Report to GENERAL SYNOD Burlington 2010 from the COMMITTEE FOR THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit our report to General Synod Burlington 2010, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007.

1. COMMITTEE MANDATE

Synod Smithers 2007 gave the committee the following mandate:

1. To maintain existing website and associated technical functions.
2. To revise the content of the website whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the *Book of Praise* is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by general synod.
3. To include on the website:
   - 3.1 Contact material about each local church, either via links or directly on the website, subject to concurrence of the local church.
   - 3.2 Contact information for committees and churches appointed by general synod for specific mandates.
   - 3.3 Publication of the official reports of the synodical committees in a standardized format (e.g., pdf) with security measures restricting access only to consistories.
     These restrictions should be lifted after synod has dealt with them.
4. To provide web and email services to the churches, and be available upon request to serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own websites.
5. To serve Synod 2010 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of this synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

2. COMMITTEE FUNCTIONING

2.1 Communication

2.1.1 Meetings

Three meetings were held. The first one (2007) in Hamilton, with the three committee members from Ontario present, the other two members from Western Canada participated in these meetings by means of a telephone conference call. The second and third meeting, in 2008 and 2009, were held using skype.

2.1.2 E-mail

Between these meetings, the communication took place mainly by e-mail. This, together with the annual meetings mentioned under 2.1.1., appeared to be sufficient for the committee to function effectively.

2.2 Members and distribution of tasks

Synod Smithers 2007 appointed two new members, Cheryl Harke and Harold Sikkema. They were appointed in the place of the brothers T.J. Flach and J.M. Hoogerdijk. These two new members together with A. VandenHoven focused on the technical aspects of the work and sr. M. VanderVelde, who also served as convenor and Rev. A. Souman, who served as secretary of the committee, focused on the administrative aspects and the content.

3. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

3.1 Hardware and technical set up

3.1.1. Internet Service Provider and Hardware

In 2007, the committee changed from having its own server to hosting the website by Dreamhost.com. The result of this is that the committee does not have to maintain the hardware anymore and does not need to make use of a separate Internet Service Provider (ISP).

3.1.3 Domain name

The domain name for the website is www.canrc.org and continues to be actively registered for the web-site and e-mail services.

3.2 Existing content

The existing content continues to be maintained on the website and updated regularly, where necessary. This concerns the introduction to the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, the Online Resources, the Church Directory and Church News. The Theological College now has its own website and is not part of the official website of the federation anymore.

For the information on the News-page as well as for the press releases of the ecclesiastical assemblies, the committee completely depends on the cooperation of the ministers and churches and organizations for these items to be posted on this page. The committee encourages the churches, ministers and organizations to provide the information in a timely manner.

Over the past years, the committee has been working on a redesign of the entire site, which will also make it easier to keep the site up to date. At the time of writing of this report the redesign is as good as finished and will be launched in the fall of 2009.

At the same time, the committee has been working on an update of the information on the website. Also the text of the three confessions has

been updated. The committee had to change the format of the text it received to html format, which took quite some work. Due to this, the text of the confessions was for some time only available in pdf format. The expectation is that with the launch of the new website in the fall of 2009 this will be solved.

3.3. New Content

As mandated by Synod Smithers 2007, the committee added the following new content to the website.

3.3.1 More information regarding each local church

The committee will contact the local churches again in the fall of 2009, after the launch of the redesigned website, to inform them of the possibilities for the local churches to present themselves on the internet via the federational website and how the website committee can help them with advice, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007.

3.3.2. Links to other websites

There is a page with links to other websites. Some websites were added to these links. The links on this page are websites from organizations and churches which have a clear and official relationship with our churches as well as a link to Bible Gateway, which provides the text of the Bible in many translations.

3.3.3. Posting of sermons

The committee has been discussing the posting of sermons on the website. It has been in contact with ‘theseed’ about this as well. However, the committee is of the opinion, now that so many churches have sermons posted on the internet, either in audio format or in text, that there is no need to put sermons on the federational website anymore. Instead of this, the committee posted links to pages of websites of local churches where sermons can be found. These links are only to websites of Canadian Reformed churches.

3.3.4. Posting of Press Releases of broader assemblies

Press Releases of broader assemblies as well as of some of the committees of Synod are posted on the Resources page.

3.3.5 Posting of the reports and the Acts of General Synods

In addition to the Acts which were already present on the websie, the Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007 have been posted on the website, as well as the reports.

According to the decision of General Synod Smithers 2007, the committee will in the fall of 2009, in cooperation with the convening church and Premier Printing, post the reports of the committees on the website, password protected, and inform the consistories about the possibility to download these reports from the website.

3.4 Web services and email services

3.4.1. Web Services

The committee has the possibility to provide a domain name for a local church website of the churches (e.g. : http://chilliwack.canrc.org). This domain name can also be used as a redirect to an existing website. It is possible to provide those domain-names to local churches as long as the service provider of the local church allows it.

3.4.2. Email services

a) ministers email

The committee continues to provide the ministers in our federation with permanent email addresses as well as a mailing list for discussion and correspondence between the ministers.

b) Consistory Clerks email

The committee offered email addresses to the churches for their clerks. However, not many churches signed up for a clerk email address.

3.5 Cost and expenses

The only costs over the past three years was for the hosting plan at Dreamhost.com, which is paid for two years in advance. For the coming three years the committee does not expect much change. The renewal dates for the hosting plan at Dreamhost.com are in 2010 and in 2012.

3.6 Feedback

From time to time the website committee receives comments from visitors of the website, which are in general positive. Sometimes the committee is made aware of minor mistakes or omissions on the website, what is also appreciated by the committee. In several e-mails which the committee received, people ask for more information, for instance about the churches, about Reformed doctrine, or about aspects of our church life. These e-mails are answered, as much as possible, by the convener, sr. M. VanderVelde, or the secretary, Rev. A. Souman. Questions about copyright for the Book of Praise are forwarded to the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site content

At this moment, the committee is of the opinion that no new content should be added. The committee should mainly focus on maintaining and fine tuning the redesigned website and promoting the services which are offered to the churches.

4.2 Future direction

The website has proven to be a valuable tool for many to find information about the Canadian Reformed Churches and also to present the federation to others. It is important to maintain the website and keep it up to date. The committee asks Synod to continue to recommend to the local churches to make use of this valuable tool to present the churches and the message of salvation on the internet. The committee was mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007 to provide web and email services to the churches, and be available upon request to serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own websites. The committee recommends that Synod Burlington 2010 make this again part of the mandate of the committee.

4.3 Email as official communication

It appears that more and more churches start to use email as an accepted means of official communication. However, churches, assemblies and organizations should be aware of the dangers of this. It is possible that organizations or others represent themselves in emails or websites as representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches or part of it, which are not officially appointed by Synod or by the churches as such. This can cause confusion or even worse. In order to keep communication by email reliable, the committee is of opinion that Synod should make a decision, for instance by deciding to strongly encourage ministers, synodical committees and local churches to use '@canrc.org' email addresses and to strongly encourage local congregations to use *congregation*.canrc.org as their primary domain name. Other domains they choose can redirect to their canrc.org domain name. Because the website committee is the only organization that can create email addresses in the canrc.org domain, create sub domains of canrc.org and publish content to the canrc.org website, the origin of anything within the canrc.org domain possesses a high level of trustworthiness as to their authenticity.

4.4 Committee composition

The current composition of the committee worked well. The committee consists of three members with advanced technical abilities, as well as the librarian of the Theological College and one minister. Now that the Theological College has its own website, there is no need anymore to have someone from the college in the committee. The non-technical work in the committee can be done by one person. For the technical work, three persons are sufficient.

Synod Smithers decided that a member is usually reappointed only once and serves six years.

Three members of the committee are slated to retire. If the Synod agrees with the committee that there is no need anymore to appoint someone from the College and that the non-technical work can be done by one member, then Synod only needs to appoint two new members: one for the non-technical aspects of the work and one for the

technical aspects. The committee will be sending a list of nominees for potential consideration by Synod under separate cover to be held in confidence and presented to the committee appointed by Synod to deal with the matter.

4.5 Mandate

The committee recommends that General Synod Burlington 2010 give the committee the following mandate:

1. To maintain the existing website and associated technical functions.
2. To revise the content of the website whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the Book of Praise is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by General Synod.
3. To provide web services and email services to the churches and serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own web sites.
4. To serve Synod 2010 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

The committee also recommends that General Synod Burlington 2010 decide:

1. To approve the annual budget of $ 750.00.
2. To appoint two new members to the committee.
3. To strongly encourage ministers, synodical committees and local churches to use a '@canrc.org' email address and local congregations to use *congregation*.canrc.org as their primary domain name.

Respectfully submitted by your committee:

C. Lane (nee Harke) (Calgary, AB)
H. Sikkema (Hamilton, ON)
A. Souman (Langley, BC), secretary
A. VandenHoven (Cloverdale, BC)
M. VanderVelde (Hamilton, ON), convener

Appendix: Financial statement and budget

The only expense in the years 2007 – 2009 was the cost for the renewal of the hosting plan, which was $ 382.80 for two years (September, 2008 – September, 2010).
The first renewal date is September 28, 2010 and the one thereafter September 28, 2012.

Three year periods	**CDN $**
Total 1998 - 2000 Expenses	$1,120.50
Total 2001 - 2003 Expenses	$2,940.11
Total 2004 - 2006 Expenses	$1,934.00
Total 2007-2009 Expenses	$ 382.80
Budgeted expenses 2010-2012	$1,000.00

Projected budget:

Hosting plan renewal in 2010 (2 years)	$	450.00
Hosting plan renewal in 2012 (2 years)	$	450.00
Miscellaneous costs	$	100.00
Total 2010-2012 Expenses	$	1,000.00