. L. Heres, br. J. de Bruine, and br. J. van Wijk. Rev. Heres had recently been ordained as the third minister in this small federation that currently consists of nine congregations. One congregation (Kampen, Rev. Hogendoorn) had separated itself from the RCN(lib), and 2 congregations came out of the RCNr. The others were local developments of individual concerned members from within the RCN(lib). In general, the meeting was a positive experience. The bothers of the RCNvv freely answered the questions presented to them and acknowledged that in the past not all things were necessarily done in a manner which is church politically correct. A new church publication, *De Weerklank*, had recently gotten off the ground. They expressed a commitment to work together with the RCNr - should they be willing – in order to seek unity with them. At this time there still appear to be some obstacles that not infrequently are due to human nature. The brothers informed us that there have also been discussions with deputies of Reformed churches in Australia (FRCA) and South Africa (FRCSA). The RCNvv have asked the VGKSA to continue this contact. The RCNvv also requested the CanRC to be positive about maintaining a form of contact.

Rev. J. DeGelder

Rev. J. Moesker

Gerard Nordeman

Dr. C. VanDam

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)

This is the Report of Deputies, who were appointed by Synod Armadale 2012 – 13, given the following mandate as recorded in the Acts

Article 142, I. 1. 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.

and Article 142, 6.

... 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.*

To carry out this mandate the Deputies did the following:

1. Concerning the mandate to arrange for a clear and accurate Dutch translation of the letter of admonition, deputies:
 - a. arranged for the compilation of a Dutch translation.
 - b. upon completion of this translation, requested several brothers, competent in both the English and Dutch language, to review it for accuracy.
 - c. in contact with the corresponding clerk of Synod Armadale, as well as the convening church of Synod Ede, made sure that the letter of admonition was properly sent and received along with its Dutch translation.
 - d. sent a copy of both the English edition and the Dutch translation to the Dutch deputies (BBK) for their information.
2. Concerning the mandate to *interact and with BBK and discuss with BBK the matters contained in the letter of admonition as well as i.*

concerns regarding independentism and ii. the formulation of the new church order, deputies:

- a. can report that deputies appointed by the previous Synod Legana 2009 met with deputies BBK during Synod Armadale before new deputies were appointed. Because at the time of meeting the decision of Synod regarding the RCN had not yet been made, the matters contained in the letter of admonition were not addressed. However, some attention was given;
 - i. to the limitation of speaking about our concerns now that the RCN Synod had decided that all such communication must go by letter from Synod to Synod. There was some acknowledgement that the disadvantage of this method of communicating becomes difficult in the context of the time required and the continuing changes taking place.
 - ii to the revised set-up of the Theological University of Kampen(TU) and in particular to how and whether the RCN Synod still make decisions regarding the work that takes place here.
 - iiii to how the RCN engage in inter-relation with the NGK while as yet no synod decision has been taken to recognise them.
- b. had not yet received a mandate regarding the RCN for the period in between the sessions of Synod Armadale; July 2012 through to April 2013, however, deputies sent a letter to deputies BBK with a copy of Synod's first session decision on how to proceed. A copy of this letter is attached as appendix one.
- c. received a request from deputies BBK for a copy of Synod Armadale advisory committee report prepared for second session of Synod. We attach a copy of this letter as appendix two. In reply we informed deputies BBK that we had no mandate to send it nor were we, as deputies, involved with this work.
- d. took note of RCN BBK recommendations in the appendix of the December 6, 2012 letter(appendix two), but now note that it played no apparent role in the decision making of Synod
- e. had resolved to meet with deputies BBK right after the second session of Synod Armadale. This meeting did not eventuate for several reasons including physical and emotional fatigue of all

parties concerned as well as travel arrangements of deputies BBK.

- f. were kept informed of matters relating to churches abroad via deputies BBK's *Spring Letter*
 - g. received a copy of the RCN new Church Order. An evaluation was made. It is attached as Appendix three.
 - h. received a copy of the RCN deputies man/woman report. A digest from this report is attached as appendix four.
 - i. sent a letter of further concern directly to Synod Ede and a copy to deputies BBK. Attention was given to the dropping away of Article 31 CO and the hermeneutics evident in the m/w report. A copy has been attached as appendix five.
 - j. who were in the Netherlands during the foreign delegates week met with with some deputies BBK, some members of moderamen of Synod Ede as well as members of its advisory committee. See report of visit to Synod Ede for details. It is attached as appendix eight.
3. Concerning the mandate to send two persons to the Hermeneutics Conference in Hamilton, deputies sent Rev. R.D. Anderson and Rev. PKA de Boer. Please see the attached Report as appendix six.
4. Concerning the mandate to send two deputies to Synod Ede; When the invitation to Synod was received, we were informed that a foreign delegates week would be held in March and that the admonition sent by the Australian Churches, as well as the concerns expressed by other sister churches, would be dealt with in May. We were given invitation to attend Synod for both or any of these times. Rev. RD Anderson and Rev. PKA de Boer attended the foreign delegates week. Their report is attached as appendix eight. Rev. de Boer also attended the sessions in May where Synod dealt with the Australian admonition. Br. J.L. van Burgel was in the Netherlands at that time and, being general secretary of deputies volunteered to be there for some of the time as well. See the attached report of their visit as appendix nine. It can be noted that:
 - a. during the foreign delegates week opportunity was given to meet with many delegates of many churches throughout the world. A large number of these delegates had the same kind of concerns about the direction within the RCN that we expressed in our letter of admonition.
 - b. during the foreign delegates week opportunity was given to

address Synod. Please see the address given in appendix seven.

- c. in the session held in May the admonition sent by the FRCA and warnings given by other churches were all lumped together. See the attached decision in appendix ten.
5. To carry out the mandate, we further note that;
- a. there was no budgeted allocation for travel to the Conference in Hamilton. However, in consultation with the treasurer, funds we used for this purpose were reimbursed.
 - b. seeing that there were sufficient funds in the overall budget for relations with churches abroad, it was decided not only to send two delegates to the foreign delegates week of the RCN synod at Ede, but also a deputy for when Synod Ede dealt with the FRCA admonition and concerns brought forward by other sister churches. Although consulted and asked, synod treasurer declined to reimburse the full amount of these expenses because deputies had overspent of the portion allocated for the churches in the Netherlands.

Analysis

1. Matters related to Synod Armadale's *Letter of Admonition*
 - a. Hermeneutics
 - i. Synod Armadale, in its letter of admonition considered the main concern regarding the RCN to be *"How do we interpret God's Word in today's context?" Indeed the answer is important, but the answer must lie only in the truth of God's Word. Whilst the times may change, the command to remain obedient to Scripture does not change. And it is here that we have serious concerns, in relation to matters that were decided on by your Synods, as well in relation to matters about which your Synods failed to affirm the clear teaching of Scripture;* instead of a return to the clear message of Scripture, the speeches at the hermeneutics conference showed a promotion of the ideas for which Synod Armadale expressed concerns (see appendix six). The following points came up in the Dutch speeches:
 1. the allowance to interpret historic passages of Scriptures metaphorically; for example; the history of creation in six days. In fact Prof. B. Kamphuis even

argued that all Scripture is metaphorical, using as example the expression, “the Lord saves His people”.

2. the allowance for applying Scriptural ordinances differently in changed cultural circumstances; for example; the place and task of women in the church. In fact prof. Van Houwelingen’s address was virtually identical to the report of deputies m/f to Synod Ede (see below).
3. the allowance for the Holy Spirit to enlighten men so that they interpret Scripture in different ways in different ages.

It is to be noted that the brothers from the Canadian Reformed Churches, United Reformed Churches of North America and Orthodox Presbyterian Church were strong in refuting these ways of interpreting Scripture.

- b. The first concern in the letter of admonition was that; *The RCN tolerates an approach to hermeneutics that does not uphold the authority and plain meaning of Scripture for exegesis. This seriously questions the ability and willingness of the RCN to fully uphold the truth of Scripture.* There has been no change regarding this matter. Furthermore, none of the points mentioned in the elaboration relating to this statement were addressed by Synod Ede.
- c. The second statement of concern was that; *The RCN tolerates an approach to hermeneutics that does not uphold the sufficiency of Scripture for ethics. This approach conflicts with what we confess in Belgic Confession Art. 7 concerning the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.* Within the churches themselves the effects of the new hermeneutics are seen in a broad range of issues such as homosexuality where the clear commands of Scripture are put in doubt. (see: <http://www.homoindekerk.nl>). Synod Ede did not address this concern specifically.
- d. The third statement of concern was that the *Decisions of the RCN about marriage and divorce leave room for a subjective approach in understanding and applying the Biblical norms. It remains our concern that such an approach has not been explicitly excluded by your synods.* This matter has not been addressed and there is no evidence of further changes.
- e. The fourth statement of concern was; *The study into whether Scripture allows for women to fill the offices of deacon, elder*

and minister fails to affirm the clear teaching of Scripture that the special offices within the Christian church are reserved for men. Synod Ede:

- i. decided not to accept the deputies m/f report, but it was not rejected either. Synod decided specifically “not to agree with the grounds of the conclusion of the committee “m/w in the church” that it belongs within the bandwidth of what may be called Scriptural and Reformed, when beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices.” However, the further decisions show that non-agreement with the grounds, does not imply non-agreement with the proposed “bandwidth”. In other words, synod agrees that “the ecclesiastical offices must be open for free debate”. This acceptance as “Reformed” of those who support women in office can also be seen in the above-mentioned decision that the issue is no longer a problem for relations with the NGK, who have women in all offices (see appendix twelve).
- ii. appointed a new committee to work further with the question of what Scripture teaches about the task of man and woman within the churches and about the structure of the ecclesiastical offices. See the attached copy of the decision as appendix eleven.
- iii. fails to affirm that the Lord directs men instead of women to take up the offices in the churches (1 Timothy 2:12 – 14). This failure can be ascribed to the current approach to hermeneutics within the RCN has led to further deterioration of Scriptural authority.
- iv. has failed to reject those who use and promote unscriptural hermeneutics as evident in the m/f deputies report while asserting that: *The Reformed Churches are accountable for the decisions they make together; they are not accountable for all kinds of opinions of persons, nor of deputies which the churches have not taken to their account* (see appendix four) and when similarly asserting in the decision regarding the grievances: *The differences of opinion with certain authors, or with (parts of) reports of deputies may not be expanded to objections to “the Reformed Churches”* (see Appendix ten, decision 2, 4) shows that the important third mark of the *true church* as confessed in Article 29 of the *Belgic Confession* is not

maintained.

- f. The fifth statement of concern regarding *The adoption of regulations that allow for the amalgamation of local RCN congregations with those of the NGK promotes a false ecumenism* has not been addressed at all, but the relation with the NGK has been further endorsed. It is to be noted that:
 - i. The NGK is a church federation which developed from the schism in 1967. It is a looser bond of churches with no strict subscription to the confessions. In recent years this bond has opened all offices to women and have become generally tolerant toward homosexuality.
 - ii. Although the RCN have never formally recognised the NGK at the national level, in recent years synods have encouraged local churches to take up contact and provided guidelines for local recognition as true church, leading to combined services and even amalgamation where appropriate. Synod provided a list of issues that needed to be talked through before classis approval could be given for such local recognition. To us as deputies this is using the back door to attain eventual recognition of a bond of churches which have become quite different to what the RCN traditionally was.
 - iii. Synod Ede decided no longer to consider the fact that the NGK have women in office as an obstacle for continued relations, stating: *regarding hermeneutics, the obstacles that were there regarding the NGK decision to open the offices for sisters in the congregation, is taken away*. See appendix twelve for a copy of this decision.
- g. The sixth statement of concern regarding *The past and continuing participation in the National Synod/Protestant Forum promotes a false ecumenism*. The response to this statement, namely "that the national Synod is a discussion forum with activities in which the Reformed Churches can possibly participate while regarding its own identity and responsibilities of Reformed Churches (decision 9 May jl)" (see appendix ten) does not address nor take away the concern regarding false ecumenism. In His word the Lord clearly teaches us Titus 3:10 *to reject a divisive man...* (KJV *heretic*) see also Romans 16:17 where the Lord tells us to *note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them*.

- h. The seventh statement of admonition regarding how *the RCN has accepted a proliferation of hymns many of which are not unambiguously Biblical and Reformed*, has not been resolved by the explanation that *the expansion of the hymn section has so far taken place in line with the guidelines for that purpose which were viewed as for the Reformed character of the worship services (GS 1999 art 58; GS 2008 art. 64)*; for these guidelines do not address the concern in how it *detracts from the Psalms, the Book of Praise in the Bible, and from other songs that are based directly on Scripture*. Furthermore, the approved hymns still include *hymns in the "Liedboek voor de kerken" that are not unambiguously Biblical and Reformed*. Instead of maintaining the accepted Reformed practice permitting only the use of the Psalms and Hymns in the churches that have been adopted by Synod (see for eg. our CO Article 67) the RCN has now decided *that also the use of other songs for the compilation of the worship service belongs to the responsibility of the consistory who in turn are accountable to the normal ecclesiastical procedure (Church Order 2014; C37.1 regarding the task of consistories to maintain an honourable church service, F73 ff regarding the possibility of members who have objections to appeal)*.

2. Matters concerning Theological University at Kampen (TUK).

Discussion with deputies during the course of synod Armadale was held on the question whether the TUK still had oversight or influence over the doctrine and life of the professors at the university. We were told that indeed the TUK has little control over these matters and that therefore synod could do very little with our admonition against the writings of certain professors. We were also told that the changes made to the structure and setup of the university were due to Dutch government legislation which relates to being registered and thereby accredited to give educational degrees as well as receiving subsidies. We now understand that accreditation was never really under threat, but that the RCN desired to have government funding and turn the university into a research institution. For this reason the changes to the setup were made. In all this the ability of the churches to effectively provide oversight as to what is taught has been lost. Lecturers and professors now fall under the Dutch labour relations act. This means that the board of governors, which is accountable to the RCN Synod, regulate those employed at the TUK.

3. Synod Ede has adopted the New Church Order after making minor editorial changes. This New Church Order deviates significantly from the historic Reformed Church Order of Dort. The most significant example is the removal of article 31. Synod Ede responded to the criticism of your deputies on this point by deciding (2g):

that the objection concerning the removal of Article 31 CO originates from a reading of that article which already was no longer valid in the Church Order edition of 1978; for the exceptional case where consistories feel that they are unable to carry out synodical decisions the normal way is that of accountability to classis.

Ground:

The reading of Article 31 CO within the framework of the so-called right of ratification, such as e.g. defended by P. Deddens in his *De ratificering der besluiten van meerdere vergaderingen* (1946) was opposed by J. Kamphuis in his *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid* (1970) and is no longer followed in the Reformed Churches. The adoption of the Church Order 2014 has not changed anything.

We consider that the statements of Synod Ede are incorrect; the discussion between Deddens and Kamphuis concerned the question when a synodical decision is to be considered in effect, before (Kamphuis) or after (Deddens) ratification of local churches. Neither author disputed the duty of a local church not to implement decisions of synod which it deems to be contrary to either Scripture or Church Order. Until 2015 the Classis has never had any role in determining the validity of such a local decision to invoke article 31. Kamphuis himself argues that when Article 31 is invoked in this way, appeal must be made to the broader assembly responsible for the decision deemed to be contrary to Scripture or Church Order. If that body is the Synod, Classis has no role to play. The Church Order edition 2015 removes this responsibility from the local church and effectively imposes a hierarchical (synodical) form of church polity.

4. Inter- church relations. Synod Ede decided:
 - a. that among others sister church relations will be maintained with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Canadian Reformed Churches, Free Reformed Churches of S. Africa, Gareja Gareja Reformatie Indonesia, Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea, Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
 - b. the method of conducting inter-church relations will change

into a networking system; the exact method and content of this new way of relating still has to be worked out and formulated. It includes the possibility to have different kinds of relations with different bonds of churches.

- c. It was decided that the URCNA refusal to enter into sister-church relations will not be pursued any further and that the offer for such a relationship has expired.
5. 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). The admonition of Synod Armadale was the culmination of several years wherein deputies had struggled to make their concerns with the direction of the Dutch churches known. These struggles have led to the frustration that your deputies have not been able to discuss our concerns with the Dutch deputies, given that they maintain that they are not able to do this. They have time and again stated that only a synod can speak to our concerns. Synods, however, up until now have not responded. In fact even now, the admonitions or grievances of many sister churches were bundled together and dealt with summarily. We reluctantly must conclude that our Dutch sisters have, as a federation corporately, departed in important ways from the "reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy". All this brings with it the problem that we feel that we can no longer remain faithful ourselves if we continue to comply with the rules for sister-church relations, particularly in the acceptance of one another's attestations and admittance of members to the sacraments without individual scrutiny.
6. On December 4, 2014 a letter was received from the general secretary of Synod Ede, dated 1 December (see appendix 13). From this letter we quote the following:

"Many of your concerns go back to subjects which in previous synods have been settled and have had the attention in the discussions between our deputies BBK and your synods and deputies.

Therefore we regret that in your correspondence and also in the contribution of your deputy in our synod concerns are based on hear say and information of individual office bearers, instead of based on what we as churches are responsible for. Nevertheless the synod once again has paid attention to your concerns. But now, dear brothers, we as Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

insist upon our sister churches in Australia to put an end to the discussion of these matters in which constantly the same historical data are repeated to show evidence for your many times impudent judgments of your sister churches in the Netherlands.

You have loudly called a wakeup call to us and we accept that for the sake of our sisterchurch relation. But please do not continue to call. Let us keep in mind each other's own responsibility, we as churches in the Netherlands and you as churches in Australia."

As deputies we regret the sentiments expressed to the FRCA in this letter and the insistence of the GKV that we no longer address them on these issues.

Recommendations:

There was common agreement among the deputies that our ongoing concerns with the RCN necessitates a change to our current sister-church relationship with them. There were, however, different thoughts on how to proceed from here, with one alternative being the termination of a sister-church relationship and the other alternative being at this time to suspend various rules pertaining to our sister-church relationship. We therefore present both alternatives to Synod Baldivis with the prayer that they might serve the Synod well to come to a well considered and God-honouring decision.

ALTERNATIVE 1.

Synod decide:

1. With sadness, to no longer maintain a sister-church relationship with the RCN
2. to encourage the FRCA congregations to pray that the Lord grant the RCN return to uprightly uphold and defend the Scriptural truth as maintained in the three forms of unity.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. inform the RCN of this decision – which may include, upon invitation, to attend the next RCN Synod and orally convey and show the reasons for this decision.
 - b. receive and monitor any response from the RCN.
 - c. where possible reply to any response received.
 - d. inform all FRCA sister-churches of this decision.

e. Report to next Synod.

Grounds:

1. The RCN expresses thankfulness for the admonitions given by Synod Armadale 2013 and other sister churches as evidence of care for one another, acknowledges that they have changed (see decision in response to admonitions 2.a.3.) but any Scriptural or Confessional or church political deviation is denied and consequently, no need for repentance and return is expressed or considered necessary.
2. Although some Churches and members within the bond of the RCN show evidence of a desire to be faithful, the bond as a whole has failed to take adequate corporate responsibility for the far-reaching unscriptural and unreformed changes and teachings which have become part and parcel of the RCN today.
3. As sister churches we have exhorted the RCN “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.) However the RCN now insists that we no longer address them on the issues for which they have been admonished.
4. Continuation of a sister church relation with the RCN opens up the FRCA to the dangerous leaven which is sadly infecting the RCN (see 1 Corinthians 5).

ALTERNATIVE 2.

Recommendation:

1. To suspend our relationship with the RCN. This suspension applies to the following 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 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.
 - 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 advise the consistories of the FRCA to close their pulpits to visiting ministers of the RCN.

- 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 and address our next synod but will not be accorded the privileges as advisers.
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. Appeal their decisions with respect to our letter of admonition and re-iterate our concerns as summarised in the deputies report to Synod Baldivis.
 - c. 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.
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 report to the next synod;
 - d. to send two delegates to the next synod of the RCN

Grounds:

1. The RCN expresses thankfulness for the admonitions given by Synod Armadale 2013 and other sister churches as evidence of care for one another, acknowledges that they have changed (see decision in response to admonitions 2.a.3.) but any Scriptural or Confessional deviation is denied and consequently, no need for repentance and return is expressed or considered necessary.
2. By deciding at Synod Ede in 2014 (art) that removing the objection of women office bearers in relations with the NGK, the RCN churches have shown that a false hermeneutic is tolerated within the churches.
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). Although the deputies report, as well as previous synod decisions and reports to synod, have substantiated many of our concerns it is important to continue to go the extra mile.

4. The RCN have clearly communicated to us that concerns and 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. While there are many brothers and sisters in the RCN who remain faithful to God's Word and the Confessions, there is also clear evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the Word of God.
6. 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. We have a long history and close relationship with the RCN dating back to the start of the FRCA in the 1950's. Within a sister church relationship the RCN is obligated under it's own rules, to listen to and engage with our exhortations. Thus while there remains opportunity for dialogue we ought to continue our exhortations. Ending our sister church relationship at this time will no longer provide a way to exhort the RCN, and to encourage brothers and sisters in RCN churches that remain faithful to God's word and the confessions.
7. 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.

RCN report Appendix One:



Deputies of the
Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Relations with Sister Churches
FRCA 2012 - 2015

November 19th 2012

Mrs H.S. Nederveen-van Veelen, Secretary
BBK, Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
Postbus 499
8000 AL Zwolle
The Netherlands

Esteemed Sister,

As you might be aware, Synod Armadale 2012 having finalized the majority of its work, will reconvene DV April 22nd 2013 to complete its final agenda item as it relates to the RCN.

While the Acts of the 2012 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, have not been printed at this time, they are available electronically on the FRCA website. Please note that the following decision, which has not been fully published in the Acts, as it relates to your federation of churches, is:

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.

The context of this decision can be found in Article 116, on pages 83-85.

The address to Synod by Rev P Meijer is recorded in the Appendix 1c (pages 100), along with a response of the FRCA by Rev PKA deBoer in Appendix 1i (pages 137).

At the same time, we would also like to express our appreciation that the brothers Meijer, Wezeman and de Jong could be present at Synod Armadale to make representation of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Their participation and fellowship during Synod Armadale was warmly received as we greatly value the bond we share in our Lord Jesus Christ. We were also thankful that they were able to meet with us, as deputies, to discuss matters of mutual edification, particularly in light of the (then pending) decision of Synod Armadale.

During this meeting of deputies, a discussion was held regarding the governance of the Theology University in Kampen (TUK), on which we would like some clarification. In this discussion, br Wezeman indicated that government regulation in the Netherlands requires that any objections (regarding the teaching of professors or staff members of the TUK) must go the Committee of Oversight (CvT) and cannot be addressed to the General Synod of the RCN. We would like some clarification about this matter, and would appreciate if you could provide the particular details of this government regulation including its precise terms. It is important that we understand this protocol, so that we can better comprehend the working relationship between the TUK and the General Synods of the RCN.

With Christian Greetings,

On behalf of Deputies,
Br. Wayne Pleiter
Corresponding Clerk

RCN report Appendix Two



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Zwolle, December 6th 2012

Dear Brothers,

It has been some months now since we, representing the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN(L)) visited your Synod, this past July. We would like to thank you again for your openness and hospitality. We felt welcome, and we appreciated you giving us the opportunity of attending not only the plenary meetings, but also the various subcommittee meetings dealing with delicate and sensitive subjects. While we must say that we felt wrongly criticized at certain points, the open discussions during the subcommittee meetings helped us gain insight into your attempt to see a balanced way forward regarding the matters at hand. We sensed sincere intentions on both sides of the issues, seeking to achieve progress in dealing with the issues under discussion.

It was good to that that a number of other sister-churches were present at the Synod, and that they were willing to support you and be involved in the serious discussion of the relevant matters.

Obviously the step taken by your Synod to formulate an “admonition” to our church puts severe pressure on our relationship. For example, the issue of how we can celebrate the Lord’s Supper together in the light of this admonition is now very relevant, but has not yet been addressed.

The decision to admonish us, and its connection to the subjects under discussion, moves us to ask the following question. Isn’t it true that the issues at hand have led to an internal FRCA discussion, as well, about the matters which concern is expressed about? Shouldn’t that discussion be allowed to follow its course at the level of your Synod before you come to admonish a sister-church? Further, are your churches sure that you are treating all your sister-

churches in the same way as you are treating us? Could it be that the RCN(L) are being scrutinized more intensely because of the historical connections between our churches? Could it be that our churches have developed in a certain direction, somewhat different from yours, but not necessarily unreformed or unbiblical? We feel that the fact that we are very close to each other, historically, has led to a more intense relationship.

This has been often good and beneficial, but it makes our relationship one which is also more liable to irritations and critical reactions. The closer the relationship, the more difficult it is! Because of this, BBK would like to ask the FRCA to study closely the RCN(L)'s last General Synod's statements on the issues under discussion. We feel that our Synod has made careful decisions, based on Holy Scripture, but also in connection with the rapidly changing context in The Netherlands. We would appreciate more sensitivity to what can occur at the local church level in The Netherlands, some of it experimental, as being part of the sometimes unwise response to this emerging context. We would appreciate your careful appraisal of our developments in the light of this. We need to seek God's help in reaching wise responses to our new historical situation. We of the RCN(L) believe that your churches, as well, will be faced with similar challenges in your own, changing context.

It is important that the FRCA make use of good sources of information about our churches in order to make a proper judgment about our churches. We strongly recommend that the deputies of the FRCA should limit themselves, primarily, to the the RCN(L) General Synod's official decisions and documents relating to the subjects under discussion, making use of information about what has occurred in various local churches only as examples of incidents which can take place in a fast changing context—one that is apparently changing faster than that of Western Australia.

In the appendix to this letter, the recommendation of BBK are given, based on our visit to your Synod. We would appreciate your comments about them.

Finally, in your letter dated November 19th 2012 you stated that you would be sending us the admonition in full detail on March 1, 2013. We would appreciate receiving the letter with the admonition at an earlier date, so that we can ascertain its admissibility by our coming General Synod.

Yours in Christ,

Appendix:

Recommendations

We recommend:

1. That the deputies BBK express their appreciation for their good reception at the FRCA Synod and the opportunity given to speak at plenary and committee sessions.
2. That the deputies BBK ask the deputies of the FRCA to provide us as soon as possible with the basic content of their admonition, including the conclusions, and the grounds for them. Then it will be possible to help make the admonition admissible and able to be handled by the coming General Synod.
3. That section 4 of BBK, being responsible for the contacts with the FRCA, not hesitate to see the analogy between this admonition from the FRCA and church discipline at the local church level.
4. That the deputies BBK persist on insisting to the deputies of the FRCA that the latter focus on the official decisions and documents of the RCN(L)'s General Synod.
5. That the deputies BBK persist in following how the FRCA press writes about our churches, independent of the issue of the admonition. Where necessary, the deputies BBK, by means of section 4, will signal to the deputies of the FRCA when it is felt that press remarks are not accurate or fair.
6. That the deputies BBK communicate to the Australian deputies their thankfulness for our sister-church relationship, but also that we feel that the FRCA continuing its contacts with churches which have separated from us (calling us false churches in the process) is not in accord with the church order.

Appendix Three:

A look at the proposed revised Church Order of the RCN

When first reading through this revision, one is struck by how the entire set up differs from the old Church Order of Dort. Although obvious elements of the Church Order of Dort remain, it appears to be set up more like an organisational constitution than a classic Reformed Church Order. Instead of Articles, it contains sections with easy to reference sentences. At times it appears to combine the classic Reformed Church Order with what in the past were local regulations for various ecclesiastical assemblies. Looking at the length and context, it also appears that with this proposal there is a turning from the Reformed practice of regulating as little as possible.

The Churches

The proposed revision begins with a section about the churches. It is here that straight away the impression of a constitution is given for just like a school or political organisation may begin formulating its foundation, so does this Church Order. The opening section speaks of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands finding their unity of the Christian faith in obedience to Holy Scriptures¹.

It then goes on to speak about *accepting* the three Creeds along with the Christian Church of old and *accepting*² the three Reformed Confessions as a *trustworthy summary of the Christian doctrine* but says nothing of being bound to God's Word as maintained in these confessions³.

The Offices:

When reading through this second section, one is immediately struck by an open place left for something about the office with regard to both male and female. It appears to be there in expectation of an addition⁴.

Although the churches are not specifically said to be bound to God's Word as maintained in the confessions, see above, the office-bearers are⁵. Concerning regulations for preachers, besides applying the Church Order they are also to apply the *general regulations for preacher's matters*.⁶ These regulations have not yet been adapted from existing synodical

1 Section A1.1

2 Section A1.2 *aanvaarden*

3 Section A1.2 *betrouwbare samenvatting van de christelijke leer*

4 Section B6.5 *Ambt m/v: gereserveerd.*

5 Section B7

6 Section B8 *...de generale regeling voor predikantszaken*

regulations.⁷

Those who request to enter the ministry must be declared eligible for call after being examined by the appropriate classis. Upon receiving a call such a candidate is admitted to the ministry only after also being examined by the classis of the district where he takes up the ministry⁸. Recent synods have abolished the old preparatory and peremptoir exams. The classes are not permitted to *examine* candidates and must trust the examination conducted by the theological university in Kampen. They do however conduct what we would call a *colloquium*. This includes the suitability for a person to be a candidate and serve in the ministry with emphasis on how he perceives the offices in the church. However, there is no examination on his ability to exegete and accurately expound the true meaning of Scripture and defend the confessed doctrine. Instead the focus is more on the person's personal life.⁹ There is a further regulation which permits Classis to make a decision regarding the admittance of a preacher from another Church with Reformed Confessions which does not have relations with the bond of Churches¹⁰. This is a particular concern in that there is no regulation restricting from where the churches might call ministers.¹¹ Moreover, even a non-preacher may be authorised by classis to preach in accordance to the "general regulations"¹².

With respect to the task of the elder, this proposal permits the consistory to solicit congregational members to assist elders in their pastoral task¹³. The consistory may also appoint one or more "church workers" to carry out some of the tasks within the church¹⁴. Of course, no one would have a problem if members in the congregation were encouraged to visit the

7 The existing regulations are as follows: preekbevoegdheid (2008)

- toelating predikantschap (1999, 2002)
- kerkelijk werkers (2005)
- ratificatie generale besluiten (2002)
- kerkelijke eenheid met CGK en andere kerken (2005, 2008)
- toelating gasten aan het avondmaal (2005)
- gastlidmaatschap jongeren (1990, 2002)
- koersbepaling kerklied (2002)
- huwelijk en echtscheiding (2002, 2005, 2008)

8 Section B11.1 and 2 ...*onderzoek door de Classis*.

9 Synod Zuidhorn 2002 Acts Art.25 and appendix III.3.

10 Section B11.3

11 Compare to FRC Church Order Article 5.A.

12 B32.2 *Aan niet-predikanten kan ... preekbevoegdheid worden verleend ...* again, these "general regulations" have not yet been formalised. They refer to the decisions of Synod Zuidhorn 2002 art.26.

13 B23.4

14 B31.1 *kerkelijk werker ... om een deel van het dienstwerk ... uit te voeren*

sick, lonely or even those that have particular spiritual struggles, but with this regulation it appears that the members can be asked to help with the regular pastoral task of the elders. Could this lead to unordained “elder assistants”? Would this open the way to a certain hierarchy? Would it also open the way to an indirect use of female assistant elders? This is already the case in at least three local churches (where such females even have voting rights at consistory)¹⁵.

The term for elders and deacons is not restricted to three years but the length of terms may be determined by local regulation. The old church order stipulated “two or more years”, the new order stipulates “three or more years”¹⁶. As previously practised, the proposed church order does state that as a “rule” there will be an annual change of some office-bearers. However, this expression “as a rule” appears to leave this to general practice, but not to necessity.

The living Congregation:

This is an entirely new section to the Church Order which appears to give certain task to the congregation as a whole. It includes the points previously incorporated in the section concerning the church services. A point is made of the congregation fulfilling its task (or translate: service) in the church and world¹⁷. The formulation used here leaves the impression that the church is an organisation to accomplish something rather than simply being the people of Christ and the gathering of His kingdom. The congregation, it is agreed, *celebrates* the Sunday as the day of Christ’s resurrection. There is no mention made here of the fourth commandment¹⁸. The consistory calls the congregation together for a public church service, “as a rule”, twice per Sunday. This insertion “as a rule” leaves an opening for not having it twice a Sunday¹⁹. These Church services are to be conducted according to the “general rules”²⁰. Instead of the requirement for God’s Word as summarised in the Heidelberg Catechism to be proclaimed, one of the services is now to be *thoroughly educational* where *instruction* is given in the *Christian*

15 Namely the churches at Oegstgeest, Amsterdam Zuidwest, Amsterdam-Stroom, Mijdrecht and Assen Kloosterveen. There are probably many more. (The cases of those churches from classis Amsterdam-Leiden are well-known to Rev. Anderson, who for years ministered in this classis). Mijdrecht and Assen-Kloosterveen are mentioned in the deputies report “M/V in de kerk” 2014, page 28.

16 B26.1 *three or more years*

17 C35.

18 C36.1

19 C36.1 *als regel*. In fact several churches already only worship once per Sunday, for example, Amsterdam Zuidwest and Amsterdam Centrum.

20 C37.2 Again “general rules” which have not yet been drafted.

doctrine with the help of the Churches confessions²¹. A further deviation from historic Reformed practice is the calling of church services for *special groups*. It is in agreement with how Scripture speaks about all the Lord's people assembling together that no services have been held for *special group* such as children, handicapped, women only, farmers only, soldiers only, soccer players only ... or whatever other group one might think of. The introduction of this practice appears to be inconsistent with what we are told in 1 Corinthians 12 about the church as the *one body of Christ* (see also Romans 12:3 – 8 and Ephesians 4)²².

Concerning the sacraments, nothing is said about the use of adopted forms. Apparently, the churches are no longer bound to use them. Different from the RCN Church Order until 1978²³ and the current Canadian²⁴ and Australian²⁵ Church Orders, the sacraments may also be administered outside of the church services. Within RCN an exception was made to the Church Order Article in 1920 for celebrating Lord's Supper in institutions. In 1999 army chaplains were also permitted to celebrate Lord's Supper with the troops in wartime. The new church order simply takes account of these long standing exceptions²⁶. As for guests at the Lord's Supper, reference is made to the as yet unwritten "general regulations".²⁷ This also applies to those coming from other churches with whom there is no sister-church relation²⁸. By this Church Order withdrawal from the Church is also formalised and consistory is to acquiesce in the desire to withdraw by making a proclamation terminating the membership.²⁹ The consistory is left to decide about the marriage of non-communicant members and members from non-Reformed denominations. This is not only done with regard to marriage, but also the breaking of marriage. This proposal includes the statement that consistories are to deal with the matters of divorce and remarriage to determine whether they will effect church membership. The

21 37.3 Een van de kerkdiensten is doorgaans een leerdienst waarin aan de hand van de belijdenis van de kerk onderwijs wordt gegeven in de christelijke leer.

22 C38.2

23 Kerkorde 1978; Artikel 56 ... zal de doop ... bedient worden in de openbare eredienst. Artikel 61; Het avondmaal ...zal ... gevierd worden in de openbare eredienst...

24 Article 56 shall only be administered ... in a public worship service

25 Article 51 The sacraments shall be administered only in a church service....

26 C40.2 Synod Leeuwarden 1920 (art.25) allowed Lord's Supper to be celebrated by a minister and elder in institutions for the elderly. Even those who were not members of the church could take part. Synod Leusden 1999 (art. 70, modified at Synod Zuidhorn 2002-03, art.101) allowed chaplains to celebrate Lord's Supper in wartime with the soldiers.

27 C41.4

28 C43.2.

29 C45.1 *berust*

only restriction is that the “general regulations” are to be “upheld”³⁰. These articles formalise what has already been the practice for many generations.

Parents are to teach their children in the doctrine of Scripture³¹ and encouraged to make use of available aids³², entrust the congregation to make use of preaching, catechism instruction and so forth³³, but no obligation remains to have them instructed in the fear and discipline of the Lord.

Ecclesiastical discipline:

Although the course and purpose of discipline is outlined in more detail than in the previous Church Order, the exact steps to be taken are not clearly outlined nor is there any reference to adopted announcements. A point is made of how those members who have divergent doctrinal insight do not necessarily need to be placed under censure³⁴.

The ecclesiastical bond:

When reading this section one straight-away notices that attention is first given to the synods and then to the classis, different from the Church Order of Dort that under the section of ecclesiastical assemblies, purposely, first, gives attention to the consistories, then classis, regional and general synod. The revised arrangement leaves one with the impression that Synod is the highest authority in the bond of churches. Besides these normal ecclesiastical assemblies, opening is given for participation in other ecclesiastical organisations such as in mission work³⁵. When seeking relations with other churches, the consistories concerned will determine which church polity will apply³⁶. Besides entering into sister-church relations, provisions are added for participation in international ecclesiastical organisations³⁷.

Decision making and Judicial application:

That a separate section is given to this matter appears to make the whole Church Order appear to be organisational. Here, the way of coming to decisions would more commonly have been found in local regulations. While no one need implement a decision that brings one into *personal*

30 C46.5 met inachtneming

31 C47.1

32 C47.2

33 C48.3

34 D56

35 E68

36 E69.3

37 E70.3

conflict of conscience with God's Word³⁸, there is no article by which churches are given the freedom not to implement decisions contrary to God's Word as upheld in the confessions³⁹. This new church order therefore makes decisions of broader ecclesiastical assemblies settled and binding for everyone except individuals who for conscience sake object to the Scriptural basis of a decision directly concerning them. The report of the discussion at synod on this point shows that the decision to abandon the traditional right embodied in the old art. 31 was deliberately and knowingly taken, despite the church history behind it with respect to the Liberation⁴⁰. We must conclude that our sister churches have become "synodical" in purest sense of the term.

It is furthermore a matter of concern to notice that the focus of judicial decisions is on Biblical wisdom for the *restoration of peace through justice* and *impartiality* rather than emphasis on Biblical faithfulness. There is the further stipulation that this must be done according to the "General Rules" of Synod, rules which have not yet been drafted. The limitation of appealing a matter within six weeks of the original decision⁴¹ not only makes it difficult for those with objections to prepare to their work well, but also closes off any possibility for the churches to reconsider wrong and unscriptural decisions that have come to their attention at a later date. It is also noteworthy to mention that there are special regulations for preachers in regard to appeals and judicial declarations⁴² as well as with ecclesiastical functionaries in regard to sexual abuse⁴³. One is left to wonder why the normal disciplinary process would not sufficiently address these matters so that they need special attention.

38 E72.4 Note that the word "persoonlijk" here means that one cannot object to a decision being against God's Word, but only to a decision which personally affects him as an individual.

39 As the well-known Article 31 of the Church Order of Dort.

40 The first version of the new church order maintained art. 31 (Ontwerp Kerkorde 20-12-2010, F2.1). The change was introduced in the second version (see F2 - 4) The explanation (toelichting) for this change (discussed under F2) makes it clear that the deputies made a conscious choice to apply the principles embodied in art.31 in a new and different way to the past. Synod Harderwijk 2011 accepted this change, which was also maintained by the same synod in the third version after the churches had been given several months to react. In the explanation (toelichting) appended to the third version (see under F2) the idea that churches need to test synodical decisions on the basis of art. 31 to see if they are in accord with Scripture, confessions and church order is opposed. It is stated that the intention of the new church order is that only the synod itself has the authority to grant an appealing body or person a suspension for carrying out the decision being appealed.

41 F76.3 and F77.2.

42 F79.3

43 F80 The synodical court dealing with these matters actually makes decisions on these cases which are settled and binding. A local consistory has no jurisdiction to decide upon the truth or falsity of cases where office-bearers are accused of sexual misconduct.

RCN report Appendix Four:

Extracts from the Report of deputies

Male/Female in the Church

NOTE: The complete report can be downloaded @ <http://www.synode.gkv.nl/english-materials/...>

1.2 What is the problem?

In this section, we wish to begin by clarifying what precisely the problem is for which we are attempting to find a solution. This problem can be characterised as theological: how do we read the Bible? At the same time, this theological problem is partly engendered by social and cultural shifts, and by changes in the way church members think and live.

1.2.1 The social and cultural context

It is clear that compared to the past, both men and women have much more opportunity to participate fully in the breadth of social and community life at large. Girls can now study and pursue a career. Women exercise leadership and fulfil responsible tasks in all kinds of areas of life.

Within the GKv, too, we witness increasing activity of women in a range of functions. Previously women were involved in work with children, in leading women's associations, in carrying out pastoral visits and the like. Slowly but surely, however, there has been a shift towards women taking on that involve leadership and instruction. Currently, women carry out tasks within the GKv that previously were chiefly or exclusively reserved for men: they provide catechesis, they serve as secretaries for consistories, they carry out pastoral and diaconal activities, they manage the churches' material and financial affairs, and they sit on all kinds of committees, including calling committees and those that evaluate the sermons and other work done by the ministers. In addition, since GS 1993, women are able to participate in the election of elders, deacons and ministers.

Increasingly, church members experience a tension between the opportunities available to women in society at large, and the comparatively restricted space for women in church life. This also leads to a tension between 'doctrine' – the official position of the churches in regard to the exclusion of women from the offices of the church – and 'life', the manner in which women put their gifts to work in the church, including instructional and leadership activities.

The previous deputies, who examined whether women could be permitted to serve in the offices of elder, deacon or minister, have carried out an empirical investigation into this situation.

A broad and thorough survey (in 2005) revealed that there is a range of views within our churches in relation to the role of women. Some of the findings of this survey:

1. Women participate in all kinds of ways in our churches;
2. Roughly half of our members have a positive view of women serving as deacons;
3. A minority of members have a positive view of women serving as elders or ministers;
4. The views of members correlate to some extent with their age and level of education;
5. There are differences of opinion and a degree of unease about the way in which Biblical prescriptions concerning men and women are to be understood.

Since 2005, no further empirical investigations concerning this subject have taken place. Some new developments have occurred, however, which have added to the urgency regarding the matter of 'women in office'.

Discussions with the deputies for the support of church development (OOG) have shown that in several church planting projects the matter of men-women-office is a significant issue. It is especially new believers for whom the exclusion of women from the offices is incomprehensible, and there is unease among 'church people' as to how established practice can be credibly defended. Where new congregations are instituted, choices are made that diverge from this practice. An example is the church plant project 'Stroom' in Amsterdam, where both men and women are active in the leadership team....

There have been similar shifts in other churches within the Protestant tradition. Some of them have opened all offices to women. This has occurred in, for instance, the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN) and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK).

In 2004, the NGK decided to admit women to the various offices (elders and ministers as well as deacons). The tendency within the NGK, which has both proponents and opponents of this decision, is to make an effort to find each other in these differences. In practice, attempts are made to come to an accommodation where these differences do not become a breaking point.

In 1998, after their deputies submitted separate majority and minority reports, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) decided not to admit women to the offices.

From our discussions with the deputies for relations with churches abroad (BBK), it was apparent that the manner in which overseas churches deal

with this matter is strongly dependent on their local culture. In our sister churches in Canada, Australia and the USA, developments within the GKv on this point are viewed with great concern. They reproach their Dutch sister churches for being too much under the influence of the spirit of the time. In Latin America, this discussion has little if any attention. Churches in Asia, Africa and India often have women as deacons, but do not admit them to the ruling or teaching offices.

A general survey of our sister churches abroad shows that none of them have women in teaching or ruling offices, or are presently inclined to move in that direction.

1.2.2 The theological position

...

More important, however, than the various arguments around ‘may we?’ or ‘may we not?’ is the underlying theological question which we could formulate as follows: “In what way do Biblical prescriptions, given in a concrete cultural situation, apply to our present situation?”

This (hermeneutical) question plays a role in all attempts to understand Scripture. It is to be regretted that our Confessions do not answer this question directly. The recognition, however, that the Word of God is the highest and final authority for disciples of Jesus Christ, is the most important starting point and anchor as we answer this question.

Nevertheless, this recognition does not yet provide us with a concrete solution to the question concerning men and women in the church. A one-to-one application of Biblical prescriptions leads to tension and alienation, as the developments described above show. Uncertainty exists as to how these prescriptions are to be applied; we do not always know how the Word of God is to be applied in a new situation (see conclusion 5 of the survey described above). At the same time we are convinced that the Bible, even though it was not written in the 21st century, wants to be and is fully relevant in our present time and context. From this perspective we search in hope for ways to let Paul’s prescriptions be meaningful in the Netherlands in our own time.

The question remains, then: “In what way do Biblical prescriptions, given in a concrete cultural situation, apply to our present situation?”

At the same time, it is part of our present church situation that the discussion concerning this question is accompanied by acute sensitivities. The results of the 2005 survey show that there are great differences of view within our churches concerning the position of women, differences which have obviously not been resolved: neither by successive reports

of deputies, nor by the discussion and reflection that these reports set in motion

....

1.3 Discussion

The first point of discussion that comes to mind is the notion that if one would only take the Bible seriously, there really is no problem. Obedience to what the Bible prescribes will solve the problem. The Bible speaks clearly about the manner in which women might function in the church: they can carry out all sorts of tasks and functions, but they are not called to the (ruling) office. Our churches have always taken this position, with an express desire to be obedient to Scripture. Some will accept this position joyfully; others will have more difficulty with it. The latter case is then just a pastoral problem – and no more than that.

In the view of the deputies, this presentation touches a very sensitive point. Is it true that the problem man-woman-office is in essence a pastoral problem, because Scripture is unequivocal, and therefore its interpretation leaves no room for discussion? Or is the problem a real one, where our reading of Scripture places us before questions that demand a resolution?

In our view, the uncertainty surrounding this question (how must we read the Scriptures in addressing the question whether or not women may be admitted to (one of) the offices?) is a real uncertainty.

It is clear, in the context of church plant initiatives (such as 'Stroom'), contacts with other churches (such as the NGK), and the prior history of our deputyship, that the answers that were provided earlier no longer satisfy a number of church members. Coming to a carefully weighed decision is therefore urgent. This implies a reflection on the current interpretation of Biblical data and its continuing tenability. Our report is characterized by an attitude of investigation, which is open to the possibility of other interpretations than the traditional one. We do so boldly, given that the light of the Word of God will shine in every time (see for example Psalm 119:105, II Peter 1:19), constantly bringing old and new treasures to light (Matthew 13:52), but not always in the same manner.

The Bible itself is a history of revelation, in which the Old Testament is continually interpreted (for example by Paul) with a view to Christ, also in non-Jewish contexts.

It must also be said that some New Testament prescriptions do not always carry the same (eternal) weight. No-one thinks it strange that we no longer practice the holy kiss (even though it was quite common in the New Testament church: Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians

13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26; I Peter 5:4), and we no longer expect elderly widows to have washed the feet of the saints, or younger widows to remarry and have children (I Timothy 5:10,14, see also John 13:14-15). “Just do obediently what the Bible says”, as we sometimes hear it, may appear to be a simple and easy-to-use rule of thumb, but in reality it is an oversimplification. The American philosopher Wolterstorff, who stands in the Reformed tradition, has warned against an arbitrary use of Bible texts, and a selective application of principles in regard to the relation between men and women.

The Bible has been not come down to us from heaven by parachute. It is a real given that it has been read differently within changing contexts. This fits with the Reformed point of departure that no human writings and no human tradition may stand above the Word of God (Article 7, Belgic Confession). We cannot a priori exclude the possibility that a manner of Bible reading in relation to men-women-office, which up till now has enjoyed the churches’ sanction, might not, in a changing context, lead to a different conclusion. When we read Scripture itself, carefully and with Spirit-led self-reflection, we may trust that the Spirit will show us the way. This is true, not only for the choices we make regarding the content of the position of women within the church, but also about the manner in which we deal with our differences in regard to those choices.

1.4 The structure of this report

Our mandate was to provide an answer to the question whether it is permissible, on the basis of Scripture, beside brothers, also to appoint sisters in the church to the office of deacon, elder and minister.

We are of the opinion that the first two questions that GS 2011 asked belong inseparably together at a fundamental level; practical considerations, however, may well make it reasonable to distinguish between these offices. We also understand the urgency that is expressed in these questions. In the current situation in the churches, opinions concerning the relation between men and women are sometimes diametrically opposed. In this situation, an unequivocal ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is quite unlikely to provide a real solution. It could so easily happen that such a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is followed by a fierce dispute, in which attention is paid only to its practical implementation, and a substantive discussion concerning the underlying vision hardly takes place

....

2 The Bible: texts and lines

2.5 In conclusion

In conclusion, it is striking that in regard to the relationship between

husband and wife the New Testament displays a clear pattern: the wife ought to submit to her husband, and the husband must love his wife and respect her. This is a consistent and univocal message. At the same time, texts that do not touch on this mutual relationship show greater diversity.

It is clear that Paul forbids excessive adornment and a dominant attitude in a woman. She must behave modestly and quietly. That leaves no room for her to teach or exercise authority over a man. It is not altogether clear, however, how this is to be applied in practice. A woman may pray and prophesy, but she may not interpret prophecy or give instruction. But what exactly does that mean, in practice?

In order to answer this question it is important to examine the arguments behind each of these prescriptions, namely...

- ...a prevailing Christian style of living ('this is our practice');
- ...the relationship between husband (man) and wife (woman), which reflects the relationship between Christ and his church;
- ...the Old Testament: creation, the fall into sin, the requirements of the Law;
- ...what is generally regarded as honourable or shameful;
- ...the progress of the Gospel in the world, or the protection of the church against error.

Myriam Klinker-De Klerck, at the end of her booklet *Als vrouwen het woord doen*, describes the interplay between these arguments, and comes to the following conclusions:

1. The central argument is consistently the required submission of the woman (wife) in relation to the man (husband).
2. This is motivated in terms of notions such as honour and shame, of reverence for God and for Christ, of references to the Old Testament and of the attracting influence of this submission. For Paul, all of these motivations form a coherent whole.
3. The manner in which a wife might dishonour her husband is determined by the cultural customs of the time. Conforming to the existing order is salutary for the spread of the Gospel among outsiders.

2.6 Connection and content

Bible texts, whether from the Old or the New Testament, connect in a particular fashion to the culture of their own time and place, also when they engage critically with it.

In confirming the subordinate position of the woman, Paul makes

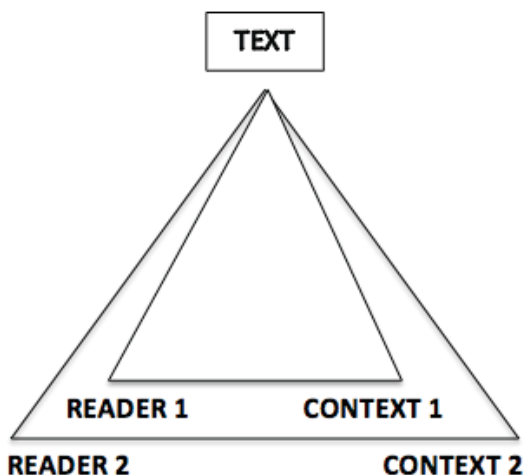
connections with prevailing moral standards. He exhorts women to love their husbands and children, and to look after their households (see also I Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:4-5). Paul's contrast between the excessive adornment and the virtuous restraint of wives was not uncommon (compare I Timothy 2:9-10). At the same time, Paul uses typically Christian notions in his argument, such as reverence for God and for Christ, references to the Old Testament (creation, the fall and the Law), and the prevention of unnecessary criticism by outsiders.

Hence, we see that the central argument (the required subordination of the woman (wife) in relation to the man (husband) is presented as a distinctively Christian realization of prevailing cultural patterns, with a view to the progress of the Gospel.

3. Hermeneutical considerations

3.1 Text, reader, context

The fact that we are or become conscious of the specific manner in which we read the Bible is described in technical terms as 'hermeneutical awareness'. For the sake of clarity, we emphasise: this is not a new manner of dealing with the Bible. Reflection on the search for meaning has always been taking place. Previously, however, that happened less explicitly. At the present time, the process of coming to an understanding of meaning is itself being examined and described; that is what we call 'hermeneutics'. It is, of course, impossible to cover all the details of this process in a Deputies' report. We will limit ourselves to a broad outline.



The diagram above shows, in schematic form, what happens when

Christians read the Bible. The smaller triangle represents the text in its original context, and for its first readers. In the larger triangle, the text is still central, but in a different context. We too are readers, and the text functions in our context also. There are many examples of such larger triangles: such as the time of Luther, the Netherlands in 1950, or Kenya today. The diagram aims to show how the reading of a text develops during the passage of time.

The order of the triangles is very important. The meaning of the text within the smaller triangle must be ascertained first, before coming to its meaning in the larger triangle. It is important, therefore, to make a distinction between the two. Sometimes, the reader may allow the two triangles to coincide; to do so could lead to two errors.

The first error is to apply the smaller triangle (the meaning of the text in its original context) directly to our situation; the second error is to begin with the larger triangle (the meaning of the text in our context) and to interpret this back to the earlier situation.

We will focus on the apostle Paul. Usually Paul does not simply state his personal opinion (sometimes he does, for instance in I Corinthians 7:12 and 40); he writes as apostle of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 14:36,37). Still, it is important to be aware of the difference between our context and that of Paul. For our present topic, this plays out in at least five different aspects, which we set out below.

- a. Paul's prescriptions in I Timothy 2 concerning the behaviour of men and women stand within the framework of the male-female relationship. That is why both categories are addressed, first separately and then in their mutual relationship. Where Paul, in his context, warns against dominant behaviour of women towards men, in our culture we are more likely to warn against domination of women by men.
- b. Paul's prescription is one for the church, but what he strives for in the church is substantially no different from what leading moral philosophers of his time also advocated. The stipulation that women ought to be silent in church was consistent with the accepted and prevailing social situation of his time (aside from a libertarian women's movement coming from Rome). In our time, this command runs counter to the accepted social situation.
- c. A great difference between the culture in New Testament times and ours is that then people thought collectively, while today we are much more inclined towards individualism. People lived more strongly as part of one single community, while today we

participate in a range of social contexts. Today, we much more easily make our own decisions in all sorts of situations, and we are much less likely to be led by established moral tradition.

- d. Mediterranean culture in the time of the New Testament (and to a certain extent still today) was stamped by the polarity of honour and disgrace, in which the distinction between men and women played a key role. In our culture, equality comes first (compare Galatians 3:28). Hence: whoever behaved in a 'disorderly' manner, especially in the relationship between men and women, brought disgrace upon the whole community. The same thing was true within the church, the familia of God.
- e. Since the separation of church and state, the church has been pushed aside, out of the public domain. Paul, with his prescriptions in the first century AD, was still able to make links with a non-Christian environment. In the 21st century however, with these same prescriptions we create or strengthen an isolation from society that might unnecessarily hinder the progress of the proclamation of the Gospel.

Paul appears to have a two-fold drive in motivating his prescriptions. On the one hand, he draws on the account of creation, explicitly referring to the history of Genesis 1-3. We should keep in mind that in doing so he aims to preserve the established order, both in the church and in society. Paul sees the church as an ideal society, a pioneering outpost, as it were, of the Kingdom, where the good order of God is to be learned and practised in the actual life of society.

On the other hand, he also uses practical arguments that play a more implicit role. He has regard for the internal structure of the church (peace and order) as well as its external, missionary influence (its public image, what is honourable/shameful).

Two kinds of motivations can therefore be distinguished, and in the concrete application of Paul's instructions in ever-changing contexts, it is important to understand what drives him. Apparently, Paul was sufficiently flexible in his thinking (pastorally, rhetorically and theologically) that for him the various motivations were not mutually exclusive but supported and complemented each other.

In our (greatly changed) context as regards man-woman relationships, these motivations could easily become a hindrance to each other. This could happen, for example, with the Biblical concept of 'submission' (Greek: *hupotassein*). Paul understood this term within the framework of a certain

ordering of society, while today it evokes a negative perception of the church among outsiders.

3.2 Reflecting upon the process of understanding

In their report to General Synod 2011, the Deputies for Church Unity (DKE) articulated a view of hermeneutics that we would like to bring in here. One of the arguments that played a role in the discussions between the NGK and GKv, and certainly one that has relevance to the question whether women may serve in the offices, was that of 'credibility'. The Deputies write that the application of Biblical prescriptions in our own time must be 'credible':

"Not in the sense of credibility before the forum of today's culture: the Gospel will always be a folly and an offence, and when we live from the word of God we may always arrive at a position that runs counter to prevailing culture (whatever that may be). Rather, in the sense of personal or ecclesiastical credibility: honestly and with integrity avoiding a selective application of Scripture. Our application of Biblical prescriptions may not limit itself to certain aspects of life, when these prescriptions also apply to one or more other domains. The authors of the VOP report (The report of the NGK concerning women in office) believe that the credibility of an appeal to Scripture is at stake when on the one hand women in the church and in society – with broad support – fill various leading roles, engage in instructional and pastoral activities, serve in calling committees, evaluate sermons, speak at congregational meetings, etc, while on the other hand the offices in the church are closed to them. And this while an appeal to the direct meaning of Paul's words could also be applied to these other tasks and activities. The expression 'credibility', when used in the context of women in office, ought to be understood in this sense, and explicitly not as 'credibility' before the forum of today's world." (p.61).

Together with DKE we point to the danger that our Christian attitude could be unnecessarily incongruent with the culture in which we live. Together with DKE we wish to posit that on the one hand the Word of God stands critically opposed to our culture, but on the other hand seeks connection with, and seeks entry into, every culture: "The prevailing culture might act as a filter that obscures our view of God's purpose and will; it might also act as a lens, by which we gain a sharper view of God's will for here and now. Personal, societal and cultural circumstances can both close and open Scripture for us. They may darken our understanding of Scripture, and hence of God's will (think of contemporary views concerning marriage,

sexuality and more generally the dominant focus on the self)

. However, they may also throw new light on (the understanding of) Scripture, and open our eyes for things that we failed to see earlier (think of changed views concerning slavery, race relations and the environment).” (p.61)

Sometimes, the word ‘hermeneutical’ evokes negative associations, as if the readers at any particular moment can read their own preferences into the Bible. Hermeneutics, however, is no magic wand.

Hence, we see it as important that we, together with DKE, understand hermeneutics as “... *critical reflection on the totality of the process of understanding the text, including exegesis. Exegesis, then, is the craft of text interpretation, one element of the whole process of understanding. In all of this, we believe in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who leads us in the truth, enlightens our minds and gives us insight into the Word of God. This process of understanding does not depend on our hermeneutics. Nevertheless, hermeneutics can assist us in critically examining this process of understanding and where necessary enhancing it. In this process of understanding we may distinguish a number of different readings of the text.*” (p.62).

The Deputies distinguish three such readings:

- The primary reading: a direct reading of the text, within the context of one's own church and faith situation. This comes before both triangles in our terminology.
- The first rereading: the reading of the text from within the context (literary and historical) in which it was first written. This corresponds to the ‘smaller triangle’ in our terminology.
- The second rereading: the reading of the text with a view to the present context of the reader. This corresponds to the ‘larger triangle’ in our terminology. Taking into account what was discovered in the first rereading, and steadfastly praying for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we seek out the meaning of the text for today.

“the understanding of the text in its present meaning is then the result of a constant back-and-forth movement between the various contexts, in which the text as a given(!) retains its primacy with respect to the reader, and in which the Spirit gradually teaches us, together with all the saints, to discern what really matters.” (p.62).

3.3 What does God want to say to us?

Paul's context and culture were different from ours. In relation to Paul's prescription that women must cover their heads in worship, it is generally

taken as self-evident within the GKv that there is no need for such covering in our culture. But why is that, actually? In ultra-orthodox circles, women do cover their heads, at least in worship, because they see that as a lasting Biblical command. There is no evidence, however, that the Bible restricts this command to the worship service.

Differences in context and culture must be read, identified and discussed; this is well-understood in the Reformed tradition. For example, in his treatment of the fifth commandment, dr. J Douma already pointed out that the Bible uses the one word for 'to obey' (hupotassein) within a range of authority relationships: parents-children, husband-wife; masters-servants; rulers-subjects. He writes:

"This kind of usage indicates that similar relationships were put on the same level in earlier times and probably treated in that way as well. But now that is no longer the case."

Douma then refers to Bavinck. In regard to the marriage relationship, Douma writes:

*"Instead of a wife 'rendering obedience to' her husband, we have come to speak of a wife 'following her husband's leading'. The latter expression harvests the good fruit of both modern emancipation movements and of the Scripturally described relationship between husband and wife."*¹

In 2001, dr. J van Bruggen spoke about the expression 'subject to'. In Paul's context it was easy to use the concept of subjection to express the notion that a wife must be faithful to her spouse. In our time and in our Western culture, the word 'subjection' gives rise to misunderstanding: may one, on the basis of Scripture, conclude that women are not only to be faithful to their husbands, but must also choose to take a role within that marriage that is characterised as 'submission'? According to Van Bruggen, it was simply Paul's intention that the love of Christ was to be given its place within marriage.²

We conclude that here, in the practice of reading the Bible, both Douma and van Bruggen have taken into account the space and distance between Paul's time on the one hand, and ours on the other. That is also the line we follow in our report.

3.4 Discussion

1 J Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, tr. N.D. Kloosterman (Philipsburg NJ: PR Publishing, 1996), 182- 183.

2 'Hermeneutics and the Bible', *Proceedings ICRC 2001*. (Dr. J. Douma served as professor of ethics (1970-1997) and dr. J. van Bruggen (1967-2001) as professor of New Testament, both at the Theological University of the GKv at Kampen, the Netherlands – tr.)

The chief question we must answer here is: does 'hermeneutics' then not mean that we, in our own reading framework, begin to lord it over the power and the authority of the Bible as the Word of God? The underlying thought being that the Bible (and not culture) must always have the last word, and that Paul's apostolic authority reaches across the horizon of his own time.

As fully justified as this question may be – for indeed, the danger exists that readers project their own thinking frameworks upon the Bible – we wish to remove every possible misunderstanding by stating a priori that for us the authority of the Bible and the apostle Paul are not open to discussion. On the contrary, we are attempting to do justice to what the Bible itself gives us as context.

Paul, after all, does not prescribe a collection of rules in isolation; rather, he provides various motivations for them. The apostolic prescriptions are not given in isolation: they are directed to the context of Paul's time. These prescriptions show how the apostles, taking their starting point in the communion with Christ, strove to set out their position within the social context of their time, so that within this context they might follow Christ. For us as 21st century readers of the Bible, it is not only Paul's instructions themselves that are directive, but also the manner in which Paul dealt with his own context, and his focus on following Christ. By listening carefully to Paul's instruction, proceeding from our communion with Christ, and in our present situation, we come to ethical rules for living and ecclesiastical agreements.

The answer to our question concerning Reformed hermeneutics may already be found in the previous paragraph. Reformed hermeneutics does not aim to bridge the imagined gap between 'then' and 'now'; it is a necessary element of reflection on the process of understanding. It is a sign of honest and adult use of the Bible to give account to ourselves and to others: this is the manner in which we want to and must read the Bible. Whoever does not wish to give explicit account at this point, will himself run the risk of implicitly forcing his own thinking framework upon the Holy Scriptures.

The Christian Church has always searched the Word of God to see what he has to say to us in our time. K. Schilder already defined 'ethics' as: 'the science of the constant grounds, the changing dispensations, and the relevant concrete specificity of man's obligation towards God's revealed will'.³ When we fail to take this distinction into account, the danger of a biblicism lurks, in which differences in context and culture only play an implicit role. We, who ourselves are bound to and determined by our

3 30 Quoted in J. Douma: Responsible conduct: Christian Principles and Ethics, tr. N.D. Kloosterman (Philipsburg NJ: ,2003), 71

own time, are only attempting to give explicit account of this process of understanding.

4. Meaning for today

4.1 Difference in context

When we, with an explicit hermeneutical awareness, revisit Paul's most important texts, taking into account the difference in context between then and now, we notice the following:

To a significant extent, Paul stays in line with what in his context were prevailing social norms. He confirms the subordinate position of women, in the church as well as in society (see 2.2). More to the point: with respect to women, Paul aligns with prevailing social norms. His reason for this is that the progress of the Gospel should not be hindered. With respect to men, Paul critically confronts (generally) prevailing social practice. For outsiders, however, that would not create offence. In both cases, then, Paul was motivated by the manner in which Christians were regarded by outsiders.

God's Word does not simply and uncritically take over the culture in which it arose. Sometimes, Paul was stricter than prevailing custom, for example in his insistence upon fidelity in marriage for men (I Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6). In addition, he regarded the mutuality within the marriage relationship as very important (I Corinthians 7:2-5; Ephesians 5:21). In various ways, Paul is motivated here by the Old Testament, where God orders human society. Hence, we find an important critical moment in Scripture when we place the texts given in chapter 2 of this report next to those texts that critically confront the culture of Paul's time, such as Galatians 3:28.

This manner of Bible reading aims, on the one hand, to do justice to the first triangle (see the diagram in Chapter 3). The text's first audience, in their own culture, understood the text this way: the manner in which the church functions ought not to give offence; rather, it must win outsiders for the Gospel.

Next to that, we wish to do justice to the second triangle: when we, in our context and culture read these texts, we conclude that the key aspects of what they say to us about the relationship between men and women are these:

- In almost all cases, the texts deal with husband and wife in marriage
- God demands unconditional faithfulness in marriage, and forbids any distortion of the husband-wife relationship through domineering behaviour
- In setting out the relationships between men and women in the

church, God asks attention for what in the prevailing culture may or may not give offence

- It is God's will that the relationship of Christ and his church is reflected in the Christian realization of the husband-wife relationship, so that it might carry out a witness into the world
- Here, Paul sometimes makes reference to the Old Testament (creation, the fall, the law)
- In this witness towards outsiders, we may not impose additional conditions upon the man woman-relationship (conditions that in our culture would give unnecessary offence)
- Where the Gospel necessarily critically confronts trends in our culture, we must make clear that this confrontation truly touches upon the heart of the Gospel

To sum up, Paul employs a whole palette of directions and arguments. He does not indicate which of them for him carries the greatest weight. It is clear, however, that as Christians we must take all of his arguments into account. In doing so, our obligation to follow Christ sets the tone and direction.

This palette can be compared with the way in which Scripture values and sometimes relativizes the family relationships created by God. In some cases, Jesus did so himself (Matthew 10:35; 19:28-30; 22; Mark 1:20; 3:31-35; Luke 9:57-62). Even Paul's well-known word that there is '*neither ... male nor female*', since believers are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) relativizes the God-given differences between the sexes. At its core, this relativization goes back to Deuteronomy 13:7-12, where it is clear that the first and greatest commandment – God above all – is the norm and regulative principle for all other relationships. Wherever and whenever other relationships form a hindrance to following the Lord, they must be set aside; otherwise they have become a form of idolatry. The radical relativization of all earthly relationships goes back to God's command to love him above all else.

On the other hand, we find clear indications in the New Testament that family and kinship are very important. Jesus, referring to the explicit commentary in Genesis 2:24 on the creation of man and woman ('Therefore...'), affirms the value of marriage (Matthew 9:4-7). And with an appeal to the command of God, Christ affirms the value of the parent-child relationship (Matthew 15:4-5). The apostle Paul, too, affirms these created structures (Ephesians 5:21-33 and 6:1-9; Colossians 3:18-19 and 3:21-4:6).

To sum up, God wants to use the (marriage and family) relationships he created to accomplish the work and progress of his Kingdom. In this

everyone must put God in the first place. To do otherwise would be a form of idolatry: one would have to make choices.

We use this comparison to show that, as highly as God values the relationships he created, they could stand in the way of the progress of his Kingdom. In such cases, it would not be right to hold on to those relationships at the cost of following Christ.

In the same way, cultural patterns in regard to male-female relationships can be fully used and employed as the stream-bed in which the Kingdom of God finds its way.

However, where such cultural patterns obscure the view of God's Kingdom as the restoration and completion of creation, and become a hindrance to following Christ, they must be dealt with critically. Mutatis mutandis, this twofold process of alignment and confrontation also applies to the role patterns that have become established in the church.

What really matters is that the church is to proclaim the Gospel: the Lord has truly risen! Christ himself first entrusted this task to Mary Magdalene (John 20:17-18): she was the one who had to bring the apostles together with this message. And just before his ascension, Christ said to his apostles: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20). In the pursuit of the spread of this Gospel we see the activity of a 'deacon' named Phoebe (Romans 16:1). Without great commotion, much changes for the disciples of Christ, in order that the Gospel might make progress.

It is not contrary to, but rather in line with Scripture when we, in our situation, attempt to do the same: where beneficial, we align with our culture; where necessary we confront it. Paul employs a whole palette of arguments. We see no reason to give greater weight to, for example, his reference to Adam and Eve in Paradise than to his argument based on the concepts of honour and disgrace. Paul's prescriptions concerning the male-female relationships are inseparably linked to the cultural situation of his time. For all times, the crucial matter is and remains: the proclamation of the Gospel in and by the church. In our contemporary Western context, men and women may participate on an equal level. This does not imply that we go along uncritically with unbiblical egalitarian thinking; instead, it is an attempt to actualize what men and women, with their own distinct gifts, can mean in the service of the Gospel.

4.2 Discussion

But isn't it so that Paul, especially in I Timothy 2, argues on the basis of a

lasting creation order? The order that God established for man and woman at the beginning of history cannot be subject to cultural change, can it?

We wish to address this question with three interrelated observations.

To begin with: When Paul briefly refers back to the story of Adam and Eve in paradise, he has three situations in mind: creation (Genesis 2), as well as the fall and redemption (Genesis 3). He interrelates these three situations. An appeal to creation must therefore always take into account that we cannot simply know or recognize this situation as such in a sinful world. Male-female relations, because of the curse in paradise, will always be a very sensitive matter. And Paul's use of terminology from before the fall is found specifically where he explains the restoration brought about by Jesus Christ, as we saw in our discussion of Galatians 3:28.

Second: Paul uses the story of creation as a comparative argument. In I Timothy 2 he does not appeal to a specific given from Scripture ('Scripture says...'); instead he recalls the story of Adam and Eve as an historic event: creation, fall, redemption. Such a reference to an historic event, even an event that lies at the beginning of history, is not a normative appeal to the commands of God. In a similar manner, Peter holds up to his female readers the example of Sarah, who called her husband 'my master' (I Peter 3:5-6; see Genesis 18:12). In I Timothy 2:13 ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve"), Paul uses the situation in paradise to provide direction to Timothy and the church in their situation. There, he interprets an order of creation events as an order of rank. While the notion of a created order of rank, in which each person was assigned their own position, aligned well with existing social patterns of the day, in our situation such an idea is hard to make sense of. The use of this argument, too, is coloured by its context.

In addition, and in the third place, we need to consider how much weight Paul gives to the situation of Adam and Eve. He brings forward a whole palette of arguments, without giving any indication as to which one, for him, carries the most weight. The question arises whether others have not subsequently assigned a greater value to the creation order, a value in which the idea of 'the creation order' has become a virtually timeless theological concept. It is clear from I Corinthians 7:7-8 that for Paul this 'creation order' argument was not decisive. For he writes that it is good to be unmarried, even though the Creator himself had considered that 'it is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18).

In addition, the fact that in the Sabbath-command, rest on the seventh day is motivated with an appeal to the creation order has never prevented the Christian church from celebrating the day of rest on the first day of the week.

In summary, the 'creation order' concept is a useful but not directly Biblical term to indicate that God himself is pleased to give shape to human relationships (both in the church and in society at large). However, this term would do injustice to the broad diversity within Scripture if we were to try to use it to fix for all time all kinds of human relationships. It is itself an element of God's creation order that people, in a believing response to the word of God, endeavour to give shape to the ways of living that God has provided.

5 Our understanding of 'the office'

So far we have dealt with the way we read and understand Scripture. But how do we understand the role of women in the church and its offices?

Central to this report is the question whether or not women may serve in the church of Jesus Christ as elders, ministers and/or deacons. What brings these three indicators of function together is that all three of them are 'offices'.

Thus the question is not whether women may carry out pastoral, diaconal or even preaching tasks within the church. In practice, these tasks are already being performed without giving rise to any principle objections. The question is whether women may be admitted to the offices of the church. But what then are these 'offices', when clearly they cannot be completely defined in terms of a number of concrete tasks and responsibilities?

5.1 The church and its office-bearers

Together with Scripture and the confessions, the office is the manner by which the church is reliably kept close to Christ. The office is a divine, not a human institution. People are called (vocatio) by Jesus Christ to keep the church, as a fellowship, to its mission in this world. Hence, the apostle Paul asks: 'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"' (Romans 10:14-15). In the task of keeping the congregation with Christ through Word and sacrament, the office-bearer represents Christ.

This special calling of certain persons means that we cannot fully define the office in functional terms such as 'administration' or 'leadership'.⁴ The office does not arise from the congregation, and therefore cannot be exhaustively described in functional terms. *"The fellowship of the church*

4 L.J. Koffeman, Het goed recht van de kerk. Een theologische inleiding op het kerkrecht (Kampen: Kok, 2009), 143-149.

requires a structuring that preserves it in the faith in Jesus Christ, and in which it is exhorted to uncover, promote and exercise its Spirit-given gifts for the church and the world."⁵ The office derives its power and authority from its calling by God himself. This is not diminished by the fact that the congregation confirms this calling. Already at the beginning of the 3rd century, history relates that the bishop was chosen by all the people, and that the bishops of the neighbouring church laid their hands on him.⁶ In addition, we must constantly stress that while the office may not be played off against the manifold gifts of the members of the church, it must be distinguished from them.⁷

The question is whether the office that is so understood and described may also be filled by women. In the apostolic church, men only were called to be elders.⁸ Does God call men only to this service? In the practice of church life, this question is being variously answered. Within the Reformed tradition, the point of departure has been that Scripture itself has made the choice for men, and that this choice is still normative for the present. A second argument is that the office that represents Christ can only be filled by men, since the Son was incarnate as a man.⁹

However, this connection between the office and the representation of Christ need not necessarily imply that only men can fulfil it. We read in Scripture that women (such as Phoebe) laboured in diaconal tasks, and that in exceptional circumstances women could even act as judges in Israel (Deborah).

It is therefore conceivable that a 'high' view of the office can go together with the possibility that, depending on the context, women also may represent Christ in an office.¹⁰ In the 'office' as such, there is apparently nothing to indicate that this calling is to be reserved for men only.

5.2 Discussion

When we – on the basis of preceding parts of this report – state that the possibility of allowing women to serve as deacons, elders or ministers does not go against a Biblical view of the office, we do so partly under the

5 G. van den Brink & C. van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012), 559.

6 Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek*, 555.

7 See M. te Velde, *Gemeenteopbouw 2. Bijbelse basisprincipes voor het functioneren van de christelijke gemeente* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1992) 100-101.

8 The fact that the twelve apostles were exclusively men cannot be considered separately from the fact that they, just as the patriarchs, represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

9 Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek*, 560.

10 See Van den Brink and Van der Kooi, *Christelijke Dogmatiek*, 560 and van der Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 271.

influence of our present cultural context. At the same time, we emphasise that this in itself need not be a cause to doubt the validity of such a position. As we have said previously: against the background of different cultural contexts, the light of Scripture may shine in different ways.

On the other hand, the present cultural context of the church in western Europe is not normative, in the sense that it prescribes what the Christian church ought or ought not to do. The chain of thought is actually reversed. The Holy Scriptures open to us the possibility that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to the foreground in new ways, to the end that there may be a beginning of restoration of the relationship between male and female, distorted in so many ways.

One of the trends that the Christian church must take account of is that of 'feminization'. By this we mean the growing influence of women, in terms of both number and substance, marginalizing the contribution of men. Both church and society – according to critical researchers – must respond to this development.

The feminization of the church might mean that men are less willing to take up their responsibilities in and for the church. To the extent that women increasingly fulfil all kinds of roles and tasks not directly associated with the offices, it might be that men wrongly surrender their responsibilities in the church, and leave these tasks to women.

For the present, the conclusion is sufficient that the church must show that it will not allow the cultural context to prescribe its practices. It also must remain alert to cultural trends (such as feminization) that are likely to have an influence on the Christian church. It has a calling to keep the catholic-reformed value of the office as defined above from evaporating; rather, it must act to preserve it. Just as well as men, women can represent Jesus Christ in their own official ministry.

We would like to suggest that as conversations are held within local congregations whether women might or might not be engaged in one or more of the offices, a broader discussion also takes place concerning the task-description of the offices, and their relationship to other roles and tasks within the church.

Three reasons may be given:

First, in many congregations this conversation (the content and responsibilities of the offices of elder, deacon and minister, and their relationship to the responsibilities of men and women who perform tasks that do not belong to the office) is already underway. As 'non-official' tasks we could think of: catechists, youth workers, church workers, group leaders, members of a pastoral team, and leaders of diaconal and

missionary projects.

Second, in a number of congregations, management models and structures are used, in which a small church council – consisting of men – leads an extensive team of men and women who carry out responsible tasks within the congregation.

Third, the Werkorde (the recently revised church order of the GKv – tr.) makes a clear distinction between the church council (consisting of elders and minister(s)) and the college of deacons. This is consistent with Reformed church polity, as set out in Article 36 of the Church Order. There are different perspectives on this, as evidenced by the fact that the Belgic Confession states that ‘elders and deacons, who together with the pastors, form the council of the church’ (Article 30).

These three observations show that – next to the question whether women may be admitted to one or more offices – other questions regarding the work of the offices and other tasks within the congregation must be carefully reflected on. To work this out in more detail would go beyond the mandate we as deputies were given.

6 Dealing with differences

As we, in line with the foregoing (starting with Scripture and informed by our view of the office), give thought to what the church might look like when men and women function in equality beside each other, including in the offices, a problem arises. For not everyone will be willing to share this perspective. We are therefore faced with the question: How do we, on this point, deal with mutual differences in the church?

6.1 Which differences?

Within virtually all the churches abroad with which the GKv maintains sister relationships, there are discussions concerning the role of women in the church.¹¹ Still, ‘women in office’ is not a hot issue among them, with the exception of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA, also known as the Doppekerken). In Africa, Asia and Latin America, ecclesiastical culture differs little from what prevails within society as a whole. In Eastern Europe and some parts of Africa, the ‘Deborah principle’ is applied: In Hungary, the Reformed accept women in all offices because there are simply not enough male office bearers available. We are informed that in Kenya, for the same reason, women may present a sermon, but not from the pulpit. For many years, Presbyterians in Ireland (the IPC) have had female ministers and elders (beside exclusively female deaconesses), be

11 This is what the deputies for BBK wrote in 2008 to the deputies male/female, p.8 of the supplementary report.

that on a local level this is sometimes still a point of discussion.¹² Among the traditional migrant churches there is a strong inclination to hold to the Dutch culture of the previous century, also when it comes to the way that the Bible is read and applied; hence, there are very strong misgivings among them on this point concerning developments within the Netherlands itself.

When we observe relations within the Netherlands, we note that the PKN has opened all offices to women. On this point, the 'Gereformeerde Bond' has explicitly taken a minority position,¹³ although within it a few churches depart from that. The CGK are living with a Synod decision in which a majority report was accepted at the cost of a minority position. In the NGK, in line with the VOP report, all offices have been opened to women. Especially this last development has created difficulties for local discussions with the GKv.

Within the GKv and NGK this discussion raises its head with a number of church planting projects, of which 'Stroom' in Amsterdam is the most prominent.¹⁴ 'Stroom' includes women in its leadership team. The 'Veenhartkerk' in Mijdrecht has a leadership team that also includes women. Of late, a similar structure has also become the practice of the 'normal' congregation in Assen-Kloosterveen.

Within local congregations there is a growing diversity of views. Frequently, the question is raised whether there needs to be a sharper distinction between Reformed practice (present custom, the way things have grown) and the Reformed confession (our confessional foundations). If so, what belongs to which? It has become quite difficult to remain in discussion without judging each other.¹⁵

There are no Biblical objections to female deacons, provided the office of deacons is separated from the ruling tasks of the church. This is what we read in the report of the General Diaconal Deputies for the General Synod of Harderwijk. J. van Bruggen had already proposed this in 1980.¹⁶ In the Gereformeerde Kerk of Harlingen a college of deaconesses has

12 We have no official sister-church relationship with these churches, but there has been an angle of lecturers between the theological colleges in Kampen and Belfast.

13 Mannelijk en vrouwelijk schiep Hij hen. Over man, vrouw en ambt. A publication of the Gereformeerde Bond in de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland [2012].

14 Nederlands Dagblad, 11 oktober 2012: "Kerkplanters vragen ruimte om af te wijken van regels".

15 Wubbo Scholte, "Omgaan met verschillen", in: Mieke Wilcke – van der Linden e.a., *Vrouw en kerk* (GSEv reeks 41; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1999), 158-166.

16 J. van Bruggen: *Ambten in de apostolische kerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), ch V. Similarly: E.A. de Boer, *Zij aan zij* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006).

already functioned for a year. Its charter states that its goal is to support the deacons in situations where the deacons deem it desirable.

Still, a pragmatic measure that opens the office of deacons to women does not really resolve the questions surrounding the service of women in the offices. This is shown clearly by developments in the NGK, where room was first created for female deacons, and ten years later this was extended to female elders and ministers.

6.2 Carried along by the past

It is useful to bring in a lesson from the past, where it comes to dealing with differences. Prof. Dr. A van Deursen, who wrote a brief history of the Reformed Churches since the Separation of 1834, observed that where the 20th century was marked by church schisms, the 19th century records three successful church unions: those of 1854, 1869 and 1892. In each of those unions, the parties involved succeeded in finding each other on the one foundation of the Reformed confessions.

How were internal differences dealt with? History teaches that it requires a certain degree of restraint, says Van Deursen. This applies to liturgy (metrical versions of the Psalms, the use of hymns) as well as to training for the ministry (1902: the Theological University in Kampen and the Free University in Amsterdam), and probably most of all for theological issues. *“Ever since 1834, discussions took place within the circles of the Seceders concerning covenant and baptism. As sharply as the parties differed, neither in the reconciliations of 1856 nor in 1869 were declarations made in favour of one side or the other. In 1892 also these questions were left to rest. Later attempts to as yet resolve the differences by means of binding doctrinal declarations led to fatal outcomes”.*¹⁷

6.3 Outside In

Another lesson concerning dealing with differences can be learned from Article 47 of the Church Order, where it addresses relations with churches abroad. Here it reads, among other things: *“... on minor points of church order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be condemned”*.^{*} What are these points? The relevant decision of Synod indicates that this refers to external structures, liturgical practices and agreements regarding church government, but also to the ways in which

17 A.Th. van Deursen, “Scheuring en hereniging in de geschiedenis van de gereformeerde kerken”, in: Van Deursen, et al.; Delen in eenheid. Omgaan met verschillen in de kerk (GSEv reeks 43; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2000), 41.

^{*} This translation uses the text Article 50 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Book of Praise, Premier, Winnipeg (2008), 670), which is substantially the same (tr.)

they confess the truth of God's Word (General Synod of Groningen-Zuid, 1978). From the rules for sister relations with churches abroad we quote: "Churches abroad shall not be condemned because of differences on subordinate points regarding the manner of confession, liturgy, church order and practice".

In dealing with churches abroad, we employ the motif 'do not condemn one another on subordinate points'. And among such subordinate points we even include 'the manner (to be read as: the content) of confession'! Why should we not, as someone once expressed it, turn this rule 'outside in'? The things we are able to accept in churches abroad ought not to constitute a breaking point in our own country – neither in our relations with other churches nor within our own church community or in church planting projects.

6.4 Sharing in unity

To put it more strongly, it raises the question whether the Christian church can retain or develop the capacity to acknowledge the value of diversity. The letter to the Ephesians is a source for this, par excellence. After all, what really counts for the church is that 'through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...' (Ch 3:10). When we are kept with Jesus Christ we will be able to discover, 'with all the saints', the love of God in him. This diversity is the other side of the unity of the church.

In this regard, Rene de Reuver has developed thoughts worthy of consideration.¹⁸ He characterises diversity within the church as a 'manifestation of unity'. It is important to note that such diversity does not erase boundaries; rather, it sets such boundaries and indeed requires them. De Reuver lists three criteria for the preservation of one's identity: 1) unity in Christ; 2) an attitude of concrete love; 3) diversity within boundaries.

The unity of the church is determined by its identity: the confession of Christ as Lord. The New Testament does not know of a 'plural church' in the present sense of the word, but one church, manifesting itself in a diversity of forms and characterized by manifold gifts of the spirit. Hence, De Reuver concludes that it is legitimate to speak of diversity within the church (he calls it 'ecclesiological plurality'). Such diversity does not break up the church; rather, it brings a variety of believers together in praise and worship, and leads them to the one table of Christ. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that such diversity of views will require sacrifices – just as an attitude of love will always ask for personal sacrifices.¹⁹

18 René de Reuver, *Eén in meervoud. De ecclesiologische waarde van pluraliteit* (Boekencentrum: Zoetermeer, 2004).

19 Here, De Reuver discusses Acts 15, Ephesians 3:14-21 en 1 Corinthians 12.

Notwithstanding, there will always be limits to such diversity.²⁰ To begin with, to the room that such diversity must provide. Diversity within the church “that disturbs or prevents the shared praise, prayer, and confession of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ, loses its theological legitimacy” (p.305). Mutual differences are no end in themselves, but must be directed towards the building up of the body of Christ.

The attitude of believers must be marked by love for Christ and love for each other as members of the same body of Christ. Christians therefore must display the fundamental willingness to learn from each other: it is quite possible that the other might be right. This attitude is a necessary condition for the Christian congregation. It takes courage to persevere in a church in which there are great differences of view. The chief point here is the question whether, how and where the Holy Spirit sets boundaries for a diversity of view.

In this connection we take the position that differences concerning the service of women in office, provided they have been carefully thought through as has been done above, may be difficult to live with, but need not create divisions within the church.

In recently-published literature the matter of ‘dealing with differences’ returns. To illustrate, Marius Noorloos, in his handbook for church development through faith development, often has an eye for mutual differences that may exist. In his view, only when the church council itself is willing to follow a learning process in which ‘heart for the Lord, heart for each other and heart for the world’ stands at the centre, a constructive manner of dealing with mutual differences will be found.²¹

Recently Piet Schelling, a minister in the PKN, wrote a booklet about ‘dealing with divergences within the congregation’. In particular, he emphasises that the differences that exist, simply exist, and that one may not remain caught up in the rightness of one’s own view. What matters is that we keep seeking the other. For the leaders of the church it is important that they stimulate mutual conversations, in which participants do not at the outset judge each other, but are willing, genuinely and with integrity, to listen to the other.²²

Neither Noorloos nor Schelling address the question where the limits to

20 Here, De Reuver discusses Paul’s four invocations of a curse (Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8-9).

21 Marius Noorloos, *Groeien bij de Bron. Kansen voor het christelijk en kerkelijk leven* (Kampen: Kok, 2005) and: *Leven uit de Bron. Via geloofsopbouw naar gemeenteopbouw* (Kampen: Kok, 2009).

22 Piet Schelling, *Mijn gelijk en ons geluk. Omgaan met verscheidenheid in de gemeente* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012).

plurality or divergence might lie. This question about boundaries is still fully in discussion within our churches, and a definitive answer has not yet been reached.²³

6.5 Discussion

The key question remains of course: where does that leave the question as to the truth? If one has the view that by having women as office-bearers we sin against the Lord, because we fail to honour the authority of his Word (which, after all, is as clear as daylight in this matter), and in doing so we have transgressed the limits of what can be permitted, then what? The question whether we, as a community of churches, are willing to allow such a fundamental difference of view to express itself, plays a role. Where does that leave the boundaries? Have we not placed ourselves on a slippery slope?

To answer this question, we must as believers acknowledge that, in this context, there is no such thing as truth that exists separately from time. The revelation of God always speaks concretely within human situations, but we can never know it in all its fullness. As creatures, we are by definition bound to time and space; we need each other to find the right path. That is not only a limitation, but also a challenge. For us, the reality of God is partly hidden. The light shines behind the clouds. Because of sin, we live in brokenness. We must learn to live with the fact that we will not always understand everything, and we must learn to hope for the new heaven and the new earth, where our knowledge will be complete.

Therefore: we must learn to discern what really matters, in love and depth of insight (Philippians 1:9-10). Further, we point to the function of the conscience of one who is born again by the Spirit (Romans 12:1-2; 14:5b). The Christian church has been given no guarantees, and it can give none either; it must learn, time and again, to live by trust in God.

7 Where to from here?

In reviewing what has been written above as a whole, the following picture emerges:

What we deduce from Scripture concerning the relationship between men and women ought not to form a hindrance to admitting women to service in the offices. Nor does the Reformed view of the office – in our view – raise any such obstacle. Christians in our time are called to forcefully proclaim the Gospel, and unnecessary hindrances to that must be avoided.

All of this does not mean that everyone within the GKv thinks the same

²³ See, for example, the special edition of *De Reformatie* 88/1 (11 January 2013). Here the question is again raised: what is meant by 'Reformed', and where should the limits be drawn?

about the role of women in the church. Even as deputies we are not of one mind on that. It is our opinion that these differences need not create division within the church, provided they are seen in their right proportions. After all, we are not talking about a doctrinal dispute. Nor is the authority of the Word of God at stake. It would seem apparent that in the light of Scripture it is legitimately possible to come to different conclusions concerning the role of women in the church.

Even if this report does not convince everyone, we do hope that readers taste in it a joint search for what Christ asks of us. To strengthen this unity among us, more time for reflection will be needed.

It is especially Scripture passages such as I Corinthians 14:34-36 and I Timothy 2:11-12 that have led to the prevailing view within the Reformed tradition that women are not permitted to fulfil ruling or teaching offices within the church. Also, many sister churches abroad have exclusively male office bearers. We wish to explicitly take this situation into account, mindful of what Paul wrote to the churches in both Rome and Corinth about accepting one another in the faith (Romans 14-15; I Corinthians 8-10). If we do not wish to judge each other as brothers and sisters in regard to their stance on the position of women in the service of the Gospel, then we will not judge our own past either. It is an element of our Christian style of living that we express no judgement as long as we recognize in each other a search to be led by the Gospel.

First of all, this implies that this point need not form a hindrance in our contacts with other church communities, whether they permit women in the offices, or not (such as the NGK and CGK respectively). In addition, we would do well to rethink our present ecclesiastical structures, in order that both men and women, each with their distinctive gifts, may come into their own.

Looking to the future, we plead for an open attitude, so that with all our existing differences we may work towards unity, not only within the GKv, but also with brothers and sisters in the NGK and CGK. Broad-mindedly Reformed!

To the end that a time of reflection as described above may be made possible, and may be well used in striving for unity, we limit ourselves in this report to the following conclusions:

1. In the light of Scripture, the position that women may be office bearers is a legitimate one.
2. Taking into account the present situation within the GKv, where divergent views exist concerning the role of men and women in the church, this does not mean that women ought to serve everywhere

as office bearers.

3. Whether or not women serve as office bearers ought not to form an obstacle in ecclesiastical contacts with the NGK and the CGK.
4. There is a continuing need to reflect on ecclesiastical structures as they have developed over time, certainly in conjunction with other churches with Reformed confessions, to do full justice to the understanding that both men and women are called by God in the service of the Gospel.

Draft proposals:

Materials:

1. Acts of the General Synod Harderwijk, 2011 (Article 29, Decision 2);
2. Report of the Deputies Male/Female in the Church, submitted to the General Synod of Ede, 2014.

Decision 1:

to discharge the Deputies Male/Female in the Church.

Decision 2:

to declare, on the basis of this report, that:

- a. the position that besides men, women also may serve in the offices of the church, as described in this report, fits within the breadth of what can be affirmed as Biblical and Reformed;
- b. whether or not, besides men, women also serve as office-bearers ought not to become an obstacle for the GKv in ecclesiastical contacts with the CGK and the NGK, or in church plant projects.

Decision 3:

not to appoint new Deputies Male/Female in the Church.

Decision 4:

to establish a committee that charts the consequences – specifically those for church government – of decision 2a for the GKv, and translates them into agreements and arrangements within the churches, in order that the peace and harmony within the local churches may be served.

RCN Report Appendix Five:



Deputies of the
Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Relations with Sister Churches
FRCA 2012 - 2015

March 3, 2014

Rev. Dr. MH Oosterhuis
BBK General Secretary
Reformed Churches of the Netherlands

Esteemed Brothers,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although it is unusual to write a letter to you during the actual dealings of General Synod, in view of some serious matters that have come to our attention, we feel compelled to do so. We write this letter along with the request that its contents be considered by you and brought to the attention of Synod Ede. We shall endeavour to be brief and to the point.

We have two of your Synod deputy Reports and recommendations in mind; namely the proposed revised church order and with the report of deputies “m/v in de kerk”.

With respect to the proposed revised Church Order, we have serious concerns at a number of different points. However, there is one point, which stands out in particular. It concerns the abrogation of the original *article 31*.²⁴ While there is still room in the proposal for a *personal* conflict of conscience regarding a decision, there is no opportunity for a local church *not* to implement a decision, which it regards as in conflict with Scripture or against the adopted Church Order. This change flies in the face of our Reformed conviction and Scriptural teaching (B.C. Article 30) that the final

²⁴ The first version of the new church order maintained art. 31 (Ontwerp Kerkorde 20-12-2010, F2.1). The change was introduced in the second version (see F2 - 4) The explanation (toelichting) for this change (discussed under F2) makes it clear that the deputies made a conscious choice to apply the principles embodied in art.31 in a new and different way to the past. Synod Harderwijk 2011 accepted this change, which was also maintained by the same synod in the third version after the churches had been given several months to react. In the explanation (toelichting) appended to the third version (see under F2) the idea that churches need to test synodical decisions on the basis of art. 31 to see if they are in accord with Scripture, confessions and church order is opposed. It is stated that the intention of the new church order is that only the synod itself has the authority to grant an appealing body or person a suspension for carrying out the decision being appealed.

responsibility for ruling Christ's church belongs with the local ruling body of elders. We can only view it as a denial of the principle that made the Liberation (*vrijmaking*) of 1944 possible.

In the second place, we are deeply concerned with the manner of reasoning (hermeneutics) presented in the deputies' report "m/v in de kerk". Office-bearers reasoning in such a manner ought to be held to account in terms of the form of subscription. The fact that, so far as we can see, no-one in the GKv has publicly called for disciplinary procedure is quite frankly alarming to us. We refer, for example, to how on page 18 in point b the report says with reference to 1 Timothy 2 that; *Paul gives an ecclesiastical instruction, but what he wants see happening in the congregation is in content no different from what contemporary renowned moral philosophers were promoting. That women must be silent in the church was in conformity to the acceptable cultural situation of that time*²⁵. This may or may not be true, but what has not been demonstrated is the relevance of such a comment for the apostle Paul himself. Paul provides two reasons derived from Genesis 2 and 3 respectively. Paul does not refer to contemporary culture. This report makes the relationship between Paul's instructions and contemporary culture a principled part of his argument. It can therefore conclude that if the culture changes, so does the force of the argument. Paul himself, however, gives no place in his argumentation to contemporary culture. This has been *read into* the text and enables the interpreter to use his own culture to provide a culturally conditioned Gospel.

We communicate this to you in upright sadness of heart and in a spirit of humility realising that we too must ever be on guard for ourselves. We maintain regular prayer in our churches for the brothers and sisters in the Netherlands and pray too that Synod Ede may receive our Lord's wisdom in its decision-making.

With Christian Greetings,

On behalf of Deputies,

Br. Wayne Pleiter

Corresponding Clerk

Rev PKA DeBoer

Chairman

²⁵ Report deputaten M/V in de Kerk – 2014, page 18; our translation of: *Paulus geeft een kerkelijk voorschrift, maar wat hij in de gemeente wil is inhoudelijk niet anders dan wat toenmalige vooraanstaande moraalfilosofen betoogden. Dat vrouwen moeten zwijgen in de kerk was destijds conform de geaccepteerde maatschappelijke situatie (afgezien van de vrije vrouwenbeweging uit Rome).*

RCN report Appendix Six:

Deputies Report

Visit to Hermeneutics Conference Hamilton, January 16 – 18, 2014

Synod Armadale decided, Acts Article 142, I.6.e. *to instruct deputies, or two people delegated by them, to attend the conference on hermeneutics to be held in Hamilton Canada 2014.* This decision appears to be based on the general statement made in grounds 4 that; *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.* To carry out this mandate deputies delegated the undersigned to attend this conference.

After having attended a conference like this, it is not easy to write a report. Of course, one can make a brief outline of all the speeches held. In some ways it would be superfluous to do so because general outlines were made available¹. There were some indications that the speeches will be published in due time and apparently some of the sessions are already available live on you-tube. Personal impressions can be given, but, of course, they remain *personal impressions* that really do not carry much weight in the scheme of all things. Having said this, in a way, one may say, that this already sums up the entire conference. Let us explain.

Right from the opening to the closing of the conference there appears to have been a certain tension and apprehension. Those attending the conference were well aware of its background. In recent years many changes have taken place in the RCN, not only in church liturgy and ecclesiastical contacts but more importantly for this conference, in Scriptural interpretation. As is well known, there are leading figures² in the RCN who interpret Scripture in such a way that leaves room for accepting theories relating to an *old age world*, bringing miracles into question, the possibility of women in ecclesiastical offices as well as other matters relating to ecclesiastical practice and ethics.

The opening address included words of caution about this being a conference where opinions are openly and freely exchanged so that care must be taken to what extent we hold each other accountable. The

1 Please see the attached speech descriptions.

2 Names are purposely left out.

closing words too, reflected appreciation for the brotherly way in which the conference could be held. The need to work together as Reformed scholars and believers in seeking to honour and know the Lord God as our Redeemer and Saviour was emphasised. It was not denied, that there were some obvious divergent approaches to interpreting Scripture. There was general recognition, including from among themselves, that there is new approach to understanding coming from within the RCN. We were further made aware that within the RCN not all agreed either. Especially among those from the RCN a strong desire was expressed to at least leave room for open scholarly discussions on matters concerning which we may have different insight.

At the same time there were those there with obvious concern and fear for whether the authority of Scripture is really being maintained within the confessional bounds. This concern was evident from the large numbers that attended, the questions that were raised and some of the emphasis that were given. While the request for time and space for scholarly discussion on these matters were met with a certain understanding, the dilemma was whether giving such time and space for discussion, itself, would already leave an opening for allowing unconfessional thoughts to be expressed. This dilemma was not addressed but was left hanging unanswered. To further illustrate this, we will concentrate on a few themes that appeared to play a central role in speeches and discussions that impacts, not only on hermeneutics, but on the entire communion of Christ's flock.

The source of knowledge:

The well known distinction between the knowledge of God from creation (general revelation) and the knowledge of God from Scriptural revelation (special revelation) was recognised. However, the importance of this distinction was brought into discussion. The question here is, whether both have the authority. There appeared to be general consensus that *special revelation* is essential for matters concerning salvation. Much is revealed here about the Lord's deeds concerning redemption that is not found in *general revelation*. Nevertheless, that one can learn about the Lord from *general revelation* was not denied. It was almost assumed that things could be learned about the Lord from *general revelation* which cannot be found in *special revelation*.

The question in particular centred around whether both these sources have the same authority and reliability? In this regard the purpose for which these two sources of knowledge have been given received due attention. If the purpose of *special revelation* is to reveal God's great mercy through Christ ... and not (so much) to help satisfy our curiosity regarding the beginning of creation, should we not rather use *general relation* concerning

questions of geography while using *special revelation* as a source when looking for the purpose and comfort of this life.

A brother suggested that both are of equal reliability. God did not put things in creation to deceive or trick us. This was not denied. However, further attention was given to the differences of medium; *revelation by things we see* and *revelation by way of words that we read*; It was suggested that words we read always convey the message more clearly. Things we see always involve perception; how we see things. The things seen are interpreted according to our own insight. The process of understanding becomes more subjective.

It was argued especially by those from among the RCN that this difference of medium is really no difference. Writing consists of symbols. These symbols only receive meaning by those who are capable to decipher them. This process of deciphering symbols also involves perception. In the end *special revelation* is just as dependant on human perception as *general revelation*. This, of course, includes the interpretation of the words that convey the message in Scripture. Thus, the question is left open, how does one get to know the true meaning of what the Lord reveals in both *general* and *special* revelation.

When leaving this an open question; the question of whether to draw our knowledge, for example, about the origin of creation, from *special* or *general* revelation does not seem to matter anymore. Either source could be just as valid. In practice this means that what is seen in nature is no longer tested according to what one reads in Scripture. This reasoning brings Article 2 of the *Belgic Confession* into question. There we confess that the Lord makes Himself *more clearly* known in Scripture. Moreover, it overlooks how the Lord can and does speak with words in Scripture about things that we cannot see with our eyes. No one witnessed God creating all things (Job 38:4-5) and what men suggest about how things came about is only conjecture. However, the Lord does clearly tell us in Scripture how He created everything.

******When it was suggested that divergent conclusions from *special* and *general* revelation can be equally valid, especially from the RCN side, although no conclusions were specifically mentioned, another element regarding the source of knowledge became evident. For when speaking about the source of knowledge, it was said that attention also needs to be given to what *knowledge* really is. *Knowledge* was viewed, not only in its objective sense, but also in its subjective sense as shown, for example, in the expression; *know the Lord*³. Thus the human experience of God in a person's life and growing and living as one of His children becomes as

an additional source of knowledge. In this context reference is made to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is with this additional source of knowledge that the believer receives the message revealed in Scripture. The believer then reads, for example, Genesis 1, not to curiously determine the ontological origin of creation. Instead the believer stands in awe at the incomprehensible greatness and majesty of the Lord God. It is a greatness and majesty that cannot adequately be expressed with words. When making this point a lot of emphasis is given to giving the Lord God due, humble respect. The problem is that with this reasoning the objective meaning of Scripture is neglected and left open for any interpretation including its central meaning concerning Christ and His work for our salvation.

The use of metaphor in Scripture:

No one denies that at times the Lord conveys His message in Scripture by using metaphor. This includes an expression such as *the Lord is my Shepherd*. The Lord is not a Shepherd of sheep ... but a comparison is made that we can all easily understand. However, at times, there is debate whether a certain expression is to be understood as a metaphor or not. Historically, the most well-known example of this is how the Lord Jesus tells us that He is the *bread of life*. Till this day Rome continues, in practice, to deny this expression to be a metaphor while persisting in its teaching concerning the mass. The question here is; how does one decide that a certain word in Scripture is used as a metaphor?

In discussion concerning this, previous Reformed attention given to anthropomorphic usage of language in Scripture was mentioned. Here one may think of the classic example of God's *repentance*. God does not change and hence does not really repent. When He speaks of His repentance it is therefore to be understood in the context of how He relates to man. Here too, the important question becomes; how does one decide that a certain word in Scripture is used in an anthropomorphic way?

There appeared to be no qualms about the classic Reformed hermeneutical answer to these questions; namely, that the *plain meaning of the text* is to determine whether a *metaphor* or *anthropomorphic expression* is used in a certain passage. However, from the RCN side there appeared to be a greater doubt in knowing the *plain meaning of the text*. Among them there was a more readily accepting, at least the possibility, of a Scriptural word or expression being use in a *metaphoric* or in an *anthropomorphic* way. One can readily understand the hermeneutical consequence of this when, for example, applied to the word *day* in Genesis 1 or to the word *head* when speaking of man as *head* of his wife.

Among some of the RCN the use of metaphor in Scripture was taken to

an extreme. For example, it was suggested that in the expression; *God comes to save His people* the word *come* is used as a metaphor because God does not *come* in the same way man comes. This was applied not only to the word *come* but to all the words in this sentence. It was argued that man can never fully comprehend the full measure of what it means that God *saves* His people. This word is insufficient to fully reveal what the Lord had done. In this context it was further suggested that due to human limitation, all the words of Scripture are used metaphorically. In the end one can never insist that this is what the Lord really says. Reference was made to Romans 11:33 where the Apostle Paul expresses the incomprehensibility of His deeds when He says; *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*

Although this reasoning may sound humble, in the end it entirely undermines Scriptural authority. It contradicts what we confess in Article 5 of the *Belgic Confession* that *we believe without any doubt all things contained in the books of the Bible* and Article 7 where we say that; *we believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length.* For if Scripture is all metaphorical, we can no longer say that these books *fully contain the word of God.*

This further led to the suggestion that all men perceive and understand the *truth* in their own way. In the end *truth* is no longer objective but becomes one's own subjective insight. Each one can then happily work within in their own truth framework

Contextualization:

There is no doubt but that Scriptural revelation is given in various contexts. The Lord sent His Prophets at certain moments and the message they bring applies particularly to the circumstances in which they are given. Here also the recognition of progressive redemptive history from the old to the new testament age is important. One may think here too, of a classic example; namely, the permission of a divorce certificate given through Moses. One may think of the further example that has risen again and again regarding the application of the fourth commandment in the new testament age. The question here is; to what extent and what kind of impact should the context in which a Scripture text is given impact its meaning?

Here too, the *plain meaning of the text* as well the *context* plays an important role. Thus, for example, given that the fourth commandment is included among the other covenant words that have continuing application,

it would be unrealistic to isolate the fourth from the others. Even though there may be no direct command for its continuation given in the new testament context, there is no indication of its termination either. This may be considered different from the example of divorce where the Lord specifically refers to this change.⁴ Here, from the RCN side, the way these hermeneutical principles were applied is being undermined.

During the course of the conference, in this regard, the example of the Apostle Paul's injunction for women not to teach or have authority, received much attention. The classic Reformed conclusion regarding these passages was that the Lord through the Apostle Paul bases these practical instructions on the foundation of what is revealed about creation. This was questioned especially by those from the RCN. Again, it was questioned whether we are consistent in our interpretation. For example, in this same context we are told how women are to have their head covered when prophesying and praying. Classically, this has been interpreted in the context of the culture of that day.

In order to seek an answer to the question of consistency, from the RCN side, this was analysed and answered as follows. First of all one has the text. It is the words that it contains. Secondly; one has the context in which it was given. This has to be taken into consideration. This includes, why the message was given. How those who received it were expected to apply it. Thirdly; it was suggested that there may be another layer of meaning that the Lord had already fore-shadowed in the text to be applicable for circumstances, such as, progression from the old the new testament. Fourthly, the same message could be applied and receive a new meaning or meanings in the continuing changes that we witness today.

In brief, suggestions were made that Roman society was hierarchical, master, wife, servants and slaves. The term *head* is used to speak of this hierarchy. It is argued that there were some women at that time who tended to dominate. The Apostle Paul did not want the Christians to be embarrassing or appear radical to unbelievers. That kind of radicalism may hinder these Gentiles to become disciples. He did not want the faith to be brought into disrepute and therefore directs the women to remain silent. That has changed today. If anything, there is a cultural fear that men dominate women too much. We should therefore apply this today by making sure that the wrong impression of men dominating be given no room. When defending this interpretation it was acknowledged that the Apostle Paul does refer to creation and the woman first eating from the tree, but this was put in the context of the Apostle using these passages to

4 Although this has become as a classic example, it does not necessarily mean that we agree with this interpretation.

show how the unity of man and woman was disrupted. The implication is that these passages have nothing to do directly with the practical question of whether women are permitted to serve in an ecclesiastical office.

Recognising this to be a change in interpreting these passages, the earlier suggestion regarding the Christian life as a source for knowledge received further attention. It is a conclusion that the church community which is filled with the Spirit reaches.

When questioned, those of the RCN emphasised that they maintain Scripture as the *norm* but the question was how to grasp that norm. The new proposed method of finding these norms leaves one to wonder whether norms will ever be found, or are they left and abandoned in the confused dust of human reasoning.

From the RCN side there was a lot of defence, to at least leave an opening, for the possibility that the Apostle spoke from within the context of the world in which he lived. The instruction given here is then no longer applicable today. The reasoning now become; this is what God established from the beginning, but that the churches are expected to live in the context of the present day. For us today, that would mean, accepting that the woman has taken on a different role in society. Especially here, the divergent approach to interpreting Scripture has serious practical impact.

In the end the plea for at least giving an opening to discuss these matters on a scholarly level leaves one with the uncomfortable post-modern taste in the mouth. Can such an opening be given? Does God's Word permit this? We can only conclude that it does not. This therefore confirms the concerns the FRCA expressed in its exhortation to the RCN in 2009 and its admonition by Synod 2012/13.

Summary of Conclusions

Tie in to our previous concerns and in particular our admonition to show that they are confirmed ...do so with direct reference to our admonition...

1. The RCN permits those who undermine the clear meaning of Scripture by giving the same authority to general revelation as is given to Scriptural revelation.
2. Although not referred to directly as a source of knowledge, indirect suggestions were made about the knowledge received through the human experience of a Godly and Spiritual life. This was further expanded to the knowledge received from the believing community that interprets God's Word. This flies in the face of what we confess in Article 7 of the *Belgic Confession* that *We may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal*

value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all;...

3. The way the use of metaphor was defended flies in the face of what we confess in Article 5 of the *Belgic Confession* about the books of Scripture being received for the *regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith*
4. The suggestion and plea to speak about these matters and accept each other's scholarly insights only confirms the postmodern way of questioning whether the truth can be really be known and imposed on men. In the end it is a denial of the truth revealed in Scripture.

RCN report Appendix 7: Greetings to RCN Synod Ede

March 2014

Esteemed delegates of Synod and honoured guests

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, we may extend greetings in the Name of our Lord and Saviour. We are thankful that we may attend your Synod and extend our greetings. We appreciate the hospitality you extend. Many of our church members trace their family histories back to you and have benefited richly from that heritage. You therefore remain close to our hearts.

Especially because you are close to our hearts, we bring our admonition with heavy hearts and sadness. As your delegates to our most recent Synod can testify, our relation with you took up most of our time. In fact, it had become such a difficult thing that Synod decided it could not finish this matter in its first sessions held in June 2012. A special committee was appointed to further advise Synod how to proceed. Synod re-convened in April of 2013. We trust that by now your churches have heard about our admonition. You, delegates, must have read it.

Let us remind you that already our Synod of 2006 had decided *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 in today's circumstances.*¹ Our Synod of 2009 decided *to exhort the RCN with love and care to be faithful in their hermeneutics....*² Until that time, as much as possible, we had spoken in general terms. We do not want to accuse anyone in particular. We do not consider it our task to accuse particular persons but to watch, and where necessary warn, you, our sister churches, of where we see you deviating from the historic Reformed practice of holding on to the clear and simple meaning of God's Word.

Again, in our most recent admonition, as much as possible, we tried to address you concerning various ecclesiastical practices. We can understand when you tell us to give "concrete evidence of where you deviate". To do so, we felt compelled to quote, not only your Synod decisions, but also Classical decisions, as well as writings from among your leaders. Your delegate at our recent Synod very strongly pointed out that we should only be referring to your Synod decisions. He argued that statements made elsewhere do not necessarily reflect your entire bond of churches. A consistory or classis may make a decision that would not stand up to the scrutiny of the bond as a whole. We were warned not to receive simply the opinion of one or two persons as the view of the RCN as a whole. We understand what you are saying. However, when articles are written, books published and lectures

1 Acts of Synod 2006, Article 94.

2 Acts of Synod 2009, Article 71.

given that appear to deviate from what the Lord clearly teaches in His Word as upheld in the confessions, we would be remiss to remain silent. The problem is that these matters do not necessarily come to the attention of your ecclesiastical assemblies. There is no evidence that the churches seek to ward off false doctrines. This makes us wonder whether the third mark of the true church really functions among you.

When referring to what some of the leaders among you have said and written, we tried to be as honest and forthright as possible. If we have been misinformed or have misquoted, please let us know. We are confident that our Synod(s) are ready and prepared to make any necessary correction. At the same time, we trust that you will receive our exhortation and admonition in the way it was intended. As specifically expressed by our Synod 2009, our exhortation was given *in love and care*. When your deputies suggest in their report that our recent admonition does not rest on total support (*geen totaal? besluit ten grondslag ligt*) of our Synod, please understand that while not everyone entirely agreed on the formulation of every section. Nevertheless, the admonition stands as a submission of Synod on behalf of all the FR Churches of Australia.

We were thankful that your delegate to our Synod informed us that *there is not something like the new hermeneutics in the RCN or at its TU*.³ However, this does not agree with how our delegates to the recent hermeneutics conference held in Hamilton, Ontario in January this year heard that you as churches are interpreting Scripture in a *new way*. This *new way* of interpreting Scripture, it was argued, has become necessary in view of recent cultural developments. We also heard it put in the context of advanced scholarly insight and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit among the people of God.

We must admit that while the label *new* for hermeneutics is used, we wonder whether your approach is all that *new*. At the hermeneutics conference we heard suggestions about the writing Scripture being limited to bringing a religious and theological message. Consequently, it was questioned whether the first chapters of Genesis should be used to help understand the geological origin of the earth. This way of reasoning reminds us of the well-known report among the Synodicals, *God met Ons*. Moreover, the argument used about the cultural background of the Apostle Paul to conclude that his words about *women not having authority in the churches* no longer apply is not new either. Very similar arguments were heard among the Synodicals in the 1960's. The same arguments are found among those of the NGK. It is therefore understandable that in the Report to this Synod regarding your relation to the NGK, your deputies simply await your decision on the man/vrouw (man/woman) report. The parallels your Deputies Report man/vrouw make to the NGK are obvious. They are arguments that you, in the past,

have rejected.

Speaking about this matter of women in office, your delegate to our Synod, in his speech, assured us that *it is only fair to say that the RCN is not moving toward the ordination of women as elders or minister.*⁴ Would it not be fair for us to say today, in view of your deputies report, that our concerns were actually warranted? No, not only our concerns about women in office, but more particularly, our concerns about your hermeneutics.

In short, brothers, we indeed see something new among you, in that you are turning from the path you walked in the past. It is not really a new path, for to us you appear to be following the same way as the Synodicals, the NGK and other liberals. Initially, you, along with us, recognised that these churches deviated from the truth of God's Word. Along with us, you addressed them. We trust that you understand how we see that you too are now following that same road. It is with tears in our eyes that we feel compelled to address you in this way. Our grief only increased and was confirmed when we heard these views being defended at the hermeneutics conference. We see still further evidence of it in your various deputies' reports. The evidence that this kind of thinking lives among your churches is becoming overwhelming. We therefore plead with you to consider and respond Scripturally and Confessionally to the points raised in our admonition. Our churches are praying for your churches and this for Synod. In response to some requests and proposals of our churches, our recent Synod concluded in one of its grounds that it *cannot now decide to terminate the sister church relationship with the RCN since we first need to know what the response of the RCN will be...*⁵ Right now, we await that response.

Finally, from the report on man/woman we understand that your deputies express some kind of hesitation about implementing their conclusion that all the ecclesiastical offices should be opened to women. The reason for this hesitation includes, we understand, how some of your own members might struggle with it and how some of your sister-churches find it unacceptable. We have difficulty with hearing this. Please do not think that a delay in implementing these decisions should make us change our mind on these matters. In fact, this kind of hesitation adds to our concern. As office-bearers, with the task to care for the flock, it only makes us recognise the need to prevent this kind of leaven from taking root and growing among our churches.

Brothers, please understand well our increasing concern for you. We pray that the Lord will open your eyes and hearts to the admonition we have presented and truly turn back to the clear meaning of His Word. We plead with you to heed these admonition so that our unity as churches may be restored and can continue.

4 Rev. P. Meijer, speech at Synod Armadale 2012, see Acts p. 126.

5 Acts of Synod Armadale Article 142 Grounds 8.b. p. 110

RCN report Appendix Eight:

Report of Visit to Synod Ede 2014

Foreign Delegates week March 24 – 28

The flights to and from the Netherlands all went well. We thank the Lord for the protection and safe journeys He granted. The accommodation and hospitality shown was very good, both when staying at homes with members of the churches, as well as when staying in the hotel that had been arranged for the foreign delegates week.

Before leaving home we had made arrangements to meet with deputies of the RCN^r (now known as De Gereformeerde Kerken, DGK) and deputies of the temporary church bond (now known as the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, GKN). We met with them separately. The first ones on Saturday, before the foreign delegates week, and the second ones on the Monday morning. At both meetings it was agreed to have minutes recorded which would be confirmed by all present. These minutes can be considered as our report of these meetings. Please see these minutes attached as appendices one and two.

The first day of the foreign delegates week, Monday 24th of March, was set aside for the visitors to arrive and settle in. Evening dinner was served at the hotel. Under the leadership of BBK, (the Dutch deputies for relations with foreign churches) words of welcome were expressed. The Lord was thanked for gathering His church from many places throughout the world. We were told that the task of BBK and the purpose of this foreign delegates week included *praising the Lord* together and *getting to know each other*. With this purpose, one can understand that throughout the week quite a bit of time was given over to simply socialising with one another.

In the evening, under the leadership of the BBK, the various deputy areas met separately with the deputies appointed for that particular area. Thus we were directed to a room where the delegates of the Asian, Australian and New Zealand Churches met. Here, in turns, we were given opportunity to introduce our churches so that we could get to know one another.

The next day, Tuesday, we were all transported from the hotel to the Church at Ede. There we met with members of BBK. After opening meditations and renewed stress on how wonderful it is that the Lord gathers His churches from many places of the world, welcoming words were spoken. All the foreign delegates present were introduced.

BBK had arranged for the foreign delegates to discuss certain issues living

among the churches in the Netherlands. The first topic of the day was the question of *Second Baptism*. Apparently some members of the churches seek to be re-baptised. These members do so while visiting other, mostly evangelical, churches. From the introduction and discussion it became evident that the leaders of the RCN do not agree with this practice. The question was whether the members who receive this baptism should be considered, by their action, to be *withdrawn* from the church, whether they should be put under *censure* or, whether they should simply be instructed more clearly concerning this matter. For discussion we were first divided into smaller groups with a plenary session afterward. In the discussion there were a lot of questions about motivation for this second baptism and whether this baptism implied membership in the evangelical churches. Further questions centred around the need to clearly teach the members beforehand how this practice really brings the Scriptural purpose and significance of baptism into question. While these kinds of questions were asked and various responses given, no real conclusions were reached. After all, it was only a discussion with the foreign delegates which was not meant to make any decisions.

The second matter raised for discussion was related to the BBK's proposal to change the form of inter-church relations from a sister-church format to a networking format. By way of introduction we were told that the present model of initial inter ecclesiastical contacts leading to sister-church relationships does not always work. Various churches throughout the world live in quite differing historic, culturally and social contexts. Relationships may exist that include an exchange of experiences and could be helpful in leading and directing each other on a faithful path, the churches may not necessarily be ready and confident, for example, to exchange pulpits. The suggestion included a comparison to international ecclesiological organisations such as the ICRC, NAPARC and EUCRC where churches meet together for fellowship and exchange of ideas even though they are not necessarily sister-churches. Thus the suggestion and proposal of BBK is to make individual and different agreements with various churches.

In the discussion that followed some understanding was shown for how a real living sister-church relation including pulpit exchanges with, for example, churches recently grown and instituted upon mission-work, might be a bit unrealistic. At the same time some concern was expressed about this method of inter-church relation leading to a kind of ranking of various churches as more and less true or being up a high or still on a lower rank of being church. A more disturbing element to this discussion (confirmed again in private conversations later) was an underlying desire to be able to network with larger liberal churches – this, with the firm confidence that the GKv also had a lot to learn from them as well. This discussion too, did not lead to any

kind of concrete conclusion nor was that the intention for Synod still had to deal with the proposal.

The third point brought into discussion was how the RCN should deal with churches that will not receive female deputies at their Synod. This gave us the opportunity to explain how upon our initial expression of concern about this matter the RCN deputies directed us to make a Synod decision on the matter. We informed that meeting that the Australian Churches have decided to give no privileges to female deputies sent to Synod. The reason is that a Synod is a meeting of office-bearers. In response, we were questioned whether all our deputies are office-bearers. We acknowledged that the men appointed to serve as deputies for sister-churches are not necessarily office-bearers while they are serving. However, we pointed out, that while carrying out this task, they are busy with office-bearers' work. Reference was made to the first rule of sister-church relations which shows a guarding each other's doctrine and life, which really is the work of office-bearers. Further, it was noted, that visiting deputies are also given the privilege of acting as advisors and it would be inappropriate for women to take on this office-bearers' task. In response we heard continual persistence that deputies are not office-bearers and therefore anyone, whether male or female should be able to carry out this task. It was also emphasised that deputies do not make decisions, but only give advice. The decision making is left with the office-bearers. Although, during this discussion, not mentioned too directly, the RCN deputies man/woman report left some discomfort in this whole context. Something was said about this discussion having something to do with the outcome of that report.

To close of the evening, one of the women of BBK led in giving a devotion. In her devotion she defended her speaking by referring to some of the women that had prophesied in the past. However, after having heard reference made to 1 Timothy 2:12 in the previous discussion where the Lord says through the Apostle Paul that *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence* one is left with the uncomfortable conclusion that this Scriptural injunction was not maintained. By way of meditation a woman was put in the position of teaching the men gathered as delegates of foreign churches. When making some inquiries and hearing that already at a previous foreign delegates week an issue was made of this matter in a similar context, we remained silent. Perhaps, after consultation with all the deputies, this needs some further consideration as to whether we should remain silent concerning this matter. We did gather that many other foreign delegates were disturbed by this female meditation. All, however, remained silent.

On Wednesday we were all taken by bus to Rotterdam. There we were taken

up the Euro-mast and saw the city from a very high view point. In the mean time there was opportunity to socialise and speak with one another. Lunch was served there at the Euro-mast. In the afternoon when we were given a boat cruise through the Rotterdam harbour. Admittedly we began to feel a bit more like a tourist group than delegates and deputies to a Synod. Late afternoon we returned to the hotel for dinner.

In the evening a meeting was held with members of the *De Verre Naaste* (DVN, translated; *the Distant Neighbour* ... a charity organisation functioning alongside the BBK). We were not really given information of their work. Instead, we heard a mediation from a foreign delegate regarding various difficulties in freely serving the Lord and how to face persecution. After this we were divided into groups to discuss with each other the challenges freedoms and privileges that some enjoy and the difficulties and persecutions others face. In the discussions recognition was given to how the churches can be attacked in different ways, by way of feigned freedoms and tolerations which in the end is no toleration at all as well as direct political and civil hostilities. It was recognised that, no matter what our circumstances are, we all entirely depend on the Lord to preserve His people and His churches.

The next day, Thursday, we were taken to the Theological University at Kampen. There, after a quick look around the building and a coffee, we were gathered for some lectures. After the opening by one of the directors, br. J. de Jong spoke some opening words and a few additional introductory words by J. Colijn (in charge of the English Master programme) some of the professors addressed us.

First, Dr. J. Paas spoke about *The Calling of the Church in the Secular Netherlands and in Europe*. In his lecture he drew our attention to how post-Christian Netherlands and Europe has changed socially due to the influx of people from different countries and backgrounds, politically by the economic extension and unity of the European countries and culturally by no longer consisting of settled villages of mostly *reformed* people of one sort or another. The former baggage of a different way of life still remains, but it is no longer there. The challenges for the churches include convincing people of the need and purpose to serve the Lord in the midst of a society where this can no longer be taken for granted. With individualisation man takes on a more subjective attitude. My own life and thoughts become more important. The challenges also include the need to look at how mission work ought to be approached. During the brief discussion afterward some attention was given to doing mission work both abroad and at home where the morality of society is formed by various social ideals and pressures from green organisations.

The second speaker was Dr. H. Schaeffer. His topic was; *Homiletics – a Living Proclamation of the Gospel*. He started his lecture by informing us that in teaching students how to preach, just like in ethics, his starting point is from creation. The doctrine of creation from nothing is more explanation of how things have come about and is an attitude and conviction of Biblical writers. By it *they express their trust in the Creator as the One who upholds creation ... it implies that the world as we perceive it and are part of it still is God's creation*. This raises questions regarding our knowledge of things regarding, for example, evil ... is it part of creation? And from there also questions regarding, for example, whether marriage is created by God or is *the product of human decision*. Similar questions are asked about the church and God's work. This leads to further questions regarding the preaching and how those who listen perceive and receive the Word. During the discussion afterward pertinent questions were asked about the need to confess the actual six creation days. By way of response we were told that this question and the related one of theistic evolution is much too large to be able to be quickly answered. One could write a book on such questions. Some more questions were asked about the Lord having creating marriage and about what constitutes a church. By way of response with reference to John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper various suggestions were made about planning the preaching and showing understanding for the people that are being addressed.

The third speaker was Dr. H. Burger who addressed us on the topic of *Hermeneutics in the (post) modern Netherlands*. Like the first speaker, he too, first explained the changes evident in this present day world. For hermeneutics the challenge includes how today people focus on epistemology, that is, how people think and reason, in order to understand and embrace Scripture authority. This includes modern day challenges regarding how generally people *pick and choose what they prefer, read (the Bible) my way*, and an attitude of; *I do whatever I like if the Bible does not forbid it*. It is in Christ that our understanding is to be renewed. We should give due attention to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit among the Churches. In the discussion we were told that there are not too many other places in the world that has experienced the kind of changes that have recently taken place in the Netherlands. There were also some questions as to whether the changes that have taken place are partly due to wrong Christianity.

The fourth speaker for the day was Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne. His topic was; *Theology for Serving in the Church and doing Academic Research: double Responsibilities*. The main focus of this speech was on the set-up of theological university training in this modern day age. We are no longer to expect those trained here to necessarily enter the ministry of the Word. In

the scientific world all forms and areas of learning are becoming more of the general knowledge of all mankind. Universities are expected to contribute and bring advancement in the general fast growing expansion of knowledge. This requires research and publication in various journals. The University at Kampen is in the privileged position of become a strong Reformed voice in this context. Of course, professors like to teach students but sometimes it is difficult to find a good balance between teaching and help in the general advancement of knowledge. In the discussion that followed some attention was given to what impact advancement in theology may have in areas like mathematics or engineering. Some comments were also made regarding the expectation of the churches and the academic world. These expectation are not always the same.

Finally drs. J. Colijn said a few words about various things happening at the theological university including possible working together and unity with the University in Apeldoorn as well as other centres of theological training. Furthermore we were informed that Synod Ede had already decided to add another faculty to the university. This faculty is to concentrate on theological aspects of medical ethics. After closing words, song and prayer, we were taken back to the hotel.

For that evening a church service had been arranged for the delegates along with the congregations of Ede. The local minister led the service. One of the foreign delegates, from India, preached. After the sermon, the Lord's Supper was celebrated. It struck us that no form for its celebration was read. Although we had brought credentials and travel attestations, we were not asked for them. Instead, a general verbal invitation was given for all present, who are members of a Reformed confessing church and put their trust in the Lord and believe in the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

For the next two days, Friday and Saturday, Synod was convened. During this time delegates from the various churches were given opportunity to bring their greetings. A response was given, section by section.

In between, Synod dealt with the proposals of BBK. This included their proposal regarding sending female deputies as delegates to foreign churches. We, foreign delegates, were given the opportunity to speak. We now had the opportunity to officially inform Synod of the decision made by Synod Armadale 2012 to give no privileges to female foreign delegates at our Synods⁵. The reason, we said, are that Synods are considered to be official meetings of office-bearers. This was emphasised by pointing out how the first rule for our present sister-church relations includes a mutual watching and caring for each other. This surely is offices-bearers' work. Scripture is

5 Synod 2012 Acts Article 90

clear that women are not to be ordained to the office nor are they to take up the office-bearers' tasks. In the discussion something was mentioned about some women in Scripture prophesying and how it were the women that were sent to bring the message of Christ's resurrection to His disciples. This was refuted by pointing out that the Lord Jesus had arranged to meet with His disciples in Galilee, but due to their hardness of heart and unbelief, the Lord sent these women. Moreover, there is clear prescription in Scripture for men to be ordained to the office in the New Testament church, 1 Timothy 2:12-13 and not women. The majority of delegates at Synod apparently remained unconvinced. From the RCN side it was stressed that deputies are not office-bearers. Synod decided that their deputies, as much as possible, are to take the sister-churches' decisions and feelings concerning this matter into account. However, there is no indication that their practice of sending female deputies as delegates to foreign synods would be unscriptural. The Synod decision only reflects an accommodation to the desire of the churches to which they send their deputies.

Significant attention was given to the new proposed way of entering into and maintaining inter-church relations. It is referred to as a *networking* system. This would include individual and separate agreements with the various churches according to their circumstances and needs. The main question in this context was what inter-church relations is all about? Is it a recognition of each other as true churches? If so, there should be no problem of a full relationship. To the suggestion that these relations are used to mutually build one another up in the Reformed faith it was asked if that is the purpose, is that not different from a sister-church relation? Is that really the purpose of sister-church relations? Are there not other means, or simply, some kind of personal or ecclesiastical contact where foreign churches can be assisted in being directed into a reformed path? These questions were not really answered except to reiterate that this proposal includes a different and individual form of relation as needed. After some amendments this form of inter-church relation was adopted.

Separate from the discussion on this networking system of inter-church relations, decisions were made to maintain sister-church relations with a whole long list of churches. There is another list of churches with which contact is maintained.

After the adjournment of Synod we were given the opportunity to meet with the Synod advisory committee appointed to make a proposal concerning the Canadian letter of concern and the FRCA letter of admonition. Besides admonition predates that report. However, we did see this report as further development and consequences of the hermeneutics addressed in our admonition. As can be seen from the report, quite some time was also

spend on how the Canadian delegate queried the permission for foreign delegate participation in the discussion when these letters are tabled at Synod. These questions arose from the letter of BBK which indicated we would only be given opportunity to speak to requests for clarification and further information. He stressed that the practice at previous RCN Synods had been different. The chairman of Synod indicated that the moderator would review this matter and perhaps bring it to the attention of Synod as a whole.

Well that brings to an end a busy week with many impressions to observe as well as the initial conclusion of this report of our visit. An additional section will be added in due time after DV visiting the sessions of where Synod deals with the Cdn RC and FRCA letter of concern and admonition as well as the man/woman report. It will also DV include a brief overview of some other decisions made by this Synod. Already from this report it will be clear that Synod Armadale had good reason to direct the churches to pray for these sister-churches that they may return to the full and complete Word of God as has been summarised in the Reformed Confessions.

R.D. Anderson

PKA de Boer

RCN REport Appendix Nine:

**Report of visit to Synod Ede 2014
Sessions of May 16, 17 and 20**

The Synods in the Netherlands normally meet only on Fridays and Saturdays. Earlier, Synod had decided that it would deal with the letters of admonition and concerns that sister-churches had sent on May 16 and that their Deputies Report Man/Woman would be dealt with on the 17. Already fore-shadowing that Synod could not finish with this matter in one day, a special, extra session was scheduled for Tuesday May 20. The Australian deputies decided that one of the deputies should be there. Rev. PKA de Boer was appointed to attend. Br. JL Van Burgel happened to be in the Netherlands at the time and seeing that he is general secretary of deputies he was added to the official FRCA delegation for Friday and Saturday May 16 and May 17.

In the opening meditation of the first session reference was made to some little known politician to make the point that we do not always understand people from another culture or part of the world. The insinuation was made that we should therefore be careful not to judge how people in different places of the world do things. After the meditation, we were heartily welcomed. Also welcomed were delegates from Uganda. They had planned to be there for the foreign delegates week. However, due to political circumstances and lack of permission to enter the Netherlands earlier, were present now. They were first given opportunity to pass on their greetings.

The Letters of Admonition and Concerns

Both the Canadian and Australian churches had submitted official letters of admonition and concerns to Synod Ede. Other churches had expressed similar concerns, including the Churches of South Africa, who, at their very recent Synod had also written a letter to Synod Ede. Even though the S. African churches knew that the Synod at Ede had already adopted its agenda and could not really receive more correspondence, they thought the matter of such importance that they did not only write a letter but also sent two delegates. There were other sister-churches that also sent delegates including the Canadian Reformed churches who had four deputies there, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

Already before the meeting we had received a proposed response to these admonitions. The proposal showed that all the concerns of the foreign churches were packaged together into one proposed decision. When this matter was tabled, a delegate from each of the foreign churches was given the opportunity to give some further elaboration and explanation of

their concerns. In their brief speeches all the churches showed concern about the manner in which the RCN allow Scripture to be interpreted. Thus also your Australian deputy pointed out how the failure to accept the clear meaning of Scripture gives a lot of confusion and opens the way to interpreting Scripture at will. Reference was made to how during the visit to Kampen in the foreign delegates week one of the lecturers had responded to the question of six days creation by saying that he could not answer that in a few words, but could write a book about it. Why could he not simply say, as Scripture does, that God created heaven and earth in six days? The context of Genesis 1 shows that the passage speaks of days like we know them today. It says that there was an evening and a morning, day one and day two. Reference was also made to how a minister in a church service suggested that we really do not know about the days of creation and it is up to you what you like to believe about the length and nature of these days. It was further pointed out that with this way of interpreting the Bible one could make the text say pretty well what one pleases. It was further pointed out that Scripture is really clear about women being silent in church and not teaching nor having authority. The context shows that this has nothing to do with the progression of the preaching throughout the world nor with difficult cultural backgrounds, but, as the text says, with creation. God first created the man and then the woman.

After the foreign deputies spoke, the Synod delegates were given opportunity to ask further questions. Their questions included; whether we consider that there is any significant impact of the way Scripture is interpreted on the general membership. Further questions were asked about the nature of sister-church relations and whether there could not be differences among churches. Suggestions were also made about the foreign churches appearing to be pretty quick and severe with their warnings. The foreign deputies responded by emphasising that we are speaking about the very fundamentals and foundations of the Christian faith; the Bible itself. Further, it was pointed out that cultures might differ from place to place and time to time, but God's Word remains the same and the instruction given there is the same for all men at all times.

After this the delegates of Synod could speak and give their opinion of the advisory committee's proposal. During this discussion there appeared to be a desire to go the extra mile with the foreign churches, show patience with them, try to do what we can to keep these relations and at the same time some expressed the need to make a clear decision to bring an end to these complaints and warnings. After some amendments were considered and made, the advisory committee proposal was adopted.¹ These decisions express some appreciation for the care the sister-churches show by giving

their admonitions and concerns. There is some understanding of these concerns expressed in the acknowledgement of changes that have taken place in the GKV, but at the same time, there is absolutely no evidence of any need to change and return back to the ways from which they have parted.

The advisory committee proposal had an attached *explanation*² of the decision. It was tabled for discussion. Even though some delegates said that they would not take responsibility for what it contains, no changes were made. It was not really adopted either. Questions were asked concerning the status of this *explanation* to which the answer was given, that this is all it is, *an explanation* to help understand how the advisory committee came to its proposal, nothing more. Without voting on it, in the end Synod received it as an *explanation*.

After the decision was made, a member of Synod stood up and suggested that the foreign delegates be granted to give their reaction to this decision. The chairman granted the opportunity to do so. This was somewhat awkward, and although other delegates did speak, in consultation with br. JL van Burgel I decided that there was no need to be pressured into saying something too. The problem was, I could not say anything positive; and was hesitant to say, on behalf of the Australian Churches, without first consulting other deputies, what the Australian response to this decision might be. There was the added concern of how the press might pick up on it. Of note is how the emeritus Prof. Van Dam of Canada used this opportunity to express sadness about how the GKV is abandoning its rich heritage of good theology which is being embraced with a lot of thankfulness in other parts of the world. The next day our concern proved to be real. The Nederlands Dagblad had written that that the foreign delegates at Synod were thankful to express their concerns and were okay with the results. Most of the foreign churches were mentioned by name but not Australia. Afterward I was asked by various brothers why I had not spoken. I explained the reasons as expressed above.

The Man/Woman Report

The next day, Friday May 17, Synod reconvened to table the man/woman report. After the opening, the vice-chairman took the place of the chairman. Later we were informed that this was because the chairman had already expressed his opinion about the matter in the press and therefore would no longer be seen as an objective, unbiased leader. Upon taking the chair, the vice-chairman pleaded for maintaining the unity of peace while dealing with this difficult matter about the place for women in the church.

After introductory words, Prof. Van 't Spijker was asked to address Synod

on this topic as representative of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. He explained how this same question has been living among them. He acknowledged that the outcome of the question has a lot to do with Scripture interpretation. He urged Synod to be careful how Scripture is interpreted. Within the CRCN they had not yet come to a clear conclusion on this matter either.

After his speech and a few questions and responses, a member of Synod suggested that seeing a delegate of the CRCN had spoken, should they not also have someone of the Netherlands Reformed Churches (Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken) speak as well. The reply was, no. The reason was; the CRCN are sister-church and even though there is good contact with the NRC and a good working relationship, including combined services, they are not sister-churches.

Next, the deputies who had written the report were given opportunity to give further information regarding their report. Some background information was given and it was pointed out the report was meant as a working tool and not necessary to be adopted in its present form. When Prof van Houwelingen spoke as deputy, he strongly defended the usage of Scripture in the report. He suggested that there may be differences of opinion in just how the result of this work would be implemented. He appeared to have in mind an article in ND which showed that most of the Professors at the Theological University did not think it would be wise to implement women in office at this time. There was also some implication of a need to revise and strengthen the deputies' report. Prof Van Houweling took exception and even some offence at how the retired Prof. Van Bruggen had indicated that to have women in office is contrary to Scripture. He felt accused of not maintaining the confessed word.

After this, members of Synod were given the opportunity to respond and give their view on the report. The opinions expressed varied a lot, from questioning the interpretation of Scripture to being happy with the report. Some thought the report needed more work and others emphasised that a lot of work has already been done and that there is nothing much more that can be added. Questions were contemplated about just what Scripture says about the difference between man and woman and whether what was said in the Old Testament has changed in the New. There were those who added that the churches should not be left without a clear answer. Suggestions were made of first implementing the report by opening the office to deacons alone. Others were of the opinion that this idea is not in line with the report and there were some who pointed out that there was no request from the churches to the effect that the office should first be opened to deacons alone.

The day was closed before all the Synod delegates had an opportunity to speak. However more than 20 of the synod delegates had spoken and, although for differing reasons as outlined above, most except a few could not accept the line of argumentation in the committee report. It was decided to continue the round when Synod met for a special additional session on Tuesday, May 20.

At the next session of Synod, after the opening Scripture reading, meditation, prayer and singing, the vice-chairman, who continued to act as chairman, first expressed a word of warning to the delegates to be a bit careful and sensitive about how they speak. He referred to how at times there appeared to be subtle suggestions reflecting in an offensive way on those who had written the report and on those who spoke in its favour. Emphasis was given to the need to trust each other's Scriptural and Confessional integrity. This led to some discussion where all appeared to agree that such care must be taken by accepting that all the delegates genuinely and faithfully uphold God's Word and maintain the Confessions.

When discussion continued afterward, it seemed to be more subdued. Now the comments and questions centred more on the implication and possible consequences of the report. The deliberation regarding the interpretation of the related Scriptural passages was now put more in the context of the question of the legitimacy of the cultural backgrounds from which these passages are explained. Questions such as: is it really true that there was a real masculine dominance in society at that time which would make women preachers a hindrance to the gospel such as the report claims?

After all the Synod delegates had spoken, the deputies who had written the report could respond. They answered some of the questions and concerns. Reference was made to what some of the women mentioned in Scripture did. It was further pointed out that until now no-one really dared speak openly about the possibility of having women in office for fear of straight away being accused of being unscriptural and unfaithful. The report is meant to at least open the way for open discussion on this matter without that kind of fear.

When Synod advisors were given opportunity to speak, they all, including Prof. te Velde and Rev. Schaeffer re-enforced this last point. As advisor, Prof. De Bruijne added that the churches should start thinking of having women in office. Not necessarily now, but there will be women in office in the GKV sooner or later. We should not hurry these things. The question is not of whether but of when...

After the deputies' advice, another round was given to Synod delegates to indicate amendments, alternate proposals and general expressions of opinion on how to proceed. Again various opinions were made including

suggestions of revising the deputies report to clarify and correct some points, including the way some Scripture passages are interpreted and the need to refer to other passages and give some more attention the “the council of the elders”³

The day was running to a close. This matter would not be finished. It was decided to deal with another small unrelated matter. I decided that there was no good reason to stay longer. Upon leaving, along with the other visitors, the chairman bade me farewell. I said a few words of thanks for hospitality and opportunity to speak and urged the brothers to make their decision according to Scripture and Confession; I said it, although being well aware that the deputies’ report had already been put into that context without it having been properly tested.

It was decided that Synod will sit for another special session on DV June 7 to continue dealing with this matter.⁴

Although no longer in the Netherlands, notice was received of the decision that was made. The decision includes to not to accept the grounds submitted by deputies m/w while at the same time leaving an opening for discussion of women in ecclesiastical offices. This rests on the grounds that Scripture speaks in a two-fold way; men and women are equivalent and men and women have differing accountability⁵. The decision also includes the appointment of a new committee to look into how the offices can be structured so that women may carry out tasks within churches and what consequence this may have on the Church Order. These deputies are also to consider the opinions of foreign churches regarding the implementation of the women in the office of minister, elder and deacon. This is to be done on the grounds of the catholicity of the church. Moreover, sister-churches both nationally and internationally are to be kept informed.

In conclusion with sadness we note that the warnings given by sister-churches including the Australian letter of admonition was not heeded. Even though the grounds of the Dutch deputy report m/w was rejected, there appear only to be a searching for other, better ways, for women to take up official tasks within the churches. The possibility for women in office is left open. The Scriptural injunction for women to be silent in the churches and to have no authority has been set aside. This is confirmed in the further decision to recognize that women in office is no longer an impediment for relations with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

On behalf of deputies: Rev. PKA de Boer

3 “raad van de oudsten”

4 A copy this Decision is attached to this Report

5 Please note my different translation from the attached. I have translated slightly different to more clearly convey the neutral flavour of the Dutch.

RCN report Appendix Ten:

Decision ‘Objections Churches Abroad’

(May 16, 2014)

Materials:

1. Letter of admonition from the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in Armadale, 2012 (April 22, 2013) with 19 appendices.
2. Letter from the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Carman, 2013 (May 21, 2013).
3. Letter from the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (June 5, 2013).
4. Letter from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (December 6, 2013).
5. Letter from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (December 12, 2013).
6. Letter from the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad of the United Reformed Churches in North America (January 1, 2014).
7. Letter from the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for Relations with Sister Churches (March 3, 2014) (supplement to Material #1).

The objections voiced in the letters may be arranged and summarized as follows:

1. Objections to TUK publications:

The publications by K. van Bekkum (historicity of the Scripture), S. Paas (idem), J.J.T Doedens (exegesis Genesis 1/2) and A.L.Th. de Bruijne (hermeneutics) are cited. Also cited are statements made by G. Harinck (Scripture and homosexuality).

It is noted that successive general synods of the GKv did not deal with these objections. The GS Zwolle-Zuid (2008) referred to the fact that the Board of Supervision dealt with these objections. Moreover, with respect to A.L.Th. de Bruijne, reference was also made to the consistory of Rotterdam-C. An appeal on the grounds of art. 31 of the Church Order was also judged to be unfounded. According to the writers of the letter, a historical-critical approach to the Bible will lead to an acceptance of Scripture-critical scholarship within the TUK and will, in the long term, result in a decreased appreciation of

the authority and accuracy of the Word of God among newly trained ministers.

Furthermore, the writers of the letter are concerned about the manner in which the GKv is “dealing with hermeneutics”. This is a recurring point of concern with regards to the report M/F and various synodical decisions, such as those concerning marriage and divorce. See next point for more.

2. Objections to decisions made by general synods and the contents of deputy reports:

- a. The GKv allow for “a speaking of the Holy Spirit that is not within the boundaries set by the Word of God and that is not based on clear biblical regulations”, thereby detracting from the perfection of the Holy Scriptures. On this point the report of the Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity mandated by the GS Harderwijk is cited.
- b. The same concern is voiced with regards to a “new manner of practicing ethics”, in which “the style of the kingdom” is employed as the directive framework when it comes to judging situations in cases of divorce and re-marriage. This manner of dealing with the matters is viewed as subjective and as a departure from literal Biblical regulations.
- c. The study concerning the question whether Scriptures leaves room for women to fulfill an office is in direct contradiction to the clear Biblical doctrine the special offices are reserved for men only (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 14:33-35; also Belgic Confession art. 30). The manner in which the report speaks of the meaning of culture also leads to a disempowerment of the exclusive authority of the Bible. Especially the use of hermeneutics in the report raises grave concerns and worries to a number of sister churches. The fear is that this opens the door to toleration of many other matters within the churches. Furthermore, there is great concern about the statement in the report that the clear revelation of Scripture (namely that only men should be ordained) may be seen as one option alongside various other opinions. The churches have the responsibility to disciplinary action against those who have these views and promote this kind of approach to hermeneutics.
- d. The broadening of the rules concerning the local ecclesiastical unity with a Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands

Gereformeerde Kerk), approved by the GS of Amersfoort-Centrum (2005) and Zwolle-Zuid (2008). The NGK allows women in office and are investigating the admission of practicing homosexuals into the offices; the churches tolerate a looser binding to the confessions. This unity with the NGK will lead to the undermining of the authority of Scripture.

- e. The GS Zwolle-Zuid decided to take part in the “Nationale Synode”, thereby promoting a false ecumenism.
- f. The ongoing addition of new songs to the songbook, many of which are not Biblical and Reformed.
- g. The omission of the old Article 31 CO in the revised Church Order. Although the new church order leaves room for objections on the basis of personal conscience, it is no longer possible for churches not to ratify decisions if these are deemed contrary to the Scripture or the Church Order. This is in conflict with the autonomy of the local churches as confessed and upheld in the Reformation of 1944.
- h. Some churches have indicated that they will review their sister church relationship or the existing correspondence if the GKv does not decisive distance itself from a Scripture-critical theology and does not clearly reject the report M/F.

Decision 1:

to treat the letters with objections by these sister churches abroad as letters received, addressed to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated).

Grounds:

1. In this way these sister churches have expressed their concerns. The synod takes note of this in view of the nature of the existing relationships with these sister churches: *The churches shall, as much as possible, assist each other in the maintenance, defence, and promotion of the Reformed confession, in accordance with Scripture, in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy* (Rules concerning the maintaining of sister church relationships, GS Ommen 1993).
2. The General Synod is the only, and as an extension of the sister church relationships also the only correct address to which these sister churches can direct their concerns. The sister churches may expect the Synod to deal with these objections, especially in light of the fact that the GS of

Harderwijk stated that foreign sister churches should direct any objections to the general synod (Acts of synod Art. 87, decision 3).

Decision 2:

a. to express that:

1. the concerns of these sister churches are appreciated as sympathetic expressions of our unity in Christ Jesus;
2. that the Reformed Churches are, and wish to remain, accountable for adherence to the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions;
3. that today's Reformed Churches, although no longer the same churches as forty years ago, but are not less Reformed;
4. that the differences of opinion regarding certain authors, or regarding (parts of) reports by deputies, should not be blown up to objection against "the Reformed Churches"

Grounds:

1. The Reformed Churches are living churches existing in a rapidly changing ecclesiastical context in the Netherlands. The views on contacts with other churches, the role of the church federation (e.g. the need for uniformity within the federation), the task of the churches in society, and the necessity to present the gospel in a way that is relevant for today, are unmistakably different than in the eighties of the last century. The churches are finding their way in these matters that is deliberately in line with the Scripture and with the Reformed confessions. This way is not infallible and requires constant alertness. In this context the expression of the concerns by the sister churches is welcomed.
2. The Reformed Churches may be asked to give account for decisions made collectively, but not for various views of people or deputies for which the churches have not accepted responsibility.

b. to express about the concerns and objections mentioned in 2, on basis of our unity in Jesus Christ:

1. that the charge that the Reformed Churches allowed for a speaking of the Holy Spirit that is not within the boundaries set by the Word of God and that is in contradiction of clear biblical regulations, thereby detracting from the perfection of the Holy Scriptures, is not substantiated by the evidence that has been presented;

Ground:

The given quotation, taken from the report of the Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity, is about finding a way in the Christian life, which largely consists of decision-making for which there are no immediate biblical regulations, but in which God's children can "walk with the Spirit". The connecting of this quotation to other discussions, such as that of the grounds for divorce, is untenable.

2. that the ethical reflection on "the style of the kingdom", by connecting main themes in Scriptural data, precisely intended to do more justice to biblical data than is done merely by working with individual Biblical statements.

Ground:

The appeal to "the style of the kingdom" does not introduce a new category, from outside of the Bible, to the discussion on ethical reflection, but simply treats important biblical data comprehensively. Just as in the appeals to the doctrine of "the covenant", it focuses the attention on the unity of the Biblical message.

3. a. that as yet no decisions have been made by the General Synod about the report presented by the deputies M/F, and that the concerns voiced by the sister churches will be included in the discussion;
- b. that no hermeneutics is legitimate in which the context of the Bible or the context of the modern reader either (i) plays *no* role, or (ii) plays an *autonomous* role in the exposition and application of texts.

Ground:

It is good to address the concerns of the sister churches already before the treatment of the deputy report M/F, by a framework statement about hermeneutics. This statement does not involve a detailed, technical decision concerning hermeneutics, but delineates the boundaries of that discussion within the churches: no one wishes to operate outside of these boundaries. Because there are concerns that this may have happened, it is appropriate to make a clear statement to this effect.

4. a. that the concerns about the talks with the Dutch Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken), do not do justice to the agreement reached, on various subjects, by the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity and the Committee for Contact and Cooperation (see the Reports of the Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity from the previous synods on this point);
- b. that the General Synod has not yet decided about the report presented by the Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity, and that the concerns

voiced by the sister churches will be included in the discussion.

5. that the “Nationale Synode” is a discussion forum, involving activities in which the Reformed Churches could possibly take part, taking into consideration the distinct identity and responsibility of the Reformed Churches (decision May 9th of this year);
6. a. that the increase in the number of songs in the Reformed songbook has, until now, taken place in accordance with the existing regulations designed to preserve the Reformed character of the worship services (GS 1999 art. 58; GS 2008 art. 64);
b. that also when other songs are used, the responsibility for the worship services lies with the local consistory, which in turn is held accountable through the regular ecclesiastical procedures (Church Order 2014, C37.1, F73 f.f.)
7. that the objection to the omission of article 31 CO is based on an interpretation of the article that has no longer been in force since the 1978 edition of the church order; in the exceptional situation that a church council feels unable to implement a synodical decision, the normal way is to give an account to the classis.

Ground:

The interpretation of Article 31 in the context of the so called right of ratification, as defended, for example, by P. Deddens in his “De ratificering der besluiten van meerdere vergaderingen” [Ratification of the decisions of various assemblies] (1946) was challenged by J. Kamphuis in his “Kerkelijke Besluitvaardigheid” [Ecclesiastical Decisiveness] (1970) and no longer in force in the Reformed Churches. The adoption of the Church order 2014 has not changed this.

Decision 3:

- a. to instruct the Board of Trustees of the TU to provide the synod with a concept response to the criticism submitted by the sister churches abroad of the publications by instructors and researchers at the TU. This response should take the form of a generous exposition, accessible to a broad audience, and it should address the individual publications.
- b. to advise the Board of Trustees to strive for the TU’s involvement in the continuation of the scientific dialogue with theologians connected to the churches that expressed their objections.

Grounds:

1. The Board of Directors supervises the Reformed character of the

education and research at the TU and is primarily responsible for responding to objections raised against it (Constitution of the TU).

2. Objections submitted in the past have been refuted, but the communication of this refutation was possibly not sufficiently broad.
3. For the relationship with the sister churches, it is important to maintain a good exchange in the theological field, as recently happened at the Hamilton conference on hermeneutics.

Decision 4:

to urge the sister churches abroad to keep serving us and each other as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world.

Grounds:

1. Insofar our churches wish to remain in the confession of God's Word there is no reason to review the existing contact.
2. Insofar our churches are increasingly dealing with the continued secularization in the lives of God's children, we have much need of the support and forbearance of our sister churches abroad.

RCN report Appendix Eleven:

Decisions “Man/Woman” Report

Decision 1

To relieve the committee “m/w in the church” of their duties.

Decision 2

- a. Not to agree with the grounds of the conclusion of the committee “m/w in the church” that it belongs within the bandwidth of what may be called Scriptural and Reformed, when beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices.
- b. The view that beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices must be open for free debate, provided that the arguments are based on Scripture.

Ground:

The message of Scripture shows two lines. One line is that of equivalence of man and woman; the other is that of the difference in responsibility that God gave to man and woman. Both lines must be accounted for.

Decision 3

- a. To appoint a new committee “m/w and office” to investigate:
 - i. how the offices can be structured so that in them women can be active for God’s kingdom; thereby taking into account the ground mentioned under Decision 2.
 - ii. what the consequences are of such a structure, relative to the current forms and the church order.
 - iii. what the opinions are within sister churches concerning the implementation of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon; this with a view toward maintaining the catholicity of the church.
- b. To inform the sister churches, both nationally and internationally, concerning this Decision 3, and to request advice.

Grounds:

1. A continuing reflection on the questions concerning men and women in the offices of minister, elder, and deacon will be served by a critical study of the current structure of offices within the Reformed Churches in the light of the whole teaching of Scripture.

2. The structure of offices originating in the times of the Reformation, of ministers, elders, and deacons, is not directly derived from Scripture and may therefore be modified and/or extended according to circumstances.
3. Not all activities of the current officers deal directly with bearing responsibility for the spiritual leadership in the congregation; it is profitable to investigate which tasks may be executed by men as well as women.
4. A different implementation and definition of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon may have consequences for the content of the forms in current use, as well as for the rules of the church order.
5. According to the rules for sister church relations (Synod of Ommen, 1993), sister churches ought to be informed about the intended study and its results.

Decision 4

- a. To appoint a new committee “m/w in the church” to investigate: working toward integration of Biblical education, the confessional norms, and the practice of the Reformed churches in connection with the roles and functions of women and men in their mutual relations, by
 - i. describing actively how and on what ground in Reformed churches men and women in various situations use their talents in the congregation;
 - ii. noting in connection to this strong points, best practices, but also difficulties and points of controversy, giving a first assessment of these matters, and communicate this to the churches;
 - iii. entering and remaining in conversation about these observations and considerations with especially the employees of the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum;
 - iv. stimulating and supporting the conversation about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the churches, with a view toward a practice that reflects the manifold message of the Scripture, with special attention to:
 1. Scriptural and obedient reading of the Bible;
 2. the influence of society on the thought and actions of Christians;

3. the special and complementary differences between man and woman.
 - v. in all the aforementioned activity, specifically asking women about their various experiences and convictions.
- b. If there are developments in the churches in this respect that converge sufficiently, so that it is responsible to make general decisions, to submit proposals to the next general Synod.
- c. To communicate relevant proposals to sister churches, both national and international, through the Contact Committee.

Grounds:

1. At this moment it is wise not to settle for one or more of the submitted “directions toward a solutions” in the questions surrounding potential female office bearers, but to continue the discussing more broadly.
2. The developments in the churches concerning the roles and functions of men and women deserve good support and interaction.
3. The different practices in the churches today require a more communal process of raising awareness and learning from one another. This is felt more urgently today than in the past.
4. By investigating one another’s practices, as churches together and in mutual relationship, we complement each other and grow in unity.
5. Input from the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum is necessary for a theologically and empirically responsible guidance of the ecclesiastical developments and preparation of potentially necessary decision-making.
6. Regardless of the conviction concerning the permissibility of female office bearers, much can be gained in a continued conversation about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the church:
 - a. There is difference of opinion about the way in which we draw conclusions for our lives today from what the Biblical authors initially wrote for their audiences.
 - b. The committee “m/v in the church” in their report rightly noted the tension that many experience between the roles and functions that women fulfill in the churches

and in society.

- c. The real differences between man and woman demand its own consideration, for instance by giving attention to “gender studies”.
7. In the discussion about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the churches their own input is indispensable.
8. It is good to take time to allow general decision-making to come up out of the churches, and to allow as much like-mindedness as possible to grow.
9. The agreements with sister churches, both national and international, must be honored as carefully as possible.

RCN report: Appendix Twelve:

Decisions: Relations with the NGK

Decision 1:

To deal with the letter mentioned under material 5

Grounds:

1. The letter was indeed received after the closing date for incoming correspondence for Synod, but this was made known in time.
2. The concrete request could not have been sent earlier seeing that the LV (i.e. Landelijke Vergadering van de Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken Zeewolde 2013–2014) first made its decision about this matter on 1 March 2014.
3. The GS and the LV purposely come together around the same time; it would be undesirable if the decisions of that meeting regarding mutual relations need to wait for several years for answers.
4. With this letter no new matters are added to the agenda of Synod; dealing with it fits into the framework of the still to be held discussion about the report of deputies ecclesiastical unity with regards to the NGK.

Decision 2

With gratitude to take note of the report regarding the discussions held by Committee for Contact and Unity of the NGK and its results as formulated in the report, namely in the Second Notation of agreement.

Ground:

The report gives evidence the discussions regarding hermeneutics show agreement, which, among others, can be seen in notation One and Two of the agreements.

Decision 3:

To declare that in view of agreement in discussions regarding hermeneutics, the obstacles that were there regarding the NGK decision to open the offices for sister in the congregation, is taken away.

Ground:

Regardless of differences in practical results with view to women in office, it appears that we as churches can trust each other regarding

the acknowledgement and acceptance of Scriptural authority.

Decision 4:

To advance the contacts with the NGK and carry on with mutual discussions in view of ecclesiastical unity

Ground:

Now that that main obstacle has been removed, the way for mutual discussion for actual ecclesiastical unity is open.

Decision 5:

To be thankful for the letter of the LV Zeewolde 2013 – 2014 and to recognize it as a heartfelt aspiration to advance on the way toward re-unity.

Grounds:

1. It is comforting and reason for joy to realize that the Lord of the church grants that after 50 years of sad schism the NGK and the GKv are now drawn so close together.
2. To now already respond to the invitation for a mutual explanation would mean that the phase of “mutual discussion with view to ecclesiastical unity” has progressed to the path of ecclesiastical unity

RCN report Appendix Thirteen:

Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde kerken in Nederland Ede 2014

To the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

c/o Rev. P.K.A. de Boer

Corresponding Clerk

per email: pkadb@iinet.net.au

Lelystad, 1 december 2014

Kenmerk: 141201-FRCA

Dear and esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus,

From you, our sister churches in Australia, the general synod of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands received a letter of admonition dated April 22nd 2013 as well as your additional letter of concern dated March 3d 2014. From other sister churches abroad we received comparable and sometimes almost equal correspondence. As general synod we have considered all these letters of concern and admonition as acceptable according to our rules for the relations with sister churches abroad in which we appoint that sister churches have to assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the reformed confession in doctrine, church government, discipline and liturgy, and according to the stipulation of the last synod of our churches on the synod to synod level. We appreciate your correspondence as a token of love and care of you as sister churches for the well being and faithfulness of our churches in the Netherlands. It's our prayer as well, that the FRCA and the RCN may stand side by side in resolutely and faithfully holding fast to God's Word and the Reformed confessions. So, even when traditions change and new circumstances require new answers, in mutual confidence we can learn to keep each other faithful to that only basis.

In your letter of April 22nd 2013 you express as your main concern that in our churches there is clear evidence of a liberal way of interpretation of scripture. Your opinion is that through this way of interpretation the authority of scripture and its sufficiency concerning ethical questions is not being maintained. In this context you refer to publications of different individual authors, most of them being part of the staff of the Theological University in Kampen.

Previously we already have answered this kind of criticism. Once again we have asked the TU, to answer your objections generously, as an additional handout. Please find it in the fifth appendix. To be clear by the way, this is not an official decision of the synod, just an answer for which the University carries responsibility.

Your letter makes clear that you are not quite aware of the regulations about supervision on publications of teachers and scholars at the TU. The synod of Ede wrote a clarifying document about these regulations. Objections against teachers do not directly regard the general synod, they will be handled by the board of the University, which is under control of the supervisory board. Clear regulations about this matter are important, also to avoid needless injury of the name of teachers and scholars.

We reject as false accusation the suggestion that the synod uses formal reasons as a means to avoid material discussion of your objections. It is a sound ecclesiastical rule, that private church members are not supposed not send their objections against a TU teacher to the general synod. A synod is a meeting of churches, not of individual members. Only Church counsels are free to address their concerns about the supervision on teachers and scholars of the TU.

You reproach our churches with tolerating ethical conclusions, that are said to be based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit but in fact are contra biblical. Please brothers, this is a wrong conclusion from what you have read in the report of our deputies on church unity. This passage in their report has only to do with choices in matters for which no biblical prescriptions are available, but in which God's children nevertheless can be guided through the Holy Spirit.

Please do not apply this quote to other discussions, such as grounds for divorce.

You reject the ethical principal of 'the style of the Kingdom', neglecting that this is meant to combine important biblical data, as such making them applicable, to avoid ethical conclusions based on isolated texts and to take in account the biblical coherence, as, for instance, in the reformed theology we are used to refer to the principal of the covenant.

Just like other churches you strongly criticized the M/V report of our deputies. The synod has not accepted the argumentation on which the conclusions in this report are based. Find the complete text of the decision in the third appendix. This subject will be studied once more.

Main purpose will be to receive a clear view on church offices. When in your letter you directly identify what the apostle writes about offices in the church with the today offices of pastors, elders and deacons, you neglect the ecclesiastical doctrinal contribution in the development of the offices in the church.

It is a sound biblical tradition to honestly review our familiar insights time and again in the light of scripture. According to this principal we will review our doctrine and practice on offices to find biblical answers about the

service of women in the church. This has also to do with the clear biblical principle of equality of men and women in the church, that you seem to neglect.

You mention also the evidence of false ecumenism, given the growing agreement of our churches with the NGK. You seem to neglect an increasing confessional tendency in the NGK and the intension of the NGK to critically review the hermeneutical basis of their decision on female elders and pastors, tendencies which we clearly observe, as we are aware of local NGK churches which adhere to the bible, criticizing their sister churches, with whom our local churches on different places gratefully can establish unity.

In your letter you also suggest that we as churches have declared to be one in faith with all the participating churches in the 'Nationale Synode'. Is this really how you consider us, dear brothers? Just as you we feel a gap between de reformed confession and the doctrinal identity of some of the participating churches. But we are convinced that, adhering to our own reformed identity, our deputies can participate in this forum.

Finally in your letter dated April 22nd 2013 you make objections against the introduction of a large numbers of songs in our liturgy, of which many, according to you, are not really biblical or reformed. Well, dear brothers, we do not know any biblical or confessional restriction about the number of songs and hymns in the church and we gratefully take serious Paul's encouragement to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph.5:19), as we take serious the command in Psalm 96 to sing a new song. And in the development of our book of praise the successive synods have used guidelines to maintain the reformed character of our liturgy. Of course there can be difference in the valuation of the separate hymns. And in the local churches sometimes songs are used that are questionable. But as RCN we strive for a broad biblically acceptable liturgy.

In your additional letter of concern dated March 3d 2014 you criticize that article 31 has been removed in the new church order. Your presupposition seems to be an application of article 31 that since long in our churches is outdated. A local church council which does not feel free to agree with certain synod decisions gives account to the classes.

In the enclosed appendix you find the text of the reply of the general synod to your and others matters of concern, which was practically unanimously agreed upon.

We hope you will benevolently take our reply in consideration, with the same love en care which we encounter in your letters. Our synod has spend quite some time in reading your letters and listening to the oral explanation of your delegates. Many of your concerns go back to subjects which in previous synods have been settled and have had the attention in

the discussions between our deputies BBK and your synods and deputies.

Therefore we regret that in your correspondence and also in the contribution of your deputy in our synod concerns are based on hear say and information of individual office bearers, instead of based on what we as churches are responsible for. Nevertheless the synod once again has paid attention to your concerns.

But now, dear brothers, we as Reformed Churches in the Netherlands insist upon our sister churches in Australia to put an end to the discussion of these matters in which constantly the same historical data are repeated to show evidence for your many times impudent judgments of your sister churches in the Netherlands.

You have loudly called a wakeup call to us and we accept that for the sake of our sisterchurch relation. But please do not continue to call. Let us keep in mind each other's own responsibility, we as churches in the Netherlands and you as churches in Australia.

Let there be mutual confidence and let us trust the Lord, who, in spite of all his admonitions, continued to care for his seven churches in Asia Minor, keeps also your and our churches in his hand.

It is our prayer that our answers will help you to overcome your concerns and may contribute to restore our mutual confidence and strengthen us in the bond in which we may encourage each other to stay steadfast and faithful in the service of Gods Kingdom, according to the reformed standards.

According to many foreign delegates the discussion in the synod was a reassuring experience, with much recognition of the honest desire to be reformed churches. We hope that this may also be the testimony of their reports and the result of our answers to your concerns.

May the triune God bless you and keep you as churches and may He keep us united in a sound sister church relationship to the glory of his name.

On behalf of the general synod of Ede 2014,

Rev. R.J. Vreugdenhil, second scribe

Appendices:

nr. 2 Text of the synod's decision about the different admonitions

nr. 3: Text of the synod's decision about the M/V report

nr. 4: Account of the TU

nr. 5: Document on TU, GS and the churches (in Dutch)

nr. 6: Text of the synod's decision about the Netherlands Reformed Churches (in Dutch)

Minutes the discussion in the synod – see:

<http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/acta-gs/612/>

RCN report Appendix Fourteen:

Theological University: response to foreign sister-churches

1. General

In this document the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) seeks to fulfill the request of the Synod of Ede, 2014, to formulate a response to the criticism from our foreign sister-churches concerning publications by lecturers and researchers at the TUK. In its request, the Synod stated that this response should take the form of a extensive exposition, accessible to a broad audience, and that it should address the various letters which have been sent. By foreign sister-churches are meant the Reformed Church in the United States, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the Free Reformed Church of Australia. We gladly comply with this request.

The Synod of Armadale, 2012, of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia mentions in its letter dated April 22, 2013, the names of Dr. K. van Bekkum, Dr. S. Paas, Rev. J.J.T. Doedens, Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne, and Dr. G. Harinck. These brothers were also mentioned in the letters from other foreign sister-churches in the past few years, in connection to objections to publications by TUK lecturers. Most of these objections have been replied to in the past. The General Synod of Ede, 2014, judged it important to address the issues raised by the foreign churches, and to give a clarification concerning the way these objections have been addressed. The BoT desires to cooperate in this endeavor, but also wants to emphasize that this clarification cannot provide legitimate grounds to reopen a procedure concerning matters that have been addressed in the past. The purpose of this letter is to give a clear description of how the objections have been handled, and how, according to our firm conviction, they have been answered adequately. The BoT wants to give a description that is clear to all, and the BoT also hopes that the foreign sister-churches will come to the conclusion that the churches in The Netherlands, and in particular the Theological University in Kampen, have handled the criticism of the past fourteen years with integrity and thoroughness. Since the beginning of the discussions about these matters, the brothers involved have also made new and significant contributions to the development of Reformed theology. The paragraphs that follow discuss: 2.1. the appointment of Dr. S. Paas; 2.2. the dissertation and appointment of Dr. K. van Bekkum; 2.3. Rev. J.J.T. Doedens; 2.4 Prof. Dr. G. Harinck; and 2.5. Prof. Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne.

2.1 The Appointment of Dr. S. Paas

The letter from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, mentioned

above, states that, although many serious objections to the dissertation and appointment of Dr. S. Paas had been made, these objections were never addressed by a Synod, and that for solely formal reasons. But this assessment can be shown to be incorrect. In a letter dated March 26, 2012, we explained to the Canadian Reformed Churches how the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011, and the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors dealt with the objections. The letter was a response to the letter of the Canadian Reformed Churches of March 9, 2011. In line with the letter of March 26, 2012, we make the following statement:

The appointment of Dr. S. Paas as lecturer at the university was discussed at the General Synod of Harderwijk, 2011. No objections to this appointment had been submitted to the Synod, but at the request of the moderamen of the General Synod, the Board of Trustees presented an additional confidential report, which addressed the main considerations in the appointment of Dr. S. Paas as lecturer at the university. We highly value a good relationship with the churches in Canada and with the sister seminary in Hamilton, but it would be asking too much to give you access to a confidential report written only for the Synod.

As Board of Trustees and Board of Directors we believe we should give you a response to some of the key points.

1. First it must be noted that Stefan Paas received his doctorate from the University of Utrecht. His dissertation was written according to the guidelines of that institution. He received his doctorate in 1998, many years before he was appointed in Kampen. The grounds for his appointment in Kampen included his publications in the field of missiology, which were all written after his dissertation. The dissertation of Paas is a contribution to the field of the history of religion, rather than theology (even though his doctoral study took place in the Department of Theology). In this work he opposes, on history-of-religion grounds, the common Higher Critical view concerning the historical origin of belief in God as Creator in Israel. At the request of the Board of Trustees, the Kampen Old Testament professor, Prof. Dr. G. Kwakkel, addressed the various issues that could be raised about this dissertation. In doing so, he concluded that Paas had written his dissertation within the framework of the the academic study of the history of religion, without making explicit his personal faith commitment. He has done the latter in other publications, which shows clearly that he is willing to be guided by the language of Scripture. Paas declared that Kwakkel's articles give a fair representation of his position. Naturally, Paas's choice for a purely history-of-religion approach is open to criticism, but given this

approach and his explicit justification of it, there is no ground for the accusation of adhering to Higher Critical theories. On the contrary, one should appreciate his courage to show, in a Higher-Critical setting, and in a manner acceptable to Higher Critical scholars, that Israel's belief in God as Creator is much older than is generally claimed by such scholars.

2. The failure to adequately take into account the context within which Paas wrote his dissertation, and the limited scope of the focus of his study (that is, the prophets, not the Torah), is evident in some of the objections raised to the way in which Paas speaks about the historicity of the Exodus and the conquest of Israel in the book of Exodus. On the basis of texts that are generally regarded as old, and archeological digs, Paas concludes that there are good reasons to view the Exodus as an historical event. He did not subject the Biblical texts about the Exodus to historical analysis, and therefore did not cast any doubt on them either. Rather, he wanted to contribute to the defense of the historical reliability of the Old Testament at one specific point, namely the dating of the conceptions of God as the Creator.
3. The same can be said for language about God in Israel. The thesis that "Yahweh was probably a branching off from the Canaanite king-god El" is supposedly in direct contradiction of God's self-revelation in his Word. Paas's treatment of this matter in his dissertation is the maximum which an academic historian of religion is able to say on the basis of the principles and methods of this field of study. It says nothing about the theological issue as to whether Yahweh really is the one true God, and whether He always has been that. Every orthodox Bible believer affirms that God is the only true God, and Paas does the same in heartfelt faith. Nor does it say anything about the issue as to what the *historical* process may have been. Rather, it only speaks to what people believe they can say *within the framework of a specific methodology, with all its limitations*. History-of-religion research deals with religion, not with God. In his dissertation, Paas adopts the scientific jargon common among the academic audience for whom he wrote this work.
4. You write: "We would have expected that as a Reformed scholar he would have stated clearly that although he does not adhere to the religion-historical approach, he will use this approach in order to show that even on the basis of those presuppositions one can defend a creation belief in eight century prophets." (p. 3) The point is that this is precisely what Dr. Paas wanted to do, according to his own testimony. He wrote this even more emphatically in the revised and

translated version of his dissertation in 2003, in which (among other things) he forcefully criticizes the literary-critical method. One may debate whether Paas should have made this more explicit in 1998 within that context, but from his own declaration it is perfectly clear that this was his objective. Naturally, he could not have known what role his dissertation would play in the later discussions in the GKv (of which Paas is not a member), and with what questions in mind people would read his dissertation many years later. The context of his dissertation and the people for whom he wrote are entirely different from the context of the later debate surrounding his dissertation in the GKv and its sister churches.

5. On p. 5 you also mention the article by Paas in *Wapenveld*. In the context of his appointment, we had a thorough discussion with Paas about this. This conversation showed to our satisfaction that Dr. Paas wants to understand Scripture according to God's intention, also concerning Genesis 1 and 2. That does not remove the possibility of disagreement about the concrete way he does this in this article. Such disagreements have always existed among orthodox Reformed theologians.

The Board of Trustees and Board of Directors concluded that the Theological University in Kampen had welcomed in Dr. Paas a valuable lecturer, who has deep reverence for the Scripture as the Word of God, and who knows himself bound to the Reformed Confession. By opposing Higher Critical theories on their own turf he actually supported scholarship that is faithful to the Bible.

In addition to this letter from 2012, the BoT emphasizes that the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011, deliberated in closed session about the objections to the appointment of Dr. S. Paas, which had been raised in letters to the BoT as well as in public articles. The clarification and defense of the BoT and BoD concerning this matter was approved by the Synod as part of the reports from the Theological University. In this way justice was done to the objections coming from the churches, and at the same time to Dr. Paas, who in 2008 was appointed by the Board of Directors.

2.2. Dissertation and appointment of Dr. K. van Bekkum

The letter dated April 22, 2013, from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia also mentions the 2010 dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum, as well as his 2011 appointment as lecturer at the university by the Synod of Harderwijk. The BoT points out that Prof. Dr. H.G.L. Peels, professor of Old Testament at the Theological University in Apeldoorn, had previously published a very favorable review of this dissertation in *Theologia Reformata*. (1. H.G.L. Peels, *Bijbeltekst, geschiedenis en archeologie* [Bible

text, history, and archeology] in *Theologia Reformata*, vol. 54, issue 3, 306-314). This document of the BoT focuses on the way in which the university and the churches have dealt with Van Bekkum's dissertation and his subsequent appointment. In the aforementioned letter of March 26, 2012, to the Canadian Reformed Churches, the BoT and BoD also addressed this matter, and in line with this letter we would like to say the following:

In your letters you also make some remarks concerning the dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum. In particular, you write that the distinction Van Bekkum makes between a "truth claim" and a "truth value" "does not reflect a high view of Scripture and should be rejected."

For the sake of clarity: a Board of Trustees of a university does not evaluate dissertations; neither does the Curatorium. The scholarly evaluation belongs to the thesis committee and the university senate. This includes the assessment as to whether the dissertation fits into the confessional framework of the university. In academic publications discussions are held about the results of academic investigations and methodological principles. Dissertations defended in Kampen must likewise be able to stand the test of such academic criticism. Hypotheses and models that are defended can also be attacked in that academic debate. The articles about Joshua 10:12-14 by E.A. de Boer and P.H.R. van Houwelingen, which you mentioned, were not published in an academic journal, but are illustration of a discussion that may be had about results of academic investigation. On a side note, they also state that Van Bekkum does not deny that God performed a miracle in response to Joshua's prayer.

The BoT and the Curatorium seek to be informed about the criteria and principles used by the supervisor of a dissertation and the senate of the university. To respond your questions concerning the dissertation by Dr. van Bekkum, we include in this letter the statement by his supervisor, professor of Old Testament Dr. G. Kwakkel:

1. At the core of Reformed theological study of the Bible—in agreement with the Bible passages quoted by the Canadian brothers as well as Belgic Confession, art. 3-7—is the question, "What does the text mean?" What do the texts intend to say? Following the Old Testament scholar Long, you can formulate this as the question regarding the "truth claim": what exactly is the "truth" the text "claims" to communicate? This comes with the question of the nature of the "truth claim"; for instance: does the text intend to communicate a historical or ethical truth, a combination of those, or perhaps something else? That question, regarding the content and nature of the "truth claim," you may discuss together as long as you want, as long as you are willing to

listen carefully to the texts.

2. For me as a Reformed theologian it is *a priori* evident that anything belonging to the actual truth claim of the Scripture must therefore be received as true, directive, and normative, because God himself teaches it to us. In that respect a discussion about the “truth value” is really no longer necessary, for I assume from the start that the “truth claim” is correct.
3. Still, in some cases it can be useful to investigate this “truth value” after all, for instance by comparing the Scripture’s testimony about historical data to the results of archeological research. Regarding this additional research, for example, in a dissertation, I do not need to convince myself of the factual “truth value” of the concrete text of Scripture. Its use is of a different nature and twofold:
 - a. In a discussion with others who do not share my *a priori* convictions concerning the “truth value” of a text, I can show them, to some extent, that there is more support for this “truth value” than they think. This is what Van Bakkum does in his dissertation. Or, if I fail to say more about the “truth value,” I realize even more that I really take Scripture and nothing else as my starting point, and that therefore faith is truly the only, all-decisive factor.
 - b. A potential *occasion* to check my view concerning the nature and content of the “truth claim.” For instance, if it appears that archeology presents a very different picture from what I think the Bible text presents, then I do well to check once again whether I have really understood the intention of the Bible text. If so, then I make peace with the (for me) unresolvable difference between Bible text and extra-Biblical academic research. If not, then I am grateful for my increased understanding of the Scripture. But in all this it remains so that I believe and accept the claims of Scripture “for their own sake,” not on the basis of other evidence. (Here ends the statement by Prof. Dr. G. Kwakkel.)

As has been stated before, the BoT of the TU does not evaluate dissertations; nor do the churches at their Synod. The academic evaluation belongs to others. The BoT considers the statement above of Prof. Kwakkel a sufficient answer to the objections from the churches, in particular on the matter of the authority of Scripture and the relationship between what Scripture says and the results of archeological research.

A separate point of interest is the appointment of Dr. K. van Bakkum

as university lecturer on the Old Testament. An appointment at the TU in Kampen follows a certain procedure, in which the evaluation of the Curatorium is also asked. In this situation, in part because of some critical reviews of the dissertation, there was a conversation between the Curatorium and Dr. K. van Bekkum, which also concerned his dissertation. This conversation resulted in a positive advice from the Curatorium to the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees regarding the planned appointment at the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011.

Our conclusion is that the Synod itself did not give an elaborate assessment of the objections from the churches. These objections were not on the agenda of the Synod, either. But in the entire process leading up to the appointment by the Synod, careful consideration was given to the objections that had been published. In the closed session at Synod, the BoT gave an account of this; the Synod subsequently approved the plans of the BoT.

Additionally, Van Bekkum interacted extensively with expressed criticism early in 2014, with the approval of the Board of Directors. (2. <http://oud.tukampen.nl/uploads/documents/389.pdf>. Also published in *Lux Mundi* 33.2 (2014), 44-50.)

2.3. J.J.T. Doedens

The name of Rev. J.J.T. Doedens is brought up regularly. In 2002 he published the article *Taal en teken van trouw, over vorm en functie van Genesis 1* [Speech and sign of faithfulness: on the form and function of Genesis 1.] The article is part of *Woord op schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel*. [Word inscripturated: theological reflections on the authority of the Bible.] At the time of publication, the Curatorium established that Rev. Doedens was not connected to the TU, so that the Curatorium had no responsibility for this publication.

Individual church members did try to obtain an ecclesiastical decision. The Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, declared the letter of objection to be inadmissible. Grounds for this decision can be found in the Acts of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, Art. 54.

2.4. Prof. dr. G. Harinck

In your letters you mention the name of Prof. Dr. G. Harinck, in connection with a number of statements in the press about a controversial approach to Scripture dealing with homosexuality. These statements were made in a radio interview with Dr. G. Harinck, part of which was published in the *Nederlands Dagblad* of January 26, 2008. On February 6, there was a conversation between Prof. Harinck and all those involved with his position as professor. This resulted in a declaration, which was also published in the

Nederlands Dagblad. The BoT includes the second part of this declaration in this letter:

The Bible

In the conversation about dealing with the Bible and the way in which Reformed Christians use the Bible, Dr. Harinck declares that he certainly acknowledges the normative character of God's Word and the force of specific texts. This applies both to living with trust in the Lord, and to theological and ethical reflection. His comments on the Bible passages that deal with women were not meant as a personal hermeneutic, but as a reflection of his personal position in this matter. Earlier in his life he had arrived at an opinion about "woman and church office" on the basis of Scripture. Naturally this involves more than the one text he mentioned in the interview. He wanted to say that he is personally not interested in revisiting that kind of debate, with a repetition of mostly the same arguments. Although he has his own view, he accepts that in the churches to which he belongs women cannot be office bearers. As for the male homosexual friendships that Dr. Harinck called unobjectionable, he declares that he meant a relationship of friendship, and not a relationship comparable to that between a man and a woman. On this point, Dr. Harnack agrees, the Bible clearly rejects homosexual behavior.

Roman mass

In the conversation about "partaking" in a Roman Catholic mass, Dr. Harnick states that he did not mean participation in the Eucharist, but rather visiting a Roman Catholic service. "If that is convenient," he added in the interview, referring to a situation where it is impossible to attend a different church service.

Careless

Initially the university understood the interview very different than Dr. Harinck intended, according to his later explanation. They were not the only ones. Some reactions to the interview were quite disturbed and vehement. Under pressure of these reactions Dr. Harinck wrote his further explanation in the paper of February 5.

The next day a conversation took place in Kampen, in which we spoke to one another in a vigorous but brotherly manner. By means of this candid discussion, we found one another in our love for the Word of the Lord and for the churches. In this setting Dr. Harinck acknowledged that his careless formulations and lack of consideration of the ecclesiastical context had led to misunderstandings concerning his views. He regrets this, and it was not his intention.

Trust

Together we realize that the current situation calls for much trust in the churches. These are important matters that have harmed the name of the Lord and of the churches, as well as the name of the university and of Dr. Harinck himself.

We emphatically expressed to one another the intention to proceed together in subjection to the Word of God and in adherence to the Reformed Confession. We also want to relate this renewed commitment to Scripture and confession to the churches.

There is homework to be done on both sides. We have concluded that the mutual fellowship in Kampen needs strengthening. We hope that, having learned from the intensive process of the previous weeks, we may be able to continue in a more united way in our concrete tasks in the service of church and society. This intention we have clearly expressed to one another. And we also express it to the churches. We ask that you give us the necessary trust, as well as your support through prayer and words of encouragement.

May our gracious God help us through his Spirit.

This declaration was signed by Professor G. Harinck, by Rev. P. Niemeijer on behalf of the Board of Directors, by Mr. J. Messelink on behalf of the Committee for Archives and Documentation, by Rev. E.A. Boer on behalf of the Board of Trustees for the lecturing position of the ADC, and by Prof. Dr. C.J. de Ruijter as the director of the Theological University.

The letter from the churches of Australia calls this declaration unsatisfactory. While a foreign sister-church may certainly evaluate critically an event that took place in the churches in The Netherlands, that same church ought to accept the judgment of the Dutch churches that the case has been resolved. In the same year, 2008, the National Synod of Zwolle-Zuid decided to reject the objections to Dr. Harinck's statements, with a reference to the Declaration quoted above (Acts Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, Art. 105, decision 3). Moreover, at the request of the Curatorium of the university, a decision was made to continue at the TUK the special lecturing position originating in the Center for Archives and Documentation (ADC) of the Reformed Churches. This lecturing position has been extended for another six years. In 2014, the Synod of Ede-Zuid adopted a similar proposal. The continuation of the lectorate also implied the continuation of the appointment of Prof. Dr. G. Harinck. Looking back on the 2008 declaration, the BoT wants to state that the trust expressed at that time has been confirmed. Our Lord has heard the prayers addressed to Him at that time, and He gave restoration and renewal.

2.5. Dr. A.L. Th. De Bruijne

The contributions of De Bruijne to *Woord op Schrift, Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel* [Word inscripturated: theological reflections on the authority of the Bible], ed. Dr. C. Trimp, Kok Kampen, 2002, were the occasion for many objections. The letter from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, dated April 22, 2013, says that these objections were rejected on the grounds that the matter had already been dealt with by

the Board of Trustees of the Theological University, and also because the objections were submitted too late. It is indeed the case that the Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, did not itself deal with the objections to these teachings.

In 2003 the Curatorium dealt extensively with the four objections submitted against the contributions of De Bruijne. The Curatorium wrote a lengthy response to all four of them. On May 17, 2003, a conference was organized by the magazine *De Reformatie* and the TUK (cf. *De Reformatie*, vol. 78, issues 33-41). At that conference De Bruijne was able to clear up a number of misunderstandings.

The Curatorium did not receive any further reactions to this response from the authors of the objections. No objections to the response of the Curatorium were sent to the General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005. Neither did the Synod receive complaints concerning the way in which the Curatorium had defended the confessional character of the education and research at the university.

Although no objections to the actions of the Curatorium in this matter were before the Synod, the synodical committee dealing with matters related to the TUK was asked to give special attention to the way in which the Curatorium had handled the objections to De Bruijne. The committee received the letters of objection and the responses of the Curatorium, and was able to gather information from Kampen. From this information they concluded that the Curatorium had carefully dealt with the matter. The Synod granted the proposal of the Drenthe committee to approve the actions of the Curatorium, and to discharge them from their duties. That this included their handling of the objection to De Bruijne is clear from the second ground of decision 1: "Deputy Curators have carefully and adequately handled the submitted objections" (Acts Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005, Art. 122, decision 1).

Subsequently the Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, rejected as inadmissible a letter of objection by certain brothers to the statements of the Curatorium concerning publications of Dr. De Bruijne. The ground for this was that the appeal against the statements of the Curatorium should have been submitted to the next meeting of its supervising body, in this case the

General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005 (Acts Zwolle-Zuid, Art. 105, decision 1, ground 1).

The BoT would like to point out that the Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005, already had arrived at an explicit conclusion concerning the dealings of the Curatorium of the university concerning the objections to the articles by De Bruijne. This can also be gleaned from the minutes of the discussion in the Acts of Synod.

3. Conclusion

In an additional document (Appendix 3) sent to the foreign churches, you will find a description of how the General Synod attempts to ensure that the education given in Kampen is Reformed in character. You will also find instructions concerning how to submit an objection, as a church member or consistory, to the writings of a professor. Such a document makes clear how the responsibilities are structured.

The BoT hopes to have made clear in this letter how the university and the churches have dealt with objections to publications and appointments of lecturers in the past 15 years. Even when the objections had not officially been submitted, the various Synods of the Reformed Churches have always dealt with those objections. Once every three years, the BoT and its predecessors gave an account of the way in which they had responded to objections of concerned church members. And the Synods discussed these accounts and approved them.

The BoT sincerely hopes that this document makes clear to you, as foreign sister- churches, how the churches in The Netherlands have responded to objections that you have raised in previous years. Even if this overview does not change your evaluation of the matters involved, the BoT hopes to be able to terminate the discussion with you regarding matters of the past. The university in Kampen is certainly willing to continue the academic debate with theologians connected to the churches who have expressed their objections. The continuation of that debate will serve the development of Reformed theology worldwide.

The Synod asked us to formulate a response to the foreign churches that would have the character of an extensive exposition, accessible to a broad audience. By means of this extensive overview we as the BoT believe we have fulfilled this request. Moreover, the BoT would like to point out that the TUK continually gives an account, also to a broader audience, of the developments in education and research as it takes place in Kampen. Anyone interested in further information can consult the Annual Reports published on the university's website. We also refer to the Hamilton publication *Correctly handling the Word of Truth* which was

recently published, and the projected publication of a collection of articles on hermeneutics in the middle of 2015.

The BoT hopes that you will receive this letter with an open heart, and that it will serve to terminate the discussion about matters of the past. The BoT also hopes that you will find an occasion, at your convenience, to encourage the professors and researchers at the university in Kampen. Like everyone else, theologians, too, need now and then to hear positive words of appreciation. That would also help create space for mutually edifying conversation, including the occasional critical questions.

Rest assured that we have written this letter in cordial union with you in Christ.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Theological University,

Zwijndrecht, 8 november 2014

Rev. J. Ophoff, president

E.W. Evers, clerk

Report of Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches — Indonesia

1. Mandate

According to Article 86 and 87 of the Acts of Synod 2012, deputies were appointed and given this mandate:

A. Regarding the GGRI:

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.

B. Regarding the GGRC

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.

2. Specific Mandate re the GGRI

2.1 Regarding our mandate *“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.”*, we may report that the new federation of the three regional synods in Papua, Kalimantan-Barat and GGRI-NTT is in an early stage of development. Since Synod Armadale 2012 the Indonesian churches did not come together in a general synod of the whole federation. As deputies we have contacted the deputies of the GGRI appointed by their general synod and presented the decision of Synod Armadale 2012 to acknowledge the new federation of the Indonesian churches as our sister churches. This deci-

sion of Synod Armadale 2012 was accepted with thankfulness. As Australian deputies we could financially support them so that the deputies of their national synod could meet in a face-to-face meeting. The Indonesian churches still need further support to develop a strong national bond of the three regional synods. In the early stage of the development of the unity between the three regions we can report that there is a development in the direction of the exchange of theology students between the three regional synods. At the moment of writing the report the deputies are the process of getting one student from the other regional synod to Australia to familiarise himself with Reformed church government and church life (see also point 2.6).

2.2. Regarding our mandate *“To visit the regional synods and conferences of the GGRI subject to available finance when invited.”*, we can report that as deputies we have visited the regional synod GGRI-NTT held in Kataka (Sumba), 6 – 20 August 2013. One of the major issues we could address at this meeting was the establishment of the Reformed Theological Seminary (see point 2.4). We could encourage the GGRI-NTT to seek further unity with the GGRC. At the meeting were also delegates from the Canadian and Dutch sister churches so that we were able to talk together about the support of the GGRI-NTT. The delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches also encouraged the GGRI-NTT to continue to seek ecclesiastical unity with the GGRC. They expressed the desire that there could be the beginning of cooperation between the theological college in Kupang and the seminary in Sumba.

On behalf of the GGRC Rev. Yawan Bunda was present (with two other representatives) as delegate of the GGRC. He stressed the fact that becoming one federation requires getting to know each other better and working together on the unification process. He pointed to further cooperation in theological education, pulpit exchanges between the GGRI-NTT and GGRC in Kupang and if necessary also to send students to Kupang (STAKRI) for further education.

2.3. Regarding our mandate *“To support the GGRI in a well-considered and responsible way with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches.”* In all the contacts deputies had with the GGRI churches we were focussed on this aspect of our mandate. Deputies want to express our appreciation for the willingness of the church at Mundijong to allow Rev. A. van Delden to lecture at the theological seminary in Waingapu, Sumba for a month every year. It is important that the other churches are encouraged to give some extra attention for the pulpit supply of the Mundijong congregation during that month. After it was reported that there were some needs among the students of the seminary the consistory of Mundijong also decided to make some funds available for the needy students at the college. The churches at

Rockingham and Baldivis are involved in mission work in the NTT province. The attention of deputies is mainly focussed on the theological training of future ministers, ecclesiastical developments and seeking unity between the Reformed federations.

2.4. Regarding our mandate *“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.”*, were able to continue our support of the Theological Seminary in Waingapu, Sumba. At the regional synod of the GGRI in Kataka (2013) we were able to express some concerns regarding the theological training in Sumba and suggestions for further development of the theological training. As deputies we came with recommendations to improve the functioning of the YASTRI Foundation of the seminary, the Daily Governance Board, the lecturers and the report about activities etc. of the college. The deputies also advised the GGRI to appoint Rev Dr. Andrew Pol of the Canadian Reformed Church of Carmen, MB, Canada to serve as External Advisory Director of YASTRI.

With thankfulness we can report that the synod of the GGRI-NTT accepted all our recommendations so that the structure of the theological seminary is more transparent.

As deputies we also asked Rev. Dr. Andrew Pol of our Canadian sister churches (previously also missionary in Sumba on behalf of the Dutch sister churches) to investigate certain development regarding the theological seminary in Waingapu, Sumba. After his visit of the seminary he could discuss his findings in a meeting of deputies.

During the past period we could give some financial assistance so that YASTRI is able to rent a building for the lectures. The title for the purchased block of land for the future college building has been finalised. At the moment YASTRI is busy developing plans for the future building of the college. In close contact with the deputies of our Dutch sister churches we monitor these development so that available funds can be provided in a responsible way. In our contact with the Dutch deputies it became clear that they are decreasing their financial contributions. For this reason it was necessary to increase the Australian contributions for the college. It was necessary to increase the levy on our local churches.

2.5. Regarding our mandate *“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).”, our deputies have tried to encourage the GGRI to seek the help of the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang (STAKRI supported by the CRC at Smithville). Seeking help in this direction is more complicated than initially thought. First of all, the seminary of the GGRI in Sumba has a MOU with SALEM, a college in Malang to which the GGRI send their students for the completion of their theological training. There are also still some questions about the accreditation of the college in Kupang. It is also remarkable that the GGRC send some of their students not to STAKRI but to SALEM in Malang.

Synod GGRI-NTT 2013 agreed to work together with STAKRI. YASTRI has asked for copies of the paperwork re the accreditation of STAKRI. Till now YASTRI did not receive this. This still needs further encouragement and contact with STAKRI/Smithville in order to work together.

2.6. Regarding our mandate *“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.”*, we can report that we as deputies tried to bring one of the minister of the GGRI-NTT to Australia with the support of the Dutch churches. The proposed candidate could not receive the necessary visa and deputies had to look for a different candidate. We expect that one of the ministers from within the Papua regional synod of the GGRI will visit our churches early 2015 in order to study English and to familiarise himself with the Australian churches.

2.7. Regarding our mandate *“To see to it that effective communication with the people involved is possible and if necessary also to make limited financial support available.”*, we acknowledge that effective communication is an important requirement to fulfil the mandate given to deputies. As deputies we are thankful that we could provide the necessary means for the necessary communication. For this reason it was possible also to provide some laptops for the students at the seminary.

2.8. Regarding our mandate *“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.”* Deputies have addressed the necessity to seek federal unity with the GGRC whenever possible. At the moment it is not possible to notice any further development in this direction. If required deputies are willing to provide some financial support in order to stimulate this unity. At the same time deputies are well aware of the fact that

this seeking of unity with another bond of churches can't come only from the GGRI. The GGRC has to be active in this respect as well.

2.9. Regarding our mandate *"To keep in contact and share information with deputies of our Dutch and Canadian sister churches regarding the GGRI churches."* We can report that we have tried to seek contact with the Dutch and the Canadian deputies regarding the churches in Indonesia. Not in every situation was this contact possible. At the moment we are confronted with the fact that the Dutch sister churches are decreasing their (financial) support of the GGRI. Deputies are of the opinion that the FRCAustralia have to seek closer contact with the Canadian churches for support. It is necessary that synod will address this also with our Canadian sister churches.

2.10. Regarding our mandate *"To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in points 2-8."*

It is with great thankfulness that we may report that all the churches within our bond generously support the work of deputies for our Indonesian sister churches and especially for the Theological Seminary in Waingapu, Sumba.

3. Recommended mandate regarding the GGRI

We recommend that synod appoint deputies with the following mandate:

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 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. To encourage the church at Mundijong to make their minister available for lectures at the seminary in Waiamaran, 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.

A.J. Pol and – if necessary – to make some finances available for his task.

6. To contact the church of Smithville and the Canadian deputies re the Indonesian churches to encourage them to seek unity with the GGRI and to continue to seek cooperation in the theological training of future minister.
7. 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.
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 monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. To ask the national and regional synod of the GGRI and GGRI-NTT respectively how they will develop this federal unity between the two bond of churches and to set a time frame in which they will seek federal unity with the GGRC.
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.

4. Specific Mandate re the GGRC

4.1 Regarding our mandate *“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.”* In consultation with the GGRC deputies could organise two series of lectures for office bearers within the GGRC. It was the intention of deputies to involve office bearers of the GGRI and the GGRM as well. Due to the fact that the invitations were sent (too late) to the general deputyship of the national synod of the GGRI and that the office bearers of the GGRM were not invited only office bearers of the GGRC were present. It was possible to organise the lectures twice. In 2013 Rev. C. Vermeulen could have a seminar about Reformed Church Polity. During the seminar he addressed the Background and Scriptural Principles of the Church Order, the authority of the Church Order, the offices in the Church, the assemblies, worship, sacraments, ceremonies and the discipline of the church. In 2014 Rev. W. van der Jagt could have a seminar with four topics: Reformed Mission – Evangelism; Relationship Church – Government according to Scripture and Confessions; Reformed Liturgy;

Church relationship with other churches. According to our contacts in the GGRC the lectures were well-received and helpful.

4.2. Regarding our mandate *“To continue to visit the synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.”* we can report that one of our deputies could attend their reconvening synod in November 2012. Deputies strongly encouraged the GGRC to seek unity with the GGRI. During their meeting it was decided to send the theological students to STAKRI (Smithville mission). It was also decided that women in office was unscriptural and thus not allowed. Unfortunately it was not possible to resolve the conflict with the GGRM. Deputies encouraged the GGRC also to seek reconciliation with the GGRM. The next synod of the GGRC will be held, the Lord permitting, in 2015 in Sabu.

4.3. Regarding our mandate *“To encourage the GGRC to strongly work towards federal unity with the GGRI and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRC Australia.”* For the activities of deputies regarding this part of our mandate we may refer to point 4.2.

4.4. Regarding our mandate *“To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point”*

With great thankfulness deputies can report that all the churches within our bond generously support the work of deputies for the GGRC. With thankfulness we can also report that the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Edmonton has contributed and is willing to contribute to the costs of the lectures for the GGRC in the year ahead.

5. Recommended mandate regarding the GGRC

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 ask the GGRC to work towards federal unity with the GGRI and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRC Australia. In order to do this the GGRC will be asked how they will develop this federal unity between the two bond of churches and to set a time frame in which they will seek federal unity with the GGRI.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 1-3.

6. General recommendation regarding deputyship Indonesian churches

During the meeting of deputies it was discussed how to find replacement

for the existing members of the deputies for contact with the Indonesian churches. According to the rules of synod the deputies have to be replaced after two terms. Deputies Indonesian churches strongly advise synod to make an exception to this rule. In the experience of the Deputies, it requires at least two terms as a deputy to gain a workable understanding of the culture and people of the Indonesian churches in order to contribute substantially to the discussions and decisions regarding the Indonesian churches. In some cases, language skills have also been acquired which greatly facilitate in the communication between the churches, especially in light of the fact that so few in Indonesia are sufficiently fluent in English. For this reason we would strongly recommend synod to reappoint the existing members of the deputyship, especially since the last synod already appointed one new member.

Contact with the Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB)

Synod Armadale 2012 decided the following:

Article 48

Decision: Synod decides to reappoint 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.

The following deputies were appointed

Article 120

Brazil

Rev J Kroeze (convenor)

Br J (John) Wielstra

Alternate: Br J Hidding

Contact

a) Since the last synod, contact with the IRB has improved significantly. Rev. J Kroeze has visited Brazil in the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 and has engaged in personal discussions with Elias Barbosa da Silva, a member of the IRB Committee of Contacts with Churches Abroad. A summary of this discussion is annexed to this report as Annex 1.

b) Further to this contact there have been various emails attempting to come to grips with what was concretely desired. Below you will find an extract from the Acts of their Synod 2006 expressing their thoughts as found in the email attached as Annex 2:

“A - These churches have fraternal contacts with our sister churches in Canada and the Netherlands;

B - We will have contacts with one more Reformed Church that is loyal and committed with the Word of God;

C - These contacts enable the exchange of advice and experience within the Reformed Faith and Practice.”

The IRB have extended invitations for us to attend their synod in annex 2 and 3.

They have also expressed again their desire for a sister church relationship as attached in Annex 4 and sent us an electronic copy of the Acts of their last synod which we have attached to this report, but not translated.

In their Acts, after having dealt with their sister church relationships, we read:

The Synod Esperança 2014 of the IRB decided as follows:

Article 81

- ii. To continue to seek initial contact with the committee [for relations with Churches Abroad] of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Evaluation

The IRB are a federation of churches established by the combined efforts of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the GKN Vrijgemaakt. The former have worked in the north east of the country and the latter in the south. They subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and have the Church Order of Dordt adapted to their situation. The resultant churches are Reformed and have set up a federation of Brazilian Reformed Churches. The number of churches is growing rapidly and so are the number of native Brazilian pastors. They have their own seminary in Recife and missionaries who are competent to teach there. They also have several schools, which depend largely on donations from abroad to survive. As part of their survival strategy they also admit children that are not of the church, but they do use the opportunity to evangelise them.

Their Reformed character comes out in the fact that they too are struggling with how to relate to our and their Dutch sister churches. This is obvious from their Acts Article 80 i, Synod 2014. This matter is being examined and a report has to be prepared before the next synod in 2015. If they cut their ties with them this support would disappear and they would, perhaps, require greater assistance from other sources.

The IRB is a young federation without much theological or financial strength, and little experience in maintaining international contacts. However, they are striving to be Reformed and, therefore, there is a desire for contact with faithful reformed churches worldwide and also support. Your deputies are sympathetic to this request.

In view of the distance between Brazil and Australia most support will have to be theological distance support or financial, but it is within the realm of possibilities that ministers or other professionals from the FRCAs might lecture in their seminary or assist them in their schools and in other ways.

Impediments

One of the issues that perhaps stands in the way of meaningful contact is Article 58 of Synod Armadale 1990 as maintained in Article 84 of Synod Rockingham 2003, Ground 2, which, in relation to several Presbyterian churches, says:

2. As a small bond of churches it is important and practical for us to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically or historically

closer to us and for whom we have greater responsibility. (see Acts of Synod 1990, Art.58). Since these churches are in the same geographical area as our Dutch sister churches we can allow them to exercise relations with these churches in a meaningful way.

The same can be said of the contact with the IRB, for the Canadian and Dutch sister churches are in a much better position to offer meaningful support. We wonder if this decision is an impediment or not to furthering our contact with the IPB. If it is we suggest that it be rescinded.

Recommendations

- 1) that Synod mandate deputies to work toward the establishment of sister church relations by obtaining more detailed information on their confessions, church order and international contacts and support.
- 2) that Synod mandate deputies to enquire how we can best be of assistance to them.
- 3) that Synod mandate deputies to offer whatever support we can in the interim period.

Grounds

1. The IRB shows the marks of a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The IRB needs theological, academic and financial support.

Convenor

Rev. J Kroeze

Deputy

J Wielstra

Annex 1

Re: The Reformed Churches of Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil)

Submitted by J Kroeze.

Report on a conversation with Elias Barbosa da Silva, member of the CCIE (Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad) of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil, held in Maceió in January 2013.

In our discussion I asked him to clarify what the intention of their request for a sister church relationship with the FRCAs was. He said that they wanted contact on the basis of the catholicity of the Church. They are aware of our fidelity to the Word of God and confessions and, therefore, desire a sister church relationship with us. They are aware of the obligations of such a relationship and would fulfil them. (Elias is a competent English speaker and promises to maintain the contact if the FRCAs enter into a sister church relationship with them.)

They are also in need of support of many kinds, such as teachers and financial support, and, although distance might make the provision of physical aid difficult, remembering each other in prayer in our respective concrete situations is also desired.

I asked Elias if he could specify some of the situations where aid might be needed and he listed the following:

1) They have a budding theological training centre on the outskirts of Recife in a place called Aldeia, which needs funding to maintain and to complete the student housing.

They need funding for the training and support of the students also. A library must be built up and some students need financial support.

They might also request the loan of qualified pastors to teach.

2) They need financial aid for evangelism (for us - missionary) purposes. This would go primarily toward paying a minister set aside for that purpose.

3) They need funding to pay pastors or build or buy houses for the pastors of some congregations. Many of the congregations are poor and small and are unable to afford a pastor or, if they can afford his salary, cannot provide him with a house.

4) They need help to maintain their schools. These schools are not parent run schools, but are run by the church. They are supported to quite a large extent by the Can Ref Churches, Hamilton and Surrey and others, but the whole budget is not covered. The rest of the budget is to come from school fees paid by the parents. The problem is that the parents are often poor and can't afford

to pay high fees. This limits the number of parents who can send their children to this school, with the result that there is an annual shortfall between costs and income. They can't charge what they would like to and they can't get enough students at the present level of fees either.

Another school related problem is the lack of Reformed teachers. They do use Presbyterian teachers at times, but since not all Presbyterians are reformed it is a less than happy solution and one that should disappear. All the teachers either have their teaching certificates or are studying to acquire them.

The schools actually do evangelise and all students receive reformed religious instruction, whether they are reformed or not. The parents are advised of this before they enrol their children and are quite open to it. Saturdays are used for contact with the parents. Also once per year the school gives a musical presentation before the church service and the parents also are invited to attend.

John Kroeze

Annex 2

From: elijahbs@gmail.com
To: johngr.kroeze@gmail.com
CC: elissandrorabelo@hotmail.com; alexandrinomoura@hotmail.com; luizfernando1517@gmail.com
Subject: [CCIE - IRB - BRAZIL] CONTACTS
Date: Wed, 1 Oct 2014 15:57:26 -0300

To: Committee of Contacts with Churches Abroad from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

From: CCIE – Committee of Contacts with Churches Abroad – Reformed Churches of Brazil

Topic: Continuing the contact to be in a relationship as sister churches

Dear brothers,

It has some time since our last contact by e-mail. Our committee was tasked to start the contact with the goal to start a sister-church relationship with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. I, as a CCIE member, had an informal meeting with Rev. Kroeze, when he was here in Maceió at the end of 2012, on the occasion of the institution of the Reformed Church in Maceió. In that time we had a brief conversation and he was able to have a feeling on why we want to start contact with you. This week (last Monday), I had the opportunity to talk again with Rev. Kroeze by phone, and it was very good to talk with him. The

CCIE made the commitment to send this letter to you, so that you could have a concrete material in your hands explain our desire.

Since 2006, the Reformed Churches of Brazil decided to start contacts with the FRCA. The reasons were basically the followings, registered in the Act of 6th National Synod held in November of 2006:

“A - These churches have fraternal contacts with our sister churches in Canada and the Netherlands;

B - We will have contacts with one more Reformed Church that is loyal and committed with the Word of God;

C - These contacts enable the exchange of advice and experience within the Reformed Faith and Practice.”

The CCIE is named with a term of two years and we confess that during the year we failed in fulfilling our task. Now, we want to assure you that, despite we understand that distance can be a barrier, the technologies that we have in our favor, make us able to keep a meaningful contact. We have already shared with you the acts of our last Synod, and also invite you to participate in our Synod. Yes, we know that Australia is on the other side of the world, but we believe that contacts like these are able to keep us at least praying for each other, as we know the important activities held in sister churches.

In some point in our conversation with Rev. John Kroeze, it was talked about what kind of projects we are running that maybe a support would be needed. We talked opened and clearly about that, being very clear that even donations would be very welcomed, as in our confederation we have few churches with few members and of course we have needs, the relation that we are looking for is not based on looking for donations. As you can read, the Synods decision have three very important points that move us towards relationship with you.

So, brothers, we hope and pray that our contacts will improve. We assure you that we will do our best to keep a meaningful contact.

May the Lord bless you.

Elder Elias Barbosa da Silva

CCIE – Secretary

Annex 3

Elias Barbosa <elijahbs@gmail.com>

25 Sep

to anthon, Matthijs, John, pk, Pieter, me

Dear brothers,

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you as you receive this correspondence.

Despite we have sent you the last minutes from our last Synod, which informs the date of the following Synod, we apologize for send you this reminder only now.

We would like to formally invite you to participate in our next Synod, which will be held in Esperança-PB, from November 03rd to 07th of 2014. We don't have the agenda yet, but we can anticipate to you that among the subjects are ecclesiastical exams for candidates to be a pastor and for seminarians students to be allowed to preach their own sermons during their training, beyond the presentation of the final report from our Committee of Contacts with Churches Abroad.

This invitation is also being extend to the Reformed Church in Australia (FRCAs) , which we are in process of having sister church relationship.

We would appreciate so much your presence with us.

May God bless your churches!

El. Elias Barbosa da Silva

CCIE -Secretary

Annex 4

Elias Barbosa <elijahbs@gmail.com>

13 Nov

to me, Chris, Adriano

From: CCIE – Committee of Contact with Churches Abroad from the Reformed Churches of Brazil

To: Reformed Churches in Australia

Dear brothers in Christ,

First of all, we would like to show our gratitude to our God for He gathers His church world wide. We would like to reaffirm our desire to establish

a sister-church relationship with you sharing the Faith and the gifts from the Lord to serve each other in true Love, so that we can make evident the deeds which are fruit of our faithfulness to the scriptures. For this reason we write this letter to you.

The Synod has nominated new members to the CCIE, they are:

Rev. Adriano Gama – rev.adrianogama@gmail.com

Elder Chris Boersema – chrisboersema@gmail.com

Elder Elias Barbosa – elijahbs@gmail.com

We pray that God will bless us in the next two years, so that we can have a clear and responsible relationship.

We take this opportunity to send you the Acts of our last Synod. We highlight that the next Synod will take place in Recife, in May 2015, from the 11th to the 15th.

Send our greetings to all the churches in Australia.

In Christ,

CCIE – The Committee of Contact with Churches Abroad

Rev. Adriano Gama

Elder Chris Boersema

Elder Elias Barbosa

Deputies for contact with the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

Report and recommendations to Synod 2015

Esteemed Brothers,

Synod 2012 appointed deputies with the following mandate:

“..... to make a careful investigation of this church (FERC) according to BC Art 29, exploring the feasibility of a sister church relationship, and presenting a detailed report and accompanying recommendations to Synod 2015.” (Acts of Synod 2012 art 22).

I. FERC History

The FERC had its beginnings in the 1960s as a small group of high school students looking to the Christian faith instead of the pagan faiths of their Chinese parents. Many divergent views brought them through a Baptist, Arminian, and a liberal Presbyterian phase and finally to the Reformed faith of salvation by grace alone. Coming to the Reformed doctrines of grace was the result of mission work by the Protestant Reformed Church of America (PRCA).

The FERC has for many years worked tirelessly to nurture a good understanding of the blessings of the Gospel of grace as confessed and embraced in the great reformation and as defined in the Three Forms of Unity. The sister church relationship with the PRCA has recently ended largely as a result of a dispute over the correct biblical teaching concerning divorce and remarriage.

For a more complete understanding of the history of the FERC, a brief history and a current overview of the FERC is attached. (Appendix A)

II. Meetings

Apart from many email exchanges, deputies met together on five occasions. Extensive information about the FERC was obtained and circulated amongst deputies, and discussed. Formal correspondence with the FERC was exchanged and discussed. Good and timely responses to requests for information were received from Singapore. An invitation was received from the FERC for us to visit Singapore in order to discuss in greater depth, face to face, the common areas and the differences between the FERC and the FRCA.

March, 2014:

In order to properly attend to the mandate deputies decided to send two of their number to Singapore in March 2014 in order to benefit from personal contact and from discussions with the elders and leaders of the church. Much could be gained by being able to experience and observe the life of the congregation.

Prior to the visit, the brothers in Singapore, in cooperation with the deputies, put agendas and programs together.

The FERC has adopted: “Guidelines for Fraternal Church Relationships.” (Appendix B)

These rules define *three* levels of fraternal church relationships. The FERC rules for fraternal relationships that accords most closely to the FRCA rules is the FERC level 2 relationship. A more detailed report of the visit is attached (Appendix C).

June, 2014:

A second visit to Singapore was made in June 2014 when Rev T VanSpronsen was invited to be the speaker at the annual Bible Camp of the FERC. Br and Sr Fokkema also attended the camp of their own volition. This four day camp was an excellent opportunity to experience the life of the FERC at close quarters.

The involvement of the youth of the church in practice at this camp was amazing. The group discussions showed great in-depth knowledge and a strong desire for a meaningful engagement with the Reformed faith in the daily lives of young and old.

In addition Rev VanSpronsen was invited to preach the Word on two consecutive Sundays. This camp visit was also an excellent opportunity to expand on the previous visit in March. Consequently a second meeting was held after the camp week.

III. Conclusion

After undertaking “*a careful investigation of the FERC according to BC Art 29*” deputies can conclude that the three marks of the true church can be found in the FERC, these being:

1. The pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein
2. The pure administration of the Sacraments as instituted by our Lord is maintained
3. Church discipline is administered according to the Word of God

In short, the FERC governs itself according to the pure Word of God, and regards Jesus Christ as their only Head.

We further list the following considerations:

1. English is the first language in the FERC.
2. Both FERC and FRCA hold to the same Reformed confessional standards and a similar Reformed heritage.

3. Both FERC and FRCA hold to the same Reformed ecumenical forms

When a sister church relationship is established:

1. Attestations of membership can be exchanged to each other's churches.
2. Ministers may preach and administer the sacraments in each other's churches
3. Visitors from either country can present attestations to participate in the other's sacraments.
4. Delegates may be invited to attend at each other's major assemblies.

Furthermore, because of the geographic proximity, we have also concluded that there are meaningful mutual benefits for both the FRCA and the FERC in a sister church relationship.

These benefits can be summarized as follows:

1. Singaporean students studying in Australia can with confidence for their pastoral care be able to study in Australia.
2. FRCA members moving to, travelling to, or through Singapore can with confidence attend a sister church in Singapore.
3. Mutual advice and support with regards to doctrinal and pastoral matters.
4. Cooperation and support for potential Mission work in SE Asia.

IV. **Recommendation of Deputies to Synod Baldivis 2015**

Taking into account the above conclusions, the deputies recommend that Synod 2015 decide that:

1. Synod extend an offer of a sister church relationship with the FERC according to the adopted rules of the FRCA.
2. Should the FERC accept the offer of a sister church relationship, this relationship is to take effect from the date of such written acceptance by the FERC.
3. The current deputies be discharged from their appointment, and that Synod appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) Contact the FERC with the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015.
 - b) Continue contact and oversee the carrying out of the decision of Synod.
 - c) Report to the next Synod the results of their work.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have sufficiently demonstrated that the FERC 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 and the FRCA from a sister church relationship.
3. Appointing of new deputies will ensure that the decision is followed up and carried out. Furthermore, there needs to be a liaising body between the two federations.

Respectfully submitted with brotherly greetings in the Lord,

Br SC Fokkema (Secretary)

Rev E Rupke

Rev T VanSpronsen (Convenor)

Appendix A

Brief History of FERC, Singapore Updated October 2013

FERC had its beginnings as a Bible class in a public school; the “Monk’s Hill Secondary School”. In the year 1962 a teacher at that school, Mr Goh Seng Fong, began to witness of the Gospel among the students. As the Lord blessed his endeavours he met every day with a group of students at recess as well as before and after school. This teacher, then in his twenties had a tremendous zeal for God and with his love for teaching and his friendliness, it is not surprising that many students flocked to such Bible class gatherings. These classes were held outside of the school classrooms, and outside of school hours but still on the school grounds.

As the group grew, it was brought under the wing of the “Youth For Christ” (YFC) movement and became formally known as the “Monk’s Hill YFC.” Under the diligent labours of Mr Goh the group flourished, and grew in knowledge of God’s Word. These were just young high-school students whose siblings and parents were mostly non-Christians and worshipped Buddha and/or ancestors. They received no support from their families in their quest for Bible knowledge. Yes the group flourished, but with knowledge there came disagreements. This led to the first separation. Some members in the Monk’s hill YFC group had come under the influence a fundamentalist Baptist Pastor. Sadly many of these impressionable young people left the group and joined with the Baptist Pastor.

By the grace of God a small group remained with Mr Goh. Between 1968 and 1969 these young Christians also began to see the errors of the YFC movement and its connections to neo- evangelicals such as Billy Graham. It was originally planned to join with and become part of the Life Bible Presbyterian Church, a plan that never materialised due to disagreements, again over doctrinal matters with that church. The group was left to fend for itself with no ties to any instituted church. Something had to be done. They needed a Pastor with proper theological training. So in September of 1972, Mr Goh departed to the US for ministerial training. Because he had no financial support, the young group pooled all its resources to come up with \$800. With this and his own savings he set out. In the US he enrolled in a Baptist college which also provided him financial assistance. Mr Goh was not at that time fully persuaded of the Baptist’s position on baptism, but considered the matter a non-issue.

With the departure of Mr Goh and his leadership the attendance gradually dwindled to just 11 persons. It was at this time that the Lord raised up a leader, Brother Johnson See (still with the FERC today) among their midst. Through the labours of Brother Johnson and the remaining persons, the group gradually grew in numbers. Students from schools other than Monk’s Hill also joined the group and attendance at the weekly Saturday club meetings where Johnson

spoke grew. By 1975 the group numbered 70 young persons.

The need to either institute a church or join an existing church gained greater urgency with the growth of the group. There were some who felt that the group should institute a church, with Mr Goh as Pastor after his return from the USA, others felt that they could join an existing church. The disagreement resulted in some leaving the group while the remainder felt that they could not join any existing church because of fundamental differences over doctrine and Christian living. Those remaining chose the first option – to institute a church. In that same year (1975) the Lord in His wisdom introduced the group to the Reformed faith that FERCS still holds to this day. In Singapore the Reformed faith was largely unknown even among Presbyterian and Anglican congregations that have a Reformed heritage. Coincidentally, two ministers from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), Prof H Hoeksema and Rev C Hanko, were passing through Singapore at that time. A brother (Mr Ong Keng Ho who was not with the group then) who was familiar with Reformed doctrines knew of their visit to Singapore and encouraged them to hold a series of three lectures. These lectures and the follow up literature provided by the PRCA ministers sparked the flame of the Gospel truths in Singapore. All this happened while their Pastor-to-be, Mr Goh, was studying for the ministry at a Baptist college in the USA.

A tiny flame had been ignited in Singapore, and gradually some in the group began to see the truths of the Bible as taught by the PRCA ministers and confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. A former student of Mr Goh who by now was himself a qualified teacher, Br Lau Chin Kwee, began to read and study the Heidelberg Catechism and became convinced of the truth of Reformed faith. He was so excited by what he read and so strongly convinced that this contained the clear Biblical teaching that he began teaching the Catechism to the group. Because many in the group had significant Arminian leanings he faced much opposition but he persisted nonetheless.

In December 1976 Mr Goh returned as Rev Goh, a staunch Baptist. Not long after, doctrinal differences between him and some group leaders came to a head. Rev Goh eventually left the group and several members went with him. Others were disillusioned by the break and left to go to other churches. It was a time of great grief for the group. The Reformed Truth, while now revealed in Singapore, was by no means firmly anchored. There was strong opposition particularly from those who held to Arminian doctrinal teachings. It was a time of great trial, yet by the grace of the Lord, Br Lau Chin Kwee continued to teach and instruct in the face of much opposition and factionalism. Some grew in faith and knowledge, but others left. In January 1978 Br Lau left his job as teacher for the full time ministry and was ordained as the first Pastor on 5th September 1982.

In 1978 the group requested help from the PRCA. Over the next 25 years this reformed church provided extensive support by sending ministers to Singapore to teach, advise, nurture and lead the group to ultimate institution of the first truly reformed church in Singapore. The work of the PRCA and its several ministers who lived and worked faithfully in Singapore for many years, notably, Pastor Arie den Hartog (1980-1986; 2002-2005) and Pastor Jason Kortering (1991-2002), before and after institution in January 1982 should be seen for what it is; The work of our covenant God. The institution of the church in 1982 with the ordination of eight office bearers, some of whom started their life with the Lord as high school students at Monk's Hill school under Mr Goh, was a truly emotional experience that still lives in the memory of those who were privileged to be present on that day.

Over the years FERC had grown in numbers and in knowledge. The church was pastor for many years by Pastor Lau Chin Kwee, who had undertaken theological studies in order to enter into the ministry.

In 1986 the Singapore church instituted a second congregation, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (CERC). Her first Pastor was Jaikishin Mahtani, a Singaporean man converted to the Reformed faith from Hinduism. As a result there were then two congregations in Singapore forming the denomination known as Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS). What followed were years of growth in number but also in knowledge of the Word and the Three Forms of Unity. While there were many struggles and disappointments, and the devil sought to destroy the church, the Lord continued to bless the church richly, not least through the work of the PRCA and its Pastors.

From the 1980s, ERCS had faced the question of whether the remarriage of an innocent party, divorced on grounds of adultery, was permitted by Scripture. Due to other tasks on hand, in- depth study into this question was delayed till 1999 when then Elder Paul Goh submitted a study paper to the Classis which first affirmed the position that Scripture permits the innocent party in a lawful divorce to remarry. This study paper formed the basis of Classis's own study into the matter through a Classical Study Committee led by the late Pastor Cheah Fook Meng. That study arrived at the same conclusion as Elder Paul Goh's (note: Elder Goh had however changed his position by then), and resulted in a recommendation that the ERCS adopt the position that the remarriage of an innocent party in a lawful divorce was permitted in Scripture. The Federation format of the ERCS meant that the Board of Elders of both FERC and CERC also had to take a position on the matter. The BOE of FERC decided in 2005 to adopt the same position as that recommended by the Classical Study Committee. This decision led to the resignation of Pastor Lau Chin Kwee in 2006. In the meantime, the BOE of CERC decided to take

the opposite position on the matter of divorce and remarriage. As differences between FERC and CERC proved irreconcilable, the decision was taken by ERCS Classis in June 2007 to dissolve the ERCS denomination.

During the years of 2006-2011, FERC was without a resident Pastor, to sustain the pulpit, the Lord provided ministers from churches of like-minded faith to come to FERC's aid. Amongst some of the ministers that preached in FERC on a regular basis were: Pastor Chris Coleborn (EPCA, Australia), Pastor JJ Lim (PCC, Singapore), Pastor Ben Berends (CRC, Canada), Pastor Winston Huizinga (FRCA, Australia), the late Pastor Thomas Chong (PRPC, Singapore), Pastor Paul Chong (Ebenezer Church, Singapore), Pastor Willy Ng (Criswell Tabernacle, Singapore), Pastor Linus Chua (PCC, Singapore), and Brother Mark Chen (Life BPC, Singapore). In the initial aftermath of the split, several CERC elders also assisted to preach occasionally. This practice ceased soon after however. There were also other visiting speakers as well as members of CERC who gave assistance on a 'personal' basis. Attempts to maintain lower level and "unofficial" links with CERC through interaction between FERC and CERC youths were later discontinued when it was realised that CERC youths were using this interaction as a platform to raise the issue of divorce and remarriage with their FERC counterparts.

Today, FERC congregation numbers about 307 members, including children. There is slow but steady growth through the testimony of members to friends and associates. The church owns its own two-story church building. She is governed by a Session comprising a Board of Elders (BOE) of six and seven deacons in the Board of Deacons. FERC has one minister, Rev Chong Nam Tuck, who was ordained in 2011 after training for the ministry at the Canadian Reformed Church College in Hamilton Canada. Since it is hard to get elders, deacons take on many duties besides their official duties, in order to alleviate the workload of the elders. For example, they assist in the instruction for youth, and do administrative work, make proposals, etc.

There are three services held each Sunday. The main morning service is in English, while another service is held simultaneously in Mandarin for a small number of the older members who do not speak English fluently, or in some cases not at all. Following the morning service there is good congregational interaction over a coffee etc. This is followed by lunch that some have bought with them. This intense congregational contact is highly valued highly since they cannot always see each other during the week. Also, after the morning service there are many meetings held for Bible instruction and Bible study. This is followed by the afternoon service in which instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism is sometimes given.

Care groups meet during the week or on the Lord's Day on a bi-weekly basis with Church Prayer meetings held on alternate Fridays. FERC has many

programs for the children, for the youth, senior youth, and students at tertiary institutes, and also for the seniors (grandparents, etc).

FERC youth are taught the Heidelberg Catechism and the other two creeds. There are several activities for the youth, centred on teaching the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity. The youth are equipped and trained for the day of their public confession of faith. They also spend time together singing Christian Hymns using guitars and other instruments. Christian “rock music” is not tolerated. FERC youth are encouraged to testify of their faith and be a witness to their unbelieving school friends. This happens quite a lot in fact. It is not unusual that a teenager comes to church through this type of witness.

FERC seeks to have a liturgy that is respectful, reverent, dignified and Reformed in character. Singing is based on a collection of three hymnals including the old American Psalter Hymnal. Accompaniment is by way of a piano. No ‘modern’ musical instruments are permitted in the worship service. There are no choirs. Children attend the entire worship service and are not shunted off to a Sunday School. A crèche with a sound system is provided giving the ability for carers to listen to the service while in the crèche.

As of today FERC has no official union, sister/fraternal relations with any church or bond. The PRCA and our former sister church, CERC, have since the dissolution of the ERCS chosen to maintain their distance. Nevertheless FERC continues to maintain contact with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA), Canadian Reformed Church (CRC), and other reformed independent local churches in Singapore which had given FERC much support with pulpit supply during the period of being without a minister

Submitted by FERC BOE



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Guidelines for Fraternal Church Relationships

1 Introduction

1.1 The First Evangelical Reformed Church (FERC) believes that it is our sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the Church on earth by establishing fraternal relationships with all churches that have obtained like precious faith with us (Jn.17:20-23, 1Cor.12:12-27, Eph.4:1-3, and Article 85 of Church Order).¹

1.2 To that effect, the purpose of this paper is to lay down the principles and guidelines by which we are to establish fraternal church relationships with other assemblies.² One of these guidelines allows for the establishment of "less complete" fraternal relationships with domestic and foreign churches, provided that the stipulations are laid down clearly.

1.3 Through our contacts with other churches over the years, we find it increasingly difficult to operate without defining what is meant by "less complete ties" or "less complete fraternal relationships" and what stipulations should govern us.

1.4 Therefore, the Board of Elders of FERC has instructed the Contact Committee (CC) to develop a policy for fraternal church relationships to augment the above guideline and serve as a basis for our work.

1.5 This policy delineates the relationship framework, the demarcation between each relationship level within that framework, and the governing stipulations.

2 Relationship Framework

2.1 There are 3 levels of fraternal church relationships that we may establish with other assemblies:

2.1.1 **Level 1: Denomination Relationship** – This is based on adoption of and adherence to the same denominational constitution and by-laws, and the same confessional standards and ecclesiastical distinctives.³ It would entail the formation of an official denomination with its accompanying Classis/Synod.

2.1.2 **Level 2: Sister-Church Relationship** – This is based on adherence to the same or similar⁴ confessional standards and essential ecclesiastical distinctives⁵, not to be contradicted

¹ "Article 85 – Foreign Churches whose usages regarding nonessentials differ from ours shall not be rejected." *The Psalter: With Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Choral Section*. Grand Rapids: M.I.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991, p.189.

² An assembly can mean a church or a denomination. By "broadest assembly," this paper refers to the largest representation of churches within a denomination, e.g. Synod or Classis (or equivalent), or in the case of local churches without denominational affiliations, the Consistory or Session (or equivalent).

³ Ecclesiastical distinctives are practices and creedal positions not expressed in the adopted confessional standards, e.g., practice of exclusive psalm-singing during worship and position on divorce and remarriage.

⁴ By "similar" we mean the difference is mostly in the expression, and where the substance or interpretation differs, the churches concerned agree to disagree or acquiesce and it does not pose an issue to the fraternal relationship. The broadest assemblies of the churches concerned will have to determine which confessional standards are considered similar, including any exception therein, and whether any

in each other's adopted standards, whether explicitly stated (including exclusions) or expressly interpreted.

2.1.3 Level 3: "Churches-In-Fellowship" Relationship – This is based on adherence to the same or similar confessional standards without the need to adopt the same ecclesiastical distinctives.⁶

2.2 In establishing the above framework, we will not need to differentiate between local and foreign churches, especially in this day and age when the world is getting "smaller" and geographical distance poses little hindrance to Internet communications.

3 Demarcation of Relationships

3.1 Level 1 Relationship (Denominational) – This has the following implications:⁷

3.1.1 The creation of a denomination. An Evangelical Reformed denomination may be created in the event that (a) a local church grows out of the present FERC congregation, or (b) an established church or denomination expresses interest in joining FERC to form a new denomination. In both instances, the establishment of a denomination must be guided by the definition and stipulations articulated in 2.1.1.

3.1.2 Mutual recognition of each other's congregations as true local churches in the Body of Christ, based on acceptance and practice of the same denominational constitution, by-laws, the same confessional standards (i.e., Three Forms of Unity) and ecclesiastical distinctives, and use of the same denomination name.

3.1.3 Mutual recognition of each other's ministers, according them the privileges to preach from the pulpit, administer the sacraments, and be eligible for calls to serve in each other's congregations.

3.1.4 Mutual recognition of each other's offices and membership attestations with the attendant facilities to allow members in good standing to partake of each other's Lord's Supper and transfer membership to each other's congregations.

3.1.5 Mutual agreement and adoption of non-creedal faith and practice matters⁸, *apart from those stated in the common adopted confessional standards*.

3.1.6 Mutual adoption and practice of the same church order and worship liturgy, using the same official version of the Holy Bible, singing from the same hymnals and Psalters, and having the same form of worship.

difference in substance or interpretation matters.

⁵ The broadest assemblies of the churches concerned will have to determine which ecclesiastical distinctives are essential to the relationship at the onset or when new ones are discovered or adopted.

⁶ Fraternal churches may have or adopt more ecclesiastical distinctives in or apart from their confessional standards, but which do not form the basis of Level 3 relationship, as agreed at the onset of the relationship or when they arise.

⁷ These are largely adapted from the Constitution of the Contact Committee of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (see Ref. 6.1). Note: The ERCS denomination has since been dissolved.

⁸ These refer to matters (including doctrinal positions) deemed important enough to hinder Level 1 relationship, if not agreed upon, and will be determined by the broadest assemblies of the churches concerned at the onset of the relationship or when they arise.

3.1.7 Mutual concern and interest in each other's church lives, informing one another of major events and happenings, and giving mutual counsels in issues affecting the relationship, especially doctrinal controversies and disciplinary cases.

3.1.8 Mutual support and participation in the denominational work of Classis⁹, Classical committees, and mutually established church activities¹⁰, contributing financially to such denominational labors on a regular basis.

3.1.9 Participation in certain denominational and mission activities are subject to invitation by the initiating body.

3.2 **Level 2 Relationship (Sister-Church)** – This has the following implications:

3.2.1 Mutual recognition of each other's congregations, as in para.3.1.2, but based on acceptance and practice of the same (i.e., Three Forms of Unity) or similar confessional standards (e.g., Westminster Confession of Faith) and essential ecclesiastical distinctives.

3.2.2 Mutual recognition of each other's ministers, according them the privileges as in para.3.1.3.

3.2.3 Mutual recognition of each other's offices and membership attestations with the attendant facilities, as in para.3.1.4.

3.2.4 Mutual agreement to accept differences¹¹ in each other's non-creedal faith and practice matters and not militate against each other over them.

3.2.5 Mutual concern and interest in each other's church lives, as in para.3.1.7.

3.2.6 Mutual recommendation of members to attend each other's churches when they are in the locality of one another's churches while away from their own congregations and not in the vicinity of churches in the same denomination.

3.2.7 Mutual agreement to send and receive delegates, where applicable, to each other's broadest assemblies, e.g., Synod or Classis (with delegates accorded the status of observers, unless determined otherwise), co-operation in mission work, and participation of members in each other's church activities, including denominational programmes like theological training and Reformed churches' conferences.

3.2.8 Participation in certain denominational and mission activities are subject to invitation by the initiating body.

3.3 **Level 3 Relationship ("Churches-In-Fellowship")** – This has all the implications of Level 2 relationship, but with the following refinements:

3.3.1 Mutual recognition of each other's congregations, as in para.3.1.2, but based on

⁹ The denominational work of Classis shall be carried out on the basis of equal representation irrespective of the size of individual church within the denomination.

¹⁰ For example, the annual Bible Camp and the annual Reformation Day Conference.

¹¹ The broadest assemblies of the churches concerned will have to determine if the differences are acceptable at the onset of the relationship or when they arise.

acceptance and practice of only the same or similar confessional standards without the ecclesiastical distinctives¹².

3.3.2 Preaching privileges are subject to BOE approval. Privileges to administer the Lord's Supper and Baptism are also subject to BOE approval where the understanding of the meaning and conduct of these privileges are aligned with ours.

3.3.3 Participation in certain denominational and mission activities is subject to invitation by the initiating body.

3.4 **Matrix** - Annex B gives a matrix view of the above demarcation between each relationship level.

4 Stipulations for Relationships

4.1 No fraternal church relationship shall be considered as established until the broadest assemblies of the churches concerned have approved it. Upon approval, the churches represented by the broadest assemblies shall be accorded the same level of fraternal privileges.

4.2 Fraternal churches in Level 1 relationship shall abide by the decisions made in their broadest assemblies. These decisions, however, are not binding upon fraternal churches in other levels of relationship.

4.3 Fraternal churches shall not interfere with each other's autonomous governance, unless in matters affecting the relationship.

4.4 For Level 2 relationship, any intended change to the confession, essential distinctive, church order or liturgical forms 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.

4.5 Except for Level 1 relationship, fraternal church relationships are not associative; that is, if *Assembly A* is in a fraternity with *Assembly B* and *Assembly B* is in another fraternity with *Assembly C*, *Assembly A* is not deemed to be in the same fraternity with *Assembly C*.

4.6 Fraternal churches shall consult each other when seeking to establish a separate fraternal church relationship with other assemblies, as this may affect the doctrinal sensitivities of the existing fraternity.

4.7 In the event of disagreement over confessional interpretations, ecclesiastical distinctives, or non-creedal faith and practice matters, the following shall apply:

4.7.1 Fraternal churches in Level 1 relationship shall abide by the church order or procedures, if any, established by their denomination to deal with doctrinal controversies, overtire, protest, appeal, or censure, as appropriate (see Ref. 6.3).

4.7.2 Except for Level 1 relationship, a fraternal church may lodge a notice of concern¹³, via

¹² The broadest assemblies of the churches concerned will have to determine if the differences in essential ecclesiastical distinctives are acceptable at the onset of the relationship or when they arise, and if so, to agree not to militate against each other over them.

¹³ As a matter of propriety, informal discussion and clarification with the discordant church should be initiated before the notice of concern is lodged.

her broadest assembly, with the broadest assembly of the discordant church.

4.7.3 Where a fraternity comprises 3 or more assemblies, the discordant assembly shall be excluded from the fraternity based on majority consensus, if reconciliation is untenable. This practice will only apply to Level 1 denominational relationships.

4.8 If a fraternal church wishes to withdraw from the fraternity, she shall give notice, via her broadest assembly¹⁴, to the broadest assemblies of the fraternal churches concerned, where applicable. A discordant assembly is deemed to have withdrawn from the fraternity if she disregards any notice of concern raised to her.

4.9 The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies. This can be done by sending each other the Acts , Minutes of meetings or the relevant decisions of the respective churches.

¹⁴ This implies that her broadest assembly also wishes to withdraw from the fraternity.

5 Conclusion

5.1 This policy provides a practical framework for FERC to pursue fraternal church relationships with other assemblies.

5.2 The demarcation between each relationship level and the governing stipulations will be refined as we gain more experience in our contacts with other churches.

5.3 Finally, we recognize that it takes two hands to clap. Therefore, the assemblies concerned must be agreeable at least in principle to the operating framework of this policy at any one level before it can be mutually practised when relating to each other at that level.

5.4 May the LORD use this relationship framework for the furtherance of His Kingdom by promoting greater unity amongst churches that have obtained like precious faith with us. Amen.

6 References

6.1 Constitution of the Contact Committee of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (now obsolete).

6.2 Article 85 of Church Order drawn up in the National Synod of Dordrecht (held in 1618 and 1619).

6.3 Handbook of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (now obsolete).

Annex A: General Doctrines of the Reformed Faith

The FERC will use the following general tenets of the Reformed Faith as the basis for establishing "Churches-In-Fellowship" (Level 3) relationships with other Reformed churches.

1 Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

The first general doctrine is Scripture alone. The Reformed faith has a high view of the sacred Scriptures. Our Reformed confessional standards speak of the sacred Scriptures as the only sufficient rule for our faith and belief. The Belgic Confession says, "We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith". This statement gives two reasons why we ought to depend solely on the Scriptures for our faith. They are holy, that is, they are given to us by the holy God; and they are canonical, that is, they are God's authoritative rule for our doctrine and life.

Furthermore, we also confess that the Scriptures given in the original autograph were immediately inspired by God. The Scriptures given by divine inspiration are thus inerrant and completely reliable, that is, infallible. We also believe in God's providential care of the Scriptures. While we do not have the original Scriptures today, God by His special care has preserved His Word for us in the original languages.

The Reformed Faith relies solely on the Scriptures to regulate its doctrine, worship, and life. In so doing, we reject all human traditions, opinions, and authorities.

2 Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone)

The Reformed Faith confesses that God is sovereign in all that He does. He works out all things in creation and salvation according to the "counsel of His own will" (Eph.1:11).

The God we believe is a decreeing God. He has foreordained all things even before the world was made. The beginning and the end of time, the rise and fall of nations, the development of the world and the church, the salvation of His elect people in Christ, and the destiny of every human person are all determined in eternity before He created time and space.

God works out His eternal plan and purpose sovereignly. By this we mean that He is not influenced by any external factors in planning and executing His decree. As God, He acts independently and freely. He is absolutely sovereign in His will and actions. While God in His grace hears the cries and prayers of His people, what He does is never influenced by the decision of man. His ultimate purpose in all things is that His own handiwork may resound with a hymn of praise to Him, saying, "To God be the glory alone."

God's absolute sovereignty is especially seen in His work of salvation. Salvation is not a decision of man. Salvation is also not a joint cooperation between man's free will and God's free grace. Salvation is from beginning to end a work of God's sovereignty. It begins with sovereign predestination, whereby in eternity God has chosen a people for Himself in Christ. This choice is not based on merits. It is also not conditioned upon man's free will. God creates an elect people according to His own pleasure and will.

3 Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

The Reformed Faith teaches that fallen man is totally ruined by sin. The Fall did not cause only a slight damage to his soul. The Fall brought spiritual death to every sinner. As a dead sinner, man has no spiritual power on his own to turn to Christ for salvation. He needs the Spirit's regenerating power to give him a new birth before he can believe in Christ. In the words of Luther, his will is bound or enslaved by sin. Sin has made every one of us dead and dull in our spiritual senses. Since man cannot do anything to save himself, God must come with His free grace to deliver him from his sin and misery. Only God's grace can free the enslaved will and make it willing to turn to Christ for salvation. Only God's grace can overpower man's sin-ruined nature and make the sinner embrace Christ.

4 Sola Christus (Christ Alone)

The Reformed Faith believes that salvation is accomplished by Christ's atoning death. Concerning Christ's death, we teach that Christ died to atone the sins of the elect alone. While we certainly believe that the value of the atonement is sufficient to save all, God designed the atonement to save His people alone. The Bible teaches this by constantly emphasizing the substitutional character of the atonement. Christ died for His people (Mt.1:21). Christ died for His sheep (Jn.10:15). Christ died for His Church (Eph.5:25). Christ died for the elect (Rom.8:33,34).

5 Sola Fide (Faith Alone)

According to Luther, this is the "standing and falling article of the Church". This is also the essence of the gospel. The Reformed Faith teaches that God declares a sinner righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness that is put into his account. This righteousness of Christ is not something God gives to the sinner because he has earned it with his good works and merits. This righteousness of Christ is a free gift. It is given to the sinner when he turns to Christ alone by faith alone. This, however, must not be construed that faith is the basis of our justification. Christ's righteousness is not imputed to the sinner because of the worthiness of his faith. Faith merits nothing before God. Faith is only the means whereby the sinner receives the righteousness of Christ. Even this faith that receives Christ is itself a gift from God (Eph.2:8-9).

Annex B: Demarcation Between Relationship Levels

S/N	Demarcation	Relationship Level		
		1	2	3
<i>With respect to church constitution & confession</i>				
1	Recognition of each other's congregations as true local churches	√	√	√
2	Acceptance & practice of same denominational constitution & by-laws	√		
3	Acceptance & practice of same confessional standards	√		
4	Acceptance & practice of same ecclesiastical distinctives	√		
5	Use of same denomination name	√		
6	Acceptance & practice of same essential ecclesiastical distinctives	√	√	
7	Acceptance & practice of same or similar confessional standards		√	√
8	Acceptance & practice of same general doctrines of Reformed Faith	√	√	√
<i>With respect to ministers & members</i>				
9	Recognition of each other's ministers	√	√	√
10	Eligibility for calls to serve in each other's congregation	√	√	
11	Privilege to preach from each other's pulpit	√	√	A ¹⁵
12	Privilege to administer the sacraments for each other's congregations	√	√	A ¹⁶
13	Recognition of each other's offices & membership attestations	√	√	√
14	Facility to partake of each other's Lord's Supper	√	√	A ¹⁷
15	Facility to transfer membership to each other's congregations	√	√	
<i>With respect to non-creedal faith & practice matters</i>				
16	Agreement & adoption of non-creedal faith & practice matters	√		
17	Adoption & practice of same church order & worship liturgy	√		
18	Use of same official version of the Holy Bible	√		
19	Use of same hymnals and Psalters	√		
20	Use of same form of worship	√		
<i>With respect to church lives & activities</i>				
21	Concern & interest in each other's church lives	√	√	√
22	Informing one another of major events & happenings	√	√	√
23	Giving mutual counsels in issues affecting relationship	√	√	√
24	Recommending members to attend each other's churches if in locality	√	√	√
<i>With respect to denominational activities & mission work</i>				
25	Participation in denominational committees	√		
26	Regular financial contribution to denominational labor	√		
27	Attendance in each other's broadest assemblies	√	√ ¹⁸	√ ¹⁹

¹⁵ See para. 3.3.2

¹⁶ See para. 3.3.2

¹⁷ See para 3.3.2. As preaching and administration of the sacraments require BOE approval at Level 3, so too the privilege to partake of the Lord's Supper.

¹⁸ See para. 3.2.8

¹⁹ See para. 3.3.3

28	Participation in each other's church activities	√ ²⁰	√ ²¹	√ ²²
29	Participation in each other's denominational programmes	√	√ ²³	√ ²⁴
30	Co-operation in mission work	√ ²⁵	√ ²⁶	√ ²⁷
<i>With respect to stipulations for relationships</i>				
31	Bound by decisions of fraternal churches' broadest assemblies	√		
32	Associated by virtue of any fraternal church relationship established	√		
33	Able to seek separate fraternal church relationship independently		√	√
34	Able to lodge notice of concern in event of disagreement		√	√

²⁰ See para. 3.1.9

²¹ See para. 3.2.8

²² See para. 3.3.3

²³ See para. 3.2.8

²⁴ See para. 3.3.3

²⁵ See para. 3.1.9

²⁶ See para. 3.2.8

²⁷ See para. 3.3.3

Appendix C

FRCA Synod deputies for contact with the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore.

Report of a visit by Synod deputies to the FERC Singapore between 5th of March and 10th March 2014.

The purpose of the visit was to assist in fulfilling the mandate to:

“.....make a careful investigation of this church according to BC Art 29, exploring the feasibility of a sister church relationship, and presenting a detailed report and accompanying recommendations to Synod 2015.”
(Acts of Synod 2012 art 22).

The deputies had agreed that an official visit to Singapore was warranted and would likely be of benefit in order to properly fulfil the mandate given by Synod.

It was decided that two of the deputies, Rev T VanSpronsen and Br SC Fokkema would travel to Singapore and engage with the FERC elders and the official “Church Contact Committee”. (CCC with a similar role to the FRCA deputies.)

There were two sets of meetings apart from other less formal engagements and interaction with church members. Rev VanSpronsen was also able to preach the Gospel in the afternoon service as well as presenting a topic on covenant theology.

The first meeting was with the “Board of Elders” (BOE) (consistory). This meeting was formal but not official, in the sense that it was designed to exchange formal greetings, and an opportunity to get to know each other better as churches. Considering that the BOE has an appointed standing “Contact Committee” to deal with fraternal relations it was entirely appropriate that this first meeting was not held with a formal agenda. Consequently minutes were not taken. However the meeting was very useful in that it allowed a broad general discussion and exchange of thoughts surrounding the purpose and benefit of fraternal relations. This was useful as there can be misunderstanding about what commitments are entered into, and what influence if any, one church can have over the other.

The FERC has in the past had a sister church relationship with the Protestant Reformed Church of America. This relationship was often felt in Singapore as by a big sister to conform to certain doctrines or practices of the PRCA. Hence the cautious approach by the FERC to fraternal relationships. It was stressed by the deputies that the FRCA fully respects the independence of sister churches on all ecclesiastical matters that do not conflict with God’s Word as the churches confess it in the Three Forms of Unity. It was also pointed out that the Church Order of Dort (Australian version) to which the FRCA adheres

states in Article 80 that: “No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office bearer over other office bearers”. There are clearly limits to a sister church relationship. The deputies were able to provide reassurance to the BOE of the intention and practice of a sister church relationship as the FRCA sees it.

Deputies could also discuss the matter of adopting doctrinal statements or practices in addition to, or above the clear teachings of Scripture and confession. Not all things are clear to all at the same time. There must be patience with one another, room for differences of opinion, of well-considered interpretations by brothers on matters that are not in conflict with the Reformed confessional standards. Binding the consciences above Scripture or the confessional standards on matters where there is no absolute clarity or where there may be legitimate differences of thought will lead to divisions and ultimate schism, as history has sadly shown.

The conclusion was that the meeting was very encouraging and up-building. Much was discussed and learnt. The deputies could see and hear that there was a sincere desire to adhere to the Reformed faith, in word and deed.

On the Sunday of the visit Rev VanSpronsen preached the Gospel in the afternoon service. The sermon centred on what both we and they confess in Lords Day 27. The sermon spoke of the rich blessings of the Covenant promises, signed and sealed in Baptism.

Following the morning service Rev VanSpronsen delivered an address on “Covenant Theology from an FRCA perspective.” This choice of topic was a specific request from the FERC brothers, as the doctrine concerning the covenant is often understood in Singapore in the same way as the FRCA generally does. The question: “Does God make His covenant with the elect, or with believers and their children”, is at the centre of the different covenant doctrines. Given the historical connections of the FERC to the PRCA this question is one that should not surprise us. Yet the FERC unlike the PRCA does not subscribe to a defined doctrinal statement concerning the covenant. The FERC is very willing to study the various covenant teachings more intensively. As much mis-information by the PRCA about the FRCA covenant position exists in Singapore it is important to be cautious when discussing these things with them. The address by Rev VanSpronsen on this very topic was very well received.

The second official meeting was held with the “Contact Committee”.

Present for the FERC:

Brother Johnson See – Chairman
Elder Joseph Liow - Secretary
Brother Yew Hoong - Treasurer
Elder Wilson Oon – Advisor

For the FRCA:

Rev Ted VanSpronsen
Brother Spike Fokkema
Observer from CanRC:
Rev Ben Berends (on a stop-over to Australia)

The meeting followed a prepared formal agenda that was developed by the contact committee in consultation with the deputies prior to arrival in Singapore.

The major point for the deputies was to enquire from the delegates of the FERC if the church shows the three marks of the true church were clearly present. Should that indeed be the case then a sister church relationship can be established.

Following formal introductions, welcome and response, each party presented a background and snap shot of the churches.

The three marks of the true church.

1. The preaching.

The Bible translation used is the King James Version. Singing is from two hymnals. (There used to be three, however, in order to avoid introducing heresies through dubious hymns the FERC has recently stopped using one hymnal because of its Arminian leanings.)

The pastor Rev Chong, Nam Tuck was trained in part at the Canadian Reformed Seminary. He usually preaches at least once per Sunday. The sermons make use of both the old and new Testaments. Sermons are usually 45 minutes long and involve members of all ages. Children stay in the worship service and do not go to a “Sunday school”. Catechism preaching as the FRCA knows it is not common, though frequent use is made of all the Three forms of Unity in the sermons.

Sometimes pastors from other Singapore Reformed churches are invited to preach. Pastors from Canada and Australia have also preached in Singapore. All visiting pastors are strictly vetted by the BOE beforehand, and they are made aware of the church doctrinal standards, and advised to not speak on matters of doctrinal difference. Elders also preach occasionally, mostly in the afternoon services. The session (consistory) meets every two weeks where the preaching is able to be addressed. The BOE formally reviews and evaluates the preaching every four months in order to provide supervision over the pulpit, and to ensure that no false doctrines are introduced, and that the whole counsel of God is clearly brought. Reading services are not generally favoured.

Youth work is active as group Bible study, singing groups, and evangelism.

The youth are also actively engaged in supporting mission projects. The catechism is taught to the youth by the pastor and by elders. Profession of faith is stimulated to the older youth. Particular care is taken to train the youth soundly in Scripture knowledge and in the Reformed doctrines.

Pastoral home visits are made to all members of the congregation in a manner similar to the FRCA. The deacons take care of the needy and assist in many other matters in the life of the congregation.

The Christian feast days are celebrated and are often used as means to invite non-Christian friends, school friends or work colleagues. These services are not official worship services and have a different character. Only the Sunday morning service is an official worship service, which all members are called to attend diligently.

The congregation has formed wards or cell groups that meet weekly for Bible study at each other's homes. Some meet on Sunday afternoon and some during the week. Women may lead in prayer in the company of men, but may not vote for office bearers elections, nor are the special offices open to women. Women may be called on to assist deacons but cannot be deacons.

2. The Sacraments

The meaning and content of the sacraments, are preached from the pulpit. Infant baptism is administered only to the children of communicant members. Parents are visited before baptism, enquiring why they request baptism for their child. This is done to ensure that the parents do not just see baptism as a custom or superstition, and so they understand the responsibility and promise to raise the child as a covenant child. Baptism is not always administered as soon as possible as is common in the FRCA. Often they will wait for a few months until there is a group of infants, and to allow family to be present. It was agreed that though baptism is not a matter of urgency like Rome sees it, yet it should not be delayed un-necessarily either. They do have regular adult baptisms as non-Christians, often family members, come to the faith.

Holy Supper is administered four times per year, and only to members of the congregation who have made public profession of faith. Visitors are rarely admitted to the Holy Supper, and then only after an intensive interview before the Sunday, enquiring into their home church membership and status.

3. Church Discipline

All members receive home visits annually at least, depending on circumstances. Members are also encouraged to see to their brothers and sisters, and in love have exercise mutual discipline towards each other. Those that do stray and do not heed admonitions are warned in accordance with the word of our Lord in Mathew 18. After much admonition they will be denied the

sacraments and ultimately will be excommunicated. The process is similar to the FRCA.

Youth that have not professed the faith or become delinquent in church attendance and activity are, after much patience and admonition “erased” as members. The reason for “erasure” is that, as they are not yet communicant members one cannot speak of ex-communication. Deputies pointed out that the FRCA has adopted a special form of excommunication for baptised members. This may be of interest to the FERC.

In preparation for the public profession of faith young people are interviewed by the BOE regarding their knowledge and motivation. All the liturgical forms are the same as the FRCA except that Singapore uses the old 1950s Psalter Hymnal version.

Other matters

The deputies also enquired into the method of church governance. The FERC has not formally adopted the Church Order of Dort, though it follows it closely where appropriate in their circumstances. They need more time to study it and perhaps adopt it in whole or in part.

The church has a formal constitution as required by Singapore law, much like in Australia.

In order to deal with fraternal relations with other churches the FERC has developed a set of “Guidelines” concerning fraternal relationships. These guidelines identify three levels of contact. See “Appendix B” for full details. In essence these three levels compare with the FRCA sister church relations rules. Singapore sees fraternal relationships as much more formalised and detailed, as below:

Level 1 Complete denominational unity, as are the churches within the FRCA bond.

Level 2 Approximates to what the FRCA would see as foreign sister churches.

Level 3 Approximates to what the FRCA would call churches “in correspondence”.

Good discussions followed about the respective guidelines. While there are differences from the FRCA Rules for sister church relations with these guidelines, the deputies could not see any impediment for a full sister church relationship (level 2 of the FERC guidelines).

Fraternal relationships

While not specifically included in the mandate, deputies felt it important to include in its report matters concerning existing fraternal relationships of the

FERC.

Currently the FERC has only one church with which it has a formal fraternal relationship. This is the “Grace Reformed Church of Penang” as a “level three” relationship. This is very much for the benefit of the Penang church, rather than Singapore.

There is no relationship now at all with the PRCA, though this is entirely at the instigation of the PRCA. The FERC has been abandoned by them as a true church. There has for many years been a close, though informal relationship with pastor Chris Coleborn (Tasmania), of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. (EPCA) He is very much loved as pastor that has helped the FERC through many years of trial. However no formal relationship exists with the EPCA.

Deputies have concluded their task with a great deal of joy and thankfulness to the Lord. The Lord Himself enjoins us to experience the unity of the church (John 17). It is therefore with great thankfulness that we commend our report to Synod.

Your deputies,

Br SC Fokkema (Secretary)

Rev E Rupke

Rev T VanSpronsen (Convenor)

Report of Deputies Reformed Churches of New Zealand to Synod Baldivis 2015

MANDATE AND INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Synod Armadale 2012 in Article 89 came to the following recommendation and grounds regarding the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). The deputies' mandate has been highlighted in bold.

Synod decides:

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.

In order to fulfil their mandate deputies met formally on eight occasions. At nearly all of these meetings all the deputies were present. In addition to these regular meetings, all the deputies met with their New Zealand counterpart (Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC)) in Geelong in November 2013. While the synod of the RCNZ met in September 2014 Rev R.E. Pot and br M. Bax were able to witness and be part of the proceedings, as well as meet again with the brothers of the IRC.

We have chosen to compile this report under various headings which are listed in the table of contents that follows.

It is and remains our prayer that the Lord, the King of the Church will bless the work of Synod Baldivis 2015 for the glory of His name and the benefit of His church gathering work here in Australia and wherever He continues to gather His Church.

Br M. Bax

Br R. Eikelboom

Rev R.E. Pot

Br A. Vermeulen

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

BBK	Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the RCN
CanRC	Canadian Reformed Churches
CER	Committee for Ecumenical Relationships of the CRCA
CO	Church Order
CRCA	Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (formerly known as 'Reformed Churches of Australia')
CRCNA	Christian Reformed Church of North America
ESV	English Standard Version
FRC	Free Reformed Church
FRCA	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
GKN (S)	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical)
GKN-Lib / GKNv	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
GKSA	Reformed Churches of South Africa
ICRC	International Conference of Reformed Churches
IRC	Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCNZ
MARS	Mid-America Reformed Seminary
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NGK	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New Kings James Version
OMB	Overseas Mission Board
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRCA	Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia
RCA	Reformed Churches of Australia (now known as 'Christian Reformed Churches of Australia')
RCN	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), also abbreviated as GKN-Lib and as GKNv
RCNZ	Reformed Churches of New Zealand
REC	Reformed Ecumenical Council
RES	Reformed Ecumenical Synod
RPC	Reformed Presbyterian Church
RTC	Reformed Theological College
URCNA	United Reformed Churches of North America
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches

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1. HISTORY OF THE FRCA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RCNZ

What follows below is a summary of the main phases of the FRCA's contact with the RCNZ. This is provided to give delegates to synod background information on our relationship as it has progressed over the years. For more detailed information regarding actual synod decisions, see appendix A.

First contacts and positive developments (Synods 1985-1994)

There is mention of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand in the Acts of Synod as early as 1962, when concerns were expressed about their relationships with the Reformed Churches of Australia and the G.K.N. (Synodical). Synod Launceston 1985 decided to correspond to the RCNZ about these concerns (Art 75, p.49), and Synod Albany 1987 thankfully observed that the RCNZ had terminated all ties with the G.K.N. (Synodical) and had strongly opposed the G.K.N. (Synodical)'s membership in the RES (Art 105, p.58-59). Synod Armadale 1990 noted ongoing positive developments in the RCNZ, including their withdrawal from the REC, but also expressed concern about their continuing ties with overseas churches such as the RCA and CRCNA (Art 53, p.29); similar thoughts about the need to work towards resolution about third parties were expressed by Synod Bedfordale 1992 (Art 84, p.46-47) and Synod Byford 1994 (Art 78, p.40-41).

Ongoing discussions about third party relations (Synods 1996-1998)

Synod Kelmscott 1996 thankfully noted that the recent RCNZ could acknowledge the FRCA a true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and expressed gratitude for the faithfulness found in the RCNZ, including *"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."* Synod also decided to strive for a sister church relation, on the grounds that *"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."* Mention is made of a 1985 Synod decision that such a recognition usually leads to a sister church relationship, but that there can be stumbling blocks that prevent practical realization of unity; in this case the relations with the RCA, and thus it was also decided to *"encourage the RCNZ to continue with their admonitions to the RCA"* (Art 53, p.30-34). Synod Launceston 1998 continued this approach (Art. 89, p42-43).

Recognition as true churches and ongoing discussion about impediment (Synods 2000-2009)

Synod West Albany 2000 received a proposal to recognize the RCNZ as

true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ and enter into a fraternal relationship with them; synod decided to agree in principle to this proposal, since it received the majority of support from the churches, but decided to postpone the implementation of this decision to give deputies opportunity to do further work and for the churches to come to a greater consensus, especially in view of the RCNZ's continuing relationship with the CRCA (Art 93, p.48-52).

Synod Rockingham 2003 abandoned the idea of offering fraternal relations, since it did not find general acceptance in the churches, but confirmed the statement of Synod West Albany 2000, namely *"to recognize that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ."* It stated that *"the only remaining difficulty with entering into a relationship with the RCNZ is the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCA"*, even though it was acknowledged that they *"maintain this relationship in a Scriptural manner"*. (Art 72, p.39-43)

Synod West Kelmscott 2006 (Art 102, p.70-72) and Synod Legana 2009 (Art 63, p.72-73) continued this approach, but also encouraged 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."* A sincere desire to enter into a sister relationship has been expressed by our synods many times, *"but the matter of their sister relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment."*

Changed relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA (Synods 2012-2015)

Deputies to Synod Armadale 2012 could report (p.179-88) that the RCNZ Synod 2011 has now decided to discontinue sister church relations with the CRCA, and changed this to a relationship of "ecclesiastical fellowship", which still required a response from the CRCA. Since further work was needed to determine the nature and practical implications of this new relationship, deputies were given an expanded mandate to investigate this point and to have further contact with the RCNZ (Art. 89). At the same time synod continued to express a positive view towards the RCNZ, an ongoing recognition as true churches, an ongoing resolve to work towards sister-relations, allocating further resources to do so, and encouraged practical support and interaction.

2. DECISIONS OF RCNZ SYNOD BISHOPDALE 2014 (mandate b)

Not all the decisions of Synod 2014 have been included but only the ones which may be of particular interest to our churches. Under these headings we will also include observations and impressions gleaned from numerous private conversations. Most of the reports and overtures can be found here: <http://www.rcnz.org.nz/synodical/synod-2014.php>. However the full acts of the synod have not been released at the time of writing this report and so no reference is made of official article numbers.

***Sing to the Lord* song-book**

The *Sing to The Lord* song-book is now complete, after being 12 years in progress, with Rev John Rogers being a key figure in bring this project to realization. There was a standing ovation given in view of the completion of this project; several of the other contributors were present and given gifts of appreciation. It was noted to be a historical moment, because it is the first time that the RCNZ has their own hymnal produced by themselves. Many of the hymns are also based directly on psalms or Bible passages. Interestingly only a few of the Psalms feature Genevan tunes; quite a number are taken from a 2003 production by the Free Church of Scotland, and apparently the words of these are very close to Scripture. Overall people seem to be very happy with the new song book, and many people spoke positively about it. Although at synod more hymns were sung than psalms, it was suggested that this was because they were new, but in practice most churches sing mostly psalms and that is the intent also. Because the song-book is still new, not all the churches are familiar with the songs yet. The song-book also reflects the diverse traditions that make up the RCNZ, by incorporating songs that originate from continental Europe, but also England and Scotland, and America. The Hymnody Committee was mandated to prepare a reprint (2000) copies, including forms/ confessions if deemed practical. Some churches also occasionally use non-approved songs as their pre-service songs. Many of the psalms and hymns can be viewed online at: <http://hymnal.ws/public/Psalms.htm> and <http://hymnal.ws/public/Hymns.htm>

Creeds & Confessions, Liturgical Forms

These have also been the subject of recent revision. A separate book of creeds/confessions/liturgical forms will be produced, but a new edition of *Sing to the Lord* will include them if possible. Some interesting changes to the liturgical forms were discussed and debated at synod. For example, it was decided to maintain the name "Form for Baptism of Adults" instead of "For the Baptism of Believers", the reasoning being that "we don't believe there are two grounds of baptism; one, that a person is a believer, and two, the children of believers, rather we baptise on the objective ground of

entry into the covenant either by birth to a member of the covenant or by profession of the covenant faith.” It was also noted that the term “baptism of believers” can be theologically confusing. We can appreciate the good reasoning and clear covenantal thinking here.

Sister church: Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Netherlands

It was decided to discontinue sister church relations (despite a lengthy history of relations), not because they are not a true church (it was noted that the RCNZ probably identify with them more than RCN), but because of lack of meaningful contact.

Sister church: Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)

Synod was encouraged about them not opening offices to women and their apparent willingness to listen to concerns of sister churches. But they also expressed concern about them not clearly rejecting hermeneutical foundations of report Man/Vrouw; and noted that their sister-church relationship may be impacted negatively as a result of this. No RCN delegates attended the RCNZ synod, to the disappointment of the RCNZ. It is very clear that the RCNZ has no tolerance for the theological liberalism of a hermeneutic that allows women to be ordained to the offices, and they take a strong position on this. The RCNZ has only been a sister church with the RCN for 9 years, so they are very disappointed with these developments, but they don't want to be hasty. Since this is also our sister church, both we and the CanRC were asked for input on the floor of synod when this was discussed, and we conveyed our deep concerns and that we'd also been addressing this with the RCN. Our impression is that the RCNZ shares our concerns.

Sister church: Reformed Church of South Africa (GKSA)

The GKSA had a delegate present who addressed synod. Regarding the GKSA, synod decided to continue to express “our deepest concern to the GKSA concerning its decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons (with emphasis on the matter of ordination)”. In connection with the GKSA's decision to have women deacons, previously the RCNZ had already noted that it could affect sister church relations. Now they have added to this that if the GKSA continue to ordain women it may lead to relationship being put under strain. The Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) was instructed to demonstrate to the GKSA where this decision is wrong. All these decisions were made unanimously, making it clear that the RCNZ very clearly opposes women ordination. But they don't want to cut ties too quickly, and feel they have a responsibility to try to warn them and explain to them why it is wrong.

Sister church: Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

The PCEA had a delegate present (Rev Sjerck Bajema) who addressed

synod. They currently have 14 congregations and/or mission posts. Synod decided to continued sister church relations.

Sister church: United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

The URCNA had a delegate present (Br Douglas Field) who addressed synod. Synod decided to continue sister church relations.

Sister church: Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

Two delegates were present (Elder Mark Bube and Rev Jack Sawyer). The OPC has a long-standing historical connection with the RCNZ. Synod decided to continue sister church relations. One of the OPC delegates made a moving presentation one evening about foreign missions, which was a passionate defence of mission work and important Biblical and practical principles relating to its operation, combined with many stories about men on the ground in various places in the world.

Sister church: Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

The CanRC had a delegate present (Rev Arend Witten) who addressed synod. Synod decided to continued sister church relations.

Church in contact: Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA)

The PRCA appears to be a splinter group of Presbyterian churches somehow that wants to pursue closer relations with the RCNZ. It was decided to have a goal of working towards a sister church relationship, but to do much more work. In discussion, synod delegates made reference to the FRCA approach of sister church relations: “we make them carefully, we break them carefully”.

Church in contact: Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

We finally had opportunity to make our fraternal address on Thursday afternoon. In Rev Paul Archbald’s response he observed that while they can understand the need for patience and that we need to take our members along, the same is true for them. The longer this process takes, then the members of RCNZ start losing interest, also given the ongoing cost and effort when it doesn’t seem to produce fruit. He remarked positively on examples of cooperation in PNG and the traffic of RCNZ members to the FRCA’s in WA, but indicated this would be so much better if we could do these things as sister churches. He concluded by exhorting us with Phil 2:1-2.

The IRC’s recommendations were tabled as follows:

“agree that the RCNZ continue to offer a sister-church relationship to the FRCA”.

“agree that the IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-

synodical period."

There were no questions or discussion; the vote on both was that they were accepted unanimously. They also decided to send a delegate to our next synod – this was recommended by the ICR as important given that we are close to making an important decision about whether or not to accept their offer of sister church relations.

Church in ecumenical fellowship: Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

The revised rules for rules for ecclesiastical fellowship were adopted with minimal debate, and no disagreement. It was also decided to call it "ecumenical fellowship" instead of "ecclesiastical fellowship" to avoid confusion, since some churches use the latter term to describe a sister church relationship.

Rev Geoff Van Schie spoke on behalf of the CRCA. He noted that over the years many points of concern kept coming up for discussion between RCNZ-CRCA, and whenever most of them were dealt with, new ones would come up; hence need for new relationship. In his view the closeness remains despite the parameters of the relationship changing; the love and care of relationship remains, plus respect remains. (As reported elsewhere in this report, the RCNZ's assessment of this relationship is not so favourable.) The CRCA has recently requested to join the ICRC; they just missed out on membership by 1 vote (RCNZ was apparently one of the sponsoring members). Despite differences they have been able to have brotherly discussions. Rev Willemse in response noted that they could be heartened by decisions of last synod (several delegates told us that this was a more conservative synod, e.g. they rejected the 2011NIV); he also expressed gratitude for ongoing cooperation in RTC, and mission work in Solomons Islands. Synod's decision was to continue "ecumenical fellowship", and inform them of the changed rules of this relationship.

Reformed Theological College (RTC)

One evening there was a presentation by the president of RTC (Dr Murray Capill). The three supporting churches are the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia, RCNZ, and CRCA. Challenges include changing enrolment patterns, new technologies, and financial. RTC couldn't survive without RCNZ support (currently \$20 per RCNZ comm. member, \$34 per CRCA member). Capill pointed out that several Presbyterian colleges in Eastern Australia are also theologically strong. RTC is having to strategize about future feasibility/vision/options (a study is currently being done by May 2015). He made a request for prayer, students, financial support. He observed that 12 of 17 pastors/missionaries/vicars in RCNZ's 20 churches are RTC trained. Capill is a Kiwi who has RCNZ connections (his mother

lives in Christchurch), and seems to be quite highly regarded in the RCNZ. From people we spoke with, it appears that the current teaching staff at the RTC are all theological strong and conservative, e.g. Dr Martin Williams. Only half of CRCA ministers get training at the RTC; many for practical reasons (so they don't have to move their families to Geelong); the RTC is also considered to be on the conservative side within the CRCA, so many CRCA theological students just get training at other Bible colleges where they live and supplement this with training in their local churches,

The partnership of churches running the RTC is now over 60 years. Deputies Students for Ministry did a comparison on studying at RTC or MARS, and in their report to synod they emphasized the essential importance of having a solid foundation for ministry; this was encouraging to hear. They concluded that both seminaries are on par and prepare men well for ministry. RTC has geographic and financial advantages, plus content can be tailored more to RCNZ. So the overall direction of the report was leaning in favour of RTC. In this connection there was discussion about arranging summer internships for RCNZ students; an amendment was proposed that this be only in RCNZ or a sister church (i.e. excluding CRCA). Deputies Students for the Ministry have previously reported concern about the influence of the CRCA on the RTC. The amendment was defeated, but only because it is acknowledged that there's a diversity in CRCA and with the understanding that deputies would use discretion to ensure students only ended up in sound churches. This discussion was indicative of some of the diversity in the RCNZ. The decision isn't an open ticket to go anywhere in the CRCA, but many delegates think there are conservative churches where theological students can safely spend some time.

During the course of synod a number of delegates were asked what they thought about the RTC, and whether they think theological training has much impact on the churches. Some don't see this as a big issue, or think it does not make much difference; overall they seem quite satisfied with what comes out of RTC; in fact what they consider to be the "best ministers" (also theologically) in the RCNZ come from various places, including RTC trained ones. However in discussions with delegates from other sister churches of the RCNZ, one wonders whether this is entirely the case; while the RTC might be theologically conservative overall, could it be that in areas like worship it is having an unwelcome influence on the RCNZ that the RCNZ itself doesn't realize or see clearly? Some church members are concerned about the RTC, so there are diverse viewpoints on this.

Overseas Mission Board (OMB)

Like many Presbyterian Churches, the RCNZ uses a centralized OMB. Synod provisionally adopted proposed changes to Mission Policy Hand-

book; this document determines mission policy of RCNZ. The reason for having an OMB is that local churches still have responsibility in missions (just like we have local churches being calling churches), but this enables the federation to support them in doing that. There was considerable discussion and debate about whether to agree to support the proposal for a compound manager for the Reformed Bible College in PNG as a federation (NZ's share is a third); many churches were reluctant because of the big commitment to PNG, and because they also support other mission work and didn't want it coming at the cost of that. When it came to a vote it was approved however.

Church Discipline Matter

A number of years ago a complicated and sad pastoral situation arose in a local church; most of this was largely dealt with by the previous synod, but there were still some lingering and outstanding matters. The matter had to do with a situation where a local church excommunicated some members who were under discipline, after getting concurring advice from presbytery (=classis), but then afterwards the presbytery withdrew its concurrence. This matter raised many church political questions about the relation of a local session to the federation. Because it arose as a sensitive and painful matter; there was a real desire to deal with it Biblically and pastorally. Before any discussion the delegates were exhorted with Scripture and prayer. The discussion showed a real desire to avoid hierarchy, to defend the duty and responsibility of a local church, and to maintain discipline in obedience to Christ for purity of church, glory of God, love of sinner. The principle that broader assemblies are deliberative bodies was maintained, and it was emphasized that pastoral work is to be left to local sessions, and not done by synod. Tension was evident when discussing this matter, and even though there were opposing viewpoints at times, it was very encouraging to see how the delegates dealt with this very sensitively and carefully, in a Biblical way, also in the godly manner in which they conducted this debate.

Sexual Abuse Guidelines

This matter arose from the above situation and was the result of a committee appointed at the last synod. Guidelines for elders in dealing with charges of sexual abuse by or against members in their congregations were accepted as provisional guidelines (status of "guidelines" is carefully defined by RCNZ Synod 2011). These guidelines were very impressive, and made much use of Scriptural principles, and covered dealing with difficult questions in relation to pastoral care, involvement of authorities, repentance/forgiveness etc. Again it was clear that the RCNZ studies Scripture carefully and wants to apply it faithfully.

Church Order committee

A church order committee had done extensive work on some of the church political questions arising from the above situation, particularly some ideological questions relating to the matter of a presbytery giving concurrence in matters of church discipline. After much discussion, it was referred back to the committee to do more work. Synod wanted more time to use careful and precise wording, since this is an important matter; this also has the advantage of considering these church political questions with greater distance from the painful pastoral situation that generated them. For example, some of the recommendations included statements like the following: “the broader courts cannot overturn a local session’s decision” (in the discussion it was acknowledged that this doesn’t take away from the fact that churches voluntarily agree to accept decisions of broader courts, and have promised to do so, but only a session can overturn its own decision). Reference was also made by some to the Westminster Standards which says that synods have authority to which local churches must submit; but most discussion defended the Reformed approach we usually have. They realize this is a very important issue because it closely relates to understanding who they are as churches, and the nature and position of a local church within a federation.

Life-time Eldership

One of the churches brought an overture about life eldership. It was not proposed that this replace term eldership in all the churches, but that local churches have freedom to practice it if they wish. In discussion some remarked that the RCNZ church order already has inbuilt balance/flexibility given different influences (e.g elders currently aren’t ordained twice, but “installed” on second term). It was noted that this change has significant church orderly implications and other weighty reasons were also given; it was soundly defeated, although not that it was necessarily considered to be Biblically wrong. A proposal to appoint a study committee for this matter was also soundly defeated.

Bible Translation

A proposal to investigate the NIV2011 was defeated (again, just as last synod). It was also decided to declare ESV and NKJV suitable for pulpit use, in addition to the translations previously given approval: NASB and NIV84. The debates on this indicated some diversity of opinion, but overall a desire to have a literal translation rather than a dynamic equivalent one.

Other Decisions

Various other matters discussed and decided included the following:

- When the budget was dealt with, it became evident that the RCNZ

has some financial restraints in terms of where they can send fraternal delegates.

- continued membership in ICRC
- A letter expressing loyalty to the queen (drafted by Rev John Rogers) was adopted; this is a standard item on their agenda apparently
- Other minor decisions on matters like website, budget, appointments
- Next Synod will be in Palmerston North in 2017 DV
- Decided to have Thanksgiving Conference for 500th anniversary of Reformation just before next synod in 2017.

See appendix C for more details of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) report to synod 2014. The full report was rather lengthy so only relevant parts have been reproduced in appendix C. The full report can be viewed at <http://www.rcnz.org.nz/synodical/synod-2014.php>

3. THE IMPEDIMENT IDENTIFIED BY PREVIOUS SYNODS CONCERNING RELATIONSHIP WITH CRCA (mandate c)

The usual pattern of sister-relations with true churches

Synod West Albany 2000 decided in principle “*to recognise The Reformed Churches of New Zealand as true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Art 93, p.51). This was confirmed and repeated by subsequent synods (Synod Rockingham 2003, Art 73, p.42; Synod Legana 2009, Art. 63, p.72; Synod Armadale 2012, Art. 89, p.50). Synod Launceston 1985 accepted the proposal of a delegate that recognizing another church as a 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 realization of unity.*” (Art. 67, p.40) FRCA synods have considered the RCNZ’s sister-relations with the CRCA to be one such stumbling block that required resolution before accepting their offer for sister-relations. Synod Armadale 2012 considered that “*there is urgency to remedy the present anomaly of recognising a church to be a true and faithful without a sister church relationship*” (Art. 89, p.53), and thus mandated deputies to determine whether this impediment has been removed as a result of the RCNZ’s changed relationship with the CRCA.

First mention of an impediment

The concern identified by previous synods that the RCNZ’s sister-church

relationship with the CRCA constitutes an impediment to entering into a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ dates back to the decision of Synod 1962, which called into question the faithfulness of the RCNZ due to their sister-relations with the RCA and the GKN(S).

This concern further found expression in the decisions of Synod Launceston 1985, which mandated Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad *“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.”* The grounds for this decision were that *“1. Synod 1962 stated that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand were not faithful Churches because of their relationship with the Reformed Churches of Australia and the G.K.N. 2. This relationship with the Reformed Churches of Australia is still current.”* (Art 75, p.49)

After the RCNZ broke ties with the GKN(S), subsequent synods continued to speak about the RCNZ's sister-relations with the RCA as an impediment (Synod 1990, Art 53; Synod 1992, Art 84).

FRCA reasoning for this impediment

The reasoning of the FRCA as to why the RCNZ's sister-relations with the CRCA constitutes an impediment for FRCA-RCNZ sister-relations can be found mainly in the reports to previous synods.

1. Synods 1996-1998

1.1 Synod Kelmscott 1996

At Synod Byford 1994, the visiting delegate from the RCNZ, Rev. M. Flinn, challenged the FRCA to review our approach of classifying such sister-relations as an impediment for sister-relations, and considering that *“in the light of the changes occurring on the ecclesiastical scene there is a need to reconsider expectations”*, deputies were mandated to study *“how the relation of the RCNZ with the RCA should impact our relation with the RCNZ.”* (Art 78, p.41). The following Synod Kelmscott 1996, in mandating deputies to clearly explain to the RCNZ the reason for the decisions of synod about the RCNZ (Art. 53, p.33), referred to paragraph 5.3 of Deputies report which states that the FRCA believes it is *“contrary to the Confessions regarding the Church to recognise two churches in one country, when those two churches are unable or unwilling to work towards unity”*, and argues that we would wrongly be encouraging the RCNZ to do this should they have sister relations with both the FRCA and the CRCA (Report to Synod Kelmscott 1996, p.101-102). Synod also considered that *“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.” (p.33)

1.2 Synod Launceston 1998

Deputies reported in greater detail about this to Synod Launceston 1998, but came with a divided report (p.187-191) that offered two different approaches:

- a) The RCNZ's sister-relations with the CRCA is an impediment, and that the principle difficulties regarding third party relations also flow to practical difficulties (p.187-189)
- b) The RCNZ's sister-relations with the CRCZ is not an impediment, because the RCNZ exercises this relationship in a Biblical and principled manner (p.189-191)

Synod Launceston 1998 agreed with the first approach, citing one of the RCNZ's own reports in which they described the position of our sister churches in the Netherlands, in speaking about the need for relationships to 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.”* (Art. 89, p.42-43) The deputies arguing in favour of this first approach also pointed out some practical difficulties that flow from the principle difficulties of this “triangular problem”, especially in relation to transfer of membership, and admission to Lord's Supper and the pulpit (p.188-189).

2. Synods 2003-2006

2.1 Synod Rockingham 2003

A more detailed explanation of how the doctrine of the church relates to this impediment can be found in the deputies' report to Synod West Kelmscott 2006. It was clear that there were different viewpoints on this impediment when two churches proposed that Synod Rockingham 2003 offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ, and a proposal was tabled at this synod but not adopted *“to accept that the third-party relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA is being dealt with in a faithful manner by the RCNZ and that this relation no longer forms an impediment to establish a sister relation with them”*. In its decision, Synod Rockingham 2003 considered that *“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,”* and expressed a need *“to build consensus among ourselves to what extent the triangular relations should*

be an impediment”, and so deputies were again mandated “*to assess to what extent the triangular relationship needs to be an impediment for entering into full sister-church relations*”; although the decision of synod also acknowledged that “*the RCNZ maintain this relationship in a Scriptural manner.*” (Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003, Art. 72, p.41-43) Synod also stated that “*past synods have not required the RCNZ to break ties with the CRCA but have expressed appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ use their relationship to admonish their erring sister.*” (Art 62, p.33)

2.2 Synod West Kelmscott 2006

Deputies reported at length to Synod West Kelmscott 2006, and again came with a divided report (p.387-410) that offered two different approaches and recommendations.

- a) “*The matter of the triangular relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment*” (p.409)
- b) “*While the continued sister-relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA is a matter of significant concern to us, it does not constitute a compelling reason for us to continue to withhold an offer of sister-church relations with the RCNZ.*” (p.409).

Synod West Kelmscott 2006 agreed with the first approach, and decided that “*the matter of a triangular relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment*” (Art. 102 2c, p.71). Instead of giving grounds, Synod simply referred to the Deputies Report as grounds.

This deputies report first reviews the historical background of this discussion (p.388-390), then examines some of the Biblical data to come with six conclusions concerning the principles and patterns for establishing sister church relations (p.390-399), which are then applied to the RCNZ (p.399-407). These six conclusions merit quoting, since they are key to the discussion:

1. Churches which are spiritually united by faith ought to exercise the communion of saints with other churches, for mutual edification and assistance, which is an important purpose of establishing sister church relations.
2. Although Christ’s church gathering work is catholic or universal, churches are not compelled by Scripture to establish “sister church relations” with all churches over the world. Following the pattern of concentric circles of communion, a church is justified in concentrating its time, energy and resources in promoting intimate communion with churches that are closest to them historically or geographically.
3. Two or more churches who live in close proximity act contrary to the

ordinance of God if they refuse to join together and maintain the unity of the church.

4. True churches are duty bound to admonish churches with which they have unity, and which become unfaithful, and to separate from those assemblies that claim for themselves the name of church, but lack the marks thereof.
5. *Version A*: The Free Reformed Churches of Australia may not establish sister-church relations with churches that maintain unity with another church that we regard as lacking the marks of true churches.

Version B: It cannot be said that as a matter of principle, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia may not establish sister-relations with churches that for certain reasons maintain sister-relations with another church that we regard as lacking the marks of the true church.

6. *Version A*: When offering sister relations to another federation, the manner in which that federation exercises sister relations must be considered because of the impact that sister relations have upon that federation itself and on our own federation.

Version B: In keeping with the instruction of Scripture, the church must weight third-party relationships in coming to a responsible decision of its own. Care needs to be taken in establishing sister-church relations with churches that maintain unity with another church that may be becoming (or is) unfaithful.

The two approaches are summarized on p.407-409. Approach A notes that the *doctrinal* position of conclusion #5 and the *practical* considerations of conclusion #6, as they pertain to the RCNZ's sister-relations with the CRCA, are at the heart of why the FRCA should not establishing of sister church relations with the RCNZ:

- i. The *doctrinal* argument is that just as an individual member can't join a true church without first separating from a church lacking the marks of a true church, according to BCF Art 28, the same principle applies to federations of churches (p.394-396); the main concern here is that the RCNZ would have sister church relations with two churches in Australia, and this would implicitly be a concession to the pluriformity of the church (p.403).
- ii. The *practical* argument is that the errors of an unfaithful church can spread to its sister churches and thereby enter a bond of churches through the back door (p.397-398); the main concerns here are 1. The admission of ministers and candidates from the CRCA; 2. The

ability for RCNZ members to join either the CRCA or the FRCA; 3. The ability for RCNZ ministers to administer Word and sacraments in either the CRCA or the FRCA; 4. The potential for FRCA youth to establish relationships with CRCA youth when attending conferences in the RCNZ (p.404-406).

Approach B makes the doctrinal argument that the *existence* of a relationship with a third party that is becoming unfaithful isn't decisive for whether this relationship is to be considered an impediment, but rather the way this relationship is *exercised* (p.394-396); and further that the RCNZ has its own responsibility for how they conduct this third party relationship (p.397-399); it is further argued that the RCNZ has been recognized by our synods as a true church (p.403-404), and has faithfully and Scripturally discharged their obligation towards the CRCA by regularly admonishing them about deviations (p.405), and that ongoing and real practical concerns such as the four stated above should not be allowed to take on a life of their own or dominate our thinking (p.406-407).

In short, it is evident that the impediment identified by previous synods has both a doctrinal and a practical dimension; at the same time it is evident from previous deputy reports (e.g. to Synod Launceston 1998 and to Synod West Kelmscott 2006) and from proposals from the churches (e.g. to Synod Rockingham 2003 and West Kelmscott 2006), that there is some diversity of thinking about these matters in the churches. Our Synods have also stated that *"it cannot be expected that the RCNZ suddenly break ties with an errant sister without first exercising brotherly admonition"* (Synod Kelmscott 1996, p.33) and *"the RCNZ maintain this relationship in a Scriptural manner"* (Synod Rockingham 2003, p.43). Nonetheless, it is the doctrinal and practical implications of the RCNZ's sister-relations with the CRCA that has always been the central concern.

4. EXPLANATION & EVALUATION OF THE RCNZ'S NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH CRCA (mandate c)

The changed relationship with the CRCA

The former rules governing the relationship (sister church relationship) between the RCNZ and the CRCA were as follows:

1. *The appointment of delegates to each other's synods or general assemblies, if possible, as a token of mutual friendship and interest in the Lord.*
2. *Keeping each other duly informed of our gesta ecclesiastica, (i.e. events, developments and decisions) through the exchange of the*

Acts of Synods or General Assemblies.

3. *Bringing to each other's attention our spiritual and ecclesiastical problems together with our attempts at their scriptural solution; and offering each other help upon request thereof.*
4. *Warning each other in respect of spiritual dangers that arise and spread and imperil the Church of Christ.*
5. *Correcting each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness whether by commission or omission on the score of profession and/or practice of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.*
6. *Consulting each other regarding the eventual revision of our respective ecclesiastical standards (i.e. the Confessions, Catechism).*

RCNZ Synod Bucklands Beach 2011 decided to discontinue sister relations with the CRCA, and instead enter a new relationship of 'Ecclesiastical Fellowship'. The provisional rules for this new relationship are quoted in Appendix B, and were reported to synod Armadale 2012. RCNZ Synod Bishopdale 2014 has adopted additional proposed changes which further tightened these rules, and distinguish them more clearly from the rules for sister-relations.

To avoid any confusion with sister-relations, Synod 2014 also decided to call the new relationship 'Ecumenical Fellowship' instead of 'Ecclesiastical Fellowship'. The new Rules for Ecumenical Fellowship as adopted by Synod 2014 now read as follows: (NB: The addition to these rules over and above those the provisional rules reported to Synod Armadale 2012 are identified with underlining)

1. *Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. If feasible, the Inter-church relations committees should meet at least once in the inter-synodical period.*
2. *The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our current practice of holding a preliminary evaluation before a call is issued and a Colloquium Doctum. (see Church Order article 10)*
3. *Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships, subject to Session examination; longer-term pulpit supply should be subject to Presbytery evaluation.*
4. *Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).*
5. *A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing*

ing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).

6. *Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns.*

*Please note: Church Order Articles 61-62, regarding oversight of the Lord's Table and the admitting of new members, do apply to Churches in Ecu-
menical Fellowship.*

Article 10 and 61 and 62 of the Church Order of the RCNZ read as follows:

Ministers of the Word

Who Is Eligible for Call Article 10

The following shall be eligible for call as Ministers of the Word and Sacra-
ments:

1. Those who have followed the Synodically prescribed course of study, and have subsequently been declared candidates by Presbytery;¹
2. Those who are already in the ministry of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand or a sister-church;
3. Ministers of other denominations who have been declared eligible for call by Presbytery;
4. Those who have been declared candidates according to Article 12 of this Church Order.

1. Theological candidates are eligible for call who have successfully completed the pre-
scribed course of study at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia, or its
equivalent (Acts 1989, Art. 19.b).

Certificates of Membership Article 60

Communicant members coming from other Reformed Churches of New Zealand shall be admitted to communicant membership upon the presentation of certificates of membership attesting their soundness in doctrine and life. The same rule shall apply to those coming from other denominations with which the Reformed Churches of New Zealand maintain sister church relationships.

Guests at the Lord's Table Article 61

Persons belonging to denominations other than sister churches may be admitted as guests at the Lord's Table only if the session has ascertained that they profess the true religion and walk uprightly.

Highlighting the Changes

There is evidently a real change here. The CRCA is no longer a sister church of the RCNZ. They are now churches in Ecumenical Fellowship. As a result attestations will no longer be automatically accepted. Pulpit exchange can only occur following an evaluation of the session (consistory). Longer term pulpit exchanges need to be subject to presbytery (classis) evaluation. Calling ministers from the CRCA has also become more difficult and a thorough process needs to be undertaken. Even prior to a call being issued a preliminary evaluation needs to occur. Only if that evaluation is positive may a call proceed. This is an extra safeguard. In our meeting in Geelong in November 2013 we discussed extensively what the change relationship means in practice. As a result of that discussion we minuted the following about the way in which the RCNZ sees their relationship working with the CRCA. (The minutes were approved by both parties):

- *Historical ties:* Historically there is a close connection between the RCNZ and the CRCA. They have fought, loved, prayed and shouted together. Although there has been and is friction between the two churches they want to maintain closeness but not the closeness of a sister church. There is still a close relationship because of the history. It is noted that there is nowhere near as much traffic between the two as the past.
- *Nature of relationship:* Is the new relationship between the CRCA and RCNZ a sister church relationship without accountability? The new rules still allows the RCNZ to express concerns; it doesn't want a sister church but still some degree of closeness. It is envisaged that the ecclesiastical fellowship may be a relationship for current sister-churches whom the RCNZ has concerns about, and yet with whom they do not want to break all contact. They do not envisage using the levels of relationships as a sliding scale.
- *Delegates:* There will be shared delegates at major assemblies to maintain contact.
- *Calling ministers:* It is noted that the new rules being proposed to synod 2014 of the RCNZ state that calling of ministers with colloquium doctum will still occur. However, as an additional safeguard a preliminary evaluation is to be conducted by the presbytery to investigate a prospective minister as to where he stands theologically and also to see if the prospective minister would fit in culturally. This preliminary evaluation does not have an official status, but will hold considerable weight. The RCNZ will not automatically do a 'done deal' with CRCA ministers. The preliminary determines if the candidate is eligible for a call. So ministers of the CRCA are no longer eligible without a prelimi-

nary evaluation. So churches can still consider CRCA ministers for call, but these are only considered very carefully and with the above-stated preliminary evaluation.

- *Pulpit supply:* Occasional pulpit exchange only occurs once there has been an examination with the local consistory. Presbytery will be involved if it is an emeritus minister serving for some time. The RCNZ is careful in who they allow to preach, and they stated that they believe it is unlikely that those ministers who are unknown to them would *want* to come to the RCNZ
- *Admission of members:* Art 61/62 of the RCNZ church order indicates that visitors from CRCA and other churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship will not automatically be able to attend Lord's Supper and membership in the RCNZ without a one-on-one interview. So with the new relationship, admission to the Lord's table will be on a case by case basis following an interview, and attendance will not be automatic, as it was previously in a sister-church relationship.
- *Joint work:* There will still be some working together with the CRCA in some projects including diaconal work, some mission work (e.g. Solomon Islands), joint Christmas compassionate catalogue.
- *Reformed Theological College:* Some theological training is also shared. The RCNZ, CRCA, and Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia together founded the RTC in 1955. So the RTC was a joint establishment, and this was membership driven rather than church driven. Since then churches also support it via a quota. RTC is independent of any church, yet deputies from each church keep an eye on what is being taught. The majority of faculty are members of CRCA, although some are of Kiwi background. In areas of doctrinal concern deputies will step in and discuss the issues, as was done with the 'Word and Spirit' issue. Faculty is consciously confessional. Some of the RCNZ theological students go to MARS; approximately 50% RTC and 50% MARS. Two representatives from NZ sit on the RTC board. The RTC also relies on the financial support of the RCNZ. In areas of controversy the RTC does not teach too strongly one way or the other. The RCNZ works with this by covering some of these areas during the vicariate (a year-long internship in a RCNZ church prior to examination to be declared eligible for call). The RCNZ is aiming for more home grown ministers.

Evaluation of the Changes

Having said that the changes are real, we also note that there remains a practical relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA. The RCNZ have

not yet been so bold as to say that the CRCA lacks the marks of the true church (Art 29 BC). At the same time we note that our past synods (e.g. 2003) have not required the RCNZ to break ties with the CRCA but have expressed appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ use their relationship to admonish their erring sister (Art 62, p.33). We do note that over the years the RCNZ has called the CRCA to task on a number of issues which did cause their relationship to come under strain. Some of these points of contention include the following:

- *The CEF model.* Already in the 1980's the CRCA moved away from a sister church relationship model and to a "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (CEF) model. The RCNZ did not initially appreciate this as they saw the change as a structure by which the CRCA could accommodate more liberal churches such as the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. (However the CRCA broke ties with the RCN before they adopted the CEF model) The CEF model which was adopted by the CRCA in 1985 no longer remains a point of contention.
- *Word and Spirit.* In the early 1990's there was unrest in the CRCA regarding extra revelation in New Testament times. This resulted from Charismatic and Pentecostal influences inside and outside the CRCA. The RCNZ seriously called the CRCA to task since the CRCA was allowing room to question the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. This matter was cleared up in 1997 following some CRCA synod decisions.
- *Worship practices.* Over the years the RCNZ has expressed some concerns about some CRCA churches moving away from more traditional Reformed worship practices. While the CRCA took the approach that if Scripture does not condemn a practice then it is possible to use, the RCNZ followed a more regulative principal style of worship.
- *Women in the office of deacons.* Around 2000 the CRCA allowed the office of deacon to be opened to women. The CRCA argues that since deacons are not part of the session (consistory) and hence do not rule in the church, it is not contrary to Scripture to allow women into the office of deacon. The RCNZ has challenged and taken issue with the CRCA on this issue.
- *Children and Church membership.* In the late 1990's and early 2000s the CRCA was discussing whether or not children should be allowed at the Lord's table. This caused tension between the RCNZ and the CRCA. The CRCA did finally conclude that admittance to the Lord's table was only permissible following the public profession of faith (although it is difficult to determine the exact CRCA position on this issue).
- *Reformed Theological College (RTC).* At times tensions have arising between the RCNZ and some of the teaching at the RTC. This was

particularly true during the discussions on Word and Spirit. This led to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the RCNZ and the RTC.

- Concerns have also been expressed by the RCNZ about the application of Lord's Day 35 (pictures of Christ) as well as the CRCA's move towards a church more focussed on their so-called "four-fold purpose of the church."

It could be argued that, in general, the last few decades of dialogue between the RCNZ and the CRCA have been dominated by discussions on various issues. The RCNZ have been faithful in addressing areas in which they believed the CRCA was deviating from Scripture and Confessions. FRCA deputies in the 1990's picked up on similar issues as the RCNZ. This was included in the deputies report to the FRCA synod of 1996 (page 111-113). Reference was also made to some of these issues at our synod of 2000 (Acts of Synod West Albany 2000, Art. 69, 72).

With the new relationship now in place between the RCNZ and the CRCA we clearly note that the RCNZ now exercise their contact with the CRCA with much greater caution. Yet they still make use of the theological training provided by the RTC, which is supported by the RCNZ along with the CRCA and the RPCA. As was noted earlier in this report the RTC is probably on the conservative side of the CRCA, yet, in our opinion, there are issues with worship practices and the doctrine of the church.

In terms of Synod Armadale's (2012) mandate we can honestly report that the relationship with the RCNZ and the CRCA has undergone a real change. This is a positive development. At the same time we are concerned about theological training and ongoing influence of the CRCA and the RTC in the RCNZ.

5. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE RCNZ (e.g. PREACHING, CHURCH LIFE) (mandate b)

In relation to this part of the mandate, deputies busied themselves with perusing the *Faith in Focus* magazine of the RCNZ, reading and listening to a variety of sermons, reviewing and assessing past synod Acts, meeting with the RCNZ IRC committee on two occasions, visiting their Synod 2014, and perusing parts of their website. Being able to visit the RCNZ to attend their Synod proved particularly valuable and useful in assisting us carry out our mandate, especially because it gave opportunity to attend worship services in local churches, speak to many different members, and get a clearer picture of church life. In relation to these activities we can report the following:

Meetings with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC):

Being able to meet and speak face-to-face and at length with our RCNZ counter-parts proved tremendously helpful. Meetings were conducted on two occasions – November 2013 and September 2014.

November 2013 meeting

The November 2013 meeting was held with five deputies from the RCNZ IRC and with the four deputies from the FRCA. This meeting was held in Geelong at the Reformed Theological College (RTC). The meeting discussed issues relating to ongoing church life and developments that had occurred in each church federation. Deputies relayed recent Synod decisions, including the common concern with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). A short discussion followed on FRCA's non membership of the ICRC, and the RCNZ deputies expressed that they have found contacts within the ICRC to be beneficial.

Following this, there was discussion on the possibilities of mutual help and assistance. Some of this is already being done with the schooling of covenant children and Reformed teacher professional development. There is also mutual involvement in mission work in PNG. The sharing of church magazines is something that could be encouraged by local church consistories.

A larger discussion then followed on the remaining impediment that hinders a sister church relationship, i.e. the relationship the RCNZ has with the CRCA. Further details about this point are reported elsewhere in section 4 above dealing with the RCNZ-CRCA relationship.

The Reformed Theological College (RTC) was also discussed. Of note is that the RTC is independent of any church, yet deputies from each church keep an eye on what is being taught. The majority of faculty are members of CRCA, although some are of Kiwi background. Two representatives from the RCNZ sit on the RTC board. The RCNZ did break contract with the RTC due to the Word and Spirit issue, and the relationship went to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In the current quota system, only those churches who can continue to support RTC in good conscience do so. Presently the RTC relies on the financial support of the RCNZ.

September 2014 meeting

A second meeting with some representatives of the RCNZ's IRC was held at the conclusion of Synod 2014 of the RCNZ, and the discussion covered a number of areas:

Concerning RCNZ Synod 2014:

There was a general discussion about the decisions made by synod:

- It was evident that at synod there were a number of questions about church polity, e.g. presbytery's role in giving concurrence to the decisions of sessions. Some of these questions show that not everyone in the RCNZ has the same view on church polity. These matters arise largely out of a very specific and painful pastoral situation. It is good that these were committed to next synod, because having some more time removed from the specific situation that led to these questions will help everyone deal with them more objectively.
- It was suggested that overall this synod made similar decisions as previous synods, even though there was quite some diversity in delegate opinions on various issues.
- The RCNZ brothers emphasized that while there is diversity in the RCNZ, you will not find new hermeneutics, or arguments that call into question what Scripture says about creation, or women in office. Examples of some areas of diversity in RCNZ would include worship practices, church polity, and ecclesiology.

Concerning the relationship RCNZ-FRCA:

- It was noted that we are at a critical juncture in this relationship. If the FRCA doesn't accept sister church relations now, the RCNZ might not be willing or able to commit more resources towards the relationship, because they are stretched thin on financial resources as it is. In the view of the RCNZ brothers, the FRCA needs to make a decision one way or the other at our next synod. If we cannot accept their offer of sister relations now, they would still love and esteem us, and perhaps still offer sister church relations, but could not see their way clear to continue to send delegates. Withdrawing contacts altogether would only happen if we were Biblically unfaithful.
- The FRCA deputies indicated that the next FRCA synod would have to decide whether or not the new relationship with the CRCA sufficiently removes the impediment, and acknowledged that there is some urgency to make a decision at this next synod. It was noted that there has also been some diversity about this matter within the FRCA.
- If the RCNZ doesn't send a delegate to the next FRCA synod, it would only be because of financial constraints. We encouraged attendance if at all possible, given that it is likely for our synod to be at a point where they make an important decision, and it would be good to have their delegate present to answer questions.

Concerning the relationship RCNZ-CRCA:

- What privileges does CRCA have? The privileges the CRCA has are similar to those that their other non-sister churches have, because the RCNZ does have some flexibility with most non-sister relations. The only

major privilege the CRCA has is meeting with the RCNZ, and doing some cooperative work (e.g. theological education, summer internship).

- How will RCNZ continue to address concerns about CRCA? When relevant in discussions, the RCNZ would bring up their ongoing concerns in meetings and conversations with CRCA representatives; and in speeches of fraternal delegates to their synod, especially when discussing matters of common interest like theological education. They will also be more inclined to bring up matters of concern in the areas they share and work with together with the CRCA, rather than keep raising the same issues which have already been discussed at length. So when it is significant and would affect things like theological education, missions, or pulpit exchanges, then the RCNZ would address their concerns to the CRCA.

Other general observations

Faith in Focus

In a review of *Faith in Focus* magazines, the articles were found to be Biblical and helpful in equipping the believers, dealing with a range of relevant issues. Articles were from ministers from various backgrounds, e.g. RCNZ, OPC, URCNA, CanRC; thus reflecting the ecclesiastical ties the RCNZ with these churches. Close historical ties between the RCNZ and the OPC were evident. Active involvement of local churches in catechism instruction, Bible courses, evangelism, and acts of mercy in local communities were clearly indicated from various articles, giving good evidence of local churches being living and active.

Diversity in general

Our impression is that there is somewhat of a spectrum of diversity in the RCNZ theologically (e.g. views on worship, music, church polity), and at times there is a range of viewpoints on these matters. The CRCA also has a spectrum of diversity, but is more theologically liberal than the RCNZ. Some CRCA churches as well as the RTC would be on the conservative end of this spectrum, and are thus closer to the RCNZ. But there are also members in the RCNZ who have concern about certain developments in the RCNZ. It could also be said about our own churches that within the context of the Reformed confessions there are different viewpoints, and at times even a spectrum of opinion on different matters.

Diversity in worship

There is, in many ways, a greater spectrum of practices in worship services than what we are used to in the FRCA. Since all our churches originated from the Liberation of 1944 we, by and large, have uniform worship services. The diverse history of the RCNZ has resulted in a greater diversity. For example, some churches exclusively use an organ to

accompany congregational singing, while others make use of a variety of instruments played simultaneously. These diverse practices do cause some controversy within the churches from time to time, and the use of music has led in some cases to members leaving one church and joining another in the federation. Some congregations will sing Psalms exclusively, while others sing a full range of hymns. In general there appears to be more singing in a RCNZ worship service than what we are used to. Other areas of divergence include use of a projector to display psalms, hymns and Bible reading, a silent prayer before the vatum, the duty elder doing the Bible reading, or leading in prayer. Most of these practices have been observed in reports to our previous synods, and are not inherently non-Reformed.

Church political diversity

There is also a spectrum of diversity in the RCNZ church politically. The RCNZ has history of roots in both Presbyterianism and continental Reformed theology, and as a result they have both Presbyterian and continental Reformed confessions (Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity). Some of their ministers also have Presbyterian backgrounds and training. Some of this background finds expression in their church order and terminology, e.g. session, presbytery. At times these different influences appear to collide. But overall the direction seems soundly rooted in the continental Reformed tradition similar to our own, as was evident in the discussion on life-time eldership at Synod 2014. The next synod will be an important one for the RCNZ in discussing some church political questions that have arisen, and relate to the question of what it means to be a federation. Based on the 2014 synod, it is evident that the RCNZ is consciously choosing not to adopt a hierarchical Presbyterian approach, but wants to maintain the autonomy of the local church, while at the same time maintaining obligations to cooperate in a federation; i.e. an approach we would very much agree with. Some voices in this discussion did seem to advocate a Presbyterian approach; but they were definitely in the minority. Being forced to look at these foundational questions is a good and important exercise, and it will be important for the RCNZ to make good choices about this in years to come; it also means that the new generation will be forced to look at the principles of the church polity they have inherited from their forbears, and make them their own.

Fundamental unity

Despite the diversity, there is clear evidence of a fundamental unity. It was mentioned to us that in some ways the RCNZ is like the CanRC, URCNA, and OPC altogether in one federation; i.e. different historical streams, but yet by the grace of God this can really work because they are one in the same faith. Everyone in the RCNZ seems to be very aware of this diversity,

but at the same time there is a conscious attempt to make it work, and to be one in the Reformed faith, and not let these differences divide. This is quite a remarkable thing, and it was very evident at synod that the brothers want to maintain their unity in faith, and not let minor differences divide them. While this creates many challenges, it is also admirable to see unity in the truth and in the Reformed faith.

CRCA influences

The relationship with the CRCA has definitely changed, e.g. the implications for transfer of members and ministers is significant. Nonetheless there is still ongoing influence in practical ways, due to the history of this relationship, and the many connections, e.g. RTC, ministers who originate in CRCA, cooperative projects (e.g. Solomon Islands mission, diaconal work in India). The RTC looks to be the preferred training ground for RCNZ ministers in years to come, and this could have a big influence on the RCNZ in future years. For now there doesn't seem to be clear evidence that this influence is adverse, but it remains to be seen how this develops in future years. Where the RCNZ gets its ministers from in years to come will prove very important. For the most part the RCNZ is critical of the CRCA (as evidenced by discontinuing sister church relationship), so even those in the RCNZ who are more sympathetic to the CRCA are cautious, and would only feel comfortable with students/ministers from certain CRCA churches. Synod Rockingham 2003 observed that the RCNZ maintains their relationship with the CRCA in a Scriptural manner, and stated that *"Past synods have not required the RCNZ to break ties with the CRCA but have expressed appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ use their relationship to admonish their erring sister."* (Art 62)

Ministers

Most RCNZ churches have less members than our own churches. The church of Bishopdale, for example, has around 400 members, and has the equivalent of three ministers (this includes one vicar working full time). There are five vacancies right now, and some retirements are also imminent, so the need for ministers is great. Where these ministers come from could prove very important for the ongoing direction of the RCNZ. Most churches do seem to be very aware that they need to be very careful where they get their ministers. There have been a few examples in the RCNZ history where ministers needed to be released or left the ministry, and this has led to caution. They seem to take very seriously the matter of choosing faithful ministers.

Preaching

When one looks at the sermons available on the federation website, overall there is a fairly even spread of sermons from across both the Old

Testament and New Testament. Over the past eight or so years, ministers in the RCNZ have preached on historical narratives as found in Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, Ruth and Esther, wisdom literature as found in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, and the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Jonah and Habakkuk. New Testament sermons have focussed on texts from the gospels, Acts, the apostolic letters and Revelation. Sermons have also been preached on the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.

It is always dangerous to make generalisations, but for the sake of brevity we make the following observations. Sermons are mostly of fairly similar length to what we are used to. Generally speaking, (and this is not said with any hint of pride, but rather in full humility) sermons in our churches seem to be more in depth when it comes to the exegesis of the text. The depth to which the text is explored is sometimes more superficial in the RCNZ than what we are used to. However, the sermons are generally stronger on application and delivery. In some ways this may also reflect the training in the RTC where application is encouraged to a greater extent than we are familiar with.

Worship

The earlier years of the RCNZ saw the good influence of soundly Reformed men like G.I. Williamson, who had a Presbyterian background, and strongly emphasized and taught the regulative principle for worship. His influence was very positive on the RCNZ, and is still evident in the older generation. However with a new generation, there are new influences pulling the RCNZ in a different direction at times. The challenge is for the younger generation to remain true to its roots, and learn the principles that shaped it in the first place, otherwise there will be little defence to innovations in worship. This is going to be a real area of challenge in the RCNZ. To some extent the FRCA has seen this happening in Holland, and the RCNZ has also seen it happening in the CRCA. But it is something that is difficult to measure and identify, since one relies largely on anecdotal and individual experiences in local churches rather than synod decisions.

Synod 2014

Overall the synod was seen by delegates we spoke with as on a similar track to previous synods, and the final decisions were considered to be more or less in line with the previous synod. Most delegates didn't consider it to be a controversial synod, and said that the agenda items were fairly standard and straight-forward, the biggest issue being the matters arising out of a situation in one local church, which appeared to be resolved fairly

smoothly in the end, despite having the potential to be very tense and controversial. Overall there was evidence of Biblical faithfulness.

Christian education

This is one area where the RCNZ can benefit from us. Most children attend non-denominational schools, where the influences from other churches are not always positive. As deputies understand it, integrated schools are government funded for teacher salaries only and even these schools need to follow government curriculum. To have complete freedom as a private school there is no government funding at all, and Silverstream is the only school where this is the case and which is consciously Reformed. In some areas in New Zealand, there are quite a few families doing home schooling. The report of deputies to our Synod 2006 (p.414) details more about options for Christian education used by RCNZ families.

Hospitality

Overall our FRCA delegates were very well cared for and received. The sense of fellowship also extended to personal conversations at synod, and we were treated as brothers in the Lord. Some of the people we met (e.g. when visiting local churches) were very well-read, and in some cases impressively knowledgeable in Reformed doctrine, with a theological knowledge and depth of thinking that could put us to shame. The homes that we visited also showed sincere godliness in devotions (e.g prayer, Scripture reading, and meditations at meal-times)

Urgency

In general our sense is that the RCNZ is becoming somewhat tired of the FRCA's hesitation to progress in our relationship. While deputies didn't detect any hostility, there is a sense of long-suffering that it is taking that long, which is understandable from their perspective, and underlines that our next synod really needs to consider carefully whether it can make a decisive decision one way or the other.

Ongoing challenges

The RCNZ will continue to face challenges in years to come. Our impression is that these challenges will come in the areas such as the following:

- i. maintaining unity in the midst of diversity
- ii. remaining Biblically faithful, despite theological influences from the CRCA
- iii. remaining Reformed in worship, despite influences from the CRCA
- iv. remaining Reformed in church polity, especially on the question of the

relation of local churches to a federation.

- v. sourcing future ministers who are faithful and thoroughly Reformed (especially if trained in the RTC)

We also acknowledge that we also face many challenges as a federation ourselves as the FRCA, and the identification of these areas is not intended to call into question the RCNZ's faithfulness as a Reformed church. We also recognize that our impressions are based on limited data, and may not be accurate in every respect.

6. OVERVIEW OF MANDATE ITEMS COMPLETED

Deputies can report that they have fulfilled all areas of the mandate given by Synod Armadale 2012. The mandate was as follows:

- a) convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide to the RCNZ a copy of the Acts of Synod Armadale 2012;

This was done by way of letter in December 2012, and personally in our meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCNZ in Geelong in November 2013.

- b) observe and report on the continuing faithfulness of the RCNZ in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy;

This was completed over a longer period of time and is reported on in sections 2, 4 and especially 5 above.

- 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;

This is reported on in section 5 above.

- d) encourage the RCNZ to continue to be consequential in their relationship with the CRCA;

This was completed primarily in the address to Synod Christchurch 2014, and in discussions with the RCNZ's IRC about how they guard against CRCA influences.

- e) invite delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod;

This has been done via email in December 2014.

- 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);

This was fulfilled by the attendance of two deputies at Synod Bishopdale 2014 in September 2014; as well as by a meeting of deputies with the interchurch relations committee of the RCNZ in Geelong in November 2013, and another meeting at Christchurch in September 2014 (while at Synod).

- 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

This was completed by published reports in the Una Sancta, and by means of this deputies report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Deputies have completed the mandate as provided by Synod Armadale 2012. From a range of different sources, including sermons, Faith in Focus magazine, discussions with the RCNZ Inter Church Relation committee as well as various ministers and elders at the RCNZ Synod, and having observed the proceedings and decisions at that Synod, it has become clear to Deputies that the RCNZ is continuing to exist as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The RCNZ is different to the FRCA. It has a different history, and a different background to our churches. Membership is more diverse, with a substantial proportion from different cultural background. Internally there can also be some differences between congregations, although what was very evident in the operations at Synod, they eagerly strive for unity and harmony. The RCNZ is not afraid to call sister churches to task, and has seriously admonished the GKNv on the matter of women office bearers, while the relationship with the GKSA is put on notice for the same reasons. The sister church relationship with the CRCA has been discontinued as was reported previously. The new Ecumenical Fellowship with the CRCA represents a real and significant change to the previous sister relations, and is far more than simply a cosmetic change. Additional scrutiny has been included in the newly amended rules where it concerns the calling of ministers and periods of pulpit supply. At the same time deputies continue to remain concerned about the ongoing influence of the CRCA in the RCNZ, especially as it comes to the RCNZ through the theological training

at the RTC.

Recommendations:

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 up to two 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:
 - a. 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';
 - b. 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;
 - c. 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;
 - d. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established 'Rules for Sister Church Relations' and keep the churches informed;
 - e. 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 Jesus Christ.

4. For a sister relationship to function in a meaningful way, it is important for the membership to become acquainted.

Further Recommendations:

All the deputies agree on the above recommendations. However, one of the deputies desires that the following recommendations and grounds be added to the mandate of the deputies for the RCNZ:

- f. To officially express our concerns regarding the ongoing influence of the CRCA in the RCNZ especially in relation to worship practices, the doctrine of the church, and theological training;
- g. To encourage the RCNZ to consider whether or not the CRCA still retains the marks of the true church (Art 29 BC)

Grounds:

1. This report has adequately shown that the RCNZ, although breaking the bond of sister church relations with the CRCA still continues to make use of some of the privileges of the former relationship including the summer internship program, theological training and mission/diaconal work.
2. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession leaves no room for churches to be pure or less pure. Churches are either churches of our Lord Jesus Christ or they are not. Over the years the RCNZ have identified areas of conflict between themselves and the CRCA. The nature of these issues is such that the RCNZ ought to question if the CRCA may still legitimately be seen as the true church.

APPENDIX A:

PREVIOUS FRCA SYNOD DECISIONS REGARDING THE RCNZ

What follows below are selected quotes of the main parts of the articles from each of our synods since 1985 as they relate to the RCNZ. This has been included for background information, so that delegates to synod can garner a good overview of developments between the FRCA and the RCNZ.

Synod Launceston 1985, Art.75

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.

Grounds:

1. Synod 1962 stated that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand were not faithful Churches because of their relationship with the Reformed Churches of Australia and the G.K.N.
2. This relationship with the Reformed Churches of Australia is still current.

Synod Albany 1987, Art.105

Decision:

2. Synod decides to convey its thanks to the R.C.N.Z. that it has terminated all ties with the G.K.N.(Syn.) and that it has decided to oppose very strongly the membership of the G.K.N.(Syn.) in the R.E.S. as well as to withdraw from the R.E.S. if the G.K.N.(Syn.) is not expelled.
3. 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.

Observations:

3. The 1986 General Synod of The Reformed Churches of New Zealand has adopted a strong stance against membership of the GKN (Syn.) in the RES. If these latter churches remain in the RES after the next RES in 1988, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand will withdraw immediately.
4. The second level of relations with the GKN (Syn.) as “correspondence churches” has been terminated in 1986, so that the tie with these deformative churches has ceased.

5. Contacts with the GKN (Lib.) have been opened. Good understanding exists in the RCNZ on what must happen before a relation as sister-churches would occur.

6. Contacts with the NRC (formerly 'buitenverbanders') has been established.

Considerations:

1. Obs. 3 attests to a positive stance of the RCNZ in the RES and should be considered as cause for thanks and optimism for future contacts.

2. Obs. 4 removes a serious obstacle in the path of our contacts and possible relations as sister-churches.

3. Obs. 5 indicates that the RCNZ desires to open contacts with faithful churches.

4. The contacts with the NRC gives cause for concern.

5. That the deputies for our sister-churches in The Netherlands registered surprise at the decision of the 1985 Synod is due to their misreading of the decision as though we had decided to terminate all contact with the RCNZ. Our Dutch sister-churches intensify their contacts with the RCNZ.

Synod Armadale 1990, Art.53

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.

Considerations:

1. Synod 1962 stated that the RCNZ were not faithful churches because of

their sister-relations with the RCA and the GKN(S). Synod 1985 stated that the continuing relationship between RCNZ and RCA were an impediment to continuing contact. Because of encouraging developments since 1985 (the RCNZ broke ties with the GKN(S)), Synod 1987 decided (though there was no recommendation from its deputies to that effect) to renew contact with the RCNZ whereby deputies were specifically instructed to call the RCNZ's attention to relations with other churches with which we have broken all ties.

2. It is reason for gratitude and joy when churches are given the obedience of faith to withdraw from apostate bodies such as the REC; however, it is disappointing that the RCNZ have not severed their ties with other churches with whom we could not have contact. In the case of the CRCNA and the NGK contacts have actually been strengthened despite warnings from our, and Dutch deputies regarding the latter.

3. To promote the good developments within the RCNZ and to give full, confessional information about the relations and contacts which disturb us and which endanger the RCNZ, so that we can give a timely warning, it is good to have more direct contacts with the RCNZ. This is also true because we are geographically close to New Zealand.

6. With respect to the contact that the RCNZ have with other churches, Synod should instruct deputies to use the present contact to warn the RCNZ, rather than cease all contact as was decided by Synod 1985.

Synod Bedfordale 1992, Art.84

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.

Considerations:

1. In their correspondence deputies have thoroughly addressed the matter of third parties; viz. NGK, CRCNA.

Synod Byford 1994, Art.78

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.

Grounds:

The report gives sufficient reason to renew the mandate of deputies.

In the light of the changes occurring on the ecclesiastical scene, there is a need to reconsider expectations (Synod Acts 1990, Article 53, Recommendation 5).

Synod Kelmscott 1996. Art.53

Decision:

1. Synod notes with thankfulness that the recent Synod of the RCNZ could acknowledge the FRCA as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Synod declares its gratitude for the faithfulness which deputies have found in the RCNZ.
3. Synod declares its appreciation for the principled approach which the RCNZ have shown in dealing with third parties by their encouragement and establishment of relations with faithful churches and by their admonition and if necessary breaking of ties with unfaithful churches.
4. To strive for a sister church relation with the RCNZ.
5. Synod mandates deputies to:
 - a. encourage the RCNZ to continue with their admonitions to the RCA, and to terminate relations with the RCA if these admonitions continue to go unheeded,
 - b. clearly explain to the RCNZ the reasons for this Synod's decisions, taking into account comments in paragraph 5.3 of Deputies report and the decision of Synod Launceston 1985 (Article 67).
 - c. investigate the developments leading to the formation of the Geneva Free Reformed Church of Auckland,
 - d. attend the next Synod of the RCNZ if invited, and
 - e. invite delegates from the RCNZ to attend the next Synod of the FRCA as observers with the privileges mentioned in Acts Synod Bedfordale 1992, Article 19, Recommendation 2b.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have indicated that in doctrine, worship and church government the RCNZ must be considered a true and faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Seeing that the matter of how the relations of the RCNZ with the RCA should impact our relation with the RCNZ has not yet been resolved, it would be premature to offer a sister relation at this point of time.
3. Deputies have reported on new relations which the RCNZ have entered into with faithful churches, and their willingness to suspend or break ties with churches which deviate from Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Although it cannot be expected that the RCNZ suddenly break ties with an errant sister without first exercising brotherly admonition, the deformation within the RCA has been evident for a considerable time, shown by their delay before finally breaking relations with the GKN(S) and their continuing membership of the REC. Deputies should encourage the RCNZ to act consequently if the admonitions of the RCNZ continue to go unheeded.
4. Synod 1985 decided that our declaration of another church as being "true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ ... has as direct consequence that a sister-church relationship can be established without disregarding the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realisation of unity" (Article 67, Acts Synod 1985).
5. Contacts with the RCNZ have proved fruitful and should be fostered by further visits to each others synods. Privileges given to RCNZ delegates should be similar to that extended to churches with which we have Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact.
6. Deputies have received correspondence from the Geneva Free Reformed Church of Auckland requesting affiliation with the FRCA. The minister and members of this church were formerly members of the RCNZ.

Synod Launceston 1998, Art.89

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.

Synod West Albany 2000, Art.93

Decision:

(NB: 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.)

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.

Synod Rockingham, 2003, Art. 72

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.

Also relevant are the decisions on appeals against Art 93 Synod 2000. These are found in Art 62, 67, 68, and 69.

Art 62, Grounds:

6. Past synods have not required the RCNZ to break ties with the CRCA but have expressed appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ use their relationship to admonish their erring sister.

Art 68, Grounds:

4. The RCNZ does indeed use its sister relation with the CRCA faithfully and is not afraid to admonish its close sister. One cannot therefore claim that they bear responsibility for any neglect by the CRCA. To state that the RCNZ does not maintain the mark of discipline because of its sister relation with the CRCA goes too far. Also, one should not issue the call to separate too quickly. The call to reformation must precede it and be pursued with patience.

Synod West Kelmscott 2006, Art. 102

Decision:

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.

Grounds:

1. Deputies have reported to synod in a manner that satisfies the mandate.

2. See Deputies Report (Appendix 10).

Synod Legana 2009, Article 63

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.

Grounds:

1. FRC Darling Downs is correct in stating that a triangular relationship does not exist.

2. FRC Darling Downs is correct to say that ongoing recognition of the RCNZ as being a true church should be explicit. With thankfulness, Synod can confirm this recognition on the basis of the Report of Deputies.

3. FRC Darling Downs correctly states that the matter of the impediment requires further discussion and clarification, also with respect to the question of the uniformity/pluriformity of the church.

4. FRC Mt Nasura seeks to bind the next Synod of the FRCA into a decision regarding our relationship with the RCNZ. A decision of a future Synod cannot, however, be made by Synod 2009. Further, our recognition of the RCNZ as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ obligates us to continue to strive for sister-relations with patience, humility and love.

5. Mt Nasura, at ground d of its Overture, refers to a statement of RCNZ deputies and not an official decision of Synod. The RCNZ's sister-relationship with the CRCA remains under strain (Synod Hastings 2008, Art 83). The outcome of developments in this relationship can only be evaluated by the next Synod of the FRCA.

6. The RCNZ have formally invited our attendance at the next ICRC (Synod Hastings 2008, Art 98), and so requires a response.

APPENDIX B:

DECISIONS OF THE RCNZ SYNOD BUCKLANDS BEACH 2011

In the summary below aspects of the Acts of the Synod of the RCNZ (2011) which may be of interest to us in the FRCA have been included. Relevant parts of the report from their interchurch relations committee to their synod are also included as part of their report 10.

1. Art 38 (page 1-9)

Two deputies from the RCNZ are to have oversight of their theological students at the RTC. This oversight includes visiting the students, discussions on curriculum, progress and vicariate placement.

2. Art 61 (page 1-16)

To continue with a sister church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches and to express appreciation for their cooperation on the mission field in PNG. They also plan to explain to the CanRC their change of relationship with the CRCA from a strained sister church relationship to a relationship called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship."

3. Art 93 (page 1-24)

Synod decides:

1. *To establish a new category of interchurch relations in addition to the existing sister-church relationship called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship".*
2. *To adopt provisionally the proposed "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as the rules for this new relationship.*

For easy reference the Stated Clerk has inserted the "Proposed Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" here, after the minutes had been approved.

1. *Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies.*
2. *The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our establish practice of a "colloquium doctum".*
3. *Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships.*
4. *Joint exchange or information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological educa-*

tion).

5. *A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).*
 6. *Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns.*
 3. *To discontinue the sister-church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.*
 4. *To inform the CRCA of this new relationship with them and seek ratification of this at the next synod of the CRCA.*
 5. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*
4. Art 110 (page 1-29)

Point 4 and 5 of this article state that the RCNZ will continue to offer sister-church relations to the FRCA and to send one delegate to our 2012 synod (this occurred when Rev P Archbald attended Synod Armadale). Point 10 of this article notes that the synod decides to inform the Canadian Reformed Church of their changes relationship with the CRCA explaining to them that seeking to continue a strained sister-church relationship has not been helpful for either the CRCA or the RCNZ.

5. Appendix 3 (page 1-44 ff)

This is the speech of the delegate from the CRCA.

The speech is well worth a read. From the CRCA side they stress the points which unit them. At the same time the speaker (Rev Henk deWaard) acknowledges that the RCNZ have had issues with them even to the point of considering severing ties, even though the CRCA has never had a problem with the RCNZ. The speech also gives a glimpse into the direction the CRCA is going. There appears to be a tension between remaining Reformed and being able to minister in the contemporary context. The CRCA is also considering joining the World Communion of Reformed Churches since the Reformed Ecumenical Council has ceased to exist. The WCRC is an even broader body than the REC.

6. Appendix (page 1-49ff)

This is the speech from Rev Kroeze from our churches. He highlights the danger of the Federal Vision movement and prays that it may not

raise its ugly head amongst the RCNZ.

7. Report 9 (page 4-75)

The report from the Deputies for Students to the Ministry shows a close working relationship with the RTC. A very interesting comment is made in section G. Here the authors state that the RTC gives good training but the deputies are concerned with the close connection between the CRCA and the RTC. They want to monitor this closely.

8. Report 10 (4-78 ff)

This is the report of the Interchurch Relations Committee. Relevant parts of this report have been included below since they are of interest to us in the FRCA. Obviously this report is not the decision of synod (that is listed above) but it does give an understanding of the process the RCNZ committee have been through.

What follows below are relevant sections from the report of the Interchurch Relations Committee to Synod 2011, as part of their report 10.

Report 10: Interchurch Relations Committee to Synod Bucklands Beach 2011

1. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

Synod 2008 made the following decisions in relation to the CRCA.

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the CRCA.*
- 2. To continue the meetings between the CER of the CRCA and our IRC.*
- 3. To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*
- 4. That Synod convey to the CRCA through the Interchurch Relations Committee that our sisterchurch relationship continues under strain due to their approval of the practice of ordaining women to the office of deacon.*

The CRCA Synod 2009 was held in May of that year and was attended by Revs. Flinn and Haverland as fraternal delegates. For a report of this synod, please see Appendix 1.

In terms of the existing sister church relationship between the CRCA and the RCNZ, the CRCA synod made the following important decision: "to endorse the CER's move to work with the IRC to redefine the relationship with the RCNZ so as to move beyond the current environment in which various issues repeatedly become a stumbling block and a cause of strain."

This decision reflects an awareness on both sides of the Tasman that for many years now our interchurch relationship has been under strain and

that this situation is unsatisfactory to both parties. By way of response, the CRCA have clearly shown a willingness to explore the possibility of redefining our interchurch relationship or establishing a new type of relationship that might remove the strain that continues to exist (see 1.4 above). As the IRC has reflected on this and discussed the matter openly with the CER of the CRCA, we agree that the problem stems from two of the rules 4 and 5 by which we conduct our relationship with sister churches (see Appendix 2):

4. Warning each other in respect of spiritual dangers that arise and spread and imperil the Church of Christ.

5. Correcting each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness whether by commission or omission on the score of profession and/or practice of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Within a church federation, this is the sort of thing that would be done via overture and debate, should a session/congregation or presbytery/classis object to some new direction or perceive some theological threat to the denomination as a whole. But in our current sister-church structures, the same principle operates on the international level. Thus, in our sister church relationships, we are bound by our rules to scrutinize each other closely and even correct each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness. This is precisely where we get into constant difficulty with our relationship with the CRCA. Because of our existing rules, we are, in effect, obligated to function like a concerned member congregation within the CRCA, not by means of overture and debate or vote, but certainly by means of warning, admonition and correction. When this occurs, if the CRCA respond positively, well and good. But if not, then the relationship comes “under strain” and work then needs to be done to try to remove that strain. The IRC has discussed this with the CER of the CRCA, and would like to propose a new type of interchurch relationship with the CRCA. The rules for this new relationship are set out below. Please note: this relationship is not a sister church relationship. It is proposal for a new category of interchurch relationship called “Ecclesiastical Fellowship”, within which both the IRC and the CER of the CRCA believe our denominations could interact fruitfully without the strain that currently exists between our federations. At the moment, the IRC is of the view that the RCNZ/CRCA relationship would be the only one that falls within this new category. However, in time, there may be other churches that would best fit within the proposed new structure rather than the existing structure of the sister church relationship.

If Synod were not to agree with this proposal, then our relationship with the CRCA will remain “under strain” as decided by previous synods. This would continue the difficulties that the IRC and the CER of the CRCA have

sought to alleviate by restructuring our relationship. If any different kind of relationship is desired, then that should be proposed by way of an overture from a session or presbytery.

Proposed Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our established practice of a "colloquium doctum".
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns.

Recommendations

1. *To establish a new category of interchurch relations in addition to the existing sister church relationship called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship".*
2. *To adopt the proposed "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as the rules for this new relationship.*
3. *To change the relationship with the CRCA from a sister church relationship to a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.*
4. *To inform the CRCA of this new relationship with them and seek ratification of this at the next synod of the CRCA.*
5. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

3. Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Synod 2008 decided:

1. *To express our appreciation to the CanRC for their acceptance of our invitation to enter a sister church relationship with them.*
2. *To continue to work closely with the CanRC in connection with the mission work in PNG.*
3. *To send a delegate to the next synod of the CanRC.*

For some years prior to the 2007 Synod of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC) we have been working closely with them in the Papua New Guinea mission. That cooperation on the mission field was the motivation for us to pursue closer relations with the CanRC and so we extended an offer of sister-church relations. The CanRC responded positively to our request in their 2007 Synod establishing full sister-church relations with us. Since then we have continued to work together closely in PNG assisting and guiding the young Reformed Churches of PNG.

8. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN-lib)

In relation to the GKN-lib Synod 2008 decided:

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN-lib).*
- 2. To continue to encourage closer contact and cooperation where and as possible especially via the International Conference of Reformed Churches.*

Direct contact between the deputies of our denominations during the inter-synodical period has taken place via correspondence as well as during the ICRC meeting in Christchurch during 2009. We received a letter from their ecumenical committee (BBK – Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad) dated 02 June 2011 (Rev Johan Plug). It points to positives: no great upheavals, continued mission work at home and abroad, continuing theological education and the development of a new version of their church order, “more adapted to the actual situation of church life in the 21st century”. This is currently under discussion.

The letter also points to a new report on the “position of women in our churches”. This, very much a work in progress, is available in English on the denominational Website and will be discussed at the forthcoming synod at Harderwijk. The report points out that the Synod of 2008 (Zwolle-Zuid) had opted for three tracks:

1. Academic consideration;
2. consideration within the churches;
3. making preparations for practical decisions for the short term. The deputies report as follows, “Deputies are still very busy carrying out the instructions on the consideration within our churches. We hope to finish this with a national conference to be held during the period that Synod is in session.” The report adds, “Now that the consideration seems to be in full progress, the road is clear for specific decision-making. We think it desirable that a new Committee be appointed for this task. In our view, this new committee should also prepare a decision with respect to female office bearers.”

The June 2010 letter also points to tension within their federation and how in two of their local churches a split has occurred. They therefore ask for prayer that the Lord will keep their churches “safe in the unity of his Word and the Reformed confessions.”

As this point of time we await the outcome of the Synod (Harderwijk) 2011.

The IRC is aware of a number of concerns that are currently being discussed by the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We are keeping abreast of the discussions and findings of these brethren.

Recommendations

19. To continue our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

(GKN-lib).

20. To continue to monitor developments within these churches, especially with respect to the role of women and the new church order.

9. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Our official discussions with the FRCA go back to the Synod of 1992 when we received at our synod a representative from these churches. Since then we have regularly exchanged delegates and continued discussion with a view to establishing a sister-church relationship with them.

Synod 2008 decided

- 1. To acknowledge with sadness that we have been unable to make progress towards a sister church relationship with the FRCA.*
- 2. To inform the FRCA that we cannot accept that our sister-relationship with the CRCA should be an impediment to the FRCA accepting our offer.*
- 3. To continue our offer of sister-church relations with the FRCA.*
- 4. To convey these decisions to the FRCA by correspondence.*
- 5. To send a delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.*

Since the RCNZ synod 2005, our churches have been offering a sister-church relationship to the FRCA. Despite the fact that the FRCA has declared the RCNZ “true and faithful” (synod 2003), the offer of a sister-church relationship has not been accepted. The “impediment,” from the FRCA perspective, remains the sister-church relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA. The issue for the FRCA lies in the fact that the RCNZ has a sister-church relationship with a federation of churches that

lies on the “back-door step” of the FRCA, but with which they believe, on principal grounds, they cannot have a sister-church relationship.

Nevertheless, contact between the FRCA and the RCNZ remains significant. There has been an increase in traffic in both directions, with a number of former RCNZ members joining the RCNZ, FRCA visitors worshipping in the RCNZ and vice versa, teachers crossing the Tasman to work in Christian schools associated with our respective churches, and even some former FRCA members joining the RCNZ. There is also contact on the mission field in PNG.

Rev. Archbald attended the FRCA synod in Legana, Tasmania, in 2009. The synod received a number of objections to their 2006 decisions on the RCNZ. These objections were generally voted down. The FRCA deputies recommended status quo, and synod agreed: synod confirmed the 2003 recognition of the RCNZ as true churches. Synod decided to discuss the issue of the CRCA with the RCNZ in more detail. It was decided to send two delegates to the next RCNZ synod, and to ask the RCNZ to reciprocate. A slight warming of the contact is indicated in the difference between the FRCA synod 2006 and 2009 decisions. Amongst other decisions, the FRCA Synod 2009 decided: “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.”

Recommendations

27. To continue our offer of sister-church relations with the FRCA.

28. To send one delegate to the 2012 synod of the FRCA.

APPENDIX C:

THE IRC'S REPORT TO THE RCNZ SYNOD BISHOPDALE 2014

Relevant sections of the RCNZ's interchurch relations committee's report to the RCNZ Synod Bishopdale 2014 as part of their report 19 have been included below.

Report 19: Interchurch Relations Committee to Bishopdale 2014

General

Synod 2011 appointed Revs. Paul Archbald, Leo de Vos, Dirk van Garderen and Daniel Wilson and Mr. Pieter van der Wel as members of the IRC.

During the inter-synodical period our committee has met five times and one of these meetings was held at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, where we also met with the Deputies of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and representatives of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. Other work has been done via email.

A. Interchurch relationships

Synod 2011 made the following decisions in relation to our interchurch relationships

1. *To establish a new category of interchurch relations in addition to the existing sister- church relationship, called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship". (Acts 2011, Art.93-1)*
2. *To adopt provisionally the proposed "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as the rules for this new relationship. (Acts 2011, Art.93-2)*

These provisionally adopted Rules are:

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our established practice of a "colloquium doctum".
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication

ventures).

6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns.

In our meetings the "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as well as the name of the relationship were frequent topics of discussion both due to questions from members of the IRC and from questions, especially from fraternal delegates, from the floor of Synod at the time.

1. Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

It is possible that our churches will use this category for other ecumenical relationships with other denominations. The committee therefore proposes amendments and a note with regard to the implications of Church Order Articles 61 and 62.

Proposed ADJUSTED Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (specifically 1-3 and the reference to RCNZ CO 61-62). The additions or amendments have been underlined.

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. If feasible, the Inter-church relations committees should meet at least once in the inter-synodical period.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our current practice of holding a preliminary evaluation before a call is issued and a *Colloquium Doctum*. (see Church Order article 10)
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships, subject to Session examination; longer-term pulpit supply should be subject to Presbytery evaluation.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns

Please note: Church Order Articles 61-62, regarding oversight of the Lord's Table and the admitting of new members, do apply to Churches in

Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Recommendation

2. That the Synod approve the adjusted Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as presented.

2. The name “Ecclesiastical Fellowship”

When the name “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” for our new proposed ecumenical relationship was discussed on the floor of Synod the OPC delegates pointed out that this designation is used as their equivalent of sister-church relationship. When looking further afield we found that:

- The CanRC has a similar nomenclature as the OPC,
- The CRCA uses “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” as a general name that covers all their ecumenical relationships;
- The PCEA uses the term “fraternal relations” for all their ecumenical relationships;
- The URCNA uses the term “Ecumenical Relations” for all their ecumenical relationships but has various levels within this concept.

As you can see there is a variety of names and structures. The committee believes under these circumstances the term “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” is not the most helpful name for our new ecumenical relationship and will not be helpful for our sister-churches to work with. We have also discussed this matter with the CER and in general terms they agree with our view on this matter.

We therefore propose

Recommendation

3. That Synod approve that the name Ecclesiastical Fellowship be changed to Ecumenical Fellowship.

2. Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 61-2,3,4):

2. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.*
3. *To express our appreciation for the privilege of cooperating with the CanRC in the mission work in Papua New Guinea.*
4. *To convey our change of relationship with the CRCA explaining that seeking to continue a strained sister-church relationship has not been profitable for either the CRCA or the RCNZ*

We have not had much direct contact with the CanRC during the past inter-synodical period. However, Rev. Paul Archbald interacted with their

delegates at the FRCA Synod in July 2012 when he attended that synod as an observer.

Rev. Dirk van Garderen also met with their delegates to the ICRC Conference in Cardiff, Wales in September 2013 and with their delegate to the RCN Synod in March 2014.

Through our cooperation on the mission field in Papua New Guinea there has been more intensive contact with representatives of the CanRC present on the field and at the recent mission conference in October 2013. We appreciate the continued good cooperation with the CanRC in this mission work.

Our study committee of Updating the Forms and Confessions has been able to make use of work done by the CanRC in new translations of the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, for which we are thankful

Recommendations

- 6. To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.*
- 7. To send a delegate to the next CanRC Synod*

7. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN-lib)

In relation to the GKN-lib Synod 2011 decided (Art. 25-4,5):

- 4. To continue our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN-lib).*
- 5. To continue to monitor developments within these churches and communicate concerns, especially with respect to the role of women and the new church order.*

The GKNv is now known as the GKN, hence the use of RCN in our report.

Direct contact between the deputies of our denominations during the inter-synodical period has taken place via correspondence, contact with their delegates the FRCA Synod in 2012, at the ICRC meeting in Cardiff during 2013 as well as the visit of Rev. van Garderen as fraternal delegate to the 2014 Synod of the RCN. His report on this visit is attached as Appendix 6.

We have received two “spring letters” updating us on various developments in the RCN and in which they also pass on greetings.

As a committee we corresponded with the RCN expressing concern about their practice of sending both male and female fraternal delegates to synods of their sister-churches. This practice came to our attention through synodical reports to the FRCA synod in 2012 which was attended by Rev. Paul Archbald.

In early September 2013 the Deputies Male / Female in the Church submitted their report Man and Woman in the Church (Report M/V) to the General Synod of the RCN. After discussing the matter the committee requested the agreement of the SIC to send a delegate to attend the week on Foreign Relations of the RCN synod in March 2014 to express our deep concern about the direction of this report and its recommendations. The SIC agreed with our request.

Rev. van Garderen expressed our deep misgivings about the report and its recommendations to the RCN synod on behalf of our churches. Our main concern is that the report uses language and presuppositions that call into question the adherence of the RCN to the inherent authority of Scripture. We believe that their hermeneutical approach places too much weight on the cultural context in which the Bible was written and the cultural context in which it needs to be proclaimed today. Other sister-churches of the RCN who were represented at the synod also expressed strong reservations about this report.

The current focus of our concern is clearly on the discussion in the RCN whether women can serve in the offices of the church. That this continues to need our attention is borne out by the fact that the RCN 'Synode Journaal' from 14 June 2014 reports that Synod has approved the ongoing discussion towards closer relations with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)¹. Therefore we can only conclude that the practice of allowing women to serve in all offices, which is the practice in the NGK, is no longer a barrier to sister-church relations.

We must be aware that the discussion on the role of women in the church is part of a bigger picture where God and religion do not seem to have the last word anymore. Other areas of concern in the life of the RCN are their views on the doctrine of creation and on homosexuality. If the current hermeneutical issues are not resolved these other issues may very well come up for debate.

Our sister church, the Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as other sister-churches of the RCN, have expressed concerns in these areas.

Recommendations

- 18. That synod is encouraged that the RCN synod did not open the offices to women and that there appears to be a willingness to listen to the concerns of sister-churches.*
- 19. That synod express its concern that the RCN synod has not clearly rejected the hermeneutical foundations of the conclusion and recommendations of the Report M/V*

20. *That Synod instruct the IRC to seek clarification from the BBK-RCN regarding these decisions, since unless they constitute a clear withdrawal from this hermeneutical direction (see Rec. 19) our sister-church relationship may be affected negatively.*
21. *That we continue our sister-church relationship with the RCN at this time.*
22. *That Synod, barring unforeseen circumstances, send a fraternal delegate to the next RCN general synod.*

1. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

Synod 2011 made the following decisions in relation to the CRCA (Acts 2011, Art. 93-3,4,5).

3. *To discontinue the sister-church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.*
4. *To inform the CRCA of this new relationship with them and seek ratification of this at the next synod of the CRCA.*
5. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

The CRCA Synod 2012 was held in May of that year and was attended by Revs. Haverland and Willemse as fraternal delegates. Their report is attached as Appendix 7.

The Synod ratified the change in relationship between the CRCA and the RCNZ to one of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The general view seemed to be that this would bring the relationship into line with the CRCA's other ecumenical relationships. Synod also agreed to send two fraternal delegates to the next RCNZ Synod and to send two CER representatives for up to two intersynodical meetings with our own IRC.

The Synod also decided to seek membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Consequently, in July 2012, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations of the CRCA (CER) wrote to the IRC requesting that the RCNZ be one of the two member churches to nominate the CRCA for membership of the ICRC. After consultation with the Synodical Interim Committee (SIC) the IRC in its meeting in October 2013 adopted the following motion:

That the Interchurch Relations Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand sponsor the application by the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia for membership in the International Council of Reformed Churches

The IRC informed the CER of this decision and on 25th February 2013

wrote a letter supporting their application for membership to the secretariat of the ICRC. The CRCA did not receive quite enough support at the Conference of the ICRC to be admitted to membership. The CER will recommend to the next CRCA Synod that it continue to pursue membership in the ICRC.

On the 13th November the IRC met with the Deputies of the CER (Revs. Reinier Noppers, Geoff van Schie and Joe Vermeulen) at the premises of the RTC, Geelong. The main topics for the discussion were the events surrounding the CRCA's application for membership of the ICRC, the proposed amendments to the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship and the possible change of name for this relationship, which are reported on above.

Various other matters were touched on briefly but these concerned mainly sharing information on the work of other synodical committees that men on the CER or the IRC were aware of.

As with our two deputies to the CRCA Synod, our committee, after meeting with the CER, also came away with a positive view of the recent developments in the CRCA for which we give thanks to God.

Recommendations

23. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with CRCA.

24. To inform the CRCA of the amended "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as per recommendation 2 under A, if approved

25. To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.

2. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Synod 2011 decided (Acts 2011, Art.110-4,5)

4. To continue our offer of sister-church relations with the FRCA.

5. To send one delegate to the 2012 synod of the FRCA.

The 2012 Synod of the FRCA met at Armadale, Western Australia. Rev. Paul Archbald represented our churches at this synod. His report is attached below as Appendix 10.

The main items on the agenda were:

- a. relations with the Dutch churches (now identified as RCN)
- b. the up-date of the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise;
- c. relations with the RCN (restored);
- d. relations with the RCNZ

There was quite some discussion with regard to the relationship with our

churches. Their decisions are summarised here:

- They reaffirmed their recognition of the RCNZ as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and their commitment to continue to work towards a sister-church relationship.
- The synod acknowledged our decision to change our relationship with the CRCA and instead establish a relationship of *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*.
- The synod did not accept their deputies' proposal to enter into fraternal relations with the RCNZ rather than a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ. This is because they do not have such a category.
- The synod also decided to appoint new deputies for contact with the RCNZ to "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". At our meeting in November 2013, at their request, we explained our committee's recommendation to amend the provisional Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- Their deputies were also mandated to meet regularly with their New Zealand counterparts, which is a new development on the part of the FRCA, if possible at least twice in every inter-synodical period.
- Other existing areas of cooperation with regard to the work of missions in PNG and Christian education between our denominations continue in a positive fashion.

We note with interest that their Synod has decided to commence work on evaluating the ESV. Our previous synodical study on this was used positively by the FRCA. The 2011 NIV is not to be used in the FRCA worship services.

In an informal meeting with the delegate of the FRC South Africa Rev. Archbald learned that the FRCSA Synod 2011 (Acts, p.19) decided "to maintain contact with the RCNZ", especially for the sake of immigrants from their churches.

Recommendations

31. That the RCNZ continue to offer a sister-church relationship to the FRCA.

32. That the IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-synodical period.

33. That the RCNZ send one delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.

APPENDIX D:

REPORT ON FIRST MEETING BETWEEN FRCA DEPUTIES AND RCNZ INTERCHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

(also published in Una Sancta)

Synod Armadale 2012/13 appointed Rev. R.E. Pot (convenor), Br. M. Bax, Br. R (Rick) Eikelboom and Br. A Vermeulen as deputies for contact with the Reformed Church of New Zealand (RCNZ).

Seeking a sister church relationship with the RCNZ has been in progress for many years and by the grace of God this progress has led Synod 2000 (Acts article 93) in recognising the RCNZ as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our two Church federations however did not become sisters due to the fact that the RCNZ had a sister Church relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA). This relationship however has been under strain due to the direction the CRCA was heading with several doctrinal issues. The RCNZ has on a number of occasions admonished the CRCA with the result that the two federations worked to reduce or remove the strain between them. Together the inter-church committees drafted rules for a new type of relationship, 'Ecclesiastical Fellowship.'

Rules of this new relationship were presented as provisional to the RCNZ at Synod 2011. RCNZ Synod 2011 decided to adopt provisionally the proposed rules. They also decided to discontinue sister church relationship with the CRCA and established a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The RCNZ also agreed to inform the CRCA of this and asked them to ratify them. This was ratified at the synod of the CRCA in 2012.

Synod 2012 of the FRCA received this information and appointed four delegates, a greater number than previously, with the mandate to meet twice with delegates from the RCNZ in the inter-synodical period, with one of the main aims to determine what the new relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA is. At the heart of the matter was, how does the new relationship differ from the previous sister church relationship, and how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous synods of the FRCA.

Mid-November the four delegates met with the delegates of the RCNZ in Geelong, Australia, at the Reformed Theological College. This meeting was held in Geelong due to the RCNZ delegates meeting the previous day with the CRCA.

The meeting was attended by five members of the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) consisting of Br. P van der Wel(c), Rev. D van Garderen, Rev. L de Vos, Rev. P Archbald, and Rev. D. Wilson. The

meeting was chaired by Br P van der Wel. After greetings the FRCA deputies conveyed Synod 2012 decisions and presented them with a copy of the Acts of the 2012 Synod. The IRC committee responded likewise, sharing recent synod decisions and current events in their federation of churches. Some of the recent developments and decisions include the compilation of a new Psalm/Hymn-book: *Sing to the Lord* - a provisional hymnal book at this stage, the acceptance of liturgical forms, including the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as translated by the Canadian Reformed Church.

Of greatest interest was the development of the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA. We were informed that the CRCA synod 2012 ratified the change in relationship, a seemingly easy thing since the CRCA has not a level of relationship called sister church, but rather has as their highest level of relationship called Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Since synod 2011 the ICR have reworded two of the rules as they felt they were not clear enough and wanted to make clear that the change in relationship was more than a cosmetic change. The implications of these changes were relayed at the meeting where it was stressed that the previous relationship had a lot of history although the delegates of the RCNZ indicated that the direction of the CRCA was not scriptural and thus the relationship needed to change.

During the meeting it was made clear to us that the newly worded rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship represent a major change in the relationship with the CRCA. These adaptations will be presented to their next Synod D.V. September 2014. Of greatest interest was the guarding of the pulpit. Although they maintain an open pulpit exchange with the CRCA, the word open is anything but that. The pulpit is guarded and only ministers who have been duly checked by the session (our church councils) are ministers allowed to preach in the RCNZ. In reality these would be ministers who have previously been ministers in NZ, but still maintain a strong Reformed view. Traffic between the two church federations has dropped significantly and nowhere near what it used to be. If a known emeritus minister from the CRCA were to fill a vacancy short term, presbytery would be involved in the process of allowing such a short term appointment. Ministers of the CRCA are not automatically accepted as ministers on the pulpits of the RCNZ.

The process of calling a minister is also a lengthy process, ending with a colloquium doctum. As an added safeguard a preliminary evaluation is to be conducted by the presbytery (our classis) to investigate a prospective minister as to where he stands theologically and also to see if the prospective minister would fit in culturally. A local Church can then only call the prospective minister if the presbytery agrees. A synodical delegation,

together with the presbytery, then conducts the colloquium doctum.

Other aspects of the relationship were discussed in an open manner. Some of these were the joint mission project at the Reformed Bible College in Port Moresby, and the support being received by parents in relation to Reformed education. All deputies agreed that a closer relationship and sharing of resources would be of benefit to both federations.

After a hearty lunch, a general discussion was held where questions could be asked. One of the questions that was asked by a deputy of the RCNZ was, are we as FRCA really willing to have sister church relationship with them? With the standing impediment gone (a decision Synod 2015 needs to decide) will the FRCA now look for some other issue to refuse the offer of sister church relationship as given by the RCNZ? These are questions many have asked before and the delegates could sympathise with these sentiments, however the delegates of the RCNZ were assured that the FRCA have and do maintain that the RCNZ are a true church and that a sister church relationship is desirable.

The meeting concluded and in thankfulness to God the meeting could be held in a brotherly atmosphere. Mention was made during the meeting of an appreciation that we could meet and that the desired relationship needs to be a real relationship where the two federations can be of benefit to each other. Time to get a correct relationship is more important than rushing to sister relationship where the federations may be at odds with each other. This was a view held by all delegates.

Where to from here? This is a matter for Synod 2015. In the meantime pray for unity of God's church. A request was made by the delegates of the RCNZ that if members of the FRCA visits NZ, please seek out a RCNZ congregation on the Sunday.

As delegates we can reflect on the blessed trip and meeting God provided us with and urge you to pray that God's command to be united in the true faith may be the desire of both federations on either side of the Tasman Sea. Pray for the unity of the Church for the glory of God's name.

R. Eikelboom

APPENDIX E:

REPORT OF VISIT TO SYNOD BISHOPDALE 2014

(also published in Una Sancta)

On 12 September Rev. Pot and M. Bax as deputies for contact with the RCNZ travelled to Christchurch to attend the national Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Due to circumstances we travelled on different flights and after some delay we arrived at our destination at around 3.00am on Saturday, where we were heartily welcomed by our host, Sr J. Mahoney.

At 3.00 PM synod was convened, which was attended by some 60 delegates and observers.

Rev R. van Wichen opened synod on behalf of the convening church of Bishopdale. After credentials were read out, moderamen was elected. Rev P. Kloosterman was elected as chairman. Rev R. van Wichen as vice chairman.

Synod deals with matters in full session, and does not really work with subcommittees, with a couple of exceptions of advisory committees to advise synod on procedural matters relating to some more complicated issues.

Synod reconvened Saturday evening for a prayer service. Rev Andrew de Vries delivered a sermon on Psalm 133 focussing on how we are called to strive for unity in the church. On Sunday we attended worship in Bishopdale, in the morning led by Rev J. Rogers, who treated us with a sermon on Zechariah 5. In the afternoon we could enjoy a service led by Rev L. de Vos on Genesis 17, dealing with God's covenant promises as sealed in our baptism. This was a well delivered scriptural message.

Synod was reconvened on Monday morning, and dealt with a number of minor reports from various deputies. Synod also dealt with correspondence from CGK in the Netherlands, suggesting that relationship, which was established some 50 years ago, be discontinued due to lack of meaningful contact. This was also proposed by the IRC. After some discussion it was decided to discontinue relations and maintain some contact with them through means of the ICRC.

In dealing with the sister church relationship with the GKNv the RCNZ is as concerned as the FRCA and have expressed deep concern about the developments in Holland. They have continued the relationship for now, and have adopted the following decisions:

18. That synod is encouraged that the RCN synod did not open the

offices to women and that there appears to be a willingness to listen to the concerns of sister-churches.

19. That synod express its concern that the RCN synod has not clearly rejected the hermeneutical foundations of the conclusion and recommendations of the Report M/V

20. That Synod instruct the IRC to seek clarification from the BBK-RCN regarding these decisions, since unless they constitute a clear withdrawal from this hermeneutical direction (see Rec. 19) our sister-church relationship may be affected negatively.

21. That we continue our sister-church relationship with the RCN at this time.

On Monday evening the principal of the Reformed Theological College held a presentation outlining the current situation at the college. At present only one RCNZ student is studying in Geelong. The RTC is not directly governed by the CRCA but is mutually funded by both federations, while it draws its board members both from CRCA and RCNZ as well as the RPC. From various discussions with delegates, as well as comments from the synod floor, it appears that there is some push for more students to attend the RTC, rather than MARS, although there are presently two students studying at MARS compared to one at the RTC. At present up to 7 young brothers are considering taking up theological studies, mostly leaning toward the RTC. One factor which makes the RTC appear more attractive is that the Australian government provides financial benefits, such as Austudy and Family Tax Benefit, effectively reducing the cost of the studies by more than \$100,000 compared to MARS. According to deputies for training for the ministry, both the RTC and MARS offer sound theological training, with RTC being a four year course, and MARS offering a more intense three year course. On a slightly disappointing note, it was agreed that RTC students doing six-week summer internship training, could be placed in CRCA congregations as well as RCNZ churches. A motion to have this restricted to RCNZ was defeated.

Tuesday morning synod dealt with a sensitive matter relating to appeals and church discipline. Of interest was that after a full morning of related debate and hearing, no decision on the actual issue was made, other than discharging the ad hoc committee put in place by the previous synod. Basically, the complainants have been heard, and the matter was laid to rest.

The Psalm and Hymn selection committee could report that the new song book "Sing to the Lord" was completed and is now being used by most churches. The compilation and production of this song book was some 12

years in the making, and there was much joy and thankfulness that the final product could now be used by all. It comprises 150 Psalms and some 380 hymns. Extensive use was made of this book during the course of Synod, with at least some 30 stanzas being sung each day. Unfortunately many of the tunes were unfamiliar to your delegates. The committee will now be working on a new edition which will be a slightly smaller in size and include the liturgical forms and confessions.

The previous synod had appointed a committee to draft guidelines for consistories in how to deal with sexual child abuse. The committee has presented a comprehensive set of guidelines setting out procedures for situations where consistories need to deal with matters relating to sexual child abuse. It is a well drafted valuable document which will be able to serve as a reliable resource, should consistories be required to address such matters. A number of changes were suggested, and the document was provisionally adopted and referred back to the committee to incorporate the suggested changes and report back to the next synod.

Up till now, the RCNZ had formally adopted the NASB as well as the 1984NIV as approved bible translations for use on the pulpit. In view of the 1984NIV soon to be out of production, the Bible translation committee reported to synod with a recommendation to adopt both the ESV and the NKJV as acceptable translations for use on the pulpit. These recommendations were adopted by synod. The 2011 NIV was firmly rejected for pulpit use.

On Wednesday evening we could enjoy two presentations relating to outreach and mission. First Miss Janice Reid gave a presentation on her work as a radio trainer in south-east Asia. Janice is working through an organisation named Reach Beyond, and financially supported by the RCNZ. Janice is teaching local people to spread the Gospel via radio broadcasts. Her presentation was followed by a presentation from Rev. Alan Douma, a name now familiar to many of us, who is working at the Reformed College in Port Moresby in PNG.

The RCNZ enjoys a number of sister church relations with various bonds around the world. Representatives were present from the OPC, URCNA, PCEA, GKSA, PRCA, CanRC. No representative was present from the GKNv. Strong admonition was made to the GKSA in relation to the matter of women serving as deacons. Of great interest was a presentation by one of the OPC delegates, elder Mark Bube, who presented an outline of the current mission projects being undertaken by the OPC. Among others, the OPC has projects happening in Eritrea, China, North Korea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Haiti, and Japan. In an informal meeting, your delegates were approached by the OPC delegates to set matters in motion to establish

some formal contact between our federations. They expressed a strong desire to start working together and benefit from one another's strengths. We explained to them that this would be outside our mandate to take on, but referred them to the general secretary for inter church relations, who may then refer the request to the local churches

Rev. R. Pot extended greetings from the FRCA and provided a brief history of our present relationship with the RCNZ and how we have been growing closer as neighbours. The address was well received, and a response was provided by Rev P Archbald. Synod then agreed to continue to offer sister church relationship to the FRCA. From discussions with the Inter Church Relation Committee it became clear that the RCNZ expects the FRCA to make a decision on the sister church relationship at their next synod one way or another. If we can not recognise them as sister church, they would continue to extend their offer but no longer send delegates to our synods, due to financial constraints.

Synod adopted without further discussion the amended rules for Ecumenical Fellowship, which represents a marked change compared to the rules for sister church relations and put in place additional safeguards relating to the calling of ministers from overseas, as well as to short and medium pulpit supply/exchange.

Although the RCNZ no longer has a sister relationship with the CRCA, it is clear that on a personal level there are still strong connections. A number of former RCNZ ministers now serve in the CRCA and vice versa. Quite a number of RCNZ ministers received their training at the RTC. It is a relationship which has lasted over 60 years and which can not be cast aside easily.

On Friday morning Br. Bax travelled back home in the wee hours of the morning, while Rev Pot continued to enjoy the Kiwi hospitality for a few more days, visiting two different congregations on Sunday.

M. Bax

APPENDIX F: ADDRESS TO THE RCNZ SYNOD BISHOPDALE 2014

(delivered on 18 September 2014; also published in Una Sancta)

Dear brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ; Mr Moderator, synod delegates and guests:

On behalf of my fellow deputies from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, we thank you for the privilege and opportunity to be in your midst to attend your synod. After the humbling of the Wallabies at the hands of the All Blacks at the end of last month, you would think that Australians would hardly dare step on New Zealand soil. But as G.K. Chesterton wrote, "*Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley.*" Perhaps from such a position we are better equipped to listen and learn from you, also at your synod, as we have been doing this week.

My fellow deputy br. Marcel Bax and I are grateful for your kind invitation, warm hospitality, and the Christian fellowship that we have already been able to enjoy with you. In your invitation, and also in the presence of your delegate Rev Paul Archbald at our last synod which was much appreciated and very helpful to us in understanding you, we see evidence of a spiritual bond that we share, which lies in our common confession of the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Reformed confessions, and in our common commitment to serve Jesus Christ as Head of the Church, in obedience to His will as revealed in the inspired Scriptures. We trust that you also see our attendance here as recognition of this same spiritual bond from our side, and a desire to see it grow and come to greater expression.

It seems fitting that our fraternal delegate speaks following the Canadian Reformed fraternal delegate, because in many respects we are like their little brother. We use the same Book of Praise, we send our men to their seminary, and many of them end up serving as ministers in their churches, and their churches are the chief hunting ground for most of our ministers. Just to illustrate with a personal example: the Canadian Reformed delegate Rev Witten spent numerous years in his youth growing up in the Free Reformed Church of Albany; I myself spent the first 12 years of my ministry in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Presently our federation consists of 16 churches, the majority being in W.A., comprising around 4500 members. I won't elaborate on all the details about our churches, because you've heard these from our fraternal delegates to you many times over the years, and I trust that the delegates of synod are familiar with the history of our relationship. Instead I'll restrict myself to some words of greeting, and then address one matter of importance. As an additional reason for humility on our part, I should mention that our last synod did appoint four new deputies for contact with

you, so while our churches have a quite lengthy history of contact, we personally presently are rookies in this role.

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, we do bring you heartfelt Christian greetings. And together with our greetings comes the sincere prayer that the Lord will bless your labours in His kingdom, including the work of your synod. In the Belgic Confession Art 27 we testify of our conviction that there is one catholic or universal church, which *“is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. Yet it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.”* This creedal statement is not an empty dogmatic statement of orthodoxy, but it expresses a living reality about the work of our Saviour Jesus Christ, in redeeming sinners in grace, and gathering them by His Word and Spirit worldwide. Ultimately it is His work that we gratefully acknowledge and witness in you.

But while our confession about Christ's catholic church gathering work gives us great comfort and encouragement, we also recognize that this work lays an obligation on us. This includes the responsibility to make ecclesiastical relationships a meaningful reality, so that unity in faith is not merely theoretical but comes to practical expression. As Australians and New Zealanders, we may have our friendly rivalries on the sports fields from time to time. But in the final analysis, we acknowledge that despite our minor geographic and cultural differences, we share a common rivalry against the spiritual forces of evil, and we serve a common coach and Lord. We are busy in the same cause, which seeks the honour and glory of our King Jesus Christ, through faithful service of His people, submission to His Word, and the advancement of His kingdom. As churches we are united in our struggle for the truth and for faithfulness in doctrine and conduct. Our people in the FRCA face temptations to compromise just as yours do, and our perseverance and victory can be only be found just as yours – by relying on God's grace and His Spirit. It is our conviction that the Scriptures indicate that mutual brotherly assistance in this struggle against worldly secularism and theological liberalism can be a rich blessing, and is furthermore even a Biblical demand. I don't know much about the finer points of rugby, but I do know that teamwork is essential. The same can be said of ecclesiastical relations, and we sincerely covet being able to bring this to the next level by means of a sister church relationship.

A desire for sister church relationship between RCNZ and FRCA was already expressed by Synod Kelmscott 1996, so what has just been said might seem like the repetition of an old refrain, especially given that the RCNZ has offered the FRCA a sister church relationship already for some

time. The question could rightly be asked whether the FRCA even wants to be on the same team. However, by our presence and words here today, we want to explicitly affirm our desire for this relationship, and to also acknowledge that there have been significant developments in recent years towards this becoming a reality, should God grant it. At the risk of repetition, most of you will be aware that your Synods acknowledged the FRCA as true churches already in the mid 1990s, and our Synods reciprocated this acknowledgement in 2000 and 2003, but for us your sister church relationship with the CRCA was an impediment for us to enter into a sister church relationship. We acknowledged then and acknowledge again now that it is an anomaly to recognize you as true and faithful churches without entering into a sister church relationship, which you have offered to us. Such an anomaly makes us uncomfortable, and so it should. It motivates us to move forward, as stated by our most recent synod: *"Therefore there is urgency to remedy the present anomaly of recognising a church to be true and faithful without a sister church relationship."*

You have been very patient with us, because we have also needed to time to come to an understanding and consensus about this matter ourselves (e.g. Synod 2003, Art 72). We hope that your longsuffering is not exhausted, particularly at an important juncture now that your relationship with the CRCA is changing. Our most recent synod in 2012 noted this change, but at that point we did not have a clear picture of what the new relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship entailed and how it differs from your previous sister church relationship, in part because the rules for this new relationship were provisional, and in part because what may be clear to you is not immediately apparent to us, being somewhat distant. Perhaps Chesterton would advise us to spend more time in your New Zealand valleys in order to see more clearly! At any rate, as deputies, part of our mandate was to come to a clearer understanding of this matter, with the hope that we could bring a favourable report to our next synod, and a positive recommendation to accept your offer of a sister church relationship. We sincerely hope that the decisions of your present synod will help us clearly see that you are being consequential in your relationship with the CRCA, and that these changes are more than just a matter of removing mutual accountability while retaining mutual privileges. In 2003 our synod made the observation that *"The RCNZ maintains this relationship in a Scriptural manner"* (Synod 2003, Ground 3). We encourage you to continue to deal with this in a faithful manner.

We also recognize that changing the contours of a relationship that involves a sister that you have walked alongside closely for much of your history is not easy. As you know, we are facing hard questions like these ourselves in our relationship with our sister the Reformed Churches of the

Netherlands. This also occupied a significant amount of our attention at our last synod, and resulted in our synod writing a lengthy and weighty letter of admonition to them, expressing our concerns, especially in the area of hermeneutics. The FRCA isn't exactly renowned for haste, although perhaps we are noted for caution; but this does mean that while we don't make sister church relations lightly, we don't break them lightly, and we value them highly.

Even though it may appear that our approach to you is one of hesitation, we hope that you will see in our most recent synod decision concerning the RCNZ much enthusiasm. We whole-heartedly concur with the observation of your official delegate to our synod that the FRCA synod *"made it clear that the aim is not to find new impediments or a justification for not entering a sister-relationship"* (p4-231) and that the decision of our synod is to be read positively rather than negatively. We appreciate that this decision has been cited in full in Appendix 10 of the Interchurch Relations Committee Report (p4-233 & 4-234), but I want to highlight that our synod explicitly confirmed what was stated by previous synods, 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."*

Additionally our synod also decided 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."* We are grateful for the ways this is happening, and hope it will increase. Already we cooperate together in mission work in PNG as we heard last night from Rev Douma and from the OMB this morning; in recent years our membership has been enriched by a growing contingent of former RCNZ members who have joined us after moving to W.A. As evidence of our resolve to make the goal of a sister church relationship a reality, please observe that the most recent FRCA synod increased the number of deputies for contact with you from two to four, gave them expanded mandate, which included an instruction to have more meetings with your committee, attend your synods upon invitation, and allocated a larger budget to facilitate this.

Our synods have previously decided to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches which are geographically closer to us (Synod 1990, Art 58), as you are, and it was this conviction that led our last synod to conclude that it *"requires allocating a certain measure of priority and resources to our growing relationship with the RCNZ."* (Synod 2012, Art 89) In rugby terms, we realize that it makes sense for us to be passing to the guys around us, rather than making plays with guys far across the

field. As evidence of our earnestness, we sent four men to Victoria at the end of last year to meet with your interchurch relations committee, and we were able to enjoy a lengthy and positive combined meeting with them. We also appreciated their recommendations concerning adjusted rules for “ecumenical fellowship”.

Brothers, we hope that these decisions give you some assurance that we are moving forward and closer. It would be a great blessing if following your synod, that our synod is finally able to accept your offer of sister church relations. Given how much we share theologically, confessionally, historically, culturally, and geographically, we recognize the value and benefit of a meaningful sister church relationship.

It is our prayer that the Head of the Church would continue to be active among His churches in New Zealand and in Australia, and that we may pursue His glory with faithfulness, zeal, and conviction, and without compromise. May God bless your work as synod, and we commend your churches into the Lord’s care, with this prayer for both you and us from Philippians:

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God.” (Phil 1:9-10)

R.E. Pot

Deputies for the Book of Praise

Mandate and Introductory Comments

Synod 2012 charged the deputies with the following mandate:

Article 106 – Book of Praise (Refer Articles 18, 19, 39, 78)

VI Decision:

Synod decides:

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.

(pages 76-78 Acts of the 2012 Synod FRCA)

In order to fulfil their mandate, deputies met formally, wrote to the churches within the Australian Federation, solicited feedback from the ministers within the Australian Federation, engaged in formal communication with Standing Committee of the Book of Praise (Canada) and investigated the feasibility of producing an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.

The original deputies included Brs A Plug and S Houweling. Br A Plug resigned due to health issues and Br S Houweling resigned due to his immigration to the United States of America. Br DJ Swarts joined the committee in mid-2013 as provided for in Article 120 – Deputy Appointments of the Acts of the 2012 Synod FRCA

The decision of Classis North to call for an extraordinary Synod to address the topic of the Book of Praise had a significant impact on the work of the Deputies. As a result of this decision Deputies wrote (hurriedly) to the Churches requesting feedback on a range of matters relating to the Book of Praise and the Authorised Provisional Version. Many of the consistories noted (rightly) that the compressed time frame resulted in a hurried response. Understandably this resulted in the deputies receiving responses in a wide range of formats which has made it difficult to synthesise all of the input from the Churches in an accurate and elegant manner.

The Deputies have enjoyed fruitful communication with the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise in Canada particularly with regard to the matters of copyright and regular updates on progress in finalising the (Canadian) Book of Praise.

September 2014

Rev C Vermuelen (convenor)

Br Elton Swarts

Br Derek Juan Swarts

- 1. Interact with the Canadian SCBP to ensure that Australian input is taken into consideration (mandate 8.b) and To submit relevant material already received from the churches to the Canadian SCBP for consideration (mandate 8.d).**

Due to significant changes in the committee these items were not immediately addressed. Events in Canada overtook the committee and it was no longer possible to submit input to the SCBP as they had already submitted their final report to Synod Carmen.

- 2. To study the use of capitalization for personal pronouns referring to God (mandate 8.e)**

As deputies, we have investigated the practice of capitalising pronouns referring to God. By researching Acts of the Synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as through personal contact with a longstanding member of the SCBP, we came to the conclusion that our Canadian sister Churches have not studied this issue. Furthermore, in our own study we did not uncover any evidence that capitalising pronouns referring to God is a principle issue, and thus conclude that it is a tradition. We believe that it is a good tradition, which serves as a constant reminder of the fact that God is worthy of great honour and respect. Furthermore, we believe that whilst retaining the capitalisation of pronouns referring to God will not cause offense, it is likely that failure to do so would cause some angst amongst members within the Free Reformed Churches. Furthermore, the Bible translation in common use amongst the Churches, the New King James Version, does capitalise pronouns referring to God.

For the full report please refer to Appendix 1.

- 3. To invite input from the churches regarding the desirability of having an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise (mandate 8.a, b, c, & f).**

Deputies wrote to all the consistories in early September 2013 to provide an update on developments related to the (Canadian) Book of Praise and to survey the Churches on their views related to “the desirability of having an Australian Book of Praise” (please refer to Appendix 2 for full details). Deputies received the final response in late April 2014. (The survey instrument and the responses have been included as Appendix 3). Each consistory responded in a slightly different manner and this variety has allowed the Deputies to harvest key themes from the responses. Deputies structured the survey around three key questions (with a fourth question related to general comments).

1. A rating of support for the desirability of an Australian Book of Praise

2. Key reasons for favouring the development of an Australian Book of Praise
3. Key reasons for opposing the development of an Australian Book of Praise

3.1 Terminology

Deputies released the survey on the Australian version of the Book of Praise to the Consistories earlier than planned in response to the unanticipated decision by Classis North to call for an extraordinary Synod to deal with the issue of the Book of Praise. In the survey document Deputies consistently used the phrase “Australian Book of Praise”. Deputies are grateful for the opportunity to clarify that by “Australian Book of Praise” they meant “Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise” specifically as outlined in Article 106 of Synod 2012. Deputies regret the confusion that this may have created and are grateful to the Consistories who pointed out this inconsistent use of nomenclature.

3.2 A rating of support for the desirability of an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise

Not all of the responses from the Consistories were in the requested format – however the Deputies have attempted to tabulate and summarise the responses in a manner that provides a useful summary while remaining true to the comments provided.

Table 1 – Summary of support for the desirability of an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise

Strongly favour	Somewhat favour	Neutral/ Divided*	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Byford	Launceston	Albany [#]	Busselton	Armadale
Darling Downs	West Albany [#]	Southern River		Baldivis
Kelmscott [#]				Bunbury
Legana				
Mt Nasura				
Mundijong				
Rockingham				

** In the original survey this was presented as Neutral. However some responses indicated that the Consistory was divided – it was felt most appropriate to record these responses here and to include the phrase ‘divided’ in the column heading.*

Three Churches presented collated responses that articulated divergent views within the Consistory. In order to justify their position within the table above the following additional information is provided.

Deputies for Book of Praise

Kelmscott (*Strongly favour = 5, Somewhat favour = 3, Neutral = 0, Somewhat oppose = 1, Strongly oppose = 0*).

West Albany (*Strongly favour = 4, Somewhat favour = 4, Neutral = 2, Somewhat oppose = 2, Strongly oppose = 2*).

Albany (*Consistory was evenly divided. Half were somewhat in favour and the other half strongly opposed*).

3.3 A summary of the reasons to support an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise

- 3.3.1 It is desirable to have an Australian Book of Praise that contains the Australian version of the Church Order and other changes to the Forms and Creeds as agreed by Synod.
- 3.3.2 We can maintain the use of capitalisation of personal pronouns
- 3.3.3 Can use the Australian approved Scripture translation
- 3.3.4 Promote a sense of ownership
- 3.3.5 We have not adopted all the hymns the CanRC has
- 3.3.6 Reduced cost
- 3.3.7 Our input into the (Canadian) Book of Praise is limited
- 3.3.8 We are currently forced into making decision because of changes by the CanRC
- 3.3.9 Our own version of the BOP would still be very similar to the CanRC BOP

Please note these summary points are by no means exhaustive. They are an attempt to capture the major themes and comments provided by the Consistories. Further details are included in the Appendix 3-Collated response from Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

3.4 A summary of the reasons to oppose an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise

- 3.4.1 The Canadian Book of Praise suits our needs and we should not waste manpower and funds to re-invent the wheel
- 3.4.2 Desire for unity with our sister Federation
- 3.4.3 This could be the start of a divergence from our sister Federation
- 3.4.4 We do not have the (creative) manpower to update the Psalms or Hymns – we would be forced to rely on our Canadian brothers and sisters
- 3.4.5 Issues with copyright and challenges in printing

- 3.4.6 We should resist any trend to isolate ourselves from our sister Federation
- 3.4.7 We should not change simply for the sake of change
- 3.4.8 The decision of Legana makes it impossible to have an Australian BOP
- 3.4.9 There is no overwhelmingly demonstrated need for an Australian BOP
- 3.4.10 We have the possibility of inserting the Australian CO in the back of the Canadian Book of Praise
- 3.4.11 It is possibly expensive

Please note these summary points are by no means exhaustive. They are an attempt to capture the major themes and comments provided by the Consistories. Further details are included in the Appendix3-Collated response from Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

3.5 Other

- 3.5.1 The difference between the Australian version of the Book of Praise and the Canadian version of the Book of Praise should be kept to a minimum
- 3.5.2 The use of (which) Bible translation (this was raised by a number of Consistories)
- 3.5.3 Desire to maintain a strong relationship with the Canadian Federation and the Deputies for the Standing Committee Book of Praise

Please note these summary points are by no means exhaustive. They are an attempt to capture the major themes and comments provided by the Consistories. Further details are included in Appendix3 Collated response from Free Reformed Churches of Australia. (Deputies have prepared a document that contains the full correspondence from the Churches. This is available on request.)

4. 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: *(please refer to article 106 for the full text of this mandate)*

4.1 Copyright

There are 2 copyright holders whose consent to publish their property is required.

4.1.1 Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches holds the vast majority of copyright to the psalms and hymns. Written advice has been received that it will provide necessary consents to enable an Australian version of Book of Praise.

4.1.2 Dr W Helder is the copyright holder for 44 Psalms and 16 Hymns. He has previously granted permission to use his property for a suggested fee. If and when a decision is made to proceed with Australian version of Book of Praise this will have to be agreed and finalised.

4.1.3 Four of the most recently introduced hymns (38, 50, 66 and 79) that are in the APV and 2014 Book of Praise are the copyright of Hope Publishing.

From the committee's investigations, copyright is no impediment to publishing an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.

4.2 Feasibility

The committee has engaged with Pro Ecclesia Printers to explore their preparedness to be the publisher/printer of a prospective Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise. In summary, Pro Ecclesia Printers are both willing and able to participate, and advantageously this removes funding as a consideration.

Estimated costs are largely dependent on:

1. Foreign Exchange Rate on the day.
2. Availability of print ready electronic files from Premier Printing, the publisher/printer of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, which has been signalled.
3. Number of edits Synod requests to be made above the alterations listed in the Mandate to Deputies 2012.

Pro Ecclesia has advised the Deputies that the costings reported to Synod 2005 are by and large still relevant. Indicative costs suggest an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise would be between (approximately) 15 and 20 dollars.

From the committee's investigations into feasibility there is no signal that the cost to Church members would increase due to the publishing of an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.

4.3 Supplementary

Should Synod proceed with an Australian version of the Canadian Book of

Praise some thought to other practical matters are best considered:

Acknowledgement and appreciation to both Canadian Reformed Churches and their publisher Premier Printing, both in the publication and otherwise.

- 4.3.1 Name given to the publication. Sensitivity is required; please note the correspondence from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches. *(Received via email 04/12/2013. "In addition, we would also like to remind you of two stipulations that the SCBP provided to the Australian deputies in a letter written in 2002: 1. Your proposed book of praise should have a different title than that of our own. 2. Your book should have a statement that the BoP committee of the CanRC has permitted the Australian churches to use their material.")*
- 4.3.2 Ongoing engagement and support to the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- 4.3.3 Definition of roles between Synod, an Australian Standing Committee (?) and Pro Ecclesia.
- 4.3.4 Legality. The copyright permissions need to be granted to a natural person or legal entity. Neither Synod nor a Standing Committee would be classified as a legal entity. Pro Ecclesia is the natural choice to be the holder of these permissions; this makes it more important to ensure the definition of roles, limits of Pro Ecclesia's use of these permissions to a scope agreed to and governed by a Standing Committee of Synod.
- 4.3.5 Working with Pro Ecclesia to set scope and priority if any, as to alternate editions/formats, e.g. printed with a Bible, large text etc., or digital editions suitable for tablets and smart phones.
- 4.3.6 Is it possible to implement a mechanism/process by which revisions to an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise, are considered and decided, and the time frame of that cycle, e.g. every third regular Synod except in extenuating circumstances? We raise this as a question, not being sure whether this is possible within Reformed Church Polity, considering that a committee's mandate is only for the period between synods.

4.4 Proposals

Deputies recommend the following

4.4.1 That Synod discharge the deputies

4.4.2 That Synod acknowledges that more churches are in favour of an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise than are opposed to it.

Ground:

1. Table 1. 9 Churches are in favour, 2 Churches are neutral or divided and 4 Churches are opposed.

4.4.3 That, if synod adopts a request from the churches to publish an Australian Version of the Canadian BOP, it appoints new Deputies for Book of Praise and mandate them to undertake all activities necessary to print an Australian (version of the Canadian) Book of Praise consistent with the Synod decisions summarized within Article 106 of Synod FRCA 2012. In appointing such a deputyship, Synod needs to give consideration to the items listed in **4.3 Supplementary** above.

Grounds:

1. Copyright is no impediment to publishing an Australian version of the Canadian BOP.
2. With respect to feasibility there is no signal that the cost to Church members would increase due to the publishing of an Australian version of the Canadian BOP.
3. Pro Ecclesia has been found ready to publish an Australian version of the Canadian BOP.

4.4.4 That synod decides that such an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise capitalises pronouns referring to God.

Grounds:

1. Although the capitalisation of pronouns is not a principle issue, it is a good tradition, which serves as a constant reminder of the fact that God is worthy of great honour and respect.
2. Whilst retaining the capitalisation of pronouns referring to God will not cause offense, it is likely that failure to do so would cause some angst amongst members within the Free Reformed Churches.

3. The Bible translation in common use amongst the Churches, the New King James Version, does capitalise pronouns referring to God.

Explanation of recommendation 4.4.3: We come with a conditional proposal here (“**if synod adopts a request from the Churches to publish an Australian Version of the Canadian BOP**”), which reflects the contingency contained in our mandate. We had been instructed to 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.

Appendix 1. Report on Capitalisation of Pronouns referring to God

Appendix 2. Correspondence to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and summary of relevant developments with regard to the Canadian Book of Praise

Appendix 3. Summary of collated responses from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Appendix 1

Report on the use of capitalisation for personal pronouns referring to God

Deputies have studied the use of capitalisation for personal pronouns referring to God, and present the following findings:

1. The use, in the Book of Praise, of capitalisation for pronouns referring to God, has had the attention of a number of recent synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The issue was raised because of the change by the Canadian Reformed Churches to the use of the NIV in public worship, a version which does not capitalise the pronouns which refer to God. The conclusion that the Canadian Reformed Churches came to at Synod Burlington 2010 was to follow in the Book of Praise, the practice of employing the recommended Bible version's rules. This decision was maintained at Synod Carmen West, 2013 (Article 180, Synod Carmen West, 2013).
2. The Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted the ESV as their main translation, a version which does not capitalise pronouns which refer to God. Thus the final edition of the Book of Praise as adopted by Synod Carmen 2013 also will not use capitalisation for pronouns referring to God.
3. Contact with one of the long standing members of the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches leads us to conclude that it is unlikely that an indepth study has ever been done by the SCBP on this matter.
4. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. There are no capitals in that language and thus there is no textual background to use capitals for pronouns referring to God in the Old Testament. The New Testament was written in Greek, a language which has both capital and non-capital forms. However, the original manuscripts of the NT were all written in capitals, every letter of every word. Thus there is also no textual background to use capitals for pronouns referring to God in the Old Testament.
5. The use of capitals for pronouns referring to God has come about for historical reasons.
 - a. The Dutch Staten Vertaling, commissioned by the Synod of Dort, 1618/19, and which, we believe, was commonly used in the Netherlands up until the 20th century, capitalises some pronouns. "He" and "Him" when referring to God are capitalised, but not "his" or "mine" or "your" when referring to

God.

- b. The KJV does not capitalise the pronouns referring to God. It does use thee and thou forms, but these were also used when referring to other people.
 - c. The NKJV and the NASB does capitalise all pronouns referring to God – “He” and “Him”, as well as “His” and “Mine” and “Your”. The Preface to the *New Geneva Study Bible, NKJV*, states that “the reverence for God in the present work is preserved by capitalising pronouns, including *You*, *Your*, and *Yours*, which refer to Him.”
 - d. The Psalter Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Churches of North America, in its 1927 as well as 1976 editions, capitalise all pronouns referring to God. It also appears that the early editions of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches already did so, even when the Churches were using the KJV (a non-pronoun-capitalising version). It might be that the practice in the Book of Praise is an inheritance from the Dutch situation, as well as following in the footsteps of the Psalter Hymnal.
6. An objection to the use of capitalisation for pronouns referring to God is that sometimes this might obscure the immediate Old Testament referent of a pronoun (see article 109 of Synod Burlington, 2010, where the Canadian . For example, a psalm might be speaking about the Davidic king in Jerusalem, but also refer to Jesus Christ, the great Son of David. Using a capital for pronouns referring to him might lead the reader/singer to overlook the fact that in the first place, this pronoun is referring to the earthly king. By not using capitals, the ambiguities of the original text are maintained. The Preface to the *New Geneva Study Bible, NKJV*, points out that capitalisation of these pronouns benefit the reader by clearly distinguishing divine and human persons referred to in a passage.

- a. For further discussion about these points, we refer you to

<http://stason.org/TULARC/education-books/bible-world-english/24-Why-don-t-you-capitalize-pronouns-referring-to-God.html#.ULckGqVqM98>

as well as

<http://stason.org/TULARC/education-books/bible-world-english/24-Why-don-t-you-capitalize-pronouns-referring-to-God.html#.ULckGqVqM98#ixzz2DBl8YBlm>

7. It would appear that the practice of capitalising pronouns is a tradition rather than a principle issue. However, it is a good tradition. When considering the trends of today's society to dismiss God's honour and reputation, it will serve the coming generations well for us to maintain the good tradition of capitalisation. It is important to instill the fear and reverence of God in the children of the covenant. In a classroom setting, making a distinction between he/He, his/His, who/Who in the children's writing and reading stands as a constant reminder and testimony of Who God is as well as our deep awe and respect for Him. It compels our children to think carefully and reverently.
8. As deputies we propose that we stick with the practice of the Bible translation. We note the following considerations:
 - a. We were not instructed by Synod Armadale about what version to include in a potential Australian Version of the Book of Praise. If a following Synod adopts an Australian Version of the Book of Praise, it is reasonable to assume that the Bible translation used in that version will be the one predominantly used in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, namely, the NKJV.
 - b. This also means that we can maintain the good tradition of capitalising pronouns which refer to God.

Synopsis of decisions made by recent synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches about this matter.

Due to the new publication of the NIV and the discussions concerning a revised BOP, Synod Chatham discusses and decides the following:

Synod Chatham 2004

5.1.9. The church at Chatham requests Synod to decide that all pronouns referring to God in all of the Book of Praise remain capitalized. "Council believes that honouring God with the use of capital letters takes precedence over a striving for consistency."

5.2. Considerations

5.2.1. Synod notes that Synod Fergus 1998 mandated the committee to "prepare the prose section of the Book of Praise with the NIV Bible references and to present this revision to the next General Synod." Synod concurs that the adaptation of the prose section is more urgent than the rhyming of the Psalm and hymn sections, the latter being poetry.

5.2.2. Synod Fergus also mandated "the committee not to proceed with the changes to the Psalms and Hymns" (Art. 140 IV.C.1,2 p. 176). Synod concurs with this recommendation of Synod Fergus.

5.2.3. Synod notes that it would be a major undertaking to review and revise the Psalms and the hymns to reflect the language of the NIV.

5.2.4. Synod considers it unwise to proceed with such an undertaking with a view to the unity talks with the URCNA.

5.2.5. Synod is not convinced that the use of various Bible translations is an inhibiting factor, since most of the translations in use have already converted the archaic pronouns to those in common use today.

5.2.6. Synod realizes that a new rhyming would mean a loss with a view to the memorization of the present rhyming, but does not consider it a determining factor.

5.2.7. Synod acknowledges that the church at Chatham may have a valid point; however, Synod is of the opinion that it should send this request to the SCBP.

5.3. Recommendations Synod decide:

5.3.1. To continue the mandate of Synod Fergus to prepare the prose section of the Book of Praise with the NIV Bible references.

5.3.2. Not to proceed with the requested changes to the Psalm and hymn sections at this time.

SCBP was mandated by Synod Chatham 2004

1.1.8 “5.1.9 The Church at Chatham requests Synod to decide that all pronouns referring to God in all of the *Book of Praise* remain capitalized” “5.2.7 Synod acknowledges that the Church at Chatham may have a valid point; however, Synod is of the opinion that it should send this request to the SCBP.”

Use of Initial Capitals for Pronouns Referring to God. (Reference: Par. 1.1.8) The Church at Chatham requested Synod Chatham to decide that all pronouns referring to God in all of the *Book of Praise* remain capitalized. In accordance with the advice received from Synod the Church at Chatham placed this request before the SCBP. The committee requested permission from the copyright holder of the NIV who has allowed us to use such capitals for quotations from the NIV. For the sake of consistency, the Committee has incorporated the use of initial capitals for pronouns referring to God for all material to be published in the *Book of Praise*.

Synod Smithers 2007 discusses and decides the following:

Article 166 SCBP – Capitalization of personal pronouns referring to God

The advisory committee presented its second proposal:

1. Material

1.1 SCBP Report 9 1.2-3 Letters from Carman West and Ottawa

2. Observations

2.1 The committee report serves as observations.

2.2 The church at Chatham requested Synod Chatham to decide that all pronouns referring to God in all of the *Book of Praise* remain capitalized. In accordance with the advice received from synod, the church at Chatham placed this request before the SCBP. The committee received permission from the copyright holder of the NIV to use such capitals for quotations from the NIV. The committee has incorporated the use of initial capitals for pronouns referring to God for all material to be published in the *Book of Praise*.

2.3 Ottawa notes that Synod Chatham passed on the request of the church at Chatham to the SCBP, and that the SCBP does not interact with this request as Synod Chatham appears to imply it should. Instead the SCBP simply “goes ahead” and capitalizes the pronouns. Hence more study should be done on this issue.

- 2.4 Two churches give reasons questioning the necessity of maintaining the use of initial capitals for pronouns referring to God:

2.4.1 This is not done in the NIV (Carman West).

2.4.2 This does not follow current rules of English usage (Ottawa).

2.4.3 This is not supported by the original languages of Scripture (Carman West, Ottawa).

2.4.4 Maintaining such capitalization has no biblical grounds (Carman West).

3. Considerations

3.1 From the report it appears that the church at Ottawa is correct that the SCBP simply “went ahead” with capitalizing the pronouns referring to God without investigating the issue.

3.2 To ask the SCBP to yet investigate this matter would mean delaying the publication of the revised prose section for another three years.

3.3 It is noted that the NIV and ESV do not capitalize, and that the NKJV (which the FRCA uses) and the NASB do.

3.4 While the points of observation 2.4 have merit, to capitalize is consistent with how the pronouns have been capitalized in our forms in the past.

4. Recommendation Synod decide:

4.1 To retain capitalization of the personal pronouns referring to God.

ADOPTED

SCBP Report to Synod Burlington simply states:

Article 166 Capitalization of Pronouns Referring to God 1.4.1 Par 4.1

The Committee retains the capitalization of personal pronouns referring to God. This applies to the Psalm and Hymn section as well as to the prose section of the *Book of Praise*.

Synod Burlington 2010 then Discusses and decides the following:

Article 109 – Appeal from Surrey re: Article 166 of the Acts of Synod Smithers 2007 1. Material Appeal from the church at Surrey re: Article 166 of the Acts of Synod Smithers 2007 (8 .5 .r) .

2. Observations

2 .1 The church of Surrey-Maranatha appeals the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 “to retain the capitalization of the personal pronouns referring to God (Article 166, 4 .1) .”

2 .2 Surrey provides two main grounds for its appeal:

[1 .] Synod Smithers did not provide adequate grounds for its decision .

[2 .] Synod Smithers did not take into account some further points which we raise .

2 .3 Surrey requests Synod to judge: [1 .] Synod erred in its judgement . [2 .] The practice of the NIV and the ESV be followed with the result that uppercase initial letters not be used in the *Book of Praise* for second and third person pronouns referring to God .

3. Considerations

3 .1 Synod Smithers bases its recommendation on four considerations. Closer scrutiny reveals that this recommendation really hinges on one recommendation namely 3 .4 “While the points of Observation 2 .4. have merit, to capitalize is consistent with how the pronouns have been capitalized in our forms in the past.” To base capitalization on what is done in the Forms in the *Book of Praise* instead of sound principles of biblical interpretation constitutes a very weak ground or consideration.

3.2 It needs to be noted that the former recommended translation in our federation, the RSV, and the current recommended translation in our federation, the NIV, do not capitalize pronouns for God. It should also be noted that the oldest, dominant English version, the King James Version, does not capitalize pronouns for God either. (*Surrey is mistaken in its reference to the RSV.*)

3 .3 Surrey is correct when it states that “the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic text of the Bible have no such practice, current rules of English usage avoid this, the NIV does not use this, and there are no known biblical grounds for this convention .”

3 .4 Surrey also rightly comments “using an uppercase initial letter may obscure the immediate Old Testament referent.” As well, it mentions “in some texts of the Old Testament it is not clear who is in view when pronouns or metaphors are used that have God as their referent.” This shows that capitalization is not just a matter of translation but can so easily become a matter of interpretation, and a wrong interpretation at that.

4. Recommendation

That Synod decide: 4 .1 To sustain the appeal of Surrey-Maranatha . 4 .2

To instruct the Standing Committee for Publication of the *Book of Praise* to bring all pronouns for God in the entire *Book of Praise* into conformity with the NIV.

ADOPTED

SCBP report to Synod 2013

1.0 Implementation of General Synod Burlington 2010 decisions re. changes in *Book of Praise*

In addition to working with all regular aspects of the mandate, the Committee has implemented the decisions made by General Synod 2010 as follows:

1.1 Pronouns Referring to God (Art.109) The Committee reviewed the entire text of the APV and ensured that all pronouns for God are in conformity with the NIV and are used consistently throughout the *Book of Praise*.

Therefore the APV is now in line with the NIV where no pronouns are capitalized.

Appendix 2

To all Consistories,

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West Albany (sjdekker@bigpond.com)
14/09/2013

Esteemed Brother,

The Deputies for the Book of Praise (hereafter referred to as ‘deputies’) have been mandated by Synod Armadale 2012 to keep the churches appraised of developments related to the Canadian book of Praise. By way of this letter and the attached report we outline for you the key developments.

Additionally, the Deputies were mandated to “invite input from the churches regarding the desirability of having an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise”.

For this reason we request that ***each Consistory please advise the deputies of their position with regard to the desirability of having an Australian Book of Praise*** by no later than November 1st, 2013. To assist the consistories the deputies have included a blank template response for consideration. It would be appreciated if the template is used so as to standardise the response from the consistories and to assist the Deputies in collating all of the responses.

(It would be appreciated given the tight timelines if all communication could be directed to Br Derek Juan Swarts via djswarts@iinet.net.au – all correspondence will be acknowledged via email)

The deputies are hopeful that all the responses can be collated and presented back to the churches to inform the deliberations that will be part of the preparation for the extraordinary Synod which will deal with this specific topic.

On behalf of the Deputies for Book of Praise

Br Derek Juan Swarts djswarts@iinet.net.au

Brief Survey by Synod Deputies for Book of Praise

Response by the Free Reformed Church of **<Insert Name Here>**

Qu. 1.

Please rate your support for the desirability of an Australian Book of Praise using the following scale

Strongly favour	Somewhat favour	Neutral	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose

Please provide comment (if you feel it necessary) to explain your choice

<Insert comment here>

Qu. 2.

Please outline the key reasons for favouring the development of an Australian Book of Praise

1. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
2. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
3. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**

Qu. 3.

Please outline the key reasons for opposing the development of an Australian Book of Praise

1. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
2. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
3. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**

Qu. 4.

Please make any additional comments you would like to bring to the attention of the Deputies

1. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
2. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**
3. **<Insert comment here as appropriate>**

Attachment to Appendix 2: Report to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia about developments in the Canadian Book of Praise.

Part of the mandate that Synod Armadale 2012 gave to the Deputies for the Book of Praise was to monitor developments with the Canadian Book of Praise and to keep the Churches informed of these developments. With this letter, we outline to you what the developments have been.

We were also mandated to “invite input from the churches regarding the desirability of having an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.” As the further mandate makes clear, an Australian version of the Book of Praise would include the following (as listed in 8g i-vii of the Deputies’ mandate in Article 106 Synod Armadale 2012):

1. 150 Psalms as printed in the Canadian Provisional Book of Praise 2010.
2. The 65 Hymns as found in the current Book of Praise (edition 2004) with the changes made in the Provisional Book of Praise 2010.
3. The Ecumenical Creeds as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the deletion of the word “Christian” from the Apostles’ Creed.
4. The Three Forms of Unity as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the changes authorized by FRCA Synods over the years.
5. Orders of Worship as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise.
6. Liturgical Forms as printed in the Provisional Book of Praise with the changes authorised by FRCA Synods over the years.
7. The Church Order as adopted by the Australian Churches.

Synod Carmen (West) 2013.

In May 2013, the Canadian Reformed Churches met in Synod Carmen. At this synod, they adopted a final edition of the Book of Praise for use in their churches. As Australian Free Reformed Churches, we have already become acquainted with the Authorized Provisional Version of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches (hereafter APV). The Australian Deputies for the Book of Praise appointed by Synod Legana reported to the Churches about this in 2011. Thus we hereby inform you what changes the Canadian Reformed Churches have made to the APV in the final edition of the Book of Praise as that was adopted by Synod Carmen, 2013.

Changes to the Psalm and Hymn section of the APV.

Synod Carmen made 20 changes to the Psalms section of the Book of Praise and proposed another 3 changes for consideration by their Canadian Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (See appendix 2.1). Presumably, the Canadian Synod felt that more work needed to be done to these 3 suggested changes than was able to be done at Synod, and also

trusted the wisdom of their committee for the final edition. We do not yet know which if any of these suggested changes will be in the final Book of Praise.

Synod Carmen also made a number of changes to the Hymn section of the APV (see Appendix 2.2). We have only included those that are relevant to our Australian situation, as some of these changes affect Hymns that we have not adopted as churches (Article 106, VI.4 of the Acts of Synod Armadale 2012 of the FRCA).

The APV version had presented quite some changes to the musical notation of the Hymns from that of the 1984 version of the Book of Praise. There was quite some feedback from the Canadian Churches about this and in some cases, Synod Carmen decided to return to the musical notation of the 1984 Book of Praise (See Appendix 2.3).

Other changes to the APV.

Synod Carmen made a number of changes to the prose section of the APV. There were seven changes adopted for the confessional sections (See Appendix 2.4). There were also a number of changes made to the Subscription Form, the Lord's Supper Form, and the Marriage Form (See Appendix 2.5).

Synod Armadale did not make any decision about the prose section of the Book of Praise. It is assumed by the deputies that the prose section of the 2010 APV is implicitly adopted, because the need to make a decision about the APV was based on the fact that we are running out of 1984 BOPs.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have not made any decision about adopting a standard form of Subscription. We note here that Synod Carmen made clear that this form is the one that is binding on the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (Acts of Synod Carmen, Article 99 - 3.1.2, 4.1.2).

Other decisions of Synod Carmen 2013 re BOP relevant to the FRCA.

Article 171 – Synod decided not to renew the mandate of the SCBP given in article 142 of Synod Burlington 2010,¹ but to direct the churches which desire the addition of new hymns to take their proposals through the ecclesiastical route. This means that the SCBP and the churches will no longer be busy with considering changes to the hymn section of the Book of Praise, until a future synod decides to propose such changes to the churches. A similar decision was made about all other changes

1 Article 142 of Synod Burlington included the following decision: “To instruct the SCBP to seek, receive, evaluate and recommend additional hymns to be compiled and proposed at a future date for testing by the churches, and for possible recommendation to a future Synod.”

to the contents of the Book of Praise as well: “All requests concerning other changes to the contents of the Book of Praise (e.g. translation of confessions, changes to metrical psalms, rewording and rhyming of psalms and hymns, changes to liturgical forms) need to arise out of the churches in the ecclesiastical way, namely from consistory to classis to regional synod to general synod.” (Article 122, 4.5; cf article 170, 4.4).

1. Article 180. In consideration 3.5, Synod makes clear that they are remaining with the decision of Synod Burlington 2010 to follow in the Book of Praise the capitilisation rules used by the recommended Bible translation. The ESV (the version recommended by Synod Carmen for use in the Canadian Reformed Churches – see article 95 of Acts of Synod Carmen, 2013) does not use capitilisation for pronouns that refer to God.
2. Article 181. The SCBP was instructed to use the ESV for quotations in the BOP. We note that the ESV is essentially a revision of the RSV, the version from which the quotes of the 1984 BOP come.
3. Article 182. The Book of Praise will continue to be published in melody only format. The SCBP was instructed to consider placing available versions of accompaniment and harmonization of hymns on the website. The SCBP was also instructed to look into the feasibility of printing hardcover copies of BOP and to investigate whether BOP should also be published in two sections, a song section and a prose section.
4. Article 190. We quote the recommendations of this decision in full:

Recommendations

Synod decide:

- 4.1 To express its regret to the FRCA that due to the circumstances listed above, the degree of cooperation and consultation re: the work on the *Book of Praise* was limited.
- 4.2 To instruct the SCBP to continue contact with the Australian Deputies for the *Book of Praise* to assist in the FRCA's pursuit of a possible Australian version of the *Book of Praise*.
- 4.3 To inform the FRCA that Synod Carman 2013 has instructed the SCBP to publish the final edition of the *Book of Praise* as the authorized version for use in the churches.
- 4.4 To instruct the SCBP to report on its contacts with the FRCA to General Synod 2016.
5. Article 101. Synod decided to include in the final edition of the Book of Praise an index of scriptural passages used in hymns which had been prepared by the SCBP.

APPENDIX 2.1

The following changes to the Psalms were **ADOPTED** (Acts of Synod Carmen 2013, art. 148):

1. Psalm 17:5.

a. Old (APV):

They like a lion crave their prey.
 Rise up, O LORD, rise up to show them
 the sword you draw to overthrow them.
 and with your hand snatch me away.
 Save me from those whose only pleasure
 is this life's portion, nothing more.
 O gorge them with the wealth they store,
 and let their offspring share such treasure.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

They like a *lion crave their prey*.
 Rise *up*, O LORD, rise *up* to show them
 the *sword you draw to overthrow* them.
 Now *with your hand snatch me away*
 from those who *trust in earthly* treasure,
 who *have in this life* their reward.
 O *gorge them and their* offspring, LORD,
 with bitter *fruits in fullest* measure.

2. Psalm 18:8, line 5.

a. Old (APV) – “The shrewd and cunning you outdo in cunning.”

b. New (Carmen 2013) – “The shrewd and crafty you outdo in cunning.”

3. Psalm 25:6

a. Old (APV):

Who, then, fears the LORD sincerely,
 walking with him day by day?
 God will lead him safely onward,
 guide him in the chosen way.
 He will thrive, enjoy success;
 with his children he will share it,
 for his offspring God will bless
 in the land they will inherit.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

Who, *then, serves the* LORD and fears him?
 God will *guide him* all his days,
 teaching *him what path to follow*,

leading *him* in righteous ways.
Then will *he* know happiness,
and *his* children God will favour:
all the *land* they will possess
as their *heritage* forever.

4. Psalm 30:1 (lines 1-4).

a. Old (APV):

LORD, yours all praise and glory be.
Out of the depths you lifted me,
and it was you who kept my foes
from gloating over all my woes.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

LORD, yours all *praise and glory* be.
Out *of the* depths you *lifted* me;
you healed me *and* you kept my foes
from *gloating* over all *my* woes.

5. Psalm 44:1 (lines 4-6; only punctuation changed).

a. Old (APV):

You drove out nations proud and bold.
You crushed them with your mighty hand;
your own you planted, made them flourish.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

You *drove out* nations proud *and* bold;
you *crushed them* with your *mighty* hand.
Your own you *planted, made them* flourish.

6. Psalm 57:3 (lines 3,4).

a. Old (APV):

My soul was grieved, for where my way I wended
they set a snare, but to their great surprise

b. New (Carmen 2013):

Alarmed was I when *foes against me* banded
to set a snare, but to their great surprise

7. Psalm 71:2 (lines 5,6).

a. Old (APV):

Protect me from their power:
God, be my strength and tower.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

Protect me from their power:
you are my strength and tower.

8. Psalm 81:6.

- a. Old (APV):
In the worst of plights
comfort I provided.
On Mount Sinai's heights
I gave you my law.
You at Meribah
tested were and guided.
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
"In a *thundercloud*
I, the *LORD*, addressed you;
my support I vowed,
and you also saw
how at Meribah
I was there to test you.

9. Psalm 81:11 (line 6).

- a. Old (APV):
Israel's defender!
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
truly their defender!

10. Psalm 89:10 (line 2; draft Synod Carmen Acts mistakenly said "line 6").

- a. Old (APV):
earth's most exalted king, in fame surpassed by none.
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
highest of *earthly* kings, in *fame* surpassed by none.

11. Psalm 90:1,2 (Two verses reduced back to the one verse of 1984, minus archaisms).

- a. Old (APV):
 - 1. Lord, you have been for bygone generations
their dwelling place, their haven of salvation.
Also for us you are the rock of ages,
our only refuge when the tempest rages,
and you in generations yet to come
will be our children's everlasting home.
 - 2. Before you formed, O powerful Creator,
the soaring mountains, all their peaks and craters;
before you set the earth on its foundations
and made the world a place of habitation,
from everlasting stood your holy throne,
to everlasting you are God alone.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

1. LORD, you have been since you did shape creation
Our dwelling place in ev'ry generation.
Before the mountains were brought forth and grounded,
And you the earth and world had formed and founded,
From everlasting stands your holy throne;
To everlasting you are God alone.

12. Psalm 93:3 (line 2).

a. Old (APV):

far mightier than the breakers of the sea

b. New (Carmen 2013):

more mighty *than the breakers* of the sea

13. Psalm 101:3 (line 2).

a. Old (APV):

The faithless and their deeds I hate sincerely.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

All deeds of faithless men I hate sincerely.

14. Psalm 118:6 (line 5).

a. Old (APV):

This is the day he has created;

b. New (Carmen 2013):

This is the day the LORD created;

15. Psalm 119:34 (line 1).

a. Old (APV):

Fixed in the heavens is your eternal word;

b. New (Carmen 2013):

Forever fixed in heaven is your word;

16. Psalm 119:38 (line 2).

a. Old (APV):

all owing to the laws I am observing.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

for all your precepts I have been observing.

17. Psalm 120:1 (line 2).

a. Old (APV):

and cry to him for my protection:

b. New (Carmen 2013):

and cry to him for his protection:

18. Psalm 123:1 (line 7).

- a. Old (APV):
so our eyes, too, look to our Master's face
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
so *do our* eyes look *to our* Master's *face*

19. Psalm 136:10 (line 1).

- a. Old (APV):
Sihon, king of the Amorites
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
Sihon of the Amorites,

20. Psalm 148:4 (lines 4-6).

- a. Old (APV):
He raised his people's horn on high;
his saints he blessed with praise and splendour,
showed Israel his mercy tender.
- b. New (Carmen 2013):
He raised his people's horn on high
Which Israel, his faithful nation
Did praise in joyful celebration.

The following changes to the Psalms were **SUGGESTED** to the SCBP:

1. Psalm 20:2 (line 3).

- a. Old (APV):
May we with shouts of joy unstinted
- b. Change suggested by Synod Carmen 2013 for consideration by SCBP:
May songs of celebration shouted

2. Psalm 92:1.

- a. Synod Carmen asked the SCBP to consider breaking up this one sentence stanza into a number of short sentences.

3. Psalm 103:1.

- a. Synod Carmen asked the SCBP to consider the suggestion to retain the word benefit in this stanza.

4. Psalm 118:6.

- a. Old (APV):
Sihon, king of the Amorites
- a. New (Carmen 2013):
Sihon of the Amorites,

APPENDIX 2.2

The following changes to the Hymns were **ADOPTED** (Acts of Synod Carmen 2013, art. 169):

1. Hymn 1, line 2 (= 1984 Hymn 1A):
 - a. Old (APV):
Maker of heaven and earth.
 - b. New (Carmen 2013):
Maker of heav'n and earth.
2. Hymn 1, line 12 (= 1984 Hymn 1A).
 - a. Old (APV):
from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
 - b. New (Carmen 2013):
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
3. Hymn 8, line 4 (= 1984 Hymn 6).
 - a. Old (APV):
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (Amen*).
**May be sung with Amen-cadence.*
 - b. New (Carmen 2013):
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.
{i.e. – the “Amen” is now standard, not optional}.
4. Hymn 17:1 (= 1984 Hymn 13:1).
 - a. Old (APV):
My soul will magnify
the Lord, who from on high
has blessed me with his favour.
His praises I will voice;
my spirit will rejoice
in him, my God and Saviour.
 - b. New (Carmen 2013):
My soul does magnify
the Lord, for he Most High
has shown to me his favour.
I praise him with my voice;
my spirit does rejoice
in him, my God and Saviour.
5. Hymn 56:3, line 4 (= 1984 Hymn 45:3).
 - a. Old (APV):

from the straight and narrow way.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

from the strait and narrow way.

6. Hymn 77 (= 1984 Hymn 59).

a. Old (APV):

1. We praise thee, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before thee, we kneel and adore thee;
we bless thy holy name, glad praises we sing.
2. We worship thee, God, of our fathers, we bless thee;
through life's storm and tempest our Guide has thou been.
When perils o'ertake us, escape thou wilt make us,
and with thy help, O Lord, our battles we win.
3. With voices united our praises we offer;
to thee, great Deliverer, glad anthems we raise.
Thy strong arm will guide us, our God is beside us;
to thee, our great Redeemer, fore'er be praise.

b. New (Carmen 2013):

1. We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you, we kneel and adore you;
we bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.
2. We worship you, God of our fathers, we bless you;
through life's storm and tempest our Guide you have been.
When perils o'ertake us, you will not forsake us,
and with your help, O Lord, our battles we win.
3. With voices united our praises we offer;
our songs of thanksgiving to you we now raise.
Your strong arm will guide us, our God is beside us;
to you, our great Redeemer, fore'er be praise.

7. Hymn 78:2, lines 3,4 (= 1984 Hymn 60:2).

a. Old (APV):

Have you not seen all that is needful has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?

b. New (Carmen 2013):

Have you not seen? All that is needful has been
sent by his gracious ordaining.

APPENDIX 2.3

The following changes were made to the musical notation in the APV (Article 170 of Acts of Synod Carmen 2013).

1. Hymn 2 (=1984 Hymn 1B).
 - a. Revert to 1984 notation without breath marks.
2. Hymn 12 (=1984 Hymn 8).
 - a. Revert to 1984 notation without breath marks.
3. Hymn 18 (=1984 Hymn 14).
 - a. Revert to 1984 version of this melody.
4. Hymn 31 (=1984 Hymn 26).
 - a. Only have one tune for this Hymn – the 2010 B version.
5. Hymn 37 (=1984 Hymn 29).
 - a. Revert to the 1984 version of this melody.
6. Hymn 40 (=1984 Hymn 31).
 - a. Remain with the APV version of this melody, but add fermatas at the end of lines 3 and 6.
7. Hymn 47 (=1984 Hymn 36).
 - a. Revert to 1984 version without breath marks.
8. Hymn 48 (=1984 Hymn 37).
 - a. Revert to the 1984 version of this melody.
9. Hymn 49 (=1984 Hymn 38).
 - a. Remain with the APV version, but insert a rest or breath mark after the second line.
10. Hymn 53 (=1984 Hymn 41).
 - a. Remain with the APV version, but add fermatas at the end of lines 2, 4, and 9.
11. Hymn 65 (=1984 Hymn 48).
 - a. Revert to the 1984 version of this melody.
12. Hymn 73 (=1984 Hymn 55).
 - a. Remain with the APV version, but add fermatas at the end of lines 2, 4, and 6.
13. Hymn 74 (=1984 Hymn 56).
 - a. Remain with the APV version, but add fermatas at the end of lines 2 and 4.
14. Hymn 78 (=1984 Hymn 60).
 - a. Revert to the notation of the 1967 version.
15. Hymn 83 (=1984 Hymn 63).
 - a. Remain with the APV version.

APPENDIX 2.4

The following changes were made to the confessions section of the APV (Acts of Synod Carmen, article 122):

1. Heidelberg Catechism.

a. Preface:

i. Old (APV):

The National Synods of the sixteenth century adopted it as one of the *Three Forms of Unity*....

ii. New (Carmen 2013)

The National Synods of the sixteenth century adopted it as one of the doctrinal standards of the Reformed Churches

b. LD 4, answer 10.

i. Old (APV):

Certainly not.

He is terribly displeased

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

Certainly not.

He is terribly angry

c. LD 28, answer 75. ...

i. Old (APV):

nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life ...

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

nourish and refresh my soul to eternal life ...

2. Belgic Confession.

a. Preface.

i. Old (APV):

Its excellence as one of the best symbolical statements of the Reformed doctrine has been generally recognized.

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

Its excellence as one of the best statements of the Reformed doctrine has been generally recognized.

b. Preface.

i. Old (APV):

...de Bres prepared this confession in the year 1561. In the following year a copy was sent to king Philip II, ...

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

....de Bres prepared this confession in the year 1561. A
a copy was sent to king Philip II, ...

c. Article 3.

i. Old (APV):

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the
impulse of man....

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the
will of man....

3. Canons of Dort.

a. Chapter 1, beginning of Rejection of Errors.

i. Old (APV):

Having explained the true doctrine of the perseverance
of the saints, Synod rejects the following errors:

ii. New (Carmen 2013):

Having explained the true doctrine of election and
reprobation, Synod rejects the following errors:

APPENDIX 2.5

The following changes were made to the liturgical Forms of the APV:

1. Form of Subscription.
 - a. Same change to third paragraph of both the form to be used in local congregation and form to be used at classis meetings:
 - i. Old (APV):
we will first make this known to the consistory and classis, and if necessary, to the broader assemblies, for judgment.
 - ii. New (Carmen 2013):
we will first submit this to the church via her assemblies for judgment.
2. Form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (section about Assurance):
 - i. Old (APV):
and he declared, saying: As often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup
 - ii. New (Carmen 2013):
he taught us to understand that (and in the following section, the SCBP was instructed to change the first person to the third person).
3. Form for the Solemnization of Marriage.
 - a. Change to prayer:
 - i. Old (APV):
We pray you, grant them your Holy Spirit
 - ii. New (Carmen 2013):
We pray that you will grant them your Holy Spirit
 - b. Change to vows:
 - i. Old (APV):
Do you promise to love and guide her faithfully, to maintain her
 - ii. New (Carmen 2013):
Because of the obscure meaning of "maintain" the SCBP was instructed to replace it with an alternative like "support", "provide for", "care for" or something similar in line with a synod approved translation of Scripture (Eph. 5:29).

Church	Qu1 (Rate support)	Qu2 (reasons for) (may include comments made in relation to Qu 1)	Qu3 (reasons against)	Other comments
Albany	Divided	Nice to have Australian version of the Church Order and other changes to forms and Creeds, but not absolutely necessary.	Canadian Book of Praise admirably suits our purpose and should not waste manpower and funds re-inventing the wheel	Deputies should have spoken about Australian Version of the Book of Praise, not an Australian BOP Unfortunate that such a short time frame was given for response. Extraordinary Synod would be unnecessary No Comment
Armada	Strongly oppose	No comment	Duplication of effort between Canada and Australia Same BOP is part of keeping unity with sister church in Canada which is very similar	No Comment
Baldvis (did not use template)	Not Supportive (but will propose Synod to publish an Australian edition of the BOP)		We cannot and should not undo Synod Legana's decision about only pursuing our own BOP when the Canadian BOP is so substantially altered that it is not longer suitable for use in Australia. We would lose the practical expression of unity with sister Church that comes with common BOP (see Synod Legana 2009, art. 24, ground 5). Needless duplication of work between Canada and Australia Pursuing Australian BOP will cause delays, while Canadian 2013 edition is print ready.	Decisions taken by Baldvis: 1. Not to support an Australian Version of the Book of Praise, but to prepare a submission to Synod Baldvis in 2015 to adopt the 2013 Canadian Book of Praise for use in the churches (excluding the 19 hymns) 2. 3. To propose to Synod Baldvis 2015 that Synod appoints a standing committee for the Book of Praise with a clear mandate to work with the relevant Canadian committee for the Book of Praise and produce an Australian EDITION of the Book of Praise which would include changes made by Synods (past and present), and the Australian Church Order. Every other aspect of the book of Praise would be identical unless decided otherwise by future Synods.
Bunbury (did not use template)	Not supportive	No comment	Strongly supportive of the bond with Canada. See the common BOP as important.	Unfortunate that such a short time given for survey response Suggested more time to review the current APV
Busselton (did not use template)	Somewhat opposed	Reduce confusion regarding Australian Synod decisions if these are incorporated into the BOP	Start of a process to diverge from Canada	Suggest try to combine the needs of both Australia and Canada into one binding.

Byford	Strongly favour	<p>1. Can maintain capitalisation of God etc. the forms.</p> <p>2. Can use correct translation of scripture for the forms.</p> <p>3. Can insert Australian Church Order</p> <p>4. No need to follow the Canadian Churches in all things</p> <p>5. We have not adopted all hymns the Canadians have adopted.</p> <p>6. Correct liturgical forms.</p>	<p>Possibility to put ourselves somewhat in isolation.</p>	<p>1. Unsure (should this be “ensure”) good printing and binding.</p> <p>2. Copy right issues, depending on how that works. May still be forced to follow Canada if copyright issues not properly sorted out in the first place.</p> <p>3. Attention drawn to decision of 2009, re suitability of Canadian BOP.</p> <p>4. Advise deputies to use work prepared previously for submission to Synod Legana.</p>	<p>1. Please make it available in a hard cover</p> <p>2. Keep in mind that we are talking about an Australian version of the CanRC Book of Praise so as to acknowledge the work that has been done by CanRC.</p> <p>3. That, despite introducing an Australian version, the unity with CanRC will still remain</p>	<p>1. What an Australian BoP will contain means very different things to different people. Some for example would like to see a complete revision of the Psalms, or retention on the older version of the Psalms. There is the (unrealistic) expectation that many pet ideas of what should be included can be accommodated. Clarity in exactly an Australian BoP will constitute and how different it will be to the Canadian BoP is essential in further discussions.</p>	
Darling Downs	Strongly favour	<p>1. Inclusion of Australian Church Order</p> <p>2. We are not forced to look at changes (eg new hymns) simply because CanRC have decided to.</p> <p>3. Scripture references are currently to the NIV</p> <p>4. Any proposed changes can become ‘messy’ as we follow CanRC and have to wait for their synod’s decisions.</p>	<p>No Comment</p>				
Kelmscott	Strongly favour	<p>We do not need to be identical to the Canadians</p> <p>Work with what Canada has done to avoid unnecessary work</p> <p>We should not use antiquated language</p> <p>We can be independent of the decisions made by Canada</p> <p>More sense of ownership</p> <p>Bible Translation can be reflected in the ABoP</p> <p>Include Australian CO</p> <p>No additional hymns to be added beyond what approved by Aust Synod</p> <p>Will potentially keep costs down</p> <p>Seldom seen changes made in Canada to BOP due to input from Australia</p>	<p>Concern that pursuing ABOP will be used to conserve much of the old BOP. Therefore, use work of Canada if we pursue ABOP.</p> <p>Issues with copyright</p> <p>Finding capable people</p> <p>Creates a break in the close relationship we have the Canadian sister churches</p> <p>Possible increase in costs</p>				
Launceston	Somewhat favour	<p>Having the Aust. CO printed in the back</p>	<p>Increased insularity</p> <p>Small population base. We do not have the (creative) manpower to update the Psalms or Hymns where that would be necessary, so would be forced to copy from and rely on the work done by our Canadian brethren. This will lead to continuing and unnecessary duplication of effort</p>	<p>1. The FRC Launceston would favour the use of the ESV for the Bible texts in the prose portion of the Book of Praise. As the ESV has not (yet) been approved for use in the churches by Synod, and as the NIV 04 is no longer easily available, we see no gain in having an Australian BOP which possibly would only be available with NKJV texts.</p> <p>2. We would like to see the Australian churches</p>			

				continue the fruitful partnership with Canada which we have enjoyed for some decades. We understand that there are no overwhelming technical difficulties for the Canadian BOP publisher to produce tailored versions for the Australian churches. The prose section could be updated with the Australian CO and the changes to forms adopted by Australian Synods. 3. Having the extra hymns in such a tailored version would not constitute defiance of Synod. Common sense dictates that we would only sing those hymns which have been approved by Synod		
Legana	Strongly favour	Frees PRCA from choices of the Canadian Sister Churches Gives freedom to adopt ABoP to our needs e.g. Bible Text, CO and tunes	No Comment	As soon as reasonably possible Important it is done well		
Mt Nasura	Strongly favour	1. As Australian Church, we need to have more 'control' over the Book of Praise used in our Church Services so that it reflects the Australian changes 2. Changes/amendments to what we use in our Church Services must come from the Australian Churches. If we continue to use a Book of Praise that reflects the Canadians decisions, we can be 'forced' along with their changes. 3. Our Book of Praise needs to reflect our own Synod decisions. – Apostle Creed, Ordination form for Officebearers, etc.	No Comment	1. It is very important that our Book of Praise needs to reflect our own Synod decisions. 2. Our desire for our own Book of Praise should not be seen as ' <i>wanting to do our own thing</i> ' but that we work with Canada and have an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise. 3. Some people in Australia don't know that the Church Order printed in the current Book of Praise is not the one our Australian Synod adopted. This would change with an Australian version. 4. As we use a different Bible translation than Canada, it would be helpful that the Australian Book of Praise reflect that.		
Mundijong	Strongly favour	1. We are a federation of churches separate from Canada. We therefore should be in a position to make our own choices regarding the text of the Psalms and Hymns as well as, and especially with regard to the forms, confessions and church order. 2. The Bible translation we have accepted in our federation of churches, which is different to that of Canada. Our BoP should be consistent with the translation we have adopted.	Lack of similarity between Aust and Canada	1. Consistency is very much in favour of adopting an Australian Book of Praise. However the difference between Australia and Canada should be kept at a bare minimum. We have adopted different Bible translations and we do have a different Church Order. We would strongly encourage a close working relationship with Canada so that together we can continue to develop and improve the BoP so that our Triune God is praised and glorified through the singing of psalms and hymns.		

		<p>3. In effect, with our current situation, we inherit a BoP by default as we have little or no input in the make-up of a new BoP. We expect that developments re the Canadian BOP will be more influenced by their contacts with other federations in North America than by us.</p> <p>4. Consistory believes we have the capacity (by way of "intelligence" as well as finance) to develop our own BoP. We then become less reliant on Canada for supply.</p> <p>5. Editing issues (such as using capitals when referring to God) can be controlled as opposed to Australia simply having to go along with Canada's decisions. This would also be the case if Canada should propose additional hymns.</p> <p>6. We would now still (presumably) be able to use the revised psalms which are a much better rendition of the Biblical psalms than we currently have.</p> <p>7. Elderly and Special need members would benefit from our own ABP as the deputies could keep their needs in mind and keep changes to a minimum.</p> <p>8. Although the cost of purchasing the printing rights might be quite considerable, having our own books printed, eg in Malaysia or China, would greatly reduce the price of the Books of Praise for us, and would offset the cost somewhat. Furthermore, the cost of the book, while a consideration, should not be a weighty factor in deciding this important matter.</p> <p>9. The fact that our Book of Praise would be somewhat different from the Canadian Book of Praise would not be a great obstacle in the use of sermons from Canada.</p> <p>10. Our Book of Praise would not differ greatly from the Canadian Book of Praise. Anyone comparing the two would find far more similarities than differences.</p>
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Rockingham	Strongly support (did not use template)	<p>1. An Australian Book of Praise (ABoP) is not consistent with Synod Armadale 2012 Article 106 decision (8f) – "...regarding the desirability of an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise" (AVCBoP). Potentially an AVCBoP will be substantially different from an ABoP, and is not what Synod allowed deputies to investigate.</p> <p>2. All English speaking Reformed Churches all over the world should do their utmost to have the same Book of Praise. In that way we express unity in faith and in worship. We should maximise the use of the same BoP as Canada has. They have spent plenty of resources in developing the 2013 Book of Praise and we can use that rather than spending many resources on developing our own BoP. Wherever we have made changes in the words of our BoP we should try to convince Canada to accept these changes as well. If we cannot convince Canada on these changes then we should seriously re-consider our implementation of these changes. The use of the ESV Bible in the newest BoP should not deter us. The old BoP uses the RSV translation which we do not use anymore and nobody has ever said anything about that.</p> <p>3. I don't want to chop and change every year. We should stick to one version for the next 15 years.</p> <p>4. An Australian Book of Praise would be a good idea if there was a desire in the FRCA to compile a book of songs and music that are consistent with Biblical principles of worship music which is</p>	<p>1. We have our own CO, changes to our Forms, and other small things. That can sometimes be a bit of a bother. But all of those things are relatively minor.</p> <p>2. There is no established broad consensus support for an ABoP amongst the FRCA.</p> <p>3. The close bond with Canada should be maintained, not put under strain by unnecessarily distancing ourselves by developing our own ABoP.</p> <p>4. The CanRC have particular expertise with respect to the music, language, rhyming and other aspects of the BoP. With all due respect, there does not appear to be such unique expertise in Australia to do this work. To duplicate the task of the SCBP here in Australia is both unnecessary and unwise.</p> <p>5. The changes made by the CanRC to the 1984 version of the BoP, towards the final version of the CBoP are good ones; changes that will also serve the FRCA very well.</p> <p>6. We should spend our resources to help Canada to improve the 2013 BoP.</p> <p>7. Why would an Australian BoP, which will have limited copies because of the FRC membership numbers, even when printed in Canada by Premier Printing, be cheaper than the Canadian BoP which will have a much larger number of copies?</p> <p>8. Printing our own BoP, either in Australia or in another S-E Asia country, will cause great difficulty with the copy rights for the texts as well the music.</p> <p>9. The most important thing for me is that I think that our churches can do without another issue to argue about. I foresee</p>	<p>After some discussion it was agreed that we fully support the development of an Australian book of Praise as soon as possible.</p> <p>1. If the relationship with our sister churches in Canada was questionable, strained or at the point of concern, then it would then be understandable that we feel uncomfortable with trusting their work.</p> <p>2. Please let's keep in sync with Canada wherever possible for the added reason that we share reading service material regularly.</p> <p>3. We need not be fearful of change; but, on the other hand we don't just accept the new CanRC version of the BoP thoughtlessly or without studying it. Fortunately, we can study the changes (via the report we recently received from our deputies). The suggested changes appear biblical and relevant for the churches and there is no reason why they would not serve the FRCA well.</p> <p>4. We need not fear hymns or the 'new' hymns! I would propose that Synod considers adopting the extra hymns as per the final version of the CanBoP for use in the FRCA. Looking at the 'new' hymns, I would make the observation that "they too, constitute a thank offering of praise when we sing of the facts of redemption by God in Jesus Christ our Lord" (BoP APV, Preface, page v). They are not explicitly or implicitly unscriptural.</p> <p>5. Adding 19 hymns to the BoP doesn't in any way imply that the other hymns are somehow out-dated, insufficient or unable to be used for worship. The 19 'new' hymns are simply an addition to the existing hymns. They wouldn't replace or supersede any others, nor would they be the dominant choice. Psalms would remain predominant in our worship services.</p>
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	<p>suitable for corporate worship. Unfortunately, the move for an Australian Book of Praise seems to be spearheaded by those whose sole aim is to conserve the old wording of the Psalms and retain only the narrow range of hymns in the historic Book of Praise with no regard for whether this is consistent with Biblical principles for worship songs.</p> <p>As mentioned before, no one was in favour of an ABoP but there was some general support for an AvCBoP. Some of the reasons given were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An AvCBoP will allow all churches in the Australian bond to be on the same page and importantly the schools as well. 2. The language of our current BoP (1984 edition) is antiquated, and creates an unnecessary barrier for understanding the intent of what is being sung. This is particularly true for children, or others not used to old style English. 3. In places our current BoP (1984) misinterprets or adds to or subtracts from Scripture. 4. An AvCBoP allows the FRCA to develop a song book which reflects its particular character and to develop a songbook focussed on bringing praise and honour to the name of God within an Australian context. 	<p>that our Synods in the next couple of years will be occupied with proposals from churches to change this thing or that. It will cost a lot of time and energy, and I don't think that will be a positive or up building exercise.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Our churches should not isolate themselves from other churches.. We need other churches to be challenged in our own. We need other churches and Christians to ask the difficult questions and to confront us with our shortcomings. Judging by the current Book of Praise and various articles in FRCA publications on songs for corporate worship, there is a limited understanding of the principles that should inform the development of an Australian BoP. Thus, it is good to be able to rely on the expertise of sister federations. 11. Don't change for change sake. 12. If possible start off with what Canada has achieved. 	<p>6. The premise that we (FRCA) have our own (different) views about psalms and hymns is not conducive, nor representative; there are few in the FRCA who either prefer psalms over hymns or would rather not sing hymns at all. Furthermore, this is not a ground for developing our own ABoP.</p> <p>7. The Deputy's word choice in Qu 2 & 3 highlights from the onset their push for an Australian BoP. This is not in line with their mandate.</p> <p>8. In Southern River we have used the APV for some period of time now. I have frequently compared the wording to that of our current book of praise, and Scripture. On every occasion, I have found the language used in the APV to be a marked improvement to that of the current Book of Praise. The entire church community will benefit from the singing of the new wording – it will cause us all to think more carefully about what is being sung.</p> <p>9. Leaving the use of the Book of Praise up to individual churches when we have schools overlapping church boundaries i.e. Kelmscott, Rockingham and JCCC is not conducive to a healthy Reformed church life in Australia.</p> <p>10. The Albany churches have set an example for the churches in the metro area by changing over to the APV in church and at school. That is what we call: promoting unity and uniformity.</p> <p>11. It is about time that we turn the present situation around: We should not say anymore that certain churches are not ready yet to implement a Synod decision or that they cannot get hold of the APV. We should say: Why have some churches not implemented Synod Armadale 2012 decision quick smart so that uniformity between the churches can be promoted?</p>
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Deputies for Book of Praise

West Albany	Somewhat in favour	<p>1. The Book of Praise doesn't reflect what our own churches have decided, e.g. Bible translation quoted, hymns, church order; and small adjustments in confessions/forms. This can be confusing.</p> <p>2. Otherwise the FRCA simply tags along with Canada, even though we are a separate federation, and we end up making decisions that are prompted by them rather than what we initiate.</p> <p>3. We are forced into awkward situations where the Canadian churches make changes, and where we have different editions (e.g. APV), which force us to make constant decisions about these changes.</p> <p>4. Our input into the Book of Praise is limited.</p> <p>5. Gives us our own identity.</p> <p>6. Appears our suggestions don't get used in Canada (but would like to see this investigated more closely).</p> <p>7. Better to only have our approved hymns in a BOP; otherwise people will start using the unapproved hymns.</p> <p>8. There has been no big call for extra hymns from the Churches. But if they are in the BOP, then there might be more requests to adopt them.</p> <p>9. We can have a BOP which uses capitals when referring to God.</p> <p>10. We can use our Bible translation.</p> <p>11. We can sing the psalms as we know them.</p> <p>12. Easier language used in it (probably meant in comparison to the old BOP).</p>	<p>1. Our synod carefully considered this (2009) and decided not to have our own Book of Praise. We must come up with proper grounds if this decision is going to be revisited and to go in a different direction.</p> <p>2. The Canadian sister churches have considerable expertise that we don't have, and we benefit enormously from their work in putting together a good Book of Praise, e.g. new rhyming, theological experts when changes are suggested. They've done excellent work until now.</p> <p>3. The Canadian sister churches have better resources available to print the Book of Praise. Doing it ourselves would require considerable cost and effort. We have to be good stewards of our resources as a federation.</p> <p>4. Having the same Book of Praise promotes unity with our Canadian sister churches, and it is important to maintain unity where possible.</p> <p>5. The differences with the Book of Praise aren't so substantial that we can't use the Canadian Book of Praise. We've managed quite fine so far.</p> <p>6. Break from the Canadian Reformed Churches.</p> <p>7. Duplication of man-power.</p> <p>8. Possibly expensive.</p> <p>9. Promotes unity with the CanRC, which is good for when people travel.</p> <p>10. Difficulties with copyright and legalities.</p> <p>11. The NIV has been approved for use in our churches.</p> <p>12. It will make it more difficult to use CanRC sermons in reading services.</p>	<p>Are we cooperating churches within the bond or are we becoming independentistic?</p> <p>Capitalisation should reflect importance of the One to Whom we sing.</p> <p>The current situation, in which different churches use different Books of Praise, is problematic.</p> <p>There have been 4 changes to BOP in 60 years. Go back to the hymn tunes as they were before.</p> <p>The new BOP is not unscriptural.</p> <p>We should look into the possibility of allowing all the hymns in the churches.</p>
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Deputies for Training for the Ministry

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1 Mandate

- 1.1. Article 68 of Acts of the 2012 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (Armada, 9 – 20 June 2012) records Deputies' mandate as:
- 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 (i.e. first) year of theological study to the churches in Australia.
- 1.2. Deputies met 6 times to discuss matters concerning its mandate, besides corresponding in between meetings.

2. Composition

- 2.1 Synod 2012 appointed Reverend E Rupke as convener of Deputies and the brothers R Heerema, M Hoogerdijk, and J (Jim) VanderPlas as the remaining deputies, with brother B (Bruce) Huizinga as alternate.
- 2.2 The deputies were organised as follows:

a) Convener	Rev E Rupke
b) Secretary 2012 – mid–2014	Br M Hoogerdijk
c) Secretary 2014	Br B Huizinga
d) Treasurer (Theological Students)	Br J VanderPlas
e) Treasurer (Theological Library Fund)	Br J VanderPlas
f) Treasurer (CRTS)	Br R Heerema
- 2.3 The secretarial task was allocated to the alternate, Br B Huizinga, following the Fam M Hoogerdijk moving to Canada mid–2014.

3. Financial Support Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

- 3.1 Deputies collected AU \$475,472.50 from the churches, and forwarded AU \$481,000.00 to Hamilton during the period January 2012 to December 2014.
- 3.2 During the period the churches were levied at a rate of \$65 per communicant member (in accordance with Article 68 of the Acts of Synod Armadale 2012)
- 3.3 Interest accrued during this period amounted to AU \$1,842.51.
- 3.4 Financial statements detailing the amounts collected and the amounts forward are contained in **Appendix A**.

4. Contact with Hamilton, South Africa, Kampen and Korea

- 4.1 Deputies conveyed messages of congratulations and fraternal greetings on the occasions of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary's Convocation in 2012 and 2014.
- 4.2 Br R Heerema visited The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in September 2013 for the occasion of the 44th Anniversary Meeting and 39th Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and a meeting of the Board of Governors.
- 4.3 Br Heerema received opportunity at the 2013 Convocation to

extend greetings on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The address delivered at the Convocation Meeting is contained in **Appendix B**.

- 4.4 Deputies conveyed greetings to Canada, South Africa, Korea and the Netherlands in 2013, and informed them of our appointment and updated mandate, as outlined in heading 2, above.
- 4.5 Deputies conveyed greetings and relayed the latest Acts of Synod 2013, to Canada, South Africa, Korea and the Netherlands.
- 4.6 Contact with the Netherlands remains low key, being limited to the greetings mentioned in 4.4 and 4.5, above.
- 4.7 Contact with South Africa has been very limited, being limited to the greetings mentioned in 4.4 and 4.5, above.
- 4.8 Contact with Korea has been very limited, being limited to the greetings mentioned in 4.4 and 4.5, above.
- 4.9 Contact with Canada has been quite extensive and continual; consisting of:
 - a. The deputies received the CRTS's financial reports and budgets
 - b. Extensive correspondence on the matter of distance education (see 6. Investigation – Theological Training).
 - c. The deputies received 2012 and 2013 agendas/minutes for the Finance and Property Committee of the CRTS.
- 4.10 Regarding the contact with Canada, previously there was some contact with one of the governors from CRTS, who ensured that agendas and minutes of the:
 - a. Board of Governors;
 - b. Finance and Property Committee, and
 - c. Academic Committee

would all be sent through to the deputies. Currently the deputies have received a few listed under point (a), most listed under point (b), but none listed under point (c).

5. Theological Library Fund

- 5.1 Acts of Synod 2012, Article 68, Decision 4d instructed deputies to “continue to oversee the Library Fund”. This fund represents past contributions from the churches for the establishment of a formal

Theological Library. However, further to deputies' considered conclusion, that formal theological education is unlikely to occur within Australia for the foreseeable future, deputies propose that Synod decide to close the Library Fund, with proceeds to be deposited into the Fund for the Support of Needy Theological students. The grounds for this proposal are:

- a. The Library Fund comprises money collected by the churches for the churches' shared responsibility to make provision for theological education.
- b. In view of a potentially larger than usual cohort of brothers preparing to study theology and requiring financial support from the churches, it is deemed prudent to utilise funds already accumulated. This will ease the financial burden of support on the churches in the short term, and allow for a more orderly transition to increased levels of financial support required from the churches beyond that time.

5.2 The Financial Statement detailing the total amount currently invested in the Theological Library Fund is contained in **Appendix C**.

6. Investigation – Theological Training

6.1 Synod Armadale 2012 gave the Deputies the following mandate with regards to investigation of theological training:

- a. 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;
- b. investigate the possibilities of theological training by extension (IT).

6.2 In our report to Synod Armadale 2012 we mention a letter received from Hamilton dated 5 December 2011. We were unable to include that letter in our 2012 report due to time constraints. Now we can report that in response to a letter from Deputies from our ongoing investigation regarding distance education Hamilton replied (quoted verbatim from their letter dated 5 December 2011):

- 1) *Advances in electronic communication, although noteworthy and impressive, should not be the primary motivator or reason for the change you request.*

- 2) *A freshmen year in Australia would entail a very substantial investment in time, equipment, space requirements and resources of the Seminary and cannot be expended lightly or easily.*
 - 3) *As much as we sense a desire to proceed quickly, we do not wish to move forward in this without a full evaluation, consultation and planning process. A program of this nature should not be retreated from too quickly.*
 - 4) *Consideration and reflection at the Seminary will include discussions by the Senate, the Finance & Property Committee and ultimately the full Board.*
 - 5) *You will appreciate that our reflection will include a comprehensive analysis of the positions laid out in your letter and the testing of the same.*
- 6.3 In September 2013 br R. Heerema visited Hamilton for the annual Graduation. He attended a Board meeting and was able to explain the reasons for our inquiries. On September 5th 2013, the Board approved a Discussion Paper on distance and extension education (**Appendix D**). From that document we quote:

As a matter of general policy, CRTS should go on record as being cautiously open with respect to online education and distance education.

CRTS needs to be open with respect to these means because of the direction of technology in our day and the significant impact it has on society. Just as we could never have imagined that technology would develop as far as it has, so we cannot imagine where it will go from here. Insofar as such developments can be beneficially used with a view to the objectives of CRTS, they should also be embraced. The fact that the students of CRTS come from areas around the world, and that much travel expense is incurred by students, faculty, and board should also make CRTS open to these possibilities.

On the other hand, CRTS needs to be cautious because the integrity of the present program has to be respected and protected. Much effort and many years have gone into developing the present program and CRTS is presently meeting its objectives. Moreover, it needs to be recognized that CRTS is not just offering an information service, but is seeking to develop and cultivate future pastors; there is

a dynamic about such education that necessitates much interaction and contact between instructors and students and also between the students themselves, and it is presently not clear that the present standards would not be sacrificed through such modern means. It needs to be recognized that any attempt for CRTS to do what it does either by distance education or by extension will be at considerable cost. It will be at financial cost, for one thing; we have been advised that distance education would involve not only increased technology costs, but also the cost of an Educational Technologist since we presently operate on a very lean IT budget and have no extra technology staff. The other more significant cost, however, may very well be to the core program itself. Adding a distance education component would involve a very significant number of adjustments for faculty, staff, and students. Considerable time and effort would need to be spent on the adjustments faculty would need to make. What would happen to the "community of learners" which is very important to ATS and to CRTS? While some have assured our attendees at the last ATS Biennial that it is possible even to work on spiritual formation through distance education, we remain somewhat skeptical. The personal contact may very well increase when distance education with 10 students is compared to a seminary campus with 1400 students, but surely it will likely decrease when compared to that which takes place on a campus with 20 persons who attend class and live in close proximity of each other. Seminary students not only learn much from professors and the program, they also learn a great deal from each other."

The report presents the following conclusion:

This paper then, as mentioned from the outset, is not meant to be the definitive answer of CRTS to all requests, but it is offered for the consideration of those making such requests. It is important for such bodies to be aware of all the issues involved, to consider and perhaps reconsider their requests in the light of the above, and then, formulate their proposals accordingly. In all such proposals, it is of utmost importance that the integrity of the M.Div. program, the needs of the student, and the larger needs of the respective federations be met and maintained in the best way possible.

It is of utmost importance that each situation be considered on

the basis of its own merits. Ultimately, what needs to drive us is the question what is best in each instance. We are convinced that the best thing that we can do for the Canadian and American Reformed churches, for instance, is to have students physically on campus in Hamilton. We would suggest that that is probably also the best for students coming from Australia and many Asian countries. It is obviously not the best for the many students who have applied from African and other countries but have been refused admission. And it may not be the best for students living and serving in South Africa. At bottom, Reformed theological education is a treasure which ought to be available to all in the best way possible; this document is intended to facilitate the discussion about how that can be done.

- 6.4 In June 2014, Dr GH Visscher was able to visit the Australian churches for the purpose of delivering some speeches. The Deputies were able to meet with him to discuss distance education. Dr GH Visscher prepared a report of his visit for the Seminary. This report can be found in **Appendix E**. We quote from that report:

One very significant meeting for CRTS was the meeting with the Deputies for Training for the Ministry. They had all read our document entitled "CRTS Discussion Paper re Distance or Extension Education," had some questions about it, but agreed that on the basis of this document the request to do the first year of theological education in Australia should be withdrawn. They intend to pass this Discussion Paper on to their next General Synod with the recommendation to put the matter to rest.

The deputies also prepared a report for internal use. We quote the relevant paragraph from that report:

Deputies Training for the Ministry enjoyed a very good meeting with Dr GH Visscher. It was good to have a brotherly, face to face meeting. At the forefront of our collective minds was the recently prepared report by the CRTS on the Australian churches' question of CRTS teaching the freshman year of the M.Div. online for the benefit of students originating from Australia. We had a beneficial discussion, where we accepted the CRTS conclusion to remain cautiously open to future online educational options, while at the same time accepting that the current 4 year programme will remain as currently presented.

- 6.5 It is clear from the documents above that the investigation of "the

feasibility of offering a basis year of theology to the churches in Australia, and of the possibilities of theological training by extension” has been extensively conducted and should be considered concluded at this point. Hamilton takes a ‘cautiously open’ stance towards distance education, but sees no avenue at this time to make distance education, including a basis year of theology, available to the Australian churches. The reasons for their decision are provided in great detail in their Discussion Paper on distance and extension education (**Appendix D**).

7. Publication and Promotion

- 7.1 Deputies arranged for the publication of various “College Corner” articles in the *Una Sancta*, thereby keeping the church membership informed concerning matters at Hamilton, its staff and students. These included the regular articles on the semester-to-semester activities of the Seminary as well as other special items as they arose.
- 7.2 The speech that was delivered by Br R Heerema, at the 44th Anniversary and 39th Convocation on behalf of the Australian churches was published in the *Una Sancta* in October 2013.
- 7.3 Deputies wrote a letter of congratulations to Br Ben Schoof, dated 19 July 2013, concerning his completion of studies at the CRTS and upon a call being extended to him by the CRC at Surrey, British Columbia.
- 7.4 Deputies arranged for advertisements in the *Una Sancta* and the *Perth District Bulletin* inviting prospective theological students to a meeting with Rev A Veldman in July 2013.
- 7.5 Deputies arranged for advertisements in the *Una Sancta* and the *Perth District Bulletin* inviting members of the Churches to a series of lectures by Dr GH Visscher of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, during May 2014. Similar advertisements for these lectures were placed in the *Albany* and *Tasmanian Bulletins* as well. Advertisements were also placed in the *Una Sancta* inviting prospective theological students to a meeting with Dr GH Visscher in May 2014.

8. Financial Aid to Students

- 8.1 Deputies continued to provide financial support to Br Ben Schoof (Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura). This support concluded mid 2013 when Br Schoof successfully completed his theological

studies at CRTS. Br Schoof is currently serving in the ministry in the Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey, British Columbia.

- 8.2 In addition to providing financial support, Deputies have endeavoured to maintain contact with the families receiving support. This was for the purpose of maintaining an awareness of general circumstances while studying, to provide encouragement, and to receive reports of academic progress.
- 8.3 Deputies report that in one case where financial assistance was given, the student contravened the rules as adopted by Synod 1992 Acts Article 50 and amended by Synod 1994 Acts Article 56. Deputies appointed by Synod, need to abide by the rules and regulations as set out by Synod. It was therefore deemed necessary to remind the student of the following regulations for the financial aid of students, in particular Articles 17, 19 and 20, which read:

Article 17: The provided loans or any outstanding amounts thereof must be repaid and are instantly claimable when:

- a. the student terminates his studies,
- b. the student decides not to become a minister,
- c. the student, after having completed his course of studies, does not within two years make himself available for call by one of the churches mentioned in Article 1,
- d. the student does not accept a call extended to him or, after having accepted a call, withdraws and does not accept another call,
- e. the student ceases to be a member of the sister church either by his withdrawal or by excommunication,
- f. the student, having become a minister, withdraws from or is dismissed by the church or sister church concerned.
- g. In the case of financial hardship when immediate repayment in full would be too difficult, deputies may consider a request for repayment by instalments.

Article 19: The obligation to repay loans may be waived in case of sickness, death or in other exceptional circumstances.

Article 20: In any cases for which these Regulations do not

make provision deputies have the authority to decide.

Deputies decided that it needed to recover the loan as the student had breached article 17c and 17e of the regulations. However, Deputies had difficulty in taking up contact with the student, because the student had moved to a remote area. In the limited contact deputies did have, the Deputies were notified that he is not in a position to repay the loan. Deputies had no choice but to make the decision to write off the debt, because there is no possibility for recovery. Since 2013 there has been no more contact.

- 8.4 As at November 2014, there were no Australian theology students receiving financial support from the churches via deputies.
- 8.5 As at November 2014, there are no current applications for financial support.
- 8.6 The financial statement detailing amounts collected and the amounts forwarded to students during Deputies' current term is contained in **Appendix F**.

9. Guest Lecturer

- 9.1 Deputies were able to secure a visit of a guest lecturer in May 2014. Professor of New Testament and Principal of CRTS, Dr GH Visscher, was able to visit the churches in the Perth Metro area, Albany, Busselton and Tasmania as well as small group of reformed families in Cairns, Queensland.
- 9.2 The total cost (to the Australian Churches) of the visit was \$5,729.82.
- 9.3 Dr GH Visscher delivered two speeches, entitled 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation', and 'Romans a foundation of Christian living'. The speeches were held in Cairns, Launceston, Albany, Busselton and Perth Metro.
- 9.4 Dr GH Visscher held an information evening about the college and its operation.
- 9.5 Dr GH Visscher attended a meeting with the Deputies to discuss the issue of the Australian Churches setting up distance education for the freshman year.
- 9.6 Dr GH Visscher met with deputies and prospective theological students to present them with relevant information and to answer

any questions these brothers and/or their parents had. This meeting was quite well attended; Dr GH Visscher also met privately with some students.

- 9.7 Deputies recommend that Synod increase the amount set aside for the costs of a visiting lecturer from \$7000/trip to \$7500/ trip, considering the increased costs of travel, especially when including substantial domestic travel within Australia.
- 9.8 Deputies also recommend that Synod consider inviting a guest lecturer from Hamilton once every three years, rather than every two years, which was decided at Synod Armadale 2012. Although there are clear benefits to having a guest lecturer more often, we were informed, by Dr GH Visscher during his visit here, that making a Professor available every two years would be very difficult to achieve. To do justice to the Australian Churches one would have to be away for approximately five weeks. As most Professors at the Seminary are relatively young, with young families, this could prove difficult. Additionally, sending a professor as a guest lecturer is disruptive to the program, which is why they tend to do it during their sabbatical.

10. Involvement with Hamilton's Board of Governors

- 10.1 Deputies resolved that Br R Heerema attend the September 2013 meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors.
- 10.2 Br R Heerema attended the meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors held on 5th September 2013, being made welcome and invited to full participation. Matters discussed at this meeting pertaining to the Australian Churches were as follows:
- a. In discussion of the Budget for 2014, the Chairman expressed gratitude for the substantial contribution to their budget from the Australia Churches.
 - b. To make Hamilton aware and to discuss with them Australia's intention to continue to investigate the possibility of distance education for the freshman year, and to seek information and advice about this from Hamilton.
- 10.3 A full report of this Board of Governors meeting, held on 5th September 2013, can be found in **Appendix G**.

11. Pastoral Training Program

- 11.1 Since Synod Armadale 2012, no students have completed the Pastoral Training Program.
- 11.2 As at November 2014, deputies have been advised of a request by David Pol, Theology Student at the CRTS, to complete the Pastoral Training Program component of his theology course at the Free Reformed Church of Southern River mid-2015. On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Deputies will implement all relevant financial arrangements as per the existing guidelines (Appendix E, p267 Deputies Reports to 2012 Synod). An additional levy may be applied to the churches in addition to the annual assessment for needy student financial support. The total expense is \$7,500, being remuneration for a 10 week period, plus return travel expenses.
- 11.3 The adopted guidelines are contained in **Appendix H**.

12. Recommendations

The deputies recommend that Synod decides to:

- 12.1 Request the churches to contribute AU\$70 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary as from 1 January 2016. Deputies recommend this increase in contribution per communicant member on the following grounds:
- a. The levied amount has not been raised in the last 6 years (two synods);
 - b. This raise in levied amount (of AU\$5 per communicant member) would be a raise in accordance with CPI.
- 12.2 In relation to the a 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 to 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”, “Kampen” 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 one of the theological seminaries of our sister churches 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, and;
- i. Collect and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program.

12.5 To keep the Library Fund as a reserve fund. Deputies make this recommendation (as in 5.1) on the following grounds:

- a. The Library Fund comprises money collected by the churches for the churches’ shared responsibility to make provision for

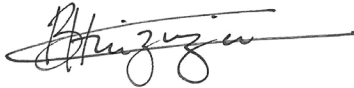
theological education.

- b. In view of a potentially larger than usual cohort of brothers preparing to study theology and requiring financial support from the churches, it is deemed prudent to utilise funds already accumulated. This will ease the financial burden of support on the churches in the short term, and allow for a more orderly transition to increased levels of financial support required from the churches beyond that time.
- 1.3. 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.

2 Greetings

Deputies send fraternal greetings to Synod and wish the brethren God's blessing on the work to be done.


Rev E Rupke
(Convenor)



Br B Huizinga
(Secretary)



Br R Heerema
(Treasurer – Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Fund)



Br J VanderPlas
(Treasurer – Theological Library Fund/Needy Students Fund)

Appendix A

Financial Statement: Hamilton Theological Fund

Treasurers Report: Deputies training for the Ministry

Hamilton Theological Fund

Statement of Receipts and payments January 2012 to December 2014

Opening Balance	\$12,679.54
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Receipts	2012	2013	2014	Note	Totals
Albany	\$15,210	\$15,210	\$15,730		\$46,150
Armada	\$18,265	\$18,005	\$17,225		\$53,495
Baldivis	\$9,165	\$9,490	\$10,920		\$29,575
Busselton	\$3,965	\$3,770	\$4,810		\$12,545
Bunbury	\$2,665	\$3,315	\$3,900		\$9,880
Byford	\$11,570	\$12,545	\$9,000	*	\$33,115
Darling Downs	\$8,905	\$9,295	\$9,880		\$28,080
Kelmscott	\$12,545	\$13,130	\$14,430		\$40,105
Launceston	\$9,230	\$9,360	\$9,360		\$27,950
Legana	\$4,615	\$4,615	\$5,005		\$14,235
Melville			\$2,832.50	*	\$2,832.50
Mt Nasura	\$9,880	\$10,140	\$9,685		\$29,705
Mundijong	\$6,825	\$8,125	\$7,730	*	\$22,680
Rockingham	\$11,115	\$11,310	\$12,285		\$34,710
Southern River	\$19,045	\$19,045	\$13,325		\$51,415
West Albany	\$12,935	\$12,480	\$13,585		\$39,000
Interest	\$1,012.31	\$453.68	\$376.52		\$1,842.51

Total Receipts	\$477,315.01
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Payments	2012	2013	2014	Totals
Hamilton	\$156,100	\$155,500	\$169,400	\$481,000
Bank Fees	\$168	\$168	\$216	\$552
Una Sancta Ad		\$40	\$390	\$430
Gift GHV			\$200	\$200

Total Payments	\$482,182
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Closing Balance	\$7,812.55
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* Notes

The books were closed and audited on 10/12/14

Some of the churches had not quite paid their 2014 payments

Appendix B

Address of Br R Heerema to the 44th Anniversary Meeting and 39th Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on 6 September 2013

Esteemed Board of Governors, Senate, Students, Brothers and sisters,

It is a great honour and privilege to be in your midst this evening, to share with you much joy and thankfulness, and also to extend to you greetings in the name of our Lord from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Geographically we may be very far away from you, (probably as far as you can get on this globe), but as sister churches we remain very close to you, and the Seminary here in Hamilton is also very close to our heart. We share not only the same language but we are also bound together by a common heritage and history, which is founded in our Reformed Confessions, and confirmed by God's Word. And in that sense we feel very much at home here, and we also have great confidence in sending our young men here to be trained as ministers of the Word. We thank you for the warm reception, hospitality and support that you show to them, and we pray that, it may continue.

Next week the Lord willing, it will be first time in the history of the seminary that there will be 5 fulltime professors who may begin their work in teaching our young men. We congratulate you, Dr Ted van Raalte on your appointment and installation as professor in Ecclesiology, and wish you God's strength and wisdom in your task here. And indeed that is our prayer for all the academic staff, the administrative staff, and Board of Governors, that you may be strengthened in the calling that you have received and in the challenges that lie ahead. For managing and supervising an institution like this certainly comes with its challenges, and we could see that also in the recent ATS (Association for Theological Schools) accreditation and self-study that you completed, and we commend you for that. We understand from our part that it was also a good process for you to stand back and evaluate how you do things here, rather than letting the wheels turn from year to year, it causes you to continually assess every aspect of the seminary.

Also added to your challenges is the request of the Australian Churches to consider the possibility of Australian students doing their freshmen year in Australia, via distance or extended education. We appreciate that you will give this request due consideration, and that from our part we may show patience in awaiting and accepting your conclusions. The bar here at the Seminary is set very high, and for good reason, you have to guard the quality of education, and it remains the challenge for you to bring these

students over that bar in the best way possible. God through His Spirit also provides the means to help us get over that bar.

Next week the students will also begin their study, and we wish them well in their study and God's strength for the task that lies before them. However we have to disappoint you, that there are no Aussie students joining you this year, however we are hopeful that in the coming years that will change. And we can say that at this point of time the prospect looks very promising.

Tonight we also see the end of a season of study for some students as they graduate, and we congratulate them, Calvin van der Linde, Theo Wieringa, and not in the least our own Australian student, Ben Schoof. And it is when we experience the tangible evidence of a graduation, and also for us, an Australian student graduating here, that we recognize the intimacy and value of what we have here in this seminary, and we may taste some of the fruits of the labours. Brothers, we congratulate you all in achieving a Master of Divinity degree, and may God bless you in the pathway that He has intended for you, and that you may use this degree in His service.

In closing may I encourage you all, in whatever capacity you have, be it teaching professors or congregation members, to continue to support and maintain the training of ministers of the Word, be assured also that your brothers and sisters in Australia are praying for you, so that the Gospel of Salvation may go out to the ends of the earth. And we know from God's Word, through His prophet Isaiah, that the Gospel will never return empty, and if I may quote that promise from Isaiah 55: 10, 11 it reads as follows:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

On behalf of your brothers and sisters in Australia I thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening.

R Heerema

Appendix C

Financial Statement: Theological Library Fund

Treasurer's Report: Deputies Training for the Ministry

Australian Theological Library Fund

Statement of Receipts and Payments, November 2011 – November 2014

Opening Balance	\$107,835.16
Receipts	\$0.00
Account Interest	\$1,271.36
Term Deposit Interest	\$4,418.81
Expenses	\$0.00
Closing Balance	\$113,525.33

Appendix D

Discussion Paper on Distance or Extension Education

CRTS Discussion Paper re Distance or Extension Education

Contents

1. Context
2. Cautiously Open: What is Best?
 - a. Are there compelling reasons?
 - b. Is CRTS able to prepare additional people for ministry in this way?
 - c. Does CRTS have the means?
 - d. In keeping with CRTS's Statement of Purpose?
 - e. Unforeseen negative consequences
 - f. ATS approval
 - g. ATS approval necessary?
 - h. Conclusion
3. Conclusion

1. Context

For the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, a discussion about Distance or Extension Education began in November 2007 when the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia wrote to the Board of Governors asking that they consider exploring the possibilities re Internet/Distance education. The letter referred to some North American seminaries that were offering some courses in this way (see attachment).

In January 2008, the Board of Governors responded with a letter in which reservation on these points was expressed and some pertinent questions were asked of the Australian Deputies.

In June 2011, the Deputies answered many of the questions posed by the 2008 letter and again urged the Board of Governors to investigate the matter thoroughly.

In December 2011, the Board responded briefly with the message that a more detailed study would be undertaken at a later date in the context also of the ATS self-study evaluative process.

The fact that the concerns of Australia are still very much alive is witnessed by the fact that the 2012 Synod Armadale of the FRCA again mandated the Deputies for Training to investigate "the feasibility of offering the first year of study in Australia or by extension" (*Press Release of the Synod Armadale*

2012, week 1).

In the meantime, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa have also entered into the discussion. In 2013, General Synod Carman decided:

to mandate the Board of Governors of our Theological College to investigate together with the FRCSA if there are possibilities to set up a form of distance learning for the first year of theological training, with the use of facilitators in South Africa (Article 129, Recommendation 3)

Most recently, Synod Carman 2013 referred to a request from the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (Article 129, observation 2.7) and “mandate the Board of Governors of our Theological College to investigate together with the FRCSA if there are possibilities to set up a form of distance learning for the first year of theological training, with the use of facilitators in South Africa” (Article 129, recommendation 3)

This document then is put forth for the purpose of discussing these matters with bodies in this world that are encouraging us to offer theological education in such a manner. It is not meant to be a definitive answer of CRTS to their overtures, but rather a basis for a discussion as to what avenues should be pursued.

For this purpose, recent documents from Australia are used as a discussion partner in the expectation that elsewhere in the world similar issues would arise when making such requests.

2. Cautiously Open: What is Best?

It should be evident from the outset, that the question this document is seeking to answer is not just about what is possible. Much is possible in this technological age, and much more will become possible. The essential question, however, is what is in the best interests of the seminary and the larger purpose for which it exists.

CRTS has also had to consider the questions raised by Australia in another context, namely, in the context of its Self--Study Report for the Association of Theological Schools, in which it needed to reflect on ATS's Standard 10. This report says:

As a matter of general policy, CRTS should go on record as being *cautiously open* with respect to online education and distance education.

CRTS needs to be *open* with respect to these means because of the direction of technology in our day and the significant impact it has on society. Just as we could never have imagined that technology would

develop as far as it has, so we cannot imagine where it will go from here. Insofar as such developments can be beneficially used with a view to the objectives of CRTS, they should also be embraced. The fact that the students of CRTS come from areas around the world, and that much travel expense is incurred by CRTS: considerations re Distance Education 3 students, faculty, and board should also make CRTS open to these possibilities.

On the other hand, CRTS needs to be *cautious* because the integrity of the present program has to be respected and protected. Much effort and many years have gone into developing the present program and CRTS is presently meeting its objectives. Moreover, it needs to be recognized that CRTS is not just offering an information service, but is seeking to develop and cultivate future pastors; there is a dynamic about such education that necessitates much interaction and contact between instructors and students and also between the students themselves, and it is presently not clear that the present standards would not be sacrificed through such modern means. It needs to be recognized that any attempt for CRTS to do what it does either by distance education or by extension will be at considerable cost. It will be at financial cost, for one thing; we have been advised that distance education would involve not only increased technology costs, but also the cost of an Educational Technologist since we presently operate on a very lean IT budget and have no extra technology staff. The other more significant cost, however, may very well be to the core program itself. Adding a distance education component would involve a very significant number of adjustments for faculty, staff, and students. Considerable time and effort would need to be spent on the adjustments faculty would need to make. What would happen to the “community of learners” which is very important to ATS and to CRTS? While some have assured our attendees at the last ATS Biennial that it is possible even to work on spiritual formation through distance education, we remain somewhat sceptical. The personal contact may very well increase when distance education with 10 students is compared to a seminary campus with 1400 students, but surely it will likely decrease when compared to that which takes place on a campus with 20 persons who attend class and live in close proximity of each other. Seminary students not only learn much from professors and the program, they also learn a great deal from each other.”

The Self--Study Report went on to write about the criteria whereby one acts upon such a “cautiously open approach.” The Report says:

A *cautiously open* approach to the question of whether to offer its services through distance education or additional locations, should involve a process whereby CRTS receives satisfactory answers to the following questions:

- a. What *compelling* reason is there for following this approach?
- b. Is CRTS able to prepare additional people for ministry in this way?
- c. Does CRTS have the necessary means to do this?
- d. Is this project in keeping with the Statement of Institutional Purpose (SIP) of CRTS?
- e. Are there unforeseen consequences to the proposal, which may be negative for CRTS, especially regarding its ability to fulfil its SIP?
- f. Are the means being considered in keeping with the standards of ATS as CRTS: considerations re Distance Education 4 set down in the latest set of educational standards (<http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/standards-and-notations>)?

It will be beneficial to consider some of the documentation presented by Australia in the light of the above questions.

a. **Are there Compelling Reasons?**

Do the Deputies for the Training of the Ministry of the FRCA offer compelling reasons why CRTS should venture into the direction they suggest?

In the letter of June 8, 2011, three reasons are given.

1. First, “we want to make the study of theology more attractive and accessible for Australian students” (page 1).
2. Second, “we will be offering the subjects to others in Australia as well” (page 2).
3. Third, FRCA Deputies also mention that they believe having such a basis year in Australia would lead to more students going to seminary and becoming ministers of the Word (page 4).

It will be beneficial to interact with these three reasons.

Regarding the *first* reason, it should be noted that the goal of making the study of theology more attractive is of course most praiseworthy, and can in fact lead persons to study theology at a later date. However, it needs to be noted that these are not the stated or primary concerns of the seminary.

This is really one of the roles of the church; where preaching is done in a faithful and relevant manner, it should spark significant interest in theology and ministry. When it is desirable to augment this, one can do this by means of another organization; in Canada, e.g., this has been done by means of the Burlington Reformed Study Centre and is still being done by the Reformed Bible College (www.rbcollege.com). A seminary, however, has the more specific task of educating those who are interested in serving as ministers of the Word. The question is pertinent: if the first reason given above is not a specific goal and mandate of the seminary, why should the seminary redirect its course with a view to what appears to be the primary goals of a possible extension of the seminary?

The level of education is also at stake here. It is the task of the church to educate those in the pew; a seminary's task is to prepare the persons who will occupy the pulpit. Thus, a seminary directs its teaching to those who have the necessary prerequisite degrees and knowledge, whereas a church directs itself to a different level of understanding accordingly.

Regarding the *second reason*, a similar response needs to be given. A seminary, by its very nature, does not offer its material to the broader public. Its instruction is geared towards those who are equipped and intent for the preaching of the Word.

While professors may occasionally deliver versions of their lectures that are more general and less academic when they are on promotional tours and the like, these are very distinct from the kind of instruction given at the seminary. In order for the seminary to do its core task well, this student-directed focus must be maintained. So the same kind of question needs to be asked here as above: if the second reason given above is not a specific goal and mandate of the seminary, why should the seminary redirect its course with a view to what appears to be one of the goals of a possible extension of the seminary? For any institution to do well it needs to stick to its stated institutional purpose; these last two concerns, though worthy in themselves, could derail CRTS away from its core purpose.

The *third* reason given by the Australian Deputies is that they perceive that there may be some who would study for the ministry if it did not involve coming to Canada or involved coming later. They suggest that distance learning "could raise interest for the studying for the ministry, making it easier for students to begin their studies...for them to go to Canada for the final three years" (p.4, June 8 2011 letter). Moreover, "we have had brothers expressing some initial interest in the study, but when 'push came to shove' the idea of leaving Australia to move to the other side of the world became quite daunting for some" (p.4, June 8 2011 letter).

While of course CRTS really appreciates the wish to gain more students,

this reasoning is somewhat difficult to assess.

First, it is understandably difficult to affix definite numbers to the objectives mentioned.

Second, there always are many young men who consider ministry for a time but are side-tracked away from the goal for any one of a number of reasons, distance and relocation being only one of them. Potential students have to be led and compelled by the Spirit to overlook and overcome such obstacles in order to become ministers of the Word.

Third, one has to wonder whether allowing such students to remain in Australia for a year would be adequate; would the same issues not arise for the subsequent years? Would persons who are reluctant to move even be good candidates for ministry since moving from one place to another is something that ministers and missionaries regularly need to consider?

b. **Is CRTS able to Prepare Additional People for Ministry in this way?**

The discussion above has already answered this question. It is possible but uncertain whether the request would actually produce more ministerial candidates.

One other aspect should perhaps be raised here. One has to wonder whether, if arrangements might be made to offer the first year in Australia, what happens to that Australian student who might prefer nevertheless to come to Canada? When new students are minimal in Australia, might he not face undue pressure to stay?

One area where CRTS might attract more students is perhaps among those who would be inclined to study initially on a part-time basis, and it is possible that CRTS should consider offering an occasional course online for this purpose. However, given the fact that there is a pressing need for ministers, and that both Australia and Canada offer funding for students who are admitted to CRTS, it is preferable for the churches to convince such persons to enrol on a full-time basis rather than growing the ranks of those who might pursue such on an extended part-time basis.

c. **Does CRTS have the means?**

The answer to this question largely depends on what exactly CRTS would be engaged in. **Online, distance learning** would involve professors in Hamilton teaching via Skype, podcasts, video recordings and the like. While much of this may be possible, there are some practical concerns. For one, there are considerable scheduling difficulties, especially with Australia (a 12 hour time gap, 6 hours with South Africa). For another, there is a marked increase in workload for professors and a considerable

barrier in terms of how to make use of all this modern technology. We have been advised that to do this all effectively, the services of an educational technologist would be required. In addition to this, there are considerable extra costs for technology; we have no doubt that much of this is presently available, but CRTS has made use of the conventional means such as Skype often enough to know that more than that is necessary. Institutions that are seriously involved in distance education have needed to invest tens of thousands of dollars beforehand. The goal here would be to ensure that the technology is so good and trustworthy that in interacting one actually forgets that the person is not physically sitting in the same room. The extra time factor, the extra technology, and services of a technologist would all be worthwhile – if there was some degree of certainty regarding increased numbers as a result.

It should be mentioned that in January of 2013, members of the IT Committee of CRTS did visit an office of Polycom (www.polycom.com) in downtown Toronto; Polycom is involved in developing the next generation of hardware and software behind future versions of Skype. That visit made it clear that it would be technologically possible to have a body of students in another area of the world hooked into a CRTS classroom through technology developed by Polycom which consists of a screen, camera, and automated computer. The cost for this would be in the \$50,000--100,000 range. At the same time, it would be possible to link up students directly from a professor's desk to the desks of students with a system that goes beyond Skype, FaceTime and the like, for an amount less than a thousand per year. Neither of these suggestions, however, takes into account the costs of personnel such as educational technologists.

Some of the comments made by the Deputies suggest that they are thinking also of **education by extension**. This would involve CRTS staff either teaching in Australia or CRTS hiring staff in Australia to do this teaching. The Deputies have suggested that ministers are willing to do this instruction; however, in order to give the necessary structure with sufficient safeguards in place, this cannot just be done on a volunteer basis. Such instruction would need to involve CRTS hiring and supervising staff in Australia to do so. The Deputies also refer to the transfer of credit that regularly takes place between institutions (p.2, June 8 2011 letter), but overlook the fact that in order to do so there has to be an actual designated seminary in Australia that can transfer such credits. Also in this scenario, a complicating factor would be the lack of dependability regarding student numbers. To organize what is suggested here may be possible if a steady number of students are in sight year after year; it becomes more problematic if there are some years when there are no Australian students at all. Since 1969, over 43 years, CRTS has admitted

12 Australian students – one student every 3.6 years; even if that number would double in the future, there would still be many years where there would be no Australian students in that first year program. It would seem that this avenue, given the distance, would be administratively challenging and probably the more expensive of the two.

d. In Keeping with CRTS's Statement of Purpose?

By way of its involvement with the Association of Theological Schools, CRTS has become aware of the significance of an institution's Statement of Purpose (SIP). If an institution is to stay true to its core purpose it needs to stay true to its SIP as the original stakeholders of the institution have formulated it. CRTS's SIP reads as follows in CH 1.1:

Statement of Institutional Purpose

The object and purpose of the College is the advancement of learning in theology for the training for the ministry of the Gospel. [ACT 3]

The College shall be carried on as a Christian institute of theology whose basis shall be the infallible Word of God as interpreted by the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dordt as adhered to by the churches. [ACT 4]

The College is called by the churches to explore in a scholarly way the riches of Holy Scripture in order that these riches may be a blessing for the life of the church into the twenty-first century.

The instruction at the College stresses above all the preparation of the students for their practical service as ministers of the Word. The churches are convinced that this preparation should aim at the highest academic standards possible.

Approved by the Board of Governors: September 4, 2003

It will be clear from a cursory reading of the above that the intention of the Australian Deputies can certainly be viewed as in accord with the SIP of the Theological College. At the same time, attention should be paid to words such as "advancement," "scholarly," "highest academic standards"; clearly, the SIP is only maintained if also the scholarly character of its work is respected and maintained.

e. Unforeseen Negative Consequences

The concern here is whether there are unforeseen consequences which would actually be detrimental with a view to CRTS and its ability to fulfil its SIP.

In this regard, there are several consequences to consider.

1. *Quality.* A considerable concern about the proposed request is what this will do to the quality of the education. While it is probably possible to acquire the services of persons in Australia to teach all the necessary courses, it remains a question whether it will be of the same quality and whether it will be as well integrated into the rest of the four years of CRTS instruction. Will ministers whose primary concern is the pastoral care of a congregation be able to give the same dedication to these subjects as a team of full-time academically qualified instructors? Because the first year is a foundational year, what happens to the instruction when the same standards and views are not shared in the first year? Because the first year is foundational, professors are presently always making reference and issuing reminders regarding matters taught in the first year. The first year is a year in which not only Hebrew and Greek are taught extensively; also all other introductory subjects are taught: matters re how to deal with the biblical texts in both OT and NT, introductory hermeneutics and exegesis, introductory homiletics, introductory courses on creeds and confessions. Can it really be maintained that these subjects can be taught as easily and as well by a number of ministers in Australia as they can by a group of dedicated men with advanced education in each respective discipline? Clearly, the present structure, which is working well, may crumble as a result of the proposed changes.
2. *Teacher--Student Connectivity.* One of the chief benefits of having students on campus is the fact that there is a significant degree of interaction between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves. Professors in very large seminaries say they actually have more contact with online students than students in the traditional classroom, but that is undoubtedly because of the very large size of the class – a professor at a seminary with 1600 students is unlikely to know them all even by name. The positive side of being a small school such as CRTS is the fact that when students are assessed, such assessment is based on interaction in the classroom, sermon session, chapels, church activities, and in respective homes. In a constructive manner, student performance is a frequent subject of conversation among faculty. All of that will not happen if the student is not physically on campus. Alongside of that, students engaged in online learning in other disciplines have said to us often: “online education is great because of the distance factor, but there is still nothing like being there in the lecture hall and seminar room.”

As Dr. J. V. Fesko wrote,

The best seminary education is a face-to-face education – that is, learning that takes place on a physical campus, in a physical classroom with live professors, real-time lectures, and dynamic peer interaction. It might surprise some of us to know that the late technocrat and mastermind behind the iPhone, Steve Jobs, was a firm believer in face-to-face meetings at the best way to generate great ideas...the pastorate involves dealing with people face-to-face...All this real-world interaction (as opposed to virtual world interaction) requires a foundation of real-world preparation¹.

3. *Student-student connectivity*: One important aspect of seminary life is that students develop strong relationships with fellow students that often last a lifetime. These friendships typically emerge during the freshmen year. If Australian students were to enter during the second year they would have missed that opportunity and it will be more difficult for them to have meaningful friendships with fellow students.
4. *Low student numbers*. One concern about having a low number of students is that one year the numbers may run so low that the school has no students or no students in a certain class. Thankfully, it has only happened once in CRTS history that there were no freshman students, but it has happened that there was only one. For both the student and the professor, this is less than desirable. Much of the interactivity is diminished, the professor needs to teach in a different manner, and the burden increases on the student as well. A significant concern is the fact that students normally also learn a great deal from each other in and outside the classroom, as they communally wrestle with the issues raised in the curriculum. It is for these reasons that ATS too insists on having a “community of learners” for every program. If the freshman year would be offered in Australia, what is sometimes a problem on campus at CRTS will almost always be a problem in Australia, as it is hard to count on having more than one student at a time. This too is problematic. Furthermore, it will add to the difficulties that CRTS periodically has due to low student numbers in the first year. To maintain a “community of learners” in the freshman year at CRTS, students from Australia and anywhere else are necessary.
5. *Consequences regarding Other Students*. One significant concern, also in connection with the discussion of the previous point, is that if the freshman curriculum were offered online for Australian students,

1 “Face-to-Face Education is Still Best”, Westminster Seminary California: Update Spring 2012, p. 6-7

there would be pressure to offer the same format of education to students in other provinces in Canada, including Ontario. Ultimately then, the question becomes not: “can the First Academic year be offered in Australia?” but “can the whole First Academic year be offered online to all students?” The faculty at CRTS is convinced that this would not be an improvement of the M.Div. program at CRTS. If CRTS was training bankers or computer programmers, this might be acceptable. Face-to-face ministry does well to be founded on face-to-face instruction.

6. *Placement of students – consequences for Canada.* Another factor to be reckoned with in this discussion is that of the 12 Australian students who received a M.Div. from CRTS since 1969, *not one* of them accepted a call to Australia upon graduation. At present, only 3 of the 11 are serving a church in Australia. The point of these remarks is that it needs to be understood that granting Australia’s request will not just impact Australian churches; it will impact Canadian churches as well. In the history of CRTS so far, Australian students become Canadian ministers. Careful consideration of the matter is imperative, because granting the request does not just affect CRTS on the periphery but has impact on the whole seminary program and on the churches at large. Thus, granting Australia’s request is likely to have consequences for CRTS graduates, but those consequences are likely to be felt mostly in Canada. f.

f. **ATS Approval**

As CRTS is in the process of acquiring accredited status with the Association of Theological Schools, it is noteworthy that ATS has recently developed standards also for extension and distance education. It should be realized that ATS is not an external, government–regulated body, but an organization formed by theological schools in North America for the purpose of maintaining the best policies and practices in theological education.

The pertinent standards, approved in June 2012, can be found at this web location: <http://docs.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>

For the purposes of this report, sections ES.2, ES.3, and ES.4 are relevant.

ATS basically distinguishes between *Extension Education*, where students and faculty are gathered in a location away from the main campus for in-person learning, from *Distance Education*, where students and instructors are not in the same location but instruction is given through technological means. ATS is supportive of both of these means provided that they are

done with certain safeguards and conditions in place.

Regarding *extension education*, the following sections of ES.3.1 and 3.2 are particularly relevant.

ES.3.1.4 *Occasional course-offering sites*. These are sites where courses are offered less frequently than on an annual basis. Whenever such courses are offered, the institution should ensure access to resources students need for successful attainment of the courses' objectives, including classroom facilities, library and information resources, faculty, administrative support, student services, and technological support appropriate for the administrative and educational needs of the program.

ES.3.2.7 Appropriate technology and technological support services will be made available to faculty and students at extension sites, as necessary.

ES.3.2.8 Faculty participating in extension programs should be selected according to the procedures that govern personnel for the institution and should possess credentials and demonstrated competence appropriate to the specific purposes of these instructional programs.

ES.3.2.9 The institution's full-time faculty shall share significant responsibility for teaching and academic oversight of extension education sufficient to ensure that the institution's goals and ethos are evident wherever the institution conducts its work. Full-time faculty teaching in extension programs should be available to students for consultation in addition to their availability when classes are in session. Adjunct and part-time faculty teaching in extension settings should have appropriate access to the administrative structures of the employing institution, be accountable to the institution's academic administration, and be appropriately oriented to the purposes of the sponsoring institution and of the extension education being offered.

ES.3.2.11 Institutions establishing extension education programs of study shall meet licensing or chartering regulations in the locations where the courses are offered.

It is apparent from the above, that for the Australian proposal to come into effect, it would not just be a matter of assembling some ministers for the task; among other things, there would be a need for CRTS to hire, supervise, etc. from a distance. Everything expected in Canada (building, library, support, syllabi, learning outcomes, assessment, etc.) would be expected in Australia as well.

Similar safeguards need to be in place regarding *distance education*. Some of the pertinent articles in ES.4 are below.

ES.4.2.8 Library and other information resources shall be available in such number and quality as needed to achieve the purposes of the curriculum, and the institution shall demonstrate that students are required to make appropriate use of these resources. Programs shall provide access to librarians and instruction by library staff regarding the selection and use of library resources.

ES.4.2.9 When libraries of other institutions are used to meet the needs of distance education programs, the Commission member school shall have written agreements with those libraries to ensure that they offer the functional availability and adequacy of resources, facilities, and librarian support.

ES.4.2.10 Sufficient technical support services shall ensure that faculty and students are able to focus on their central tasks of teaching and learning. Schools offering distance education courses shall create systems for faculty development to ensure support for course development, training, implementation of the programs, and troubleshooting. Schools shall ensure that students have training and one-on-one technical support for their participation in a distance education program.

ES.4.2.11 Technological support services should include both (1) staff with a sufficiently high level of technical skills to ensure student facility in handling software and the technological aspects of course offerings and (2) the systemic evaluation and upgrading of technological resources and services consistent with the learning goals of theological scholarship.

ES.4.2.12 The program shall also ensure that the educational objectives are not hindered by time delays in support services or the lack of capable personnel to ensure the several bridging functions between technology and theological education, between theological curriculum and delivery systems, between teachers and learners, and between the distance education program and the goals of the overall curriculum for the courses and degree program being offered.

ES.4.2.13 Procedures that govern personnel for the total institution shall be used for selection of faculty in distance education. Faculty must possess requisite credentials, demonstrate competence appropriate to the specific purposes of these instructional programs, and benefit from institutional practices regarding scholarly development and support for faculty research. Institutions shall

provide regular and formal procedures for evaluating faculty engaged in distance education.

ES.4.2.14 The institution's full-time faculty shall have significant participation in and responsibility for academic development, teaching, and oversight of distance education. They shall ensure that the institution's goals and ethos are evident, the program is rigorous, and the instruction is of a high quality.

ES.4.2.15 Adjunct and part-time faculty should have appropriate access to the administrative structures of the employing institution. They should receive a thorough orientation to the purposes of the institution and to its particular distance education programs.

ES.4.2.16 In recruitment efforts, services, and publications, institutions shall accurately represent their distance education programs, including but not limited to a description of the technology used and the technological ability, skill, and access needed to participate in the program satisfactorily.

ES.4.2.17 Admission requirements shall effectively inform students regarding the necessary skills and mastery of technology to participate fully in the distance education programs to which they are admitted.

ES.4.2.18 Students in distance education programs shall have access to appropriate services including advisory and administrative support, technological support, program and vocational counselling, financial aid, academic records, and placement. The policies and procedures governing financial assistance shall be published and administered equitably.

It is apparent from the above that also engaging in distance education is considerably more complex than might be thought initially. It is not as simple as connecting a professor and a student through Skype. A considerable amount of planning needs to precede such an offering, and a significant amount of money would need to be invested in appropriate technology and personnel, as ES.4.2.11 says.

It's also helpful to survey the Handbook on Accreditation, which says:

ES 3 Extension Education

- The issues identified in each of the eight General Institutional Standards are all present, though from a different perspective, in extension education activities. This subsection seeks to focus the General Institutional Standards with respect to the distinctive

concerns of extension education

- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of extension education in ways that are congruent with the institution's mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfil the purposes of the degree programs?
- How has the institution addressed the purposes of its extension site programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures? What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify its extension programs?
- How does the institution establish, approve, and review the programs of study and course curricula for extension education programs in ways that are consistent with its formal institutional policies and procedures?
- How does the institution ensure that library and information resources are appropriate and sufficient for the purposes of the extension program(s) and the needs of students at extension sites? If library resources and facilities of other institutions are used to meet the needs of extension education programs, how does the school demonstrate that those libraries offer the functional availability and adequacy of appropriate resources?
- Do the full-time faculty members share sufficient responsibility for teaching and academic oversight of extension education to ensure that the institution's goals and ethos are evident wherever the institution conducts its work?
- In what ways does the institution ensure that students in extension programs have access to appropriate services, including advisory and administrative support, program and vocational counselling, financial aid, placement, and academic records?
- Has the institution met the licensing regulations of the community in which the program is offered?

ES 4 Distance Education

- The issues identified in each of the eight General Institutional Standards are all present, though from a different perspective, in distance education courses and programs. This subsection seeks to focus the General Institutional Standards with respect to the distinctive concerns of distance education
- There is a mandatory expectation in the Procedures (VI G 5) that

the institution will have a process by which it verifies that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. This expectation should be treated in the same fashion as a mandatory requirement. Does the institution have such a process in place?

- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of distance education in ways that are congruent with the institution's mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfil the purposes of the degree programs?
- In what ways, if any, is the institution's terminology inconsistent with the standard's definition of distance education, (e.g., describing an extension site as "distance education" because it occurs at a distance from the main campus)?
- How has the institution included planning and evaluation processes for its distance education programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures?
- What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify either its distance education programs or its mission statement or both?
- In what ways does the school demonstrate how programs offered through the mode of distance education seek to meet the standards of learning, teaching, and research described in Standard 3; the goals of the theological curriculum addressed in this standard; requirements regarding library and information resources outlined in Standard 4; and the provisions for faculty control, involvement, and development described in Standard 5?
- How has the institution guarded against allowing the accumulation of distance education courses to constitute a significant portion of a degree program that, as a result, lacks coherence, intentionality, and curricular design?
- How does the institution ensure that distance education programs provide students with appropriate opportunities for collaboration, personal development, interaction with faculty members and among peers within a community of learning, and supervised field or internship opportunities when appropriate to the degree program?
- In what ways does the school provide for faculty development and assistance, thus ensuring consistent, effective, and timely support?

- What procedures are in place to ensure that faculty members possess requisite credentials, demonstrate competence appropriate to the specific purposes of these instructional programs, and benefit from institutional practices regarding scholarly development and support for faculty research?
- How accurately do the school's recruitment efforts and publications represent the technological aspects of the distance education programs, including a description of the hardware and software used and the ability, skill, and access needed for students to participate satisfactorily in the program?
- How does the school integrate the administration of its distance education programs into its regular policies and procedures?

See <http://docs.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/handbook-section-5.pdf>, sections ES.3 and ES.4.

g. ATS Approval Necessary?

When one notes the intensity of ATS regulations concerning the above matters, and the need for ATS to approve distance and extension programs, one might be inclined to suggest that CRTS should forego ATS membership and involvement altogether.

It should then be realized however that CRTS has recently been informed about attempts on the part of the federal and provincial governments to control education of foreign students. Basically, the Government of Canada has decided that as of Spring 2014 foreign student visas will only be granted to foreign students who are accepted by schools provincially certified and approved for such education. Thus, colleges and universities throughout Canada are busy with the necessary adjustments lest the flow of foreign students stops altogether as of September 2014. At CRTS, one staff member has been given the mandate to ensure that CRTS will meet all the necessary conditions. Of interest, however, is the fact that when the Principal and this staff member attended a meeting about these developments in the Ministry of Education building in downtown Toronto, one of the first questions that was put to the schools represented was: how do we know that you are appropriately qualified and accredited? Clearly, the government will want us to meet some external accreditation standards and the standards of accreditation of ATS are very widely recognized. Venturing without ATS into the field of distance and extension education would then be pointless as we would then probably not be provincially certified and federally recognized and thus unable to admit any foreign student into the institution. Besides, the point of ATS' standards is simply to ascertain that the distance or extension student receives the same quality

of education as the regular student.

3. Conclusion

This paper then, as mentioned from the outset, is not meant to be the definitive answer of CRTS to all requests, but it is offered for the consideration of those making such requests. It is important for such bodies to be aware of all the issues involved, to consider and perhaps reconsider their requests in the light of the above, and then, formulate their proposals accordingly. In all such proposals, it is of utmost importance that the integrity of the M.Div. program, the needs of the student, and the larger needs of the respective federations be met and maintained in the best way possible.

It is of utmost importance that each situation be considered on the basis of its own merits. Ultimately, what needs to drive us is the question what is best in each instance. We are convinced that the best thing that we can do for the Canadian and American Reformed churches, for instance, is to have students physically on campus in Hamilton. We would suggest that that is probably also the best for students coming from Australia and many Asian countries. It is obviously not the best for the many students who have applied from African and other countries but have been refused admission. And it may not be the best for students living and serving in South Africa. At bottom, Reformed theological education is a treasure which ought to be available to all in the best way possible; this document is intended to facilitate the discussion about how that can be done.

Approved by the Board of Governors

September 5, 2013

Appendix E

Report by Dr GH Visscher on visit to Australia, PNG and Indonesia, April 2 – June 3, 2014

REPORT ON TRIP TO AUSTRALIA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND INDONESIA

April 2 to June 3, 2014

This is a report on an extensive trip that my wife and I made to churches in three countries from which CRTS receives students and/or has graduates working.

While invited and mandated by CRTS to visit the Australian churches, we added Indonesia and Papua New Guinea to the trip. This is partly due to the fact that we have often been requested by Smithville Mission as well as by graduates to visit when in the general area, and partly due to some spontaneity on our part. When approached, all three mission boards involved contributed some money to cover airfare costs as they were convinced such a visit would be appreciated by their missionaries and mission workers – and it certainly was.

Board members and hundreds of others have also been kept up to date on our travels through our blog which is still all readily accessible on <http://www.wherewithintheworldisghv.blogspot.ca>. This resource is largely due to the significant determination of my wife who was always committed to keeping it up even when I was less so; it should not be expected that all those from CRTS who make such travels do the same.

In most places where we travelled I delivered two talks, one on “Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” and the second on “Living by Grace: a Survey of Romans.”

Our itinerary was as follows:

April 2 – 15	Cairns, Australia
April 15 – 22	Lae, PNG
April 22 – 28	Port Moresby, PNG
April 28 – May 5	Tasmania, Australia
May 5 – May 26	Western Australia, Australia
May 26 – June 2	Timor, Indonesia

April 2 – 15: Cairns, Australia

Our first stop was in Cairns, on the northeast corner of Australia. We were there for three purposes: to enjoy a partial vacation in a delightful tropical area, to visit with the new house congregation of the FRCA, and to journey on to PNG as you cannot fly directly from North America to PNG.

During this time, I delivered both talks mentioned above, preached on both Sundays, was able to provide counsel to this young congregation and its officebearers, and enjoyed some social time in the homes of its members. We are particularly grateful to Sjaak and Cheree van Laar who provided us with accommodation and wonderful fellowship.

2 April 15 – 28: Papua New Guinea

Here we spent the first week in Lae with Ian and Nadia Wildeboer and Tim and Francine Sikkema. In this time I preached on Sunday with Ian translating, did a talk for the congregation and officebearers on “The Value of Homevisits”, observed the missionaries both in street and regular preaching, attended a delightful school Easter presentation (see the blog for some videos) and a Good Friday service.

The second week was spent largely on the grounds of the Reformed Churches Bible College in Port Moresby with Henry and Rita Versteeg; it was unfortunate that we entirely missed Cornelis and Greta Kleyn as they were in Perth in connection with the birth of a child. In Port Moresby I did two chapel devotions, taught four classes, presented the talk on Forgiveness and Reconciliation, attended a faculty meeting, and we attended a Papuan Christian wedding on the grounds of the seminary complex. On these secured grounds, the faculty homes, student homes, and the classrooms are all located. It is noteworthy that while the language in which instruction is given is English, serving as the official language in a country with over 800 languages, there is no Greek or Hebrew taught also because the academic level of the students is quite low, given the nature of the educational system in PNG.

To us it was very noticeable throughout our visit that missionaries in both places enjoyed having Canadian visitors who could relate to the issues they were confronted with, and could provide a sounding board for discussing weighty matters that concerned them. It was helpful to be there also to discuss the relation between CRTS and the work on the field, as well as the future of the respective mission sites, also in view of eventual repatriation of missionaries whether due to retirement or age of children. From our side, now that we have been there we have gained a tremendous degree of respect for the work of the missionaries, and what they are all willing to do in order to bring the gospel to many unreached areas of the world. From an educator's side as well, as a former pastor I am able to envisage situations that future pastors might find themselves in, and exposure to mission fields in this way helps one to envisage situations in which missionaries are in.

April 28 – May 5 Tasmania, Australia

From PNG, we travelled to Hobart, Australia (wrongly, by the way, as we were under the impression that there was only one international airport

in Tasmania), and made use of the opportunity to visit Port Arthur, a museum of the British penal colony from the period of colonization. Upon arriving in Launceston, I did the Romans talk for the congregation, did the Forgiveness talk for the officebearers of Launceston and Legana, did a talk on Headship to males of both congregations, and preached in both churches. I also met with members of the calling committee of Launceston (at their request). Again, we enjoyed tremendous hospitality and were struck with the fact that while we came to this island knowing no one, we left with an appreciation for many brothers and sisters. We particularly appreciated the hospitality and friendship of John and Rose Heys of Launceston.

3 May 5 – May 26 Western Australia

From Tasmania we travelled for a three-week period to the area where most of the FRCA churches are found, the Perth area. From Wednesday to Monday of the second weekend we travelled to Albany, from which we returned along the coast to visit the Bunbury-Busselton area. In this period, I delivered the two talks three times (Armadale, Albany, Busselton), met with the Deputies for the Training of the Ministry, met with possible future students in both Armadale and Albany, as well as with two possible future students privately, preached twice each Sunday, spoke at two of the area schools, met with one of the calling committees (at their request), met with the Board of a new Christian Counselling Association because of my involvement with a similar organization in Ontario, met with the chairman of the Armadale Mission Board re mission in PNG, and socialized with many of the colleagues in these three areas. It was particularly gratifying visiting with some of the present colleagues whom I taught in earlier years, and meaningful to consider CRTS's strengths and failures in preparing them for their present tasks.

One very significant meeting for CRTS was the meeting with the Deputies for Training for the Ministry. They had all read our document entitled "CRTS Discussion Paper re Distance or Extension Education," had some questions about it, but agreed that on the basis of this document the request to do the first year of theological education in Australia should be withdrawn. They intend to pass this Discussion Paper on to their next General Synod with the recommendation to put the matter to rest. On other points, there was a discussion about the future of theological training in general, and a discussion about some of the challenges with respect to the wish expressed by their General Synod that one of the professors of CRTS come to Australia every two years. In this regard, upon my request, and in order that we might be able to appreciate the impact of such visits, they have also sent us a document entitled "Deputies Report on Dr GH Visscher's Visit," which has been included below as **Sub Appendix E**.

Another set of significant meetings was with future students. On one occasion I met with fourteen possible future students, some of who came out of interest and others with serious intent. Some of these came with a parent and some with their pastor (and sometimes this was the same person!). I was able to speak with them about the joys and challenges of ministry, about the entrance requirements, the course of study, and answer their many questions. All the Deputies were also present for the meeting in Armadale. In Albany I met with two other students with serious intent; they came with both their parents and their pastor. Half of these possible future students were already on the radar of the Registrar's office, but all of them will be included on the newsletter that goes out periodically from the Registrar's office.

In Armadale I also met with two of these students at my request; the concern is that while we generally have not been impressed with any online instruction in ancient languages thus far, I learned at the general meeting that these two young men were pursuing Hebrew instruction through www.eteacherbiblical.com which is affiliated with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I thus wanted to see some of the material they were using and discuss their program with them. I was quite impressed with the material and the program, and have asked Dr Smith, our Hebrew instructor, to ask for copies and look more carefully at this material. If this material meets also with his approval, it will be a valuable resource for us as it has often been a challenge for future students to find Biblical Hebrew at their respective universities.

Another significant evening was a full evening dedicated to the general nature of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. It is regrettable that the attendance was the poorest at this evening, partly because there were two school association meetings that evening, as well as some seem to have confused it with the evening intended only for future students. In any case, to a group of about 50 people I spoke about CRTS in general by means of some pictures on PowerPoint, spoke about some of the many changes that occurred since 2000, and answered questions from the floor. Strikingly, there were no questions about the recent CRTS-Kampen conference, nor about distance education. There was considerable gratitude for the work of CRTS.

Once again we enjoyed wonderful fellowship during this period. In Armadale, we were housed in the apartment behind the home of Alwyn and Anne Terpstra, and in Albany in the apartment behind the home of Hank and Gerda Olde. It was delightful to get to know these brothers and sisters, enjoy their hospitality and fellowship, and hear about life in Australia also from them.

May 26 – June 2 Timor, Indonesia

Next we travelled from Perth to Bali to Kupang in order to visit with Ed and Femmy Dethan and to teach at the Indonesian Reformed Theological College. Upon arrival in Kupang, we were immediately brought to the office of the Radio program that is broadcast from the grounds of the seminary and interviewed about what brought us to Timor. In these days it was truly a blessing to see how this brother and his wife manage to take care of a family, serve as a missionary to a growing number of churches, supervise a College with about 90 students, teach at this College, run an orphanage with about 18 orphans, and a Radio Station with about 5000-6000 listeners. We were impressed with all this work, with their ability to build into it all the necessary delegation of duties and accountability structures.

In this period of time, I preached on Ascension Day and on the Lord's Day, addressed the radio audience for about five hours over three days, taught five hours at the College on topics related to Romans as well as Canonical studies, delivered the talk on Forgiveness and Reconciliation to officebearers and about 90 very engaged students of the College on a Saturday morning. In this period my wife also served as an English instructor. Worthy of special interest is the fact that during part of the three day period in which I spoke about the Holy Spirit, Benny Hinn (the American televangelist known for his "Miracle Crusades") was visiting Kupang for a faith-healing service; this brought special interest to our broadcast on Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Of general interest to CRTS is the fact that the three graduates of CRTS who are serving in Indonesia (also Yonson Dethan, and Pila Njuka) are all giving theological instruction at three different institutions and involved in mission work in three different federations which have no ecclesiastical relations with each other. This was the subject of some significant conversation between Ed and myself, and is a point that Edwar too is concerned about. We did conclude however that a resolution of these difficulties is not likely to come about through pressure from federations outside of Indonesia; instead it is likely to be most effective if it comes from within and we were able to discuss some scenarios that might be helpful in this regard.

Once again, however, we were thankful for the delightful fellowship and hospitality we enjoyed with the Dethans, and we were impressed with their work, their example and zeal for the gospel, and their passion to seek the wellbeing of others as they live in this third world country.

Concluding General Comments

I would like to conclude this report with some comments, not just as the one who visited Australia but also as the Principal of the seminary reflecting on

the future of these kind of promotional tours.

1. It was a pleasure to speak throughout this tour on these two topics. As one colleague wrote to me, "I really think the content of both was helpful for developing the thinking of the church community here, in connection with both topics." It's important that the talks of professors be not just of general academic interest but carefully chosen with a view to connecting with the person in the pew, and if possible with the ongoing needs of the respective churches.
2. By means of PowerPoint, Prezi, and an iPad, I was also able to do these talks in a more casual, teaching manner rather than from a written text behind a lectern. That was appreciated. The iPad also allowed me to travel in a paperless manner and to draw from my electronic files as needed. CRTS should thus ensure that those travelling have the necessary technology to do also this work as effectively as possible.
3. While being thankful that we were able to work towards a resolution of the first year instruction, I became increasingly aware of the need for CRTS to put forward as forceful a presence through the Internet as possible. While full--scale online education may be a bridge too far, it should be possible for CRTS to offer more lectures, classes, and perhaps even individual courses online. Again, this may necessitate further expenditures re technology but it will be a significant means to do some of the promotional work that is necessary among our supporting churches – not only in Australia and abroad but also throughout North America.
4. There is a need for the Board, perhaps through a Committee, to think long and hard about the nature of these trips, especially because Australia is asking for this to happen every two years rather than every three. Specifically, these are some of the questions that need to be addressed:
 - a. Is it feasible for every professor to make such a trip every ten years? Can CRTS expect that of each professor?
 - b. Should this be happening during a sabbatical period, or in another time?
 - c. Can CRTS expect that wives of professors will always accompany them, given their own family and work responsibilities?
 - d. Are adequate provisions in place for the financial consequences that such trips would have on the professors and their families?
 - e. Churches appear to conclude that preaching is part of the

package offered by CRTS; if it is, should CRTS remunerate extra in this regard?

- f. To what degree can and should professors add other countries to such trips, and to what degree can CRTS be expected to cover such costs?

Questions raised under point four above should not all be interpreted as complaints on our part, though we do have some concerns and these should be brought to bear on discussions on these matters.

My wife and I are very glad to have made the trip, and thankful that we were able to enjoy this experience which was very beneficial for CRTS and rewarding for us.

Gerhard H. Visscher

June 17, 2014

Sub Appendix E

Deputies Report on Dr GH Visscher's Visit

Dr GH Visscher has requested that Deputies for Training for the Ministry prepare a submission to be incorporated into his report on the recent visit to the Australian Churches.

We were privileged to have Dr and Sr Visscher in Australia during April – May 2014. It was a genuine pleasure for us to host them, and they were gracious guests. A visit such as this, presently occurring just once in three years, is considered by us to be a special occasion. From our perspective, we are convinced that the interaction it brings carries numerous and lasting benefits to both the CRC and FRCA federations. From the Australian churches' vantage point, one of the best representations the CRTS can make is that by one of their own faculty members. Of course no individual professor can represent the institution in its entirety. Yet Dr GH Visscher, in his capacity as CRTS Principal and Professor of NT studies, raised its profile amongst us in the course of this tour. This has great relevance for intending students, and also has implications for maintaining wholehearted support amongst the wider church membership.

Numerous presentations were made by Dr GH Visscher in the various locations where the Australian churches are concentrated. Specifically, there were two speeches, held on separate occasions. These lectures were well received by large and appreciative audiences. This was evidenced by attentiveness, meaningful question times, positive feedback, and multiple requests for audio copies of the speeches. These have since been placed on the Free Reformed Churches' website for future reference. In summary, these types of presentations stimulate deeper thought and reflection on the meaning and application of God's Word on topics relevant to everyday Christian living.

Further, Dr GH Visscher preached in a number of the churches visited. Hearing one of the college professors preach is less common in Australia than Canada. From our perspective, therefore, to hear preaching by a teacher of future preachers does add that extra dimension.

Deputies for Training for the Ministry enjoyed a very good meeting with Dr GH Visscher. It was good to have a brotherly, face to face meeting. At the forefront of our collective minds was the recently prepared report by the CRTS on the Australian churches' question of CRTS teaching the freshman year of the M.Div. online for the benefit of students originating from Australia. We had a beneficial discussion, where we accepted the CRTS conclusion to remain cautiously open to future online educational options, while at the same time accepting that the current 4 year programme will remain as currently presented.

A CRTS presentation evening by Dr GH Visscher for prospective theology students was very well attended. A number of young brothers present are well advanced in their preparatory university and language studies for entry to the CRTS. A significant secondary group shows keen interest. It was invaluable for all of these young men, in some cases there with a parent, to gain some insights into life at the seminary. The presentation touched on various aspects of the M.Div. programme, the college facilities, mentoring, and also included some well-placed advice about personal prerequisites for the future pastoring of the Lord's people. This event, including pictorial content, was considered by all to be very worthwhile. Dr GH Visscher met individually with some of the students to advise them about their Greek and Hebrew studies, and to just chat generally.

Unfortunately, a similar CRTS information evening organized for the wider church membership was less well attended, not because of disinterest, but due to two separate School meetings being convened on the same evening.

In summary, this visit highlighted the place and work of the CRTS amongst the FRCA. The value of a personal visit by a CRTS professor, whose love for the furtherance of the gospel is clearly evident, is not to be underestimated. The CRTS is an institution domiciled in Canada within the CRC. The FRCA are physically distant, but we feel strongly that this visit has bridged the distance once again. We really enjoyed the formal contact, but also the brotherly and sisterly connection with the Visschers. As deputies, we considered this visit to be an effective way of promoting theological education within our churches.

We are, DV, looking forward to the next.

May the Lord bless our mutual endeavours for theological education into the future.

Appendix F

Financial Statement: Needy Students Fund

Treasurer's Report: Deputies Training for the Ministry

Needy Students Fund

Statement of Receipts and Payments

November 2011- November 2014

	Date	
Opening Balance	11/10/2011	\$15,385.77

Receipts

FRC Albany	\$5,680.00
FRC Armadale	\$6,576.00
FRC Baldivis	\$3,616.00
FRC Bunbury	\$1,568.00
FRC Busselton	\$1,512.00
FRC Byford	\$2,976.00
FRC Darling Downs	\$3,458.00
FRC Kelmscott	\$6,416.00
FRC Launceston	\$3,480.00
FRC Legana	\$2,328.00
FRC Melville	\$0.00
FRC Mt Nasura	\$2,472.00
FRC Mundijong	\$3,760.00
FRC Rockingham	\$4,272.00
FRC Southern River	\$8,592.00
FRC West Albany	\$4,800.00
Interest	\$79.76
Total	\$61,585.76

Payments

Student Support	\$24,608.00
Administration	\$346.05
Total	\$24,954.05

Closing Balance	10/11/2014	\$52,017.48
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Appendix G

Report on Board of Governors' (CRTS) meeting, held 5th September 2013

This meeting began at 1.00 pm in the afternoon, in the large lecture room. The academic committee and the property and finance committee had already met in the morning. The chairman, Rev Richard Aasman, opened the meeting and welcomed all, with a special mention to the four new incoming board members and to the representative from Australia. I was given full rights to speak, but not able to vote.

The board now consists of Rev R Aasman (chairman), Rev J Ludwig (vice-chairman), Dr AJ Pol (secretary), Rev E Kampen, Rev A Souman (new member), Rev M van Luik (new member), Br H Kampen (treasurer), Br B Hordyk, Br A Bax, Br C Medemblik (new member), br F Oostdyk (new member). Dr GH Visscher as principal of the seminary is also present at the meeting.

The chairman also expressed appreciation and thankfulness for the support received from the FRCA, not only in monetary support but also in prayer support and a steady stream of students from Australia. The bond is strong as far as the seminary is concerned and this is also evident in the presence of a representative from the Australian Churches.

I was then invited to say some words, where I extended greetings from Australia, expressed appreciation for being able to be in their midst, and spoke a bit about the deputyship and the work that we were busy with.

The meeting had a full agenda with approximately 40 items; the matter of distance education was near the end of the agenda. The chairman explained that supper would be served at 5pm, and that the meeting would then continue till 7pm. The meeting proceeded by going through the agenda items, due attention was given to all items. Some items had been discussed at the academic or property and finance meetings, where recommendations were put forward and were rubber stamped at this meeting. Some of the items, that may be of interest, were:

- Sabbatical was granted to Dr GH Visscher, he has in mind writing a book about the writings of NT Wright, a modern day NT Scholar.
- Br Richard Tomlin was appointed as adjunct lecturer in public speaking, he teaches English at Guido de Bres.
- Dr N Kloosterman is translating some of J Douma's material, the seminary has a publication fund set up which finances projects such as this.

- Dr J vanVliet is appointed as acting principal during Dr GH Visscher's sabbatical.
- Dr J Smith is writing a commentary on the Psalms.
- The upcoming year will only see 2 new students begin (both from the URC) – John Boekee from Aylmer (Ontario) and James Zekveld from Woodbridge (Ontario) beginning their freshman's year, a third student from Korea had pulled out just the past week. It is one of those rare years that there will be no students from the Canadian Reformed Churches, however there is a still total student body of 19.
- The financial assessment for confessing members of Canadian Churches will be increased from \$72 CAD to \$79 CAD to cover for the costs of a fifth Professor.
- The ATS has recommended that the CRTS include the PTP Programme in the Master of Divinity degree; this has the attention of the senate and they will try to come with a proposal by May 2014.

At 5 pm we stopped for supper, at this point there were only a few remaining items left on the agenda including distance education. The meeting resumed at 5.45 pm.

The item of interest, for us, was finally discussed, this being our request for doing the freshman year in Australia via distance education. The board members had received all the material, which included all our correspondence since 2008, and the 15 page discussion paper prepared by Dr GH Visscher. It was noted that the discussion paper was intended to serve the board with some direction and did not aim to give a definitive answer. The academic committee informed the meeting that it had discussed the discussion paper that morning and would put forward a recommendation. In short the recommendation was to send the discussion paper with a covering letter to the FRCA deputies and to VJK South Africa, to provide us with information, which can be discussed with Dr GH Visscher during his visit in 2014.

I was invited to make some comment. I replied that it was difficult to interact with the discussion paper as I had only just received it and that it would need to be discussed by deputies as a whole before coming to any conclusions. However I did say that at a quick glance the paper did not seem to favour distance education and some of the argumentation used was perhaps not considered by the Australian deputies. I again stressed to the BOG that our primary purpose was to make it easier for students to enter into the ministry by being able to do the first year in Australia. I was also asked if the Australian Churches would strongly consider setting up their own Seminary if this request was not met, I replied that I have heard

voices in that direction. Some comments in the discussion were:

- a. it would be a very positive development if one day the FRCA would set up a training facility to serve the reformed churches in our part of the world;
- b. the CanRC should not become dependent upon the financial, and other support, of the FRCA;
- c. the seminary appreciates the support from the FRCA and the request should not be dismissed lightly. The item was closed by the BOG agreeing to the proposal put forward by the academic committee; to adjust the discussion paper so as it comes from the board, and to send it to the FRCA and the VJK SA.

The remaining items were dealt with quickly, including procedures for the upcoming convocation and graduation, the meeting was then closed by Rev M van Luik at 6:45 pm.

R Heerema
September 2013

Appendix H

Guidelines developed by the Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee (Canada), adapted by Deputies Training for Ministry and then adopted by Synod Legana 2009 for the Australian Context

1. Compensation for students in the Pastoral Training Program

- a. Deputies Training for the Ministry will liaise with the Canadian Committee (appointed to oversee payment of students in Canada in the PTP) to determine the rate of pay for students undertaking the PTP. This Committee decided to pay \$20.00 per hour or \$750.00 per week for students employed during the summer of 2008. Since the requirements of PTP program are considered to be fulfilled during a minimum of 10 weeks of training, the Committee decided to pay the employer, the Church where the student is placed by mutual agreement between the PTP Coordinator and the mentor, a total amount of \$7,500.00 for the 10 weeks of training. The Committee will pay each of the Churches employing a student the above stated amount in a manner ensuring that the student can be paid on time.
- b. To encourage participation of the Churches in Australia in the Pastoral Training Program, the travel expenses to and from Australia will be paid by the Australian Churches. This amount would also be sent to the local hosting church.
- c. Deputies Training for the Ministry will not pay for additional travel costs, mileage, the student being married and having a family to look after, housing expenses, tuition fees or other considerations. The Canadian Committee considered that it has as mandate to fund an educational program. The Committee is not a Committee for Needy Students. Also, employers that hire students enrolled in a cooperative program of studies at Canadian universities pay students for the period of the training program, but not for travel expenses, family needs, housing expenses or other expenses. However, a local hosting church could, at its discretion, add to the approved amount based on the individual student's circumstances.
- d. Deputies Training for the Ministry will fund only the 10 week Pastoral Training Program period. Students should be able to complete the requirements of the mandatory 10-week Pastoral Training Program during that period of time. The

Church employing the student may, at its discretion, enter into an agreement with the student to employ him for a period longer than 10 weeks but would then itself face payment of the additional costs.

2. Assessment

Deputies Training for the Ministry will consider at its October meeting the number of students to be employed by the Churches in the ensuing year and send a letter to the Churches regarding the annual assessment for the PTP requesting the churches to pay the assessment before March 31 of the following year.

3. Foreign Students

It remains the responsibility of the student to apply for the necessary work permit where applicable.

4. Employment and taxes

Churches employing students will be responsible to determine the issues regarding employment of students and payroll deductions for taxes, unemployment insurance, etc.

Evaluation of the ESV and NIV 2011 for Synod Baldivis 2015

1) Mandate

Synod Armadale 2012 - Article 91 - Bible Translations

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.

ADOPTED

Notes

- *Additional material about the discussion on the translations to be used in the FRCAs can be found in*
 - 1) *the Acts of Synod 1994 Article 55 pp30-32 and the report on pp 182-193.*
 - 2) *the Acts of Synod 1996 Article 59, pp 35-38 and the report on pp 133-135*
- *The original deputies appointed under Article 120, Synod Armadale 2012 were the Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze and Rev. M. Retief.*

Rev. M. Retief was unable to contribute due to ill health and felt compelled to resign from this deputyship in September 2014. He was replaced by the alternate, Dr. R.D. Anderson, who was, however, unable to assist until 2015 due to other commitments. Unfortunately the reports had to be submitted by 22 December 2014. Consequently you will find only one signature at the end of this report.

Therefore, I caution Synod as to its acceptance as a valid report. The

proper assessment of a translation is a mammoth task, and requires many, many hours of close reading. In this case there were three translations that were involved, two of which required close reading. Unfortunately, the best that I have been able to do has been a relatively cursory examination.

One shortcut I took was to compare the NIV 2011 in all places where it materially differed from the accepted NIV 1984. Another shortcut I took was to collect all the criticisms I could find of the ESV translation on the internet, in books and from my own reading, which I then compared to the originals. If they were of dogmatic importance I have included them. If they were simply translational choices they made I did not agree with I omitted them, unless they demonstrated some other aspect of the ESV.

My work has focused on the accuracy of the translations, but not on the literary qualities of the translations. One does of course get an impression from reading them both, but you will only find a cursory evaluation of them below. There are many evaluations of the qualities of the NIV 2011 and the ESV and if you read a number of them, or better still, read the translations, you will get a fair idea of their achievements.

2) Overview

By now the background of all three translations is well known. I give only a cursory summary below.

The NKJV and the NIV were born at the time of much ferment in Bible translations as a reaction to the RSV, a liberal and critical translation, which caused quite a backlash among Evangelical circles. However, its English was more modern and created a widespread desire for a faithful Bible in a more contemporary English. The NKJV and the NIV took different approaches to the problem. The NKJV aimed for a more formal, literal translation in line with the KJV, and the NIV for a more functionally equivalent translation. The latter was not only a departure from the approach taken by the KJV in translational philosophy, but also based itself on different manuscripts in the original languages. Consequently, it caused quite some division in Evangelical circles, but was widely adopted for its ease of comprehension. It is fair to say that all the doctrines of Scripture can be supported from both translations.

However, once broadly adopted, the NIV showed a worrying tendency to move in the direction of egalitarianism. The ESV, came into existence, partially in reaction to that agenda as it made itself felt in the proposed NIV1 translation of 1996 and later in the TNIV and now the NIV 2011.

Another aspect that prompted the ESV translation was an increasing dissatisfaction with the removal of connectives in the NIV 1984 text, which was experienced as a dumbing down of the Bible. This fault has been addressed to some extent in the NIV 2011.

The NKJV is known as a would be clone of the KJV, which failed for those who cling to the KJV because it did not use the same Hebrew text for the OT as the KJV. For those who have moved on from the KJV it failed because it maintained the Received Text, on which the KJV is based, as basis of the NT translation. Again for others it failed because of its turgid prose, which is a consequence of its translational philosophy and its attempt to maintain KJV phraseology. However, it is regarded by many as a faithful translation. Its theology is not suspect and all Reformed doctrines can be adequately defended from it.

The ESV is also not a new translation. It is a reworking of the RSV in which the latter's critical bias was removed and the language updated. The critical translational choices that the evangelical world objected to were all removed and replaced by translations true to the intention of Scripture.

Since it was created because of a trend in the NIV towards gender inclusiveness it is perceived as having an anti-egalitarian, or more positively, a complementarian bias. It often does use gender neutral terminology where it does not impact Christology, the position of the male as head, or office in the Church, although it is somewhat erratic in this.

Doctrinally it is known as a Calvinist translation because of a perceived bias towards double predestination. The translation of the following verses, which can support the doctrine of double predestination, have raised the ire of some: Ex 7:13,22; 8:18; 9:35; Ps 49:14; Prv 16:4; Rom 9:22; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 4.

Its prose is sometimes dated, but more modern than the NKJV. As a rule, it does not remove the connectives, which you find in the Greek text of the NT. It is, however, the least consistent translation of the three because it does not rigidly stick to its translational principles or guidelines. At times this is beneficial, but sometimes it is methodologically confusing. It might be fair to say, in that regard, that it is the less polished than the NIV 2011, perhaps due to the haste with which it was produced.

It can be safely used to defend and maintain reformed doctrine.

The NIV 2011 is a modern, evangelical translation and an update of the 1984 NIV. It has a very smooth style and as far as readability goes it is one of the smoothest translations available. Also as a translation of the originals it often gets high marks, especially in the Pauline epistles. However, it has sold out to egalitarianism and this negatively affects its usability because

gender neutral translation at times obscures OT Christology, the Biblical relation of men and women and the non-admissibility of women to office in the Church. Because of this it cannot be recommended as a translation for official use in the Church.

Original Texts on which the translations are based

There are many and various criteria that can be applied to Bible translations. Basic to them all is the underlying Hebrew and Greek texts. The ESV and the NIV 2011 take a more eclectic approach than the NKJV to the extant manuscripts.

The NKJV is tied to the KJV as closely as possible. However, it has departed from the KJV in that the OT is now based on the Leningrad Manuscript B19a and no longer on the Jacob ben Chayyim text of 1524-25.

The NT translation is still based on the Received Text, the so called Textus Receptus (TR), but where it differs from the Byzantine type text, called the Majority Text (MT), a footnote draws attention to this fact. The translation, therefore, implicitly gives more weight to the Majority Text than to the TR on which it is based.

That raises the question whether the translation is based on market appeal or on conviction that the TR is the best text available. The issue of the TR is beyond the scope of this evaluation. Suffice it to say that the Byzantine (Majority) text, on which it is based, is enjoying something of a revival among Biblical scholars as many of its readings have now been shown to be very early. That puts the so called Majority Text into a better light and justifies the fact that Thomas Nelson have so heavily footnoted their translation.

Both the ESV 2011 and the NIV 2011 are based on the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible as found in the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, and on the Greek text of the Greek New Testament, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS), and Novum Testamentum Graece, edited by Nestle and Aland. A judicious use of other supporting textual witnesses was also made.

However, this also has to be watched as these critical original language texts are constantly undergoing revision and some of the textual changes may not be acceptable to us. A general trend is becoming visible in the UBS ratings (A-D) of their choices. They are becoming more certain of their choices over time, or we could say that their choices are hardening. Some decisions that earlier received a B, C or D rating have received an A,B or C rating respectively in the latest version.

Translational Philosophy

The differences between the NKJV, the ESV and the NIV are basically that

between a more formal and more functional equivalence approach to the original languages and texts. They locate themselves on that translational scale in the order listed above although neither the NKJV or the NIV are extreme examples in their commitment to their philosophy. The ESV locates itself somewhere between these two, since it strives to be as literal as possible, but it also adopts functionally equivalent translations at times. This translational philosophy is not an issue in itself, but to the degree that it is used the nuances of the underlying text disappear. Again that is not always an issue, for it is doubtful if the majority of readers could catch the nuances. However, we are evaluating Bibles for use in the church services. It is easier to preach where the nuances of the Hebrew or Greek can be pointed out from the translation used.

Language Use

The translational philosophy has its effects on readability. The NKJV translation is the least fluent and causes less competent readers difficulties and in a few spots is quite rough. It also is not a very elegant translation.

The ESV is generally more fluent and more elegant English, but still causes less competent readers to stumble and in a few spots is also quite rough.

The NIV 2011 is the smoothest and most readable translation. However, where it moves to gender neutral terminology sometimes the translation's smoothness can and does suffer. It is also aimed at a somewhat lower reading age. The NIV 2011 translation has actually improved in many places moving back closer to the original text than the 1984 version while maintaining readability.

Doctrinal Inclinations

Note:

This doctrinal evaluation was done by a judicious comparison of certain texts that have been theological battlegrounds and of important proof texts cited under the articles of the Belgic Confession of texts.

All translations have a doctrinal bias. The three translations we have been charged with monitoring and investigating all come from, broadly speaking, the evangelical wing of North America and are Protestant in orientation. It would be fair to say that they still live in the shadow of the KJV, the NKJV most of all, then the ESV and the NIV in that order.

All the translators of all three translations believed that the Bible is God's inspired and inerrant word. None of them include the Apocrypha. Sometimes, however, the cross references and notes in the study Bibles leave something to be desired. Often various options are presented without a decision between them being given. A Reformed interpretation is given in

those Bibles that are printed for that segment of the Christian population.

With respect to the doctrine of God all three refer to God by masculine pronouns. The divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ is more prominently upheld by the ESV and NIV 2011 than by the NKJV in Rom 9:5. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is not obscured by any of these translations.

All three translations are 'creationist' in the translation although sometimes the study notes make one wonder to what degree the doctrine of creation in six literal days is held.

The doctrine of original sin and total depravity can be upheld from each translation.

None of them show biases in texts that deal with election, except in the ESV there is a supposed Calvinist leaning in texts dealing with reprobation: Ex 7:13,22; 8:18; 9:35; Ps 49:14; Prv 16:4; Rom 9:22; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 4. .

The Reformed understanding of the redemption that we have in Christ can be adequately defended. However, propitiation is regularly translated as atoning sacrifice in the NIV 2011, which although similar, has a somewhat different focus, which may be an issue.

The issue of the righteousness of God in Romans is properly dealt with in all three translations.

The confession of the church is properly dealt with by the ESV and NKJV, but not by the NIV 2011, because its egalitarianism places it in tension with BC 30, 31 and our CO article 3.

The Reformed understanding of the sacraments can be defended from all three translations including infant baptism, although the NIV 2011 translation of Matthew 19:14/Mark 10:14 might be a weakening of the acceptance of those specific children presented to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The obligation to obedience to the civil government can be maintained from all three translations as can the day of judgement.

Printers

The NKJV is printed by Thomas Nelson Inc., a commercial publishing house, which also holds the publishing rights. The character of this publishing house can be seen from the fact that it has acquired Word Publishing and has also recently issued together with Zondervan a Macarthur Study Bible with the egalitarian NIV 2011 text. It is, therefore, not a confessional publisher, but must be understood to be a 'for profit venture'.

The NIV is published by Biblica (formerly known as International Bible Society) and printed in the USA by Zondervan Publishing House and in the UK by Hodder and Stoughton, both commercial publishing houses and not confessional publishers.

The ESV is published by Good News Publishers, a not-for-profit Christian ministry that publishes and distributes gospel tracts. Good News Publishers is the parent company of Crossway Books, a publisher of evangelical Christian books, which holds the copyright to the ESV. Their goal is to provide the ESV free through digital media everywhere and at any time throughout the world. This Bible is free to download in various formats for computer, tablet and mobile phones. The printed copies are also sold as cheaply as possible. This I regard as a great plus for the ESV.

Translational Stability

NKJV

There is not much to say about the NKJV. The advantage of the NKJV is that it has only undergone one minor revision in 1984 (which is not mentioned in the copyrights), and, as can be seen from the email below, the printers do not have any revision planned, thus leaving the churches and readers with a reasonably static text.

Josh (HarperCollins Christian Publishing Customer Support)

Oct 20 10:37 AM

Rev. Kroeze,

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the New King James Version. At this time, there are no scheduled revisions to this translation.

Sincerely

HarperCollins Christian Publishing Customer Care

ESV 2011

Since its first printing in 2001 the ESV has undergone two revisions, in 2007 and 2011. These revisions are minor and made to enhance the translation. These revisions are not of the same order as the principle the NIV operates under. The changes are documented here: http://www.esv.org/wp-content/uploads/misc/esv_2011_changes.html

There are no revisions planned at this time as the following email makes clear.

Crossway Information <info@crossway.org> (sent by ewarren@crossway.org)

Dear John,

Thank you for your message.

Since the ESV was released in 2001, there have been two revisions-one in 2007, and one in 2011. There are no planned revisions at this point. I hope this helps, but please let me know if you have any further questions.

Blessings,

Emily Warren

Receptionist / Customer Service Representative

1300 Crescent St., Wheaton, IL 60187

[\(630\) 682-4300](tel:6306824300) Fax: [\(630\) 682-4785](tel:6306824785)

info@crossway.org

www.crossway.org

New International Version 2011

This Bible operates under a constant revision principle quoted below and, therefore, must be considered to be constantly in flux. Major changes can be expected roughly every 25 years. These changes, as we have seen, include the modification of the translation under the pressure of cultural changes.

“From the very start, the NIV sought to bring modern Bible readers as close as possible to the experience of the very first Bible readers: providing the best possible blend of transparency to the original documents and comprehension of the original meaning in every verse. With this clarity of focus, however, came the realisation that the work of translating the NIV would never be truly complete. As new discoveries were made about the biblical world and its languages, and as the norms of English usage developed and changed over time, the NIV would also need to change to hold true to its original vision.

And so in the original NIV charter, provision was made not just to issue periodic updates to the text but also to create a mechanism for constant monitoring of changes in biblical scholarship and English usage. The CBT was charged to meet every year to review, maintain, and strengthen the NIV’s ability to accurately and faithfully render God’s unchanging Word in modern English.

The 2011 update to the NIV is the latest fruit of this process. By working with input from pastors and Bible scholars, by grappling with the latest discoveries about biblical languages and the biblical world, and by using cutting-edge research on English usage, the Committee on Bible Translation has updated the text to ensure that the New International Version of the Bible remains faithful to Howard Long’s original inspiration.”

<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/niv/Translators-Notes.pdf>

Feminism and Gender Inclusive translation

One of the main issues in Bible translation today is the trend to gender

inclusiveness, or gender neutral language. The original languages in which the Bible is written include the female under the male. e.g. Man, men, brothers, sons can all include the woman, women, sisters and daughters respectively, when the context demands it. To translate with a gender inclusive term in such cases is not wrong in itself. It is wrong when it is used to promote a cause which is contrary to Scripture.

The removal of gender loaded terms and the extent to which they are replaced with neutral ones can remove a witness to the structure of the human race as God determined it. That structure in the languages is not a product of culture or patriarchy, but language comes from God and reflects God's intended structure. The deliberate changing of language to promote egalitarianism or any other cause is an attack on God's creation order and ultimately on God who is always designated by male terms. With the removal of the priority of Adam as the first 'Man' by the theory of evolution and the removal of the fact that the woman is included in the man from the language we will obliterate that memory for the collective human consciousness. If the language no longer upholds God's order, it becomes correspondingly more difficult to uphold that order. Gender inclusive language is not gender neutral, but gender removing and, as such, heads in the direction of the sin mentioned in Jude 6 ("... who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode ...".) for both men and women, one for potentially abdicating his position and the other for potentially arrogating it to themselves.

Gender inclusive or neutral language does enter into the ESV translation to some degree when the context seems to demand it. There are some erratic applications of the principle such as Mark 8:24, where it seems that only men were present, but people is chosen as the translation of men. However, the guidelines for this translation rule it out as a systematic translational principle.

Textual Evaluation: New International Version 2011

The feminist influence on the NIV 2011 and its gender inclusiveness stand out. When one reads the NIV 2011 it becomes especially obvious how often and in how many ways the translation has tried to replace male terms with gender neutral terms, to the point of contorting the language. As a whole the NIV 2011 reads extremely well, but time and again the language has to change to avoid masculine terms even to the point where it sometimes end up negatively affecting the smoothness of the translation.

Some NIV 2011 translations that have been criticised as showing feminist bias with the translational argumentations are shown below and *are copied from their own site* <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/translators-notes/>. My comments follow in italics.

- **Romans 16:1-2** now reads, "I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a **deacon** [diakonos] of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the **benefactor** [prostatis] of many people, including me." Complementarian and egalitarian scholars alike are increasingly agreeing that diakonos here means "deacon" (not just "servant," though "servant" is provided as an alternative in the footnote; see also the New Living Translation [NLT] and the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) and that prostatis means a patron or benefactor (as in the English Standard Version [ESV] and the Holman Christian Standard Bible [HCSB]), not just someone who was a "great help" in some unspecified way. But, because different churches use labels for offices or leadership roles in so many, sometimes conflicting, senses, a footnote now explains that "deacon refers to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways."

Deacon, as a translation, is tendentious. Its primary meaning is servant (not slave). In the absence of any historical evidence that the early church had deaconesses it ought not to be translated by a term that indicates office. Together with 16:2 it indicates that Chloe has served the church in Cenchrea well, but as a rich patroness.

- **1 Corinthians 11:10** now reads, "It is for this reason that a woman ought to have **authority over** her own head." The expression "a sign of" before "authority" in the 1984 NIV did not correspond to anything explicitly in the Greek and is increasingly recognised as an inadequate rendition of this verse. Whether Paul wanted the women in Corinth to wear an external head covering while praying or prophesying, or simply to have long hair, or maybe even to wear a partial face veil, the point is they should be able to control what they do or do not have on their heads.

This translation goes against the whole flow of the Apostle Paul's argument. Literally it says: on account of this the woman ought to have authority upon the head on account of the angels. This verse is the centre of a chiasmic construction and is meant to show that the woman is under the authority of the man. The argument is that since the woman was from the man 11:8 and made on account of the man 11:9 the woman should have authority upon her head on account of the angels. She is sandwiched between men and angels. The addition 'because of the angels' is difficult to exegete, but it cannot mean that the women should have authority over their own heads. Angels don't have authority over their own heads and it is difficult to see how it could justify the woman having authority over her own head. These angels are those

who did not leave their proper place (Jude 6), and it is much more likely that this points to the meaning here. Let the woman keep her God given place. They act before the elect angels who have done so and were blessed for it. The authority upon the head is best understood as a head covering indicating being under authority.

- **1 Timothy 2:12** now reads, "I do not permit a woman to teach or **assume authority** over a man." Much debate has surrounded the rare Greek word *authentein*, translated in the 1984 NIV as "exercise authority." The KJV reflected what some have argued was in some contexts a more negative sense for the word: "usurp authority." "Assume authority" is a particularly nice English rendering because it leaves the question open, as it must be unless we discover new, more conclusive evidence. The exercise of authority that Paul was forbidding was one that women inappropriately assumed, but whether that referred to all forms of authority over men in church or only certain forms in certain contexts is up to the individual interpreter to decide. Footnotes to verses 11 and 12 also inform the reader that *anēr* and *gunē* here could mean "husband" and "wife" rather than "man" and "woman."

The LSJ lexicon gives this verb as to have full power or authority over. The BDAG lexicon has changed its position from the 1979 version to the 2000 version. The former says the verb means: to have authority, domineer over someone. The latter says: to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to w. gen. of pers. (in loc.). I am unable to say to what degree this change in the lexicon is driven by an egalitarian agenda as I do not have ready access to the necessary primary sources. In any case the Apostle's meaning would seem to be that the women are not to have any authority over the men in the church.

- **1 Timothy 3:11** now reads, "In the same way, **the women** are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything." A footnote adds, "Possibly deacons' wives or women who are deacons." The Greek root word is *gunē*, which most commonly means simply a "woman." From the context, it is possible that these women were either deacons' wives or women deacons, but neither can be demonstrated from the word alone. The old American Standard Version (ASV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New American Bible (NAB) and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) all adopt this translation as well.

The term woman can mean wife as is true also of man/husband. The meaning is determined by the context as can also be seen in 3:2 where the combination of man/husband and woman/wife also occurs.

The structure of verses 10-13 is chiasmic as follows: a: verse 10; b: verse 11; b': verse 12; a': verse 13. In this construction it is clear that verse 10 and 13 are about service, evaluation and reward. Verses 11,12 are about the qualities of women/wives and deacons with respect to their wives and family respectively. Given this grouping the possibility is that the Apostle is referring to deacons' wives. This case is further strengthened by the parallel to verses 3:2 (man/husband of one woman/wife), 4,5.

Further to translate in a way that implies the office of deaconess would require that the translator explain why there would be a reduced set of qualities stipulated for deaconesses than for deacons.

If the Apostle Paul had meant the deacons' wives he only had to add one word in Greek 'of them' to make that clear.

If he wanted to indicate 'deaconesses' he could have written diakonoi with the feminine plural article. The force of the latter argument is diminished by the fact that he has not used articles with episkopos and diakonos when referring to them earlier or subsequently 3:1,8,12 or to the women either 3:11. Therefore, to add an article here would have thrown the balanced construction out of kilter.

The other possibility that could explain the mention of women with a reduced set of qualities is if there was a task given to women, but restricted in its scope, possibly to women's matters. It is possible that this text is referring to women, who were organised in some way, who performed works of charity in the church, especially with respect to those tasks that traditionally were the women's role. e.g making of clothes, caring for people cf. Acts 9:36,39; 1 Timothy 5:9-10. Therefore, in this case I can support the translation.

Other texts of concern under this heading

Num 6:5

The change from the masculine pronoun to the impersonal 'their' makes becoming a Nazirite open to women and this is unlikely.

Psalms 8:4-5

Man, son of man and him are translated by mankind, human beings and them respectively, thus breaking the connection with Heb 2:6-9, where this is interpreted Christologically as speaking of His rule over God's creation.

Isaiah 19:16

'In that day the Egyptians will become weaklings (translates women). Also Nahum 3:13.

1 Cor. 14:33–34

The NIV 2011 is rather unintelligible in 14:33: For God is not a God of disorder but of peace – as in all the congregations of the Lord's people. Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.

The NKJV is not better: For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says.

This is a question of punctuation, but one wonders why the NIV 2011 reverts to the older punctuation. The NIV 1984 says: For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

The ESV says: For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.

Philippians 1:14

“And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters (translates - brothers) have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” (this change is regular in the NIV 2011)

2 Timothy 2:2

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people (translates – men) who will also be qualified to teach others.”

2 Tim 3:17- man of God becomes servant of God and so the restriction of the office to men is obliterated, for in the context Timothy is being urged to equip himself well by studying God's word so that he can do His work as an evangelist.

James 3:1

“Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers (translates - brothers), because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

All of these translations so change the text that they allow women to preach or to hold office in the church.

Other translational blemishes NIV 2011.

God's people

The word saints/holy ones is often replaced by God's people, which is only equivalent by implication.

Jews in the Gospel according to John is often translated by Jewish leaders and in Acts by some of the Jews.

Gen 48:22 – Shechem means shoulder, and is here translated by ridge of land (also similar in NKJV and ESV), which makes Jacob's gift vague and breaks the connection with Joshua 24:32; cf. Acts 7:16. Jacob is playing on words, for the shoulder is a choice portion of an animal. He is saying that he gives the choice portion, Shechem, to Joseph in this death bed scene.

The Hebrew says "And I have given to you Shechem, one (portion) above your brothers, which I have taken from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and my bow."

Ex 12:46 the Passover had to be eaten inside one house has been changed to the house. It can be argued that the stress on one is significant to the meaning of the meal as one sacrificial Lamb was to be eaten in the one house. And no one was to go out of it until morning 12:22. If there was too much to be eaten by one family the neighbour could be invited, but it was not to be split over two houses 12:3-4.

Num 27:16 The change from 'the God of the spirits of all mankind' to 'God who gives breath to all living things' obscures the fact that it is not general life that is in focus here, but the type of man who will lead Israel and so Moses is asking for a man spiritually fit for the task.

Dt 32:17; Ps 106:37 – the change from demons to false gods, although argued on philological grounds, breaks the connection with 1 Cor 10:20.

Ps 2:12 Kiss the Son lest He be angry becomes Kiss His Son or He (Yahweh) will be angry. This change, impacts the understanding of verse 11, for Yahweh stands in parallel to the Son and so the probable identification of the Son with Yahweh is made more difficult and an OT Christological text is obliterated.

Is 7:14

A textual note gives almah as young woman and not virgin even though it is interpreted as virgin in the NT. There is no text in Scripture that does not admit of being translated as virgin. Young womanise is sometimes preferred either because the translators do not believe in miracles, or because of a conviction that Is 7:14 was initially fulfilled in the time of the Assyrian invasion through a married woman in the circles of Ahaz and who as a sign pointed forward to the greater sign fulfilled in the pregnancy of Mary.

Is 13:3

Holy ones becomes those prepared for battle. cf. Their treatment of hasidim which is translated by faithful ones.

Mal 2:15

This is admittedly a difficult verse, but the NIV 2011 has made a bad job of it. As it is an important verse with respect to divorce it should have stayed closer to the text.

The preceding verse is an accusation condemning the breaking of the marriage union as is also the following verse.

<i>Verse 15 literally says:</i>	<i>The NIV 2011 says:</i>
1) and not one He made?	1) Has not the one God made you?
2) and a remnant of Spirit (or spirit) to him ;	2) You belong to him in body and spirit.
3) and what/why the one ?	3) And what does the one God seek?
4) Seeking seed of God!	4) Godly offspring.
5) and guard yourself in your spirits	5) So be on your guard,
6) and with the wife of your youth don't act act faithlessly.	6) and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

The interpretation of 'one' is the issue.

In line 1 and 3 above "one" is masculine and most probably refers to the man God created. God created Adam from whom God created Eve with the intention of reunion, since 'the two shall be one flesh'. Contextually this fits well into this prohibition of divorce.

However, 'one' could also be understood to refer to God as in the Shema (Dt 6:4), where God is said to be one. In that case the article should have been present; viz. Did not *the* One make.... If that choice is made 'you' has to be supplied as object, but it is not in the text.

(The LXX has 'another' for 'one', which is a valid translation of the Hebrew. However, its meaning is equally difficult to determine.)

In line 3 'one' has the article in the Hebrew (not in the LXX), but here it quite naturally would be understood to be referring back to the 'one' in line 1, which, if it refers to Adam, would contextually provide the best fit.

In favour of the NIV 2011 reading Line 3 can be read as running on into line 4': what is the One seeking? godly seed? This is a possible reading, and if followed could justify the translation of lines 1,2 to some extent.

The introduction of the oneness of God can also be understood

contextually as an implicit condemnation of the breaking of the marriage union since man, male and female, was made in God's image. However, both exegetically and contextually this translation seems the weaker option.

In line 2 above "to him" is the preposition 'to' and the pronominal suffix, and often indicates possession. The pronoun could refer to the one person God made or to God. If the former it means that man has some spirit left in him. If the latter, it could mean that there is some spirit left to God, which cannot be. The LXX has 'of Him', or 'of him'. The Hebrew can best be read to mean the one whom God made had a remnant of God's Spirit or human spirit. It makes most sense to take remnant as referring to the remnant of God's Spirit left to Adam. The choice of the word remnant would be especially fitting if this is referring to his situation after the fall. That would seem logical as this verse is being spoken to Israelites who had returned from exile and were still living way below the spiritual level required, who are Adam's descendants. They have enough of God's Spirit left to them to still discern good from evil with respect to how they should conduct themselves in their marriage, but they are failing. The NIV 2011 rendering also opts for possession, 'You belong to Him', but omits remnant and adds body. Consequently that can hardly be recognised as a translation of the line.

In line 5 the Jews are urged to guard themselves in or with their spirits, the consequence of which becomes visible in the following parallel phrase, in not being unfaithful to the wife of their youth. It would seem then that line 2 provides the grounds for the rebuke of line 5. They have a remnant of God's Spirit and so must use that wisely. By the Spirit they must guard their spirits by being faithful to their wives so that they do not lose the Spirit by angering God cf Ps 51:11 by bringing the purpose of God with marriage into danger. This line is repeated in 2:16. In both cases the word 'spirit' is omitted from the NIV 2011 translation and 'be on your guard' only is found, which breaks the connection to line 2 in 2:15.

Mat 1:19 - Joseph is called a righteous man in the Greek but that becomes faithful to the law in the NIV and so introduces tension into the account as he did not want to make an example of Mary. Matthew did not mention the law. He highlighted righteousness, with the implication that fulfilling the letter of the law is not always righteousness. That is obscured by the NIV 2011 translation cf. John 8:7,11.

Mat 5:32 – Makes her to be an adulteress/commit adultery becomes makes her the victim of adultery. This obscures the meaning of the verse, which is that any marriage with anyone who has been divorced for illegitimate reasons is adulterous also, for it improperly breaks the union God created. If either remarries, the first to do so breaks the bond with the other not only by divorce, but by physical adultery, and then, presumably, the remarriage

of the remaining one is no longer adulterous as the marriage has been definitively broken. It was the Lord's intention to hamper the practice of easy divorce and to maintain God's intention with marriage. Victim focuses on the woman, whereas the Lord's focus was on the marriage.

Lu 10:6 – a son of peace becomes someone who promotes peace. The question is if that is what is meant. It is more likely that it is the opposite of a son of wrath. i.e. someone who receives peace from God.

John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9

monogenes is translated by 'one and only Son', but there is a very good case to be made for 'only begotten'. A word such as theogenes – born of God (LSJ in loc.) – indicate that only begotten is not far off the mark. There is also a term, theogennes, which means begotten of a god (LSJ in loc), but there is no monogennes in the lexicon. Monogenes could, therefore, be translated only born, but in some case begotten makes more sense: only born or begotten of the Father 1:14; only born or begotten Son 1:18; 3:16 only born or begotten Son of God 3:18; His only born or begotten 1 Jh 4:9.

John 9:24 – Give glory to God becomes Give glory to God by telling the truth. This is an interpretation, perhaps based on Joshua's words to Achan who had committed a crime (Josh 7:19), but here it is said to a man whose sight the Lord restored, whom they reject as a sinner, making this interpretation unlikely. The import of the verse seems to be, give glory to God for the cure, but don't believe in Jesus, who is a sinner cf. Gal 1:24.

John 12:45. - The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.
- The verb to look at/behold appears twice in this verse, but is translated by two different words, look at and see. It would be better to translate by one verb to behold, for the seeing that is done is a spiritual seeing in both cases. The one who beholds Jesus in faith beholds Him who sent Him. 'Look at' gives the impression that just seeing Jesus already is enough to see the Father who sent Him, which is not what is meant.

Rom 1:18 – unrighteousness becomes wickedness (already in 1986 NIV), breaking the juxtaposition with 1:17, where the righteousness of God is set out.

1 Cor 15:23 – Each in their own turn becomes each in turn. The inclusion of 'own' points to the fact that Christ's resurrection was determined by God at that stage of history and ours at the end. The removal of this word makes it simply a question of order.

Gal 1:6 – called you in/by the grace of Christ becomes called you to live in the grace of Christ. The question is if the call was by grace or the call was to a life in the grace of Christ. The former would seem to be the case,

although the latter would be the consequence.

Gal 3:27; 4:6,7 – sons is translated by children, breaking the linguistic unity which the Apostle Paul has been building up between Christ and those in Him, who have put on Christ, by the use of Son and sons.

Eph 1:15,18; Rev 8:3 etc. - saints becomes God's people, whereas in Eph 3:18 somewhat inconsistently, saints becomes Lord's holy people.

Col 2:11 circumcision of Christ becomes circumcised by Christ. This weakens the identification with Christ in His crucifixion. The change could perhaps be influenced by a Baptist interpretation of this verse which is intended to break the connection between circumcision and baptism.

2 Tim 2:20,21 – vessels for honourable and dishonourable use become for special and common use. Special can be especially dishonourable and so the Apostle's message is obscured.

Heb 11:1 - 'faith is the substance' is translated as 'confidence', but the first time it is used is of Christ in 1:3 as the exact representation of God's being/substance/essence. Hypostasis has substance to it. It is not simply confidence. In 3:14 the objective reality of sharing in Christ is what they have to hold on to. Their hypostasis is their faith that Jesus is the Son of God, their High Priest. That is the firm foundation on which they must continue. Therefore, in 11:1 faith is the solid foundation of what is hoped for, for it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and our hope is obtained by that faith.

Further faith is the 'proof of things not seen' becomes conviction of things not seen, but the conviction is more than a strongly held belief. Elenchos means a proof and so to be convicted. It is to know what is not visible because you have received proof of it (cf Jh 14:17;16:8; Heb 6:4,5. As this text is often used as a definition of faith it is important to get it right.

Rev 19:10 – 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' becomes, For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus. This translation seems to ignore the meaning of this phrase in 1:2,9; 12:17; 20:4 where testimony of Jesus means either the testimony given by Jesus, or the truth that Jesus revealed to John, or the testimony born by believers to Jesus as their response to Him and His word as true.

Therefore, here it should mean that that revelation is the (S)pirit of prophecy. Prophecy cannot exist unless it is speaking from Christ's revelation because His words are Spirit and Life Jh 6:63, because it is His Spirit that reveals 1 Pet 1:11 and because it comes from God Rev 1:2.

The context would also point in this direction, for John seems to want to worship the angel because of the blessing he had spoken and his

confirmation that these were the true words of God. The angel is saying that he had only spoken the true words which he had received from Jesus, who had received them from God. Therefore, John should not worship him, but worship God. The true words of God, the testimony of Jesus are in this case that the greatly longed for marriage feast of the Lamb would most certainly happen. That promise was the reason that John, as part of the longing bride cf. 22:17, wanted to worship. Therefore, the NIV 2011 translation misses the point completely.

Rev 20:10

The NIV 2011 has 'where the beast and the false prophet *had been thrown*'. It adds '*had been thrown*' to the text - while the NKJV only supplies '*are*' and the ESV '*were*'. The Greek has no verb 'to be', or 'to be thrown'. All three translations omit '*also*' from the Greek, which says 'where *also* the beast and the false prophet'. This translation makes the proper understanding of the millennium somewhat of an issue as it gives greatest support to a chronological reading of ch 17-20 and so to pre-millennialism.

Textual Evaluation: English Standard Version 2011

Translational blemishes

Gen 3:6

'and she gave also to her husband with her and he ate' becomes 'her husband who was with her'. With her most likely does not mean at her side, but the husband who lived in the garden with her.

Gen 49:10

'until tribute comes to him' instead of, 'until Shiloh comes'. The explanation of this text is admittedly difficult, but this emendation hides the Christology of the verse.

Dt 32:43

'Rejoice o Gentiles with His people' quoted in Rom 15:10 is inexplicably omitted.

'Makes atonement for' (kipper) becomes 'cleanses' and so obscures the Christology of the verse.

2 Kings 5:13

Practically unintelligible as it stands, but not a doctrinally significant verse.

Is 31:5

'passing over' becomes spare, thus destroying the connection to Passover.

Luke 11:41 – 'But give as alms those things that are within' is practically unintelligible.

NIV 2011 is much better – But now as for what is inside you – be generous.

The NKJV takes another approach, which, translation wise, is also better, but, I think, wrong – But rather give alms of such things as you have.

John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9

monogenes is translated by 'only Son', but there is a very good case to be made for 'only begotten'. A word such as theogenes – born of God (LSJ in loc.) - indicates that only begotten is not far off the mark. There is also a term, theogennes, which means begotten of a god (LSJ in loc.), but there is no word 'monogennes' in the lexicon. Monogenes could, therefore, be translated only born, but in some case begotten makes more sense: only born or begotten of the Father 1:14; only born or begotten Son 1:18; 3:16 only born or begotten Son of God 3:18; His only born or begotten 1 Jh 4:9.

John 1:18 'only begotten Son' becomes 'only God'. If monogenes were translated as suggested above this would be, only born/begotten God. This translation is following a different Greek reading. As it stands it is textually and doctrinally defensible, but if John would have written that is open to question.

1 Cor 11:3

The head of a wife is her husband. The translation limits male headship to marriage, whereas the text can legitimately be read as far broader as – the head of the woman is the man cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15. The Apostle Paul is extrapolating in this text from how Adam and Eve were created to setting a rule for the church services and so the broader view should not be obscured.

Gal 1:16

'was pleased to reveal His Son in me' is translated as 'to me', and in this way the identification between Christ and Paul as His messenger is broken cf 6:17; Phlp 3:10,11; etc.

1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6,11

'idle(ness)' should be disorderly, for that is what the Greek means. The disciplinary actions are far broader than simply directed at idleness.

1 Tim 5:21 – 'keep these rules without prejudging.' translates 'guard/keep these things without prejudice..'. The translation 'rules' makes exercising judgement difficult. Rules are applied mechanistically.

Titus 1:1

'for the sake of the faith of God's elect' translates 'according to the faith ..'. Paul's apostleship is in conformity to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness. 'kata' is to be read three

times in this verse giving a parallel construction. In other words his teaching is orthodox and wholesome and conforms to what those who know the truth have always believed and do.

Heb 1:1

'faith is the 'hypostasis' is translated as 'assurance', but the first time it is used is of Christ in 1:3 as the exact representation of God's being/ substance/essence. Hypostasis has substance to it. It is not simply confidence. In 3:14 the objective reality of sharing in Christ is what they have to hold on to. Their hypostasis is their faith that Jesus is the Son of God, their High Priest. That is the firm foundation on which they must continue. Therefore, in 11:1 faith is the solid foundation of what is hoped for, for it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and our hope is obtained by that faith.

Further faith is the 'proof of things not seen' becomes conviction of things not seen, but the conviction is more than a strongly held belief. Elenchos means a proof and so to be convicted. It is to know what is not visible because you have received proof of it (cf Jh 14:17;16:8; Heb 6:4,5. As this text is often used as a definition of faith it is important to get it right.

Conclusion

In conclusion the NIV 2011 is the smoothest translation, and in the Pauline Epistles, especially in Romans, it is apparent that they had the assistance of someone who had written a commentary on it and is at home in Pauline studies. It has greatly improved its translation of the originals, also in the OT. There are translational choices that I find dubious, but every translation has those. Unfortunately it has one great flaw, egalitarianism. Sadly, I do not believe that it can be used in the church services. I would even caution our people from using it. Its influence will be felt.

The ESV, as any other translation has its faults, but none of them are of such an order that it cannot be used. The consistency of application of its guidelines leave something to be desired, some of its translational choices are doubtful, but its literary qualities are generally smooth and elegant. Doctrinally there is no reason to avoid it, while there are reasons for adopting it.

The NKJV has not been fully part of this evaluation, but it has been used in comparison all through the evaluation process. It is comparable to the ESV although not as smooth or elegant in general. The biggest difference is the original language base, which I do not believe is superior to that of the ESV or NIV, but it has made judicious use of footnotes, which does improve its usability. It too has its fair share of dubious translational choices.

Rev. J. G. R. Kroeze.

Convenor

Report of Deputies Art. 48 C.O.

MANDATE

Esteemed brothers,

Synod Armadale 2012 made the following appointments to serve as Deputies according to Article 48 of the Church Order, i.e. "to assist the classes in all matters provided for in the Church Order":

For Classis South-West: Rev RE Pot (alternate: Rev S 't Hart)

For Classis Central: Rev W van der Jagt (alternate: Rev A van Delden)

For Classis North: Rev PKA de Boer (alternate: Rev J Kroeze)

ASSISTANCE GIVEN

As deputies we were requested to give assistance to the classes in the following instances:

1. Retirement of Rev. A. Veldman

Classis North of 19 October 2012

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. W. VanderJagt were invited to attend Classis North of 19 October 2012 in connection with the retirement of Rev. A. Veldman, minister of the FRC of Southern River.
- b) Since Rev. Pot was unavailable on this particular date, Rev. S. 't Hart attended as alternate.
- c) Classis was supplied with the proper documents related to the request for emeritus declaration.
- d) Classis was satisfied with the reasons presented for a retirement somewhat earlier than usual. Classis was also satisfied with the evidence presented that the church of Southern River would provide honourably for Rev. Veldman's support, according to Art. 13 C.O.
- e) Classis decided to declare that Rev. Veldman be granted an honourable release from the responsibilities of his office.
- f) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

2. Retirement of Rev. P.K.A. de Boer

Classis North of 25 October 2013

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. W. VanderJagt were invited to attend Classis North of 25 October 2013 in connection with the retirement of Rev. P.K.A. de Boer, minister of the FRC of Mt Nasura.
- b) Although deputies from Classis South-West were not in a position to attend in person, Rev. Pot made himself available during classis by email/phone, and also supplied classis with a written communication,

while Rev. VanderJagt attended in person. All the necessary documentation was supplied to the deputies in advance, and Rev. Pot and Rev VanderJagt were able to consult together beforehand, and were like-minded as to their view on how classis should proceed.

- c) Classis was supplied with the proper documents related to the request for emeritus declaration, including Rev de Boer's request for emeritus to the consistory of FRC Mt Nasura, in view of reaching retirement age of 65 on 25 February 2014; a letter confirming consistory's decision to grant an honourable discharge; and an outline of provisions for supporting Rev and Mrs de Boer during retirement.
- d) Classis was satisfied that Rev de Boer could receive an honourable discharge from active duties. However Classis concluded that Classis needed greater assurance that the financial package presented at Classis for the support of Rev. de Boer satisfies the requirement of Art. 13 C.O.
- e) Classis decided "to approve the retirement of Rev. de Boer with the proviso that Mt Nasura review the financial package and after further discussion with Rev. de Boer report back to the next Classis."
- f) Deputies agreed that further assurance of honourable support was necessary, and also agreed that there was no reason to delay Rev. de Boer's retirement, and therefore were able to give concurring advice to the decision of classis.

Classis North of 9 May 2014

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. W. VanderJagt were invited to attend Classis North of 9 May 2014. Both deputies were able to attend.
- b) An agenda item at this classis was a verbal report on a review of the financial package for Rev de Boer from FRC Mt Nasura.
- c) When dealing with this agenda item, Classis decided that since deputies had given concurring advice to the decision of Classis North of 25 October 2013, their judgement was no longer necessary, and so Classis decided to deal with the matter in closed session, in the absence of deputies.
- d) As such, deputies are unable to report whether the support of Rev. de Boer satisfies the requirement of Art. 13 C.O.

3. Retirement of Rev. W. VanderJagt

Classis Central of 24 October 2014

- a) Rev. P.K.A. de Boer and Rev. R.E. Pot were invited to attend Classis Central of 24 October 2014 in connection with the retirement of Rev. W.

VanderJagt, minister of the FRC of Byford. Both deputies were able to attend.

- b) Classis was supplied with the proper documents related to the request for emeritus declaration, including Rev VanderJagt's request for emeritus to the consistory of FRC Byford, in view of reaching retirement age of 65 in May 2015; a letter confirming consistory's decision to grant this request; and an outline of provisions for supporting Rev and Mrs VanderJagt during retirement.
- c) Classis was satisfied that Rev. VanderJagt could be granted an honourable release from the responsibilities of his office. Classis was also satisfied with the evidence presented that the church of Byford would provide honourably for Rev. VanderJagt's support, according to Art. 13 C.O.
- d) Classis decided to declare that Rev. VanderJagt be granted an honourable release from the responsibilities of his office.
- e) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

4. Release of Rev. M. Retief

Classis North of 9 May 2014

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. W. VanderJagt were invited to attend Classis North of 28 May 2014, in connection with the request from the FRC Kelmscott to release Rev. M. Retief from his call as minister of FRC Kelmscott due to ill health. Both deputies were able to attend.
- b) Classis was not able to give approval to this request, and so deputies were not asked to give concurring advice.

Classis North of 28 November 2014

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. W. VanderJagt were invited to attend Classis North of 28 November 2014, in connection with the request from the FRC Kelmscott to release Rev. M. Retief from his call as minister of FRC Kelmscott according to Art. 14 C.O. Both deputies were able to attend.
- b) Classis was supplied with substantial documentation related to this request, including correspondence from the consistory, correspondence from Rev. Retief, and an outline of provisions for supporting Rev and Mrs Retief during the proposed period of eligibility for call.
- c) Classis was satisfied with the reasons presented for release according to Art. 14 C.O. Classis was also satisfied with the evidence presented that the church of Kelmscott would provide honourably for Rev.

Retief's support for the period of the eligibility for call.

- d) Classis decided to approve the proposal that Rev. Retief be released from his call as minister of FRC Kelmscott, according to Art. 14 CO. Classis further decided that Rev. Retief remain eligible for call for a period of three years, during which he retains the honour and title of minister of the Word, and receives honourable support from the church of Kelmscott.
- e) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Involvement of deputies with retirement of ministers

According to Art. 48 C.O. deputies have the mandate "to assist the classis in all matters provided for in the Church Order." Deputies observe that in connection with the retirement of ministers according to Art. 13 C.O., the Church Order does not explicitly provide for the involvement of classis or deputies, and so strictly speaking an argument could be made that they are not required in such cases.

Nonetheless, the follow evidence suggests that the churches do want classis and deputies to be involved in Art. 13 C.O. cases of retirement:

- a) It has been common practice such requests to be brought to classis for approval, and also for deputies to be invited to give concurring advice (e.g. retirement of Rev. Huizinga at Classis South of 22 October 2010).
- b) Synod Armadale 2012 made no judgment that this was outside the task of classis or deputies, but rather stated that "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." (Art. 110, p.81)
- c) The Form for Emeritus Declaration (Ecclesiastical Ordinances, Form 6), makes explicit reference to the involvement of classis and deputies, when it states that the honourable release granted by classis in the event of retirement is "supported by the favourable advice of Deputies Article 48 CO."
- d) The Regulations of Classis North (3.6) include specific mention of Art. 13 C.O. as an example of a case where the convening church is to notify synodical deputies of the need to attend.

Thus our church order does not appear to reflect what the churches want in this matter, and is not sufficiently explicit on this point.

However deputies can make no recommendation to change the church order, since this must come from a local church. Thus deputies respectfully

draw the attention of the churches to the apparent inconsistency in our ecclesiastical documents and decisions, so that a local church could propose to synod an appropriate change to Art. 13 C.O. to stipulate the involvement of classis and deputies (i.e. similar to Art. 13 C.O. of our sister churches in Canada, where this is also common practice). Alternatively, it needs to be made explicit to the churches that deputies not be involved in cases of Art. 13 C.O. (despite the decision of Synod Armadale 2012), and further that the Form for Emeritus Declaration needs to be changed.

2. Involvement of deputies in determining assurance of honourable support

It was proposed to Synod Armadale 2012 that “synod decide that it is within the task of deputies Article 48 to receive assurance that ministers of the word that are released from their task within the churches (emeritus or otherwise) received honourable care and support” and further that deputies be mandated to “obtain documented evidence from Classis South whether the ministers granted release received honourable care and support”, but Synod did not want to make a decision that finds insufficient support in Art. 13 C.O. At the same time Synod did acknowledge that “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.”

Deputies respectfully draw the attention of the churches to the fact that they are unable to report whether the support of one retired minister is honourable according to the requirement of Art. 13 C.O., and that the task of deputies in this respect remains unclear given the current provisions of the church order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Deputies respectfully recommend that synod:

1. receive this report, and release deputies from their task.
2. appoint new deputies to assist the classes according to Art. 48 C.O., with one deputy and one alternate from each classical region, i.e. according to the manner decided by Synod Armadale 2012, Decision 3 (Art. 110, p.80-81).
3. explicitly clarify what the task of deputies is in cases of the retirement of ministers according to Art. 13 C.O., and determine what is necessary to ensure that our ecclesiastical documents and practices are consistent with this.

With brotherly greetings,

Deputies Art. 48 C.O.

Report - Deputies CO Art 48

Rev P.K.A. de Boer (*item #3 general observations #1*)

Rev R.E. Pot (*items #1,2,3,4; general observations #1,2*)

Rev S. `t Hart (*alternate; signatory for item #1 only*)

Rev W. VanderJagt (*items #1,2,4; general observations #1,2*)



Free Reformed Church
of Launceston

P.O. Box 705
Launceston 7250
Tasmania, Australia

8 December 2014

Synod Baldivis 2015 of the
Free Reformed Churches of Australia
PO Box 4153
Baldivis, W.A., [6171](#)

Re: Article 66 Church Order

Esteemed brothers

Synod 2012 appointed the Free Reformed Church of Launceston (Acts, Article 120) as Deputies for Article 66 Church Order (Days of Prayer).

In fulfilment of this mandate we can report that since the last Synod the Church of Launceston has proclaimed no Days of Prayer.

With brotherly greetings

Steve Thompson
chairman

Dirk Veltkamp
secretary

Report Deputies for Indexing Synod Decisions

Synod Armadale 2012, in its Article 95, mandated *Deputies for Indexing Synod Decisions* to:

1. continue the work of the late Rev G Van Rongen in collating the decisions of Synod as they relate to articles of the Church Order;
2. publish these decisions on the official web page of the FRCA;
3. notify the churches of any changes when these decisions are updated;
4. make all the published acts of the general synods since the start of the FRCA available in electronic form.

Deputies have carried out this mandate by:

1. adding to the Index of Synod Decisions those decisions of Synod Armadale 2012 that relate to articles of the Church Order;
2. publishing the updated Index on the official web page of the FRCA;
3. notifying the churches when this was completed;
4. scanning the published Acts of the general synods into the computer with a view to making them available in electronic form on the FRCA website.

The scanning into electronic form of all the published acts was a labour-intensive task and is not quite complete. The Acts of synods from 1954 to 1992 and from 2003 to 2012 are now in electronic form. We hope to have the remaining Acts completed by the time Synod 2015 is convened at which time they will all be made available on the FRCA website.

As pointed out to Synod 2012, for the sake of conciseness we included in the index only the synods' decisions and not the grounds on which the decisions were based. Only in a few instances, where the recorded decisions were unintelligible without the grounds, did we make an exception to this rule. The full texts of the decisions, including the grounds, are of course available in the official Acts, which are also available on-line at the FRSA web site.

Furthermore, your deputies also fulfilled their mandate "to upload the Synod rules and make them available in electronic format on the website" in accordance with Acts 2012, Article 121 (see also Article 90).

We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Br Martin Pot in facilitating the uploading of the material onto the website, and also in writing a programme that provides the search function.

Jelte Numan (convenor)

Robert Eikelboom

December 16, 2014

Report - Deputies for Synod Archives

12 December 2014

The Consistory,

Free Reformed Church at Mt Nasura.

Esteemed brothers,

REPORT ON ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY OF SYNOD

In accordance with 'Rules for the Archivist', Synod Acts 1998, Appendix 11, point 3. "The Archivist reports to the church council on the contents and condition of the Archives; stating who has received or seen items, and the items involved", I hereby submit my report as follows:

Contents of Synod Archives

Additions to archives since the January 2012 report.

Synod 2012 material: Items 12.01 - 12.85

Additions to library

Deputies Report 2012.

Acts of Synod 2012.

Loans from Archives

Br.SC Fokkema 30 April 2012: Synod 2006 Item 06.45 Article 81 Classis South Report - Overture from Classis South re name change for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia..

A detailed chronological listing of all documents added to the synod archive since July 2009 is attached.

A detailed chronological listing of all synod archived documents since 1954 is stored in the archive cabinet.

Archive Inspection

The archives of 2009 and 2012 were inspected by two representatives of the Free Reformed Church of Byford on 11th December 2014.

With Christian greetings,

Mrs A.C.Hordyk

(Synod Archivist for the Church of Mt Nasura)

CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX TO SYNOD ARCHIVES

(items added after last reported date January 2012)

SYNOD 2012- AGENDA CREDENTIALS

- 12.01 Agenda
- 12.02 Signing of the attendance list and examination of credentials for Classis North, Central and South.
- 12.03 Signing of the attendance list and examination of credentials for RCNr, GGRC, GGRI, FRCSA, RCN, CanRC.

SYNOD 2012 – CORRESPONDENCE INWARD

- 12.04 FRC Armadale - Recommendation to appoint Sr Kina Van Duyn as administrative assistance.
- 12.05 FRC Armadale - Request regarding Abbotsford. See 12.35.
- 12.06 FRC Armadale - Overture regarding RCN.
- 12.07 FRC Armadale - Letter regarding change of synod rules.
- 12.08 FRC Kelmscott - Request regarding material received from the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford. See also 12.35.
- 12.09 FRC Kelmscott - Request in relation to Art.8 of the CO regarding the position of Brother J Bruning.
- 12.10 FRC Kelmscott - Appeal regarding Art.24 of the 2009 Acts of Synod in relation to the Book of Praise.
- 12.11 FRC Kelmscott - Overture regarding the use of Hymns for the worship services.
- 12.12 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford. See also 12.35.
- 12.13 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding RCN.
- 12.14 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding RCNZ.
- 12.15 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding CanRC.
- 12.16 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding amending synod rules.
- 12.17 FRC Mt Nasura - Overture regarding RCNr.
- 12.18 FRC Legana - Developments in NIV Bible translations and use of ESV.
- 12.19 FRC Byford - Overture regarding Psalm Book.
- 12.20 FRC Byford - Overture regarding RCNZ.
- 12.21 FRC West Albany - Overture regarding Rules of Synod – Visiting Delegates.
- 12.22 FRC West Albany - Overture re RCN.
- 12.23 FRC West Albany - Overture Book of Praise.

- 12.24 FRC West Albany - Overture re Reformed Church of Brazil.
- 12.25 FRC West Albany - Overture re Rules of Synod re Treasury.
- 12.26 FRC Darling Downs - Overture re RCN.
- 12.27 FRC Darling Downs - Overture re RCNZ.
- 12.28 FRC Darling Downs - Overture re Book of Praise.
- 12.29 FRC Darling Downs - Overture re Training for Ministry.
- 12.30 FRC Busselton - Overture re Federation name.
- 12.31 RCN deputies for foreign church relations (BBK) - Responses to FRCA deputies report.
- 12.32 Classis North - NIV, Article 8, Preaching Consent, RCN, Book of Praise.
- 12.33 Classis South West - Submission re FERC Singapore re Art.46 of the CO, towards sister church relations.
- 12.34 Deputies Supplementary Report 2 - RNC Attachment Appendix A, B, C.
- 12.35 Liberated Reformed Church Abbotsford with Appendices A – H. See also 12.08, 12.12.
- 12.36 Synod Treasury - Report and Budget.
- 12.37 Synod Treasury - Audit Report
- 12.38 Deputies Training of the Ministry – Audit.
- 12.39 Synod Archives and Library - Corrected copy.
- 12.40 Deputies Report Articles 48 and 76 Church Order.
- 12.41 FRC Armadale - Convening of next Synod.
- 12.42 Personal Letter - Rev A Veldman.

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE:

- 12.43 Letter of Appointment to Synod Advisory Committee - Rev. PKA de Boer, Rev. R. Pot, Br. W. Spyker, Br. W. Vanderven, Br. B. Veenendaal, Rev. S.'t Hart (alternate)
- 12.44 Letter to BBK regarding our decision to send an admonition.
- 12.45 Letter to Synod Ede with letter of admonition to REC (including Dutch translation).
- 12.46 FRC Armadale - LRC Abbotsford, RCN, Synod rules.
- 12.47 FRC Busselton - Federation Name change.
- 12.48 FRC Byford - Book of Praise, RCNZ.
- 12.49 FRC Darling Downs - RCN, RCNZ, Book of Praise, Training for the Ministry.
- 12.50 FRC Kelmscott - LRC Abbotsford, Article 8 J Bruning, Book of Praise.

- 12.51 FRC Legana - Bible translation.
- 12.52 FRC Mt. Nasura - LRC Abbotsford, RCN, RCNZ, CanRC, Synod rules visiting delegates , RCNr.
- 12.53 FRC West Albany - Synod rules re visiting delegates and treasury, RCN, Book of Praise, RC Brazil,
- 12.54 LRC Abbotsford - Synod Armadale 2012 decision.
- 12.55 FRC Armadale - re RCN.
- 12.56 FRC Darling Downs - re RCN.
- 12.57 FRC Mt. Nasura - re RCN.
- 12.58 FRC West Albany - re RCN.
- 12.59 Classis South West - FERCS.
- 12.60 Classis North - Bible Translations, Article 8 J Bruning, Rules for Preaching consent, RCN and Australian Book of Praise

LETTER OF APPOINTMENT

- 12.61 Deputy Relations Churches Abroad - Rev. DJ Anderson , Rev. PKA de Boer, Rev. S. 't Hart, Br. W. Pleiter, Br. W. Spyker, Br. W. Vanderven, Rev. T. Van Spronsen (alternate).
- 12.62 Letter to deputies churches relations abroad decision and mandate regarding RCN.
- 12.63 Deputy Indonesian Churches plus corrective letter- Br. B. Bosveld, Br. B. Kramer, Br. E. Heerema, Rev. A. Van Delden, Rev. W. Vander Jagt, Br. T. de Vos (alternate).
- 12.64 Deputy for contact with Churches in Brazil - Br. J. Hidding, Rev. J. Kroeze, Br. J. Wielstra.
- 12.65 Deputy for contact with RCNZ - Br. M. Bax, Br. R.M. Eikelboom, Rev. R. Pot, Br. A. Vermeulen, Br. J. Bruning (alternate).
- 12.66 Deputy contact Churches in Singapore - Br. S. Fokkema, Rev. E. Rupke, Rev. T. Van Spronsen, Rev. W. Huizinga (alternate)
- 12.67 Deputies Training for the Ministry - Br. R. Heerema, Br. M. Hoogerdiijk, Rev. E. Rupke, Br. J. (Jim) Vander Plas ,Br. B. Huizinga (alternate).
- 12.68 Deputy Book of Praise - Br. S. Houweling, Br. A. Plug, Br. E. Swarts, Rev. C. Vermeulen, Br. D. Swarts (alternate).
- 12.69 Deputy Bible Translation - Rev. J. Kroeze, Rev. M. Retief , Rev. R.D. Anderson (alternate).
- 12.70 Deputy Article 48 Church Order - Rev. PKA de Boer, Rev. S. 't Hart, Rev. J. Kroeze, Rev. R. Pot, Rev. A. Van Delden, Rev. W. Vander Jagt.
- 12.71 Deputies General Secretary - Br. J.L. Van Burgel, Br. J. den Boer as assistant,

Br. M. Pot as FRC webmaster.

12.72 Deputy for Indexing Synod decisions - Br. R. Eikelboom, Br. J. Numan.

12.73 Deputies for Synod venue and infrastructure - Br. E. 't Hart, Br. A. VanderWel.

12.74 Deputies Nominating Authorities - Br. T. Houweling, Br. H. Faas.

12.75 Synod archives - FRC Mt. Nasura.

12.76 Audit of Synod Archives - FRC Byford.

12.77 Synod Treasurer - Br. E. Eikelboom, Br. D Bonker (alternate).

12.78 Financial Auditors,

For Synod treasury - FRC Mt. Nasura.

For Training for ministry - FRC Kelmscott.

12.79 Article 66 Church Order Days of Prayer - FRC Launceston.

LETTER OF DISCHARGE AND THANKS

12.80 Deputy for Relations with Sister Churches - Br B Veenendaal, Rev. A Veldman, Rev.C Vermeulen.

12.81 Deputy Indonesian Churches - Br. H Swarts, Br. P Van Dyke.

12.82 Deputy for contact with RCNZ - Rev. J Kroeze, Br JL van Burgel.

12.83 Deputy Book of Praise - Br. A Vermeulen, Br H Schoof.

12.84 Deputy Article 48 Church Order - Rev. E Rupke, Rev A Veldman.

12.85 Deputies General Secretary - Br D Veltkamp.

GLOSSARY OF ECCLESIASTICAL ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS INDEX

CanRC Canadian Reformed Churches

FERCS First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore

FRCSA Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

FRCA Free Reformed Churches of Australia

GGRC Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvin

GGRI Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia

RCN Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

RCNr Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored)

LIBRARY

Deputies Reports 2012

Acts of Synod 2012

11 December 2014

The Consistory
Free Reformed Church of Mount Nasura
PO Box 207
Armadale. WA 6112

Esteemed brothers,

Audit of accounts Deputies Training for the Ministry - Art 17 and 18 of the Church Order.

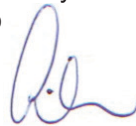
The undersigned audited the accounts of the Deputies Training for the Ministry as requested, and found the accounts for the support of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, the Needy Student Fund and the Theological Library to be in good order.

It was noted that some churches are sometimes a bit slow in making their contributions for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary which places additional financial pressure on the Deputies and the Seminary. Churches should be encouraged to make their contributions as soon as possible.



etings

A Hordyk



L Schiebaan

NOMINATING AUTHORITIES - MARRIAGE ACT 1961

31 January 2015

Synod 2015

C/- Free Reformed Church of Baldivis

PO Box 4153

BALDIVIS WA 6171

Esteemed brothers

Deputies' Report

Mandate

Synod Armadale 2012 made the following decision with respect to Nominating Authorities (Article 74):

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

Background

On 22 September 1999, the Governor-General first declared the Free Reformed Churches of Australia as a “recognised denomination”, such declaration having been made under section 26 of the *Marriage Act 1961 (Cth)*. This declaration has since been repeated, most recently under the *Marriage (Recognised Denominations) Proclamation 2007* made on 4 October 2007.

The declaration of the FRCA as a “recognised denomination” entitles all ministers of religion within the bond of the FRCA, by virtue of that fact, to become registered as marriage celebrants (see section 29 of the *Marriage Act 1961*).

The Act requires that the “recognised denomination” nominate ministers of religion within that denomination for registration. To that end, deputies are required to be appointed by each Synod with the authority to nominate new ministers within the bond for registration.

The *Marriage Act* is administered by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department – Marriage Law and Celebrants Section. From time to time this Department issues information updates which deputies then circulate to the various ministers within the bond.

Helpful information as to the administration of the Act and related links can be found at <http://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Pages/default.aspx>.

It should finally be noted that, whilst the declaration of a “recognised denomination” is made by the relevant Commonwealth department (Attorney-General's Department), the registration of the individual minister is performed by the relevant State Department

(Department of the Attorney-General in Western Australia and Department of Justice in Tasmania).

Execution of Mandate

Deputies have been able to execute their mandate over the past 3 years.

In summary, the following has been carried out:

- Incoming ministers have been nominated by deputies to the relevant State Registrar, and these ministers have become registered as marriage celebrants (Rev Van Spronson, Rev Anderson, Rev Hagg, Rev Alkema, Rev Poppe)
- The relevant State Registrars have been advised of departing ministers from the bond of the FRCA (Rev Eikelboom)
- The records of the ministers within the FRCA kept at the relevant State Registrars have been kept up to date
- Information disseminated by the Commonwealth Attorney-General has been forwarded to all ministers within the FRCA.

The *Marriage Act 1961* and the *Marriage Regulations 1963* have recently been amended, with those amendments taking effect from 1 July 2014. Ministers have been informed of these changes via e-mail and a revised edition of the Guidelines for marriage celebrants has been made available. New forms approved by the Commonwealth Attorney-General must be used from 1 January 2015.

Deputies remain of the view that it is administratively convenient that, for the purposes of marriage celebrancy within the FRCA, the FRCA remain a “recognised denomination”. We recommend that 2 deputies be appointed for the task of nominating ministers and circulating information.

Recommendation

Deputies recommend that Synod Armadale 2012 resolve:

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

Respectfully submitted

Humphry Faas

Tim Houweling