

Press Release of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The *Book of Praise* committee's mandate is to take care of all things related to the *Book of Praise*. As well, the committee is a subcommittee of the Committee for Church Unity. In this latter capacity it is known as the Common Songbook Subcommittee. As such it is charged by General Synod to work with its United Reformed counterpart in the production of a songbook for the federation of churches which will emerge from the merger of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches of North America, should the Lord grant the merger.

This press release will cover four issues with which the committee is busy: Psalm revisions, the Augment to our hymnary, the next edition of the *Book of Praise*, and the committee's work with its United Reformed counterpart.

1. General Synod instructed the committee to work on revising our Psalter. Synod mandated the committee to engage Dr. W. Helder of Hamilton in this work. Dr. Helder has been busy with the Psalms for decades and is now revising the whole Psalter. We are very thankful for his labours and dedication. The committee spends hours poring over his work, word by word, line by line, stanza by stanza. Suggestions are made to Dr. Helder for his consideration. The goal of this work is to present to the churches versions of the Psalms that are ever more faithful to the text of scripture in contemporary English, to replace obscure words, and so to enhance the singing of Psalms in our churches and homes. Mostly the 1984 Psalter (the present one) was very well done but there were some songs that were not. E.g., let the reader compare Psalms 47 and 141 in the present *Book of Praise* with the text of scripture and he will see that there are some problems. The new versions are much closer to the biblical text. At present, 110 revised Psalms are posted at www.bookofpraise.ca. Many of our churches are using them in worship. The committee encourages the reader to become familiar with the revised Psalms. It is our hope that the complete revised Psalter will be in the committee report going to General Synod 2010 (and to the churches six months prior to Synod).

2. Synod 2007 mandated the committee to publish a booklet of 28 hymns ("the Augment") for the churches. Every congregation received one for every member. Most, if not all, the churches have been using these hymns. The committee is mandated to solicit feedback from the consistories on the hymns. Recently the committee sent a survey to all the consistories and is looking forward to receiving them back. The committee will appoint an *ad hoc* committee to summarize the results. This *ad hoc* committee will also be asked to evaluate the letters churches had already sent Synod 2007 and any other letters received from consistories relating to the "Augment" hymns. The *ad hoc* committee will compare the feedback carefully in the light of the synod-adopted principles and guidelines which the reader can find on pages 2 & 3 of the Augment. The committee has decided to appoint an *ad hoc* committee to do this work because it wants an unbiased assessment. The *Book of Praise* committee, being the body that proposed the 28 hymns to Synod 2007, may be somewhat prejudiced when evaluating the surveys and letters. The committee reminds the reader that Synod 2007 said that comment on the

hymns is to come from the consistories rather than individuals. At the same time, the committee reminds the consistories that they do not necessarily need to endorse every letter received from members of their congregations. It may be that they receive a letter which, while not agreeing with it all, is yet considered worthwhile to pass on to the committee. The *ad hoc* committee will be instructed to submit its report to the *Book of Praise* committee by mid-June 2009.

3. Synod 2007 adopted the updated prose section (confession, liturgical forms and prayers) with the NIV Bible references and the consequent linguistic changes. This is something the churches have been waiting for since Synod Fergus, 1998. The next edition of the *Book of Praise*, to be published this Fall, will contain the revised prose section. The question may be asked: "Why not wait until the revised Psalms are ready to be published and we are finished with the question of the hymns?" It would not be good to wait. It was Synod 1998 which mandated "...the committee to prepare the prose section of the Book of Praise with NIV Bible references." We are now a decade later and all is now approved by Synod 2007 and ready to print. No one will *need* to buy this edition as the 1984 version will still be adequate when following along with the liturgical readings from the prose section. The edition which will include the revised Psalter and Hymnary still needs to be approved and ordered by a General Synod.

4. Synod Schererville, 2007, of the URCNA put the brakes on the work of our joint United Reformed/Canadian Reformed Songbook Committee. We had been working well together as a joint committee for six years and were nearing the point where the joint committee was going to propose the hymnary part of the songbook to both General Synods 2010. Unfortunately, the 2007 URCNA synod altered their songbook committee's mandate to work first on an exclusively URCNA Psalter Hymnal. The common songbook was put on a back burner. At present, the *Book of Praise* committee is seeking clarity and advice from its URCNA counterpart as to how we can continue to work together as a joint committee in light of the facts that while the United Reformed mandate has changed, the Canadian Reformed has remained the same since 2001.

The committee humbly requests your prayers and the prayers of the congregations for this important work. May the Lord bless our labours, and may He be enthroned on the praises of His people.

On behalf of the *Book of Praise* committee,
Rev. George van Popta