

**Reports to
General Synod Smithers
2007**

**Committee for Contact with Churches
in the Americas
(CCCA)**

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The Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas Report to Synod Smithers 2007

October 1, 2006

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of Christ, we submit our report to General Synod Smithers 2007, as mandated by General Synod Chatham 2004. We do this with thankfulness to the Lord for His blessings on the many positive and brotherly discussions, meetings, and visits that took place. We face the ongoing challenge of doing our work in reliance upon Him and in full submission to the Word of God. May this work be supported by the continuing prayers of the churches that we may be diligent “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3) and to further that unity where possible, encouraging one another to serve the LORD faithfully according to His Word.

1. Introduction

1. Committee members

General Synod Chatham 2004 made the following appointments for the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas: (p.122)

P.G. Feenstra (convener) (2007), K. Jonker (2007), J. Jonker (Owen Sound) (2010), Jacob Kuik (2013), A.J. Pol (2010), A. Poppe (2007), R.E. Pot (2013), A. Schutten (2013).

Br. A. Schutten informed the committee that he was unable to accept his appointment. Dr. R.A. Faber (Elora) was found willing to serve as committee member in his place. Replacements need to be appointed for Revs. P.G. Feenstra and K. Jonker and Br. A. Poppe, who will complete their terms in 2007. To promote good continuity in the future, in a separate letter the CCCA will propose to Synod nominations of suitable individuals who are willing and able to serve in this capacity.

Recommendations:

1. Revs. P.G. Feenstra, K. Jonker and Br. A. Poppe be discharged from the CCCA, and thanked for their years of service to the churches as members of the CCCA;
2. Suitable replacements be appointed to the CCCA, with consideration given to the geographic distribution of committee members in East (Ontario) and West (Manitoba), and to the candidates suggested by the CCCA;
3. Dr. R.A. Faber be appointed to serve as committee member until 2013 in place of Br. A. Schutten.

2. **General activity and committee structure**

Plenary meetings of the CCCA were held on September 10, 2004, September 9, 2005, and September 8, 2006. At the first plenary meeting, appointments were made as follows:

- a. Chairman: Rev. P.G. Feenstra
- b. Secretary: Rev. A.J. Pol
- c. Treasurer: Br. A. Poppe

Two subcommittees were formed according to the location of committee members in Ontario and Manitoba, and the following division of labour was agreed upon:

Subcommittee East: Contacts with OPC, ERQ, KPCA

Subcommittee West: Contacts with RCUS, IRB

Members of subcommittee West were responsible for attending NA-PARC in 2004, and subcommittee East in 2005 and 2006. Minutes of the subcommittee meetings were exchanged via email to promote good communication and mutual scrutiny.

3. **General Mandate**

General Synod Chatham 2004 gave the CCCA the general mandate: (p.27)

1. Continue contact with all those churches in the Americas with which we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules, and in accordance with the mandates described in decisions taken by Synod with respect to the churches with which we have ongoing relationships;
2. Investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship in the Americas;
3. Respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in the Americas;
4. Report on its findings with suitable recommendations to the next General Synod, and to present to the churches a report of its work six months prior to the convening of the next General Synod.

Recommendation:

That this continue to be the mandate of the CCCA.

2. **Subcommittee East**

1. General activity

Meetings of subcommittee East were held on May 19, 2004; 8 November 2004; 24 January 2005; 10 May, 2005; 22 August, 2005; 13 December, 2005; 22 February, 2006; 12 May, 2006; and August 21, 2006, with Rev. Feenstra serving as convener, and Rev. Pot as secretary. In addition the subcommittee met with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relationships of the OPC on 7 April, 2005; with representatives of the ERQ's Committee for Ecumenicity on 22 August, 2005 and

September 30, 2006. Various members of the subcommittee attended the 72nd General Assembly of the OPC in Grand Rapids in June 2005, the Synod of the ERQ in November 2005, and the NAPARC in November 2005. When feasible and in the interests of effective analysis and reporting, two delegates were sent to attend these assemblies. Arrangements are being made for the entire subcommittee to attend NAPARC in November 2006, and to combine this with meetings with the committees for ecumenicity of the OPC and the ERQ. The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the ERQ and OPC via telephone and email.

2. Reports and recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

1. L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA)
3. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

3. Subcommittee West

1. General Activity

Meetings of subcommittee West were held on April 19, 2004; May 19, 2004; August 31, 2004; September 20, 2004; October 27, 2004; November 10 (together with the IRC of the RCUS), 2004; December 2, 2004; May 9, 2005; August 15, 2005; April 3, 2006 and June 13, 2006. Rev. K. Jonker served as chairman and Rev. A.J. Pol as secretary. Its four members attended NAPARC together in 2004, traveling in one rented vehicle; various members also attended the 258th (2004), 259th (2005) and 260th (2006) Synods of the RCUS and the 174th (2005) Synod of the RPCNA. One member also visited the Igreja Reformadas do Brasil (IRB) for two weeks on a personal holiday in April 2005. There were also numerous e-mail contacts between subcommittee members and members of Interchurch Relations Committees of the churches with which contact is being maintained.

2. Reports and Recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

4. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
5. The Igreja Reformadas do Brasil (IRB)
6. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

4. NAPARC

A report and recommendations regarding the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is also attached.

5. Budget

Given the mandate of Synod, it was not possible to remain within the amount allocated by Synod (\$8,000). Committee members tried to avoid limit costs for the CCCA by combining CCCA activities with personal trips and paying for this themselves or by simply not requesting reimbursement for certain costs. In other cases, decisions were made not to attend certain assemblies or to send only one instead of two delegates in order to limit costs. Nevertheless, once all the costs have been counted, the approximate final total will be about \$12,000. Costs of air travel in particular continue to increase. The committee is of the opinion that in order to fulfill the various aspects of the mandate in a satisfactory way in the next period, \$15,000 could be needed to cover anticipated expenditures. It therefore requests that this amount be allocated for the work of the CCCA.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

Subcommittee East:

P.G. Feenstra (Owen Sound, ON)

R.A. Faber (Elora, ON)

J. Jonker (Owen Sound, ON)

R.E. Pot (London, ON)

Subcommittee West:

K. Jonker (Winnipeg, MB)

J. Kuik (Winnipeg, MB)

A.J. Pol (Carman, MB)

A. Poppe (Carman, MB)

Appended Reports

1. L'Eglise Réformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Korean Presbyterian Churches in North America (KPCA)
3. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
4. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
5. The Igreja Reformadas do Brasil (IRB)
6. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
7. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 1: L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)

1. Mandate

General Synod Chatham 2004 instructed the CCCA to continue fulfilling the mandate given by General Synod Neerlandia 2001, namely (*Acts 2004*, p. 22):

1. To discuss the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards as found in the "Evaluation of Divergences" received by Synod 1986. Considering the limited resources of the ERQ priority should be placed on discussion and clarification of pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's table, and confessional accountability;
2. To work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules;
3. To encourage the churches to continue supporting the ERQ financially, when needed;
4. To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made on matters of confession, church polity, liturgy, and mission.

2. Historical Survey of Relations with the ERQ

2.1 *Synod 1995: Beginnings*

To properly appreciate the present state of relations with L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ), a brief historical survey of relations with the ERQ is in order. Some information about the general history of the ERQ is available on their website, www.erq.qc.ca. The history and official reporting of relations between the ERQ and the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches on a federational level begins with *Acts General Synod 1995*. Given an extensive submission by the church at Ottawa, a classis Ontario North in 1994 requested Synod that it should mandate "the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad to intensify and confirm the contact initiated by the church at Ottawa with a view to entering a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Art 73)." Besides the validity of a classical recommendation to Synod, concern was expressed about the jurisdiction to which contact with ERQ should be assigned, as the ERQ is not a "church abroad" but does function in a context of history, culture, and language that may prevent it from becoming one with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Acknowledging the biblical and confessional duty to

seek unity with other federations of true believers, Synod considered that despite cultural and other differences, within one nation churches should seek federative unity.

Synod 1995 also decided to appoint deputies to discuss with their counterparts in the ERQ the apparent differences in confession, church polity, and worship. Furthermore, the deputies were to evaluate correspondence of the ERQ with other federations (esp. CRC and PCA), and to determine whether it is feasible for our federation to become one with the ERQ.

2.2 *Synod 1998: Fact-Finding*

The newly-formed Committee for Contact with ERQ submitted an extensive report to the churches (see *Acts General Synod 1998*, App 7), in which it records especially an evaluation of the apparent differences in confessions, polity, and worship. It advised that on “the basis of confessional documents and their maintenance” in the ERQ, relations with these churches in Quebec “can and should be established.” Regarding church polity, the Committee judged the differences to be “minor points of church order,” while observations of worship and practice led it to conclude that “the commitment of these young churches who are attempting to mount a faithful Reformed witness in a secularized Roman Catholic culture and world must be acknowledged.”

The report also summarizes the history of relations between ERQ and other denominations that have supported it morally and financially throughout the years, though without entering into official relationships with it. In sum, regarding relations with other churches, the ERQ “jealously guards itself from what it would consider to be potential unreformed influences.”

Regarding the feasibility of federative unity, the Committee, having discussed at length with deputies from the ERQ (which had established its own Interchurch Committee), observed that the differences in language and culture preclude a practical federative unity, and moreover that recognition of the Lord’s distinct church-gathering work in Quebec is not tantamount to advocating the pluriformity of the church. Relaying the *Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship* (in *Acts General Synod 1998*, p. 300), and interpreting the import of them, the Committee recommended that ecclesiastical fellowship be established with the ERQ, and that, besides discussing matters of confession, church polity, and worship, the churches assist one another, especially in mission.

The report that is summarized above was duly considered by the churches in anticipation of Synod. By means of letters and

overtures, several congregations expressed concerns, of which the common ones pertain to fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership, eligibility for the diaconate, and the apparent lack of liturgical forms. Synod considered the relative young age of the ERQ to be a factor in the non-articulation of certain matters (order of worship, fencing of Lord's Table, etc.), and that clarification was desirable on six topics: status of deaconesses, Sunday worship (liturgical forms, supervision of pulpit, Sunday observance), seeming differences in fencing the Lord's Table, confessional membership, the varying Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and the possibility of federative unity.

2.3 *Synod 2001: Moving Towards the Goal of Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

By the time Synod 2001 was convened, a subcommittee for contact with the ERQ had been formed within the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA). This subcommittee was charged with an investigation of the topics of concern (listed in the previous paragraph) that had been conveyed to Synod 1998. The Interchurch Committee informed the deputies of our federation of various developments and challenges facing the ERQ, some of which touched upon the features of the mandate given to our deputies. The ERQ was in the process of addressing the internal variances, which it felt needed to be addressed first. The Report of the Canadian Reformed committee appears as Appendix 2.4 in the *Acts General Synod 2001*, and it includes an assessment of each of the six topics. Among the recommendations to Synod, the CCCA included a restriction of further discussion to confessional membership and admission to the Lord's Table.

When Synod convened in 2001, it had received a few submissions from congregations commenting on the report. Upon making its observations, Synod considered, among other things, that "varying practices in applying principles" does "not constitute scriptural unfaithfulness." It moreover observed that the following topics of concern have been addressed adequately and satisfactorily: the status of deacons and deaconesses; liturgical forms; order of worship; Lord's Day observance; differences in rules for ecclesiastical fellowship; the desirability of federative unity. It points out that supervision of the pulpit, confessional membership, and fencing of the Lord's Table remain as topics of discussion. Synod therefore decided that "progress has been made in advancing the development of the relationship," and that the committee be reappointed "with the goal of establishing ecclesiastical fellowship."

2.4 Synod 2004: Careful Continuance

As for previous Synods, so too for the one held in 2004 the subcommittee for contact with the ERQ submitted a report on its operations, including important discussions with the ERQ's Committee for Inter-Church Relations. While the Interchurch Committee had not been mandated to interact with the remaining topics of concern to the Canadian Reformed Churches, it stated that fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership were being studied and addressed. By 2003 these topics were added to the responsibilities of the Interchurch Committee: admission to the Lord's Supper; supervision of the pulpit; adherence to the confession of the ERQ by its members. In the report submitted prior to Synod 2004 (see *Acts General Synod 2004*, p. 247 ff.), the CCCA states that while it would "love to recommend that Synod Chatham decide to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ," internal discussions within the ERQ on the three topics mentioned above are not complete, so that the concerns raised within the Canadian Reformed Churches cannot be deemed as removed. Continuation of mandate was advised.

Synod 2004 examined this latest report and recommendation, as well as other admissible material. Considerations included that "the respective committees can come to an agreement which will provide the framework for further discussions and growth within the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (*Acts General Synod 2004*, Art 25). Synod decided that the committee should continue its investigations, with especial focus on clarification of pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's Table, and confessional accountability. Moreover, the committee should "work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules."

3. Contact and Meetings

The ERQ presently consists of six churches, and the total membership is around 300. Given the small size of their federation, and the present state of development in the ERQ as a young Reformed church federation, it needs to be remembered that within the ERQ a significant amount of work is shared by a small number of church leaders, leading to understandable constraints of time and resources. Contact was hampered somewhat as a result of the ERQ's limited manpower, and initial efforts to establish a meeting were not successful due to changes within their various committees, and the desire of the ERQ to discuss some of the matters for discussion internally first. Despite this, the ERQ is active both internally and in the area of inter-church relations, and although somewhat limited, there were opportunities for contact by

phone, email (through the sharing and discussion of documents), and also for a couple of meetings. Minutes of some of the “Synodes” were also made available to us in translation.

3.1 *Meeting with ERQ Interchurch Committee representative on August 22, 2005*

On August 22, 2005, three members of the CCCA sub-committee East had the opportunity to meet with Rev. Ben Westerveld, a member of the ERQ’s Interchurch Committee, at the Theological College in Hamilton. It was noted that the work of the Interchurch Committee had been challenged by significant turnover of members, since two of the three committee members had recently resigned and been replaced. Thanks was expressed on behalf of the ERQ for the CanRC’s prayerful and financial support. It was also noted with gratitude that there is a new church plant at Laval, which is a significant location due to a strong Roman Catholic presence there. This has created discussion within the ERQ whether they are overextending themselves by having too many projects with small amounts of people.

There was some discussion regarding the three issues mandated by our Synod for dialogue with the ERQ:

1. *Confessional membership*: The ERQ has established a Liturgy Committee, which has been mandated to draft liturgies for profession of faith, baptism, and ordination. The issue of confessional membership and confessional subscription will be dealt with implicitly by how the questions in the form for profession of faith are worded. In order to solicit advice and feedback, drafts of these forms would be submitted to churches with which the ERQ has contact, including the CanRC.
2. *Lord’s Supper*: The Ministerial Committee was mandated to look at this issue some years ago, and give a recommendation to Synod. This work is still in progress, but the committee was recently mandated again to come with a report, and to give special attention to the Statement of Agreement between the OPC and CanRC. Time constraints are a consideration.
3. *Supervision of the pulpit*: The Ministerial Committee also will be addressing this issue. It was noted in connection with minutes of a previous Synode, that it is evident from the ERQ’s procedure for examination that they take the supervision of the pulpit seriously.

Some discussion also followed about the value of NAPARC, in view of the CCCA’s desire for reassurance that it is not a duplication of the ICRC, but a responsible use of time, and is of benefit to the CanRC. It was noted that NAPARC has a much

more regional focus than the ICRC, and in the ERQ's experience, it fosters closer contact with sister churches, and gives opportunities to make contacts with and appreciate other Reformed churches in North America.

Although in the past the ERQ has invited the CanRC to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, at present the ERQ has no formal or official relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with any other churches. There is a long history of contacts with the PCA through individual churches and pastors, but no formal relationship exists at this time. The ERQ is also in a corresponding relationship (Phase 1) with the URCNA.

The CanRC encouraged the ERQ to have a unified denominational focus, and to clarify their position on some of the outstanding issues. Because of its history and context, and the various personal connections and backgrounds of its leaders, there are different strands of influence within the ERQ, which at times results in diversity. A sound Reformed direction is evident in many local churches, and the overall direction of the ERQ seems to be positive and confessionally Reformed, but time is needed to develop a consensus within the ERQ on these matters that we have been mandated to discuss with them. The adoption of liturgical forms will also inevitably help the ERQ churches to bond together, and input from the CanRC was invited as part of this process.

3.2 *Visit to the ERQ Synode, November 2005*

In November 2005, Rev. P. Feenstra and Dr. R.A. Faber attended the November Synode of the ERQ as observers, upon invitation from the ERQ. A report on this visit was published in *Clarion* (Appendix 1), along with an encouragement for our churches to continue prayerful and financial support of the ERQ. Although the Synode is the broad assembly of the ERQ, it needs to be remembered that these quarterly "synodes" also function in a manner similar to our classes. Amongst other agenda items, the consistories of the seven churches of the ERQ reported on developments in their congregations, and reports from various committees were dealt with. At this time, work by the Ministerial Committee on the various liturgical forms was not yet complete. Of special note is the fact that the ERQ will be hosting the next NAPARC in Laval, which will present opportunities for our committee to attend NAPARC, and potentially meet with representatives from both the ERQ, and the OPC.

4. Liturgical Forms

In 2006, we received from the ERQ a draft version of a proposed liturgical form for Profession of Faith, and soliciting our feedback.

Some of our suggestions included strengthening the promise to submit to the spiritual authority of the church by including an explicit promise to submit to the discipline of the office-bearers; and a more explicit affirmation to accept *the doctrine* of the Word of God. Since confessional membership is at stake in the wording of this form, we were grateful to notice that these suggestions had been taken into consideration in a more recent revision of the proposed form, which includes a promise to “submit willingly to the spiritual authority and discipline of this Church in all things, according to Scripture,” and also the question “Do you believe wholeheartedly that the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God, the only infallible rule for your faith and life, and that its doctrine of salvation is taught faithfully in this Christian Church?”

Although the matter of confessional membership will continue to be an item of discussion with the ERQ’s Interchurch Committee, the formulation of the questions in this proposed form for Profession of Faith does imply some form of confessional membership. At the time of when this Report to General Synod was prepared, however, this liturgical form was still in draft form, and had not yet been submitted to the ERQ Synode for consideration and possible adoption.

5. Proposed Agreement

5.1 *The Intention*

In view of the need for the ERQ to come to an internal consensus on some of the outstanding issues we were mandated to discuss with them, the suggestion was made to present to them a proposed statement of agreement on the matters of confessional membership and Lord’s Supper, for their consideration, with the hope that this would encourage the ERQ to come to an internal agreement that reflects our own position on these issues. Such a statement of agreement was also used in our history of relations with the OPC, and has been dealt with by General Synod, so our committee felt at liberty to borrow the text of this existing document and recommend it to the ERQ for their consideration.

5.2 *Letter to the ERQ Interchurch Committee*

Accordingly and in line with the above, the following letter was sent to the Interchurch Committee in June 2006:

Dear brothers in the Lord,

We believe that since it is our mutual desire to serve the Lord in accordance with His holy and inspired Word, as summarized in our Reformed confessions, we are duty-bound by our Lord

Jesus Christ to live together in communion and thus also in visible Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Within Canada, where secular humanism and immorality prevails we need to stand shoulder to shoulder helping and assisting each other, in our own cultural context, to serve the Lord in faithfulness, to be established in the truth and to proclaim the good news to those who no longer know the Lord. As Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas we have been mandated to work towards entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ.

We recognize your limitations as a small federation to respond to our questions when there are many other issues that have your attention. We therefore propose the following agreement that, the Lord willing, upon adoption by our respective churches, will open the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Please note that this proposed agreement is virtually the same as the one which allowed us to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in 2001. It is our prayer that the Lord will bless this effort and receive a favourable response from your committee and your churches.

Concerning Admittance to the celebration of the Lord's Supper
The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

Concerning Confessional Membership
The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

These statements are not intended to prevent further interaction and discussion on (perceived) differences in confession or other areas of church practice. It is understood that these discussions can take place within the relation of

Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the intent of mutual edification and encouragement in the faith to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph.4:3).

Supervision of the pulpit

Besides what is being proposed it would be beneficial, in view of our mandate to discuss and reiterate the Scriptural principles that determine pulpit supervision.

We would like to discuss these matters with you as soon as possible given the fact that we hope to recommend entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with you to Synod 2007.

On behalf of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (East)
Peter Feenstra

5.3 Response from the Interchurch Committee

At the end of August, our committee received the following response from the Interchurch Committee:

August 24, 2006

Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (East)

Dear brothers,

We would like to respond to your letter from May 2006 concerning a possible agreement for adoption by our respective churches. We are thankful for your desire to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and we share your concern to see mission of the Reformed churches advanced in North America.

The Inter-church Committee of the ERQ met on August 22nd and discussed the proposed agreement. While we appreciate the general direction of the points mentioned, we cannot sign on to the agreement or ask the ERQ synod to accept it without clarifying particular terms and practices. With that in mind, we would like to explain the practice of the ERQ. While we recognize the need for reform according to Biblical and confessional principals, we do believe that the present practices are within the bounds of Scriptural requirements. Your committee will need to decide if our practice is in accord with the spirit and intent of the agreement as well as the expectations of the Canadian Reformed Churches for full sister church fellowship. We would welcome further discussion of these points as we mutually seek to be faithful churches of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Concerning Admittance to the celebration of the Lord's Supper

The ERQ agrees that we must not profane the table of our Lord, and consequently, the elders of the local church must supervise its administration. As you are already aware, the Ministerial Committee of the ERQ has been mandated by the synod to study the issue of administering the Lord's Supper and to guide the local councils. Admittedly, the committee has been slow to work on this mandate. Nonetheless, the issue is being discussed, different points of view are being exchanged, our thoughts are maturing, and, with time, we imagine that some changes (reforms) will be made.

The present practice of the ERQ congregations involves celebrating monthly communion during which the pastor addresses a clear verbal invitation and warning to all those who are present. Baptised members of the congregation are not received at the Lord's Table until they have professed their faith. Neither are excommunicated members received until they have been restored through public profession. With respect to visitors, the same verbal invitation and warning are addressed without requiring a written attestation. In some of our congregations, a follow-up is made of those visitors who attend more regularly the worship service concerning their participation at the Lord's Table.

Concerning Confessional Membership

While we recognize the necessity that the church contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3; Romans 16.17), we do believe that the burden of this defence falls upon the elders and pastors (Acts 20.28-31; 1 Timothy 1.10-11; 3.2; 6.18; 2 Timothy 1.12, 14; 2.2; 4.3-5; Titus 1.9).

In the ERQ, professing members do receive the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. We also expect members to be willing to be instructed in the Reformed faith as it is received through the preaching each Sunday and through various forms of catechetical instruction. However, at present, we do not require professing members to be bound to or to adhere to the Reformed doctrine articulated in our confessions.

As you are well aware, the synod of the ERQ has mandated an ad hoc liturgy committee to prepare an official liturgy for the public profession of faith. The articulation and adoption of the first question concerning the professing member's responsibility vis-à-vis the confessions of the church will indicate the official position of the ERQ with respect to confessional membership. The initial proposal of the committee – *"Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures, Old and*

New Testaments, are the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life, and do you whole-heartedly accept to grow in the faith (doctrine) professed in this Church?" – was generally well received by the synod.

Supervision of the pulpit

The supervision of the preaching of God's Word is the responsibility of the local council of elders. Where a local council of elders does not exist, a provisional council is established. We are thankful to report that in the past years, two congregations have ordained or installed elders, and a third congregation is training two men for eldership. The establishment of more local councils ensures greater supervision of the pulpit.

The synod examines and approves candidates for the ministry, and approves their ordination once they receive a first call from a local congregation. (Church Order ERQ 2.3.4; 2.3.9; 3.2.4; 3.3.4). With respect to pulpit supply during the absence of a pastor, the local council decides who may or may not preach. Most of the councils have restricted themselves to ordained ERQ pastors and approved candidates, while a limited number of councils have permitted non-ERQ pastors to fill their pulpits.

We hope and pray that these explications will satisfy the requirements of your synod so that the ERQ may be received into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. As you are well aware, the ERQ synod has already recognized and received your federation as a faithful, sister church. Local ERQ congregations have invited and received visiting members from Canadian Reformed Churches at the table of our Lord. For several years, your federation has worked cooperatively in supporting the ERQ denomination as well as the mission work of the Owen Sound and St-Georges congregations. Furthermore, the ERQ synod mandated the ad hoc liturgy committee to consult with your federation, as well as other denominations, in fulfilling its mandate. In short, we already function as sister churches on several levels. While further discussion with respect to our confessional and practice differences will be necessary in order to edify our two federations, we hope that these interactions may take place in the context of full sister church fellowship.

May the Lord bless and direct your deliberations for the glory of his name.

Ben Westerveld
for the Interchurch Committee of the ERQ

5.4 Meeting with the Interchurch Committee on September 30, 2006

On September 30, 2006, three members of the CCCA sub-committee East drove to Quebec City to meet with the two representatives of the Interchurch Committee, Rev. Ben Westerveld and elder Marc Drouin (Appendix 2). In this meeting, the benefits and importance of meaningful fraternal relations were affirmed, and to that end the discussion revolved around the three points mandated for discussion by General Synod.

1. *Confessional Membership*: The ERQ does not demand a strict confessional subscription of all members, but is trying to find a midway point between a Presbyterian and a continental Reformed approach. It is left to the freedom of local consistories to make a decision about what amount of knowledge required for public profession of faith is. Although the ERQ emphasizes the responsibility of the office-bearers with respect to teaching and defending pure doctrine, it maintains that all the members of the church have a responsibility with respect to doctrine and to contend for the faith, and that professing members must have the desire and willingness to grow in their knowledge of the Reformed faith, and be instructed in it.
2. *Supervision of the Lord's Supper*: As a matter of principle, the ERQ agrees that the elders have a responsibility to ensure that the Lord's Supper is not profaned, and that the consistory has the responsibility to exclude unbelievers. The precise practice of supervision might vary from congregation to congregation according to the local situation and the approach of each local consistory. At the very least, the ERQ guards the table by giving a verbal warning, so that individuals who have not confessed their faith in Christ or are living in sin are warned not to participate.
3. *Supervision of the Pulpit*: The formulation of a policy regarding an examination of ministers does imply that the ERQ is concerned about supervision of the pulpit. In the absence of a pastor, it is up to local councils to decide who may preach, and there are no commonly adopted principles that define this. In practice, it happens very infrequently that non-ERQ pastors preach.

6. Evaluation and Assessment of the Present State of Relations with the ERQ

In 2001, Synod considered that "the ERQ is faithful to the Word of God and brings the Reformed confessions and church order to expression in its own context." (Consideration 4.1) Further, "the ERQ in certain issues has established principles but varying practices in applying these principles. This does not constitute scriptural unfaithfulness. The ERQ is open to further discussion regarding various principles and

practices. This process must be encouraged.” (Consideration 4.3, Art. 22, Acts 2001, p14) The CCCA was charged to “work towards formalizing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship,” and that priority was to be given to discussing and clarifying pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord’s table, and confessional accountability (Recommendation 5.4.1, p15). It was reported to Synod 2004 that these discussions had not yet happened (Observation 3.1 Acts 2004, p20), and so the mandate was renewed. This clarification has now happened:

1. *Evaluation regarding confessional membership.* The ERQ is a confessional church. With respect to doctrine, the ERQ does emphasize the role of the elders more, and confessional subscription is explicitly required of the office-bearers, since the confessions faithfully summarize the doctrine of God’s Word. At the same time it is understood that members in the local churches have the duty to receive this doctrine and be willing to be instructed in it. In reality, this functions in the same way as it does in other churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship, such as the OPC.
2. *Evaluation regarding supervision of the Lord’s Supper.* The ERQ affirms that the elders have the duty to supervise admission to the Lord’s Supper, and to exclude unbelievers. Although their practice is different from our own, it can be said that discipline is exercised, and supervision is also applied to guests.
3. *Evaluation regarding supervision of the pulpit.* Local consistories exercise supervision of the preaching, and the elders have a special responsibility with respect to the faithful proclamation of the Word.

It can not be denied that there is some diversity within the ERQ, and that the ERQ does not have a clearly articulated and formalized or official position on every issue. Despite this, the overall direction of the ERQ is positive, and there is a clear and ongoing development toward becoming a more confessionally Reformed church. One also needs to bear in mind the reasons for the diversity within the ERQ, in particular on account of the diverse ecclesiastical backgrounds of members and guests which inevitably result from a mission-type context. As a result, the ERQ is regularly faced with situations that are more the exception in established churches like our own, where in most cases those who profess their faith are children from believing families who have grown up in established churches and received Reformed instruction from youth. It also needs to be remembered that having a council of elders is only a recent development in some ERQ congregations.

Moreover, uniformity on every point cannot become a condition for ecclesiastical fellowship; what is demanded is a unity of faith and doctrine, and an agreement on principles. With respect to the ERQ, our churches have identified various issues for discussion, many of

which were concluded by the time of General Synod 2001, and recommended for further discussion within the context of ecclesiastical fellowship (Consideration 4.4, Acts 2001, p14). Since 2001, the goal of ecclesiastical fellowship was clearly expressed, and our committee was mandated to especially focus on the matters of confessional membership, fencing of the Lord's Supper, and pulpit supervision. Although there had been a report on these matters already in 1998, the ERQ's position on these issues needed to be clarified and confirmed, and it is evident from the Report to Synod 2001 and to Synod 2004 that these matters had not really been revisited in discussions.

This discussion and clarification has now taken place. It has become clear from our discussions that although the practices in ERQ and the Canadian Reformed Churches are not identical, their position mirrors what the Canadian Reformed Churches have agreed to in discussions with the OPC, and that in this respect that there is an agreement on the same principles. To live up to Biblical and confessional principles in practice is a challenge that faces both of our federations. As such ongoing discussions should occur in the context of ecclesiastical fellowship. In this way we would be taking an approach consistent with our fraternal relations with other Reformed churches in North America. Furthermore, it can be said that the ERQ has moved in a more confessionally Reformed direction over the last decade.

It was originally the ERQ that initiated an invitation for ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC in 1997. It now appears that the obstacles to accepting this invitation have been removed. This does not remove the need for further discussions. A relationship of Ecclesiastical fellowship should be meaningful and practical, and promote growth in the unity of faith and a mutual working together to assist one another in defence of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, and other aspects of church life. In short, our recommendation implies that our work as committee is not complete. Differences in practice should not disappear from the agenda once ecclesiastical fellowship is established. It is understood that a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship be a living reality, as implied by the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship.

7. Financial support

The subcommittee would fail in fulfilling its mandate if this report ended without a reminder of the ongoing need to encourage individual members and congregations in the Canadian Reformed Churches "to continue supporting the ERQ financially" (*Acts General Synod 2004* p. 22). The ERQ as a whole continues to operate under financial deficit due to the small number of members and despite conservative fiscal policies and prudent management. Few local congregations are financially self-sufficient, and more than one local church has experienced a financial shortfall. There is also a financial need with

respect to Institut Farel, although our churches should be aware that this is not an official seminary, despite the fact that there is a significant involvement of ERQ personnel in its operation.

8. Recommendations

Our committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To express gratitude for the work of the Lord in the ERQ, for their commitment to the Reformed faith, and for their efforts to come to a consensus about some of the outstanding issues, as this is evident in their efforts to adopt liturgical forms.
2. To enter into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules.
3. To mandate the CCCA:
 - a) To convey this decision to the next ERQ Synode, via the Interchurch Committee.
 - b) To actively engage in the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules.
 - c) To express to the Interchurch Committee a willingness to provide encouragement and assistance in the adoption of liturgical forms, and in other such matters, and to provide this assistance where possible.
 - d) To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made on matters of confession, church polity, liturgy, and mission.
 - e) To continue discussion on existing differences in confession and practice with a particular focus on admission to the Lord's Supper and confessional accountability.
 - f) To meet and have contact with the Interchurch Committee as often as is feasible for this purpose, but bearing in mind the limited manpower of the ERQ.
 - g) To encourage the churches to continue supporting the ERQ financially, when needed, and prayerfully.

9. Appendices

1. Report on visit to the Synod of the ERQ (November, 2005) - R.A. Faber & P.G. Feenstra
2. Report on visit with Committee for Inter-Church Relations of ERQ (September 30, 2006) – Subcommittee East

**Appendix 1: Report on visit to the Synod of the ERQ (November, 2005)
- R.A. Faber & P.G. Feenstra**

The broad assembly of the ERQ, a federation consisting of seven congregations, is called "synode," a term that should not be understood as equivalent to "synod" in our federation. Given the size and relative young age of the denomination, the quarterly "synodes" also treat matters that would appear on the agenda of classes in the Canadian Reformed Churches, and generally last two days. In 2005 the ERQ invited us to attend the November Synode as observers; delegated were Rev. P. G. Feenstra and the undersigned (who was asked to serve on the CCCA when a synodically-appointed brother had declined, in 2004).

One of the highlights was the first attendance of *pasteur* Jason Zuidema, who had been ordained as minister of the congregation at Repentigny. As usual, delegates of the seven consistories were given the opportunity to report on developments in their congregations: the size of the obstacles and the amount of opportunities facing the small and financially-challenged congregations were not lost upon the observers. In closed session Synode deliberated upon a matter of church discipline.

The next day's activities began with devotions; when Synode was reconvened, the *observateurs* were invited to address the assembly. The unity of the faith and the bond we share with the ERQ were mentioned especially in our address; the questions posed revealed the Synode's interest in the growing relations between the federations. The remainder of Synode treated reports of various committees, notably the Committee for the Ministry (re procedures of examination, ordination, and installation of candidates for the ministry), the Committee for Education (which is responsible for disseminating materials of use to the men in ordained office), and the Interchurch Committee. In both the formal meeting of Synode and in informal conversation, delegates enquired about church polity and liturgical practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches. The observing brothers could report to the committee that the visit served to advance our relationship with ERQ.

-R. Faber

Appendix 2: Report on visit with Committee for Inter-Church Relations of ERQ (September 30, 2006) – Subcommittee East

On September 30, 2006, three members of the CCCA sub-committee East drove to Quebec City to meet with the ERQ's Interchurch Committee. Of the three members of the Interchurch Committee, present were Rev. Ben Westerveld and elder Marc Drouin. Dr. Riemer Faber, Rev. Peter Feenstra and Rev. Richard Pot were representing the CCCA-East. The meeting was opened with the reading of Titus 1:1-4, some meditative reflections, and prayer.

Benefits of Contact

The discussion was opened by reflecting on the value of fraternal relations and ecclesiastical contact. It was noted that it is our calling to unite with fellow believers of the true faith, in a meaningful way to help and assist each other. This especially applies in the context of our own country Canada, to help each other in our witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a secular culture. This is the broader perspective that is the context for our discussions between the ERQ and CanRC.

It is remarked that there is an increasing awareness about each other: the ERQ does on occasion refer people to CanRC churches when they travel in Ontario, and CanRC visitors from Ontario occasionally worship in ERQ churches. This kind of contact is encouraging. The instructional material prepared by Rev. Bédard is also being used in other churches, and he also publishes regularly in the ERQ magazine. The ERQ also has some corresponding contact with the PCA, URC and OPC and some of their churches also give financial support.

The ERQ presently consists of six churches, and the total membership is around 300. Growth in the ERQ often includes people from varying ecclesiastical backgrounds, and this diversity arising from a mission context creates its own challenges.

Confessional Membership

The ERQ is presently in the process of adopting a proposed form for public profession of faith. The CanRC expressed appreciation for some of the more recent revisions made to this document. Discussion initially addressed the first question of the form, and the implications this has for confessional membership. The ERQ does not demand a strict confessional subscription of all members, but is trying to find a midway point between a Presbyterian and a continental Reformed approach. In their view, Scripture suggests that a growth of doctrine is required, and yet those who had an elementary knowledge of doctrine were already at the Lord's Table. It is left to the freedom of local consistories to make a decision about what the amount of knowledge required for public profession of faith is.

The ERQ also believes that all the members of the church have a responsibility with respect to doctrine and to contend for the faith, as required by Scripture in the book of Jude. However, they point to passages in Scripture which indicate that especially the elders and pastors have a responsibility to hold to sound doctrine, and that exhortations with respect to holding to the pure doctrine are often addressed particularly to the office-bearers (e.g. Timothy). This is why in the ERQ office-bearers are required to study and sign the confessions, and to know them completely, whereas this is not the case in the same way for individual members of the church. The responsibility of professing members in the ERQ is to have the desire and willingness to grow in their knowledge of the Reformed faith, and be instructed in it.

The CanRC note that in the CanRC the confessions also play a role with a respect to church discipline. In most cases where people are questioning Reformed doctrine, the discipline functions first through preaching and teaching, but it could become a matter of discipline if they start undermining the preaching. All believers have the responsibility to adhere to the truth of God's Word; this is in part a response to Roman Catholicism, because we want to avoid a clergy-laity distinction where only those in office have a responsibility with respect to doctrine.

The matter of confessional membership in connection with public profession of faith is also faced by the ERQ in a more direct way than the CanRC, where in most cases those who profess their faith are children from believing families who have grown up in established churches. Most people in the ERQ have not received Reformed instruction from youth, but come from a variety of ecclesiastical backgrounds.

Supervision of the Lord's Supper

A discussion is held about the responsibility of the consistory with regards to the supervision of the Lord's Supper. In the ERQ it is understood that the consistory does have this responsibility. We realize that we can not look into people's hearts, but at the same time those who by confession or life show themselves to be unbelieving or ungodly are to be excluded. The ERQ has not formulated official policies on this issue. It is quite common that ERQ churches have regular visitors and adherents, and these usually attend Lord's Supper. With respect to guests, the ERQ guards the table by giving a verbal warning, so that individuals who have not confessed their faith in Christ or are living in sin are warned not to participate. In at least one congregation, the names of visitors who intend to participate are also announced. The precise practice of supervision might vary from congregation to congregation according to the local situation and the approach of each local consistory. Certainly the ERQ's practice is different than the practice within the CanRC, but the ERQ agrees that the elders have a responsibility to ensure that the Lord's Supper is not profaned. The difficult question is how does this principle work in practice. Certainly there

have been instances in the ERQ where members were excluded as a result of excommunication, and also where guests were excluded. Regular visitors are visited by the elders, and if the elders perceive that their faith is questionable, they are requested not to attend.

It is admitted from both sides that the challenge is for us to live up to our principles and to work them out in practice. The CanRC acknowledge that despite the benefits of the CanRC practice in this regard, the role of self-examination may appear to be less prominent. Nonetheless, it is important that we have a principle that we can go to. The Interchurch Committee members of the ERQ do not think there would be resistance within the ERQ to the text of the proposed agreement on this point. It also needs to be remembered that having a council of elders is only a recent development in some ERQ congregations; further, the character of members and guests in the ERQ is quite different than CanRC, so some of these practical issues are usually not faced in the CanRC. The CanRC practice especially can be appreciated in a context where there are well-established churches and members who have been brought up in the Reformed faith since childhood.

Supervision of the Pulpit

Appreciation is expressed for the ERQ practices in connection with the ecclesiastical exam prior to ordination; the formulation of a policy regarding an examination of ministers does imply that the ERQ is concerned about supervision of the pulpit. In the absence of a pastor, local councils decide who may preach; but there aren't any commonly adopted principles that define this. In one congregation, the consistory has agreed only to invite preachers who subscribe to the Reformed confessions. In practice, it happens very infrequently that non-ERQ pastors preach, in part because of the language barrier. But there are no uniform practices on this point, and this is a matter left to the local consistory. It is expected that perhaps over time a uniform practice might be adopted as a result of the work of the Ministerial Committee, but this committee has many other projects to work with already.

The CanRC suggest that the principle behind their practice is the importance of doctrinal unity. A positive advantage of ecclesiastical fellowship is that it ensures that the respective churches can be confident that this doctrinal unity is in place when inviting a guest minister from another federation. Although there might be different styles of preaching in different churches, there is a confessional and doctrinal unity.

Ecclesiastical Fellowship

It is pointed out that it was originally the ERQ that initiated an invitation for ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC in 1997. Although the ERQ continues to see many benefits to such a relationship, it has to be admitted that not everyone in the ERQ would see the value of this. From a CanRC

perspective, it is regarded as a Biblical mandate that we should seek unity, and such fraternal relationships should be meaningful and practical, and not just theoretical.

The CanRC reaffirmed the decision of a previous General Synod that a move towards ecclesiastical fellowship would not necessitate an insistence upon federational and organic unity, and that given the unique cultural context of the ERQ, the goal for the CanRC at this time is to foster meaningful fraternal relations, rather than to become one federation.

Rev. Ben Westerveld closed the meeting in prayer of intercession and thanksgiving. Following the meeting and in the course of a 12 hour drive home, we could reflect on a fruitful meeting, gratefully recognizing that within the ERQ there is a clear desire to be a confessionally Reformed church.

-R.E. Pot

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 2: The Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA) - Kosin

1. Mandate

General Synod Chatham 2004 gave the CCCA the mandate: (p. 23) “to contact the Korean Presbyterian Churches in North America with the help of our sister churches in Korea.”

2. Contact

With the help of Dr. S.G. Hur, former principal of the PCK’s seminary in Pusan, we were successfully able to make some initial email contact with some of the ministers of the Korean Presbyterian Churches in America (Kosin). A member of sub-committee West also spoke with one of the delegates of the KPCA (Kosin) at NAPARC in 2004, and subsequently obtained a copy of the 2004-2005 edition of their church directory, which for the most part is published in Korean. No delegates of the KPCA attended NAPARC in 2005. Further attempts at contact have not proven very fruitful.

3. Information

The KPCA (Kosin) church directory uses the official designation “Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin).” One of our contacts informed us that “Our denomination has about 100 churches and 150 ministers and three denominational affiliated seminaries.” From what we can gather from the church directory, the KPCA consists of six presbyteries, and most of their churches are in the United States. The affiliated seminaries appear to be located in New Jersey and California. Their most recent General Assembly was held on October 25-28, 2005, in Houston, Texas, and our understanding is that proceedings are conducted in Korean. Their official website is also published exclusively in Korean (NB: The original domain name has recently expired, and appears to have been replaced with <http://www.kosinusa.org>.)

4. Considerations

Members of the OPC’s Committee for Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations have testified to us that their contact with the KPCA has been severely hampered by cultural and language barriers, and that we need to be realistic about the significant cultural barriers associated with a first-generation immigrant community from Korea. In view of these considerations, at the present time it does not seem fruitful to actively pursue contact with the KPCA. Until contact with these young immigrant daughter churches of the PCK can be meaningful and fruitful, it seems responsible to be satisfied with the contact that the CRCA already has with the PCK.

5. Recommendation

The committee recommends that Synod decide not to renew the mandate to actively pursue contact with the KPCA (Kosin).

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 3: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

1. Mandate

General Synod Chatham 2004 decided the following with respect to the CCCA and OPC: (p. 84)

1. To thank the CCCA for its work in our contact with the OPC;
2. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules;
3. To continue the contact with the OPC by the CCCA with the mandate to continue the discussions on the existing differences in confession and church polity as noted in the Considerations 4.2-4.4;
4. To endeavour to meet with the CEIR at least once a year;
5. To publish a synopsis of the discussions on the various issues and of the positions papers which have been written over the past twenty years.

2. Discussion of Outstanding Issues

From the mandate, it was evident that continued discussion was necessary with the OPC on the existing differences in confession and church polity as noted in Considerations 4.2-4.4 of the Acts of Synod 2004, Art. 89. These Considerations also reflected that the goal (4.2), focus (4.3), and priority (4.4) of these discussions were to be as follows:

1. The *goal* of discussions is: “to determine whether the unity of the faith regarding the church, the covenant and the sacraments is adequately and faithfully expressed in our confessional standards, as already implied in Article 45, Consideration 4.11 of the Acts Synod Neerlandia 2001.” (Consideration 4.2)
2. The *focus* of discussions is to be two-fold: (Consideration 4.3)
 1. “on the one hand, the scriptural faithfulness in the confessions”
 2. “on the other hand, the actual application in the reality of church-life, i.e. how the principles are put into practice, or should be put into practice.”
3. The *priority* in discussions is to be: (Consideration 4.4)
 1. “The two points of the joint agreement, namely, the supervision of the Lord’s Table and confessional membership, as amended by Synod Fergus 1998;”
 2. “The way in which the doctrine regarding covenant and church relate to these matters.”

Now that we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, continued discussions about existing differences are important so that we might grow in the unity of the faith. At the same time, we must recognize that we are in a new phase in our relationship with the OPC. Many previous discussions were prior to entering into ecclesiastical fellowship, and

consequently focused on identifying what matters were impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship, and ensuring that there was sufficient agreement and unity of faith on these issues in order to enter ecclesiastical fellowship. Now in the context of ecclesiastical fellowship, further discussion can continue on these outstanding differences that were not impediments to ecclesiastical unity, in order to further grow in understanding and unity in the faith, and assist each other as churches in the context of ecclesiastical fellowship.

At the same time, it is important that previous discussions not be duplicated, but that we build on the work and discussions of the past. Many of these issues have already been discussed throughout the years, so we should not merely rehash what has already been said. Before continuing discussions with the OPC in this new phase of our relationship, having a good understanding of previous discussions is essential, to avoid merely repeating them, and to ensure that there is progress in the relationship. Our committee was mandated by Synod to prepare a synopsis of previous discussions with the OPC, and the subcommittee decided to complete this project first, in order to help us to determine what matters needed *further* discussion, and what matters have been *sufficiently* discussed, so fostering fruitful discussions with the OPC and making progress in our contact with them. A synopsis not only serves the purpose of being helpful to our own church federation, but sharing a synopsis with the CEIR will also help us fulfil our mandate by promoting positive discussions with the OPC, having first clarified the progress already made in previous discussions.

3. Synopsis

3.1 *Mandate*

The mandate “to publish a synopsis of the discussions on the various issues and of the position papers that have been written over the past twenty years” arose from the consideration of General Synod Chatham that although “many of the issues have been discussed and many position papers have been written and presented to the CEIR, yet in their letters the churches express a lack of knowledge about the discussions and papers ?... It would be beneficial for the churches to receive the evidence of these discussions and their outcome.” (Art. 89, Consideration 4.1).

3.2 *Challenges with respect to content*

It appears that the content of this synopsis was to consist of more than a mere summery of synod reports and decisions, but was to include reference to the content of the internal discussions between the OPC and CanRC committees. Within our committee there was discussion about whether it would be appropriate for such

internal “in progress” discussion papers at the committee level to go into the public domain, since they might gain an official status beyond their original intention. At any rate, it became apparent that the record of previous discussions and discussion papers was neither comprehensive nor complete, despite our best efforts to obtain this material from various sources. For example, some of the discussion papers mentioned in committee reports are no longer available. At the same time, it can be noted that much of the reports of the committee presented to Synod throughout the years accurately reflect the main points of internal discussions. In view of the limited material we had to work with, it seemed best to restrict ourselves to the official record of previous discussions. Nonetheless, it seems prudent that we draw the attention of Synod to the more general matter of archive-keeping of the various synodical committees, and perhaps to address this.

3.3 *Challenges with respect to intent*

The intention behind the mandate to create a synopsis was not entirely clear to our committee, primarily because there appeared to be some internal inconsistency in the Acts of Synod 2004 regarding its purpose. It seems that the idea of a synopsis apparently did not come up in connection with the OPC, but in connection with the FCS and the PCK, and that this mandate arose in connection with differences between the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity, and not in connection with divergencies discussed with the OPC in the last twenty years. Other parts of the Acts shed further light on what the idea behind the synopsis really is. Regarding the FCS, Synod 2004 observed “The church at London requests to keep the FCS and PCK informed about the progress of our discussions with the OPC regarding the evaluation of confessional divergences.” (Acts, Art 43, Observation 3.7, page 45). From this came the following Consideration: “The request of the Church at London would help the churches to coordinate the discussions with the various church federations with which we have fellowship about the differences between the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity. In our relationship with the OPC we have discussed these differences for many years. It would be helpful for the churches to have a synopsis of these discussions, so that we can share the information for the benefit of all involved.” (Acts, Art. 43 Consideration 4.6, page 46). The same observation and consideration were made with respect to the PCK (Acts, Art. 59, Consideration 4.4, page 54). This created somewhat of a dilemma for our committee:

1. The way the mandate to prepare a synopsis came about (as evident from the decision dealing with the FCS and PCK) suggests that its focus is to be confessional differences. But discussion on these confessional differences occurred with the

OPC more than 20 years ago, and we have little record of these discussions apart from the official record in the Acts of Synod.

2. The actual mandate to prepare a synopsis only addresses the last 20 years of discussions with the OPC, which for the most part did not deal with confessional differences, but focused more on discussion regarding confessional membership and fencing of the Lord's table.

Since the mandate did not seem to accurately reflect the way the idea of a synopsis originated, it was decided to make a comprehensive synopsis, and attempt to sum up all previous discussions with the OPC, focusing on the official reports and decisions of Synod, but without restricting ourselves to the last twenty years of discussion. In this way the synopsis would also include a summary of the discussions regarding confessional differences, and so potentially prove useful in other contexts as well.

3.4 *Preparation of synopsis*

The preparation of this synopsis required a realistic timeframe. As subcommittee, we agreed on the following plan of action with respect to the preparation and use of the synopsis:

1. Stage 1: *Abridgement*. Complete the index and synopsis of discussions and positions of the OPC and CanRC on all topics discussed in the history of contacts with the OPC.
2. Stage 2: *Assessment*. Evaluate this synopsis internally as a subcommittee, to determine what has been agreed by both OPC and CanRC on these topics.
3. Stage 3: *Agreement*. Meet with the CEIR to discuss this synopsis, to determine whether we can agree to its accuracy and that it reflects the current position of the CanRC and OPC, and so enable future discussions to build upon what has already been agreed upon without rehashing previous discussion.
4. Stage 4: *Advancement*. Meet with the CEIR and progress in discussions beyond what has already been agreed upon and discussed previously.

At the present time the synopsis has just been completed, and we are now at the point where we can share it with the CEIR, and work toward meeting with them and promote ongoing discussions which build on the work of the past.

As it stands, the synopsis is appended to this report, and covers all the significant topics that were the subject of discussion with the OPC from 1965-2004, including but not limited to confessional and church political differences:

- A. Visible and Invisible Church
- B. Assurance of Faith
- C. Covenant of Grace
- D. Descent into Hell
- E. Sabbath Observance and Explanation of the Law
- F. Church Polity
- G. OPC and third-party relationships
- H. The Shepherd Case
- I. The Hofford Case
- J. The Blue Bell Controversy and Laurel
- K. "Fencing" the Lord's Supper (and Confessional Membership)
- L. Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

4. Contact and Meetings

4.1 *General contact*

Aside from occasional email and telephone communication, contact with the OPC included the exchange of information, such as the receipt of the *Minutes* of the annual General Assemblies, regular editions of the *New Horizons* periodical, and also a recently published book with the Westminster Confession of Faith and proof-texts. It is also encouraging to note that delegates from the OPC attend meetings of our local Classes as fraternal observers.

Based on past experience, it was considered that the recommendation to meet annually with the CEIR might not be feasible for the OPC brothers. A meeting was held with the CEIR on April 7, 2005, and another is tentatively planned for November 2006, in conjunction with NAPARC.

4.2 *Meeting with CEIR on April 7, 2005*

Three members of subcommittee East traveled to Philadelphia for a meeting with CEIR on April 7, 2005. The previous meeting with the CEIR had been on April 15, 2003. Our committee was still working on the synopsis at this point, so in line with our plan of action with regard to future discussions with the OPC, we did not address the topics that would be covered in the synopsis. The CEIR welcomed our suggestion to prepare a synopsis, to share it with them upon completion, and subsequently discuss some of issues it addressed in a fruitful and upbuilding manner. Discussion at this meeting reviewed some of the more significant decisions of our respective broader assemblies, as well as matters that were of mutual concern and interest, such as the benefits of NAPARC, and inter-church relations with other federations such as the URCNA,

and the RCN. In connection with a discussion on church planting, it was also agreed that there should be good consultation on a local level before beginning a new project in an area where there is an established and faithful Reformed church. Underlying our approach to issues like this is a Biblical doctrine of the church. The atmosphere and tone of discussion throughout the course of this meeting was very positive and upbuilding. We hope that future discussions with the OPC can continue in this positive vein.

5. General Assemblies of the OPC

Prior to each General Assembly, our committee received a warm invitation to send a fraternal delegate to the GA. We were unable to have delegates present at the General Assembly in 2004, and circumstances also made it impossible to attend the General Assembly in 2006. The customary practice in such cases is to send a fraternal letter of greeting. Two members of our sub-committee did attend the 2005 General Assembly. We also received copies of the *Minutes* of each General Assembly upon their publication. The churches of our federation were informed prior to each General Assembly of the OPC, so that the local churches could commend the work of these assemblies to the Lord in public prayer.

5.1 71st General Assembly – June 2004

The 71st General Assembly of the OPC was held June 2-9, 2004 in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, commencing with a worship service, as is the custom in the OPC. As well as the regular reports from the various Committees, several decisions were of special interest. A substantial report regarding the doctrine of creation was submitted to this GA, affirming the historicity of the entire book of Genesis, and excluding Theistic evolution. In connection with ecclesiastical examinations, it was noted that Presbyteries that examine candidates for the ministry should ensure that men are sound in their doctrine of Scripture, creation, and providence. Reports such as this one can be downloaded from the official OPC website, www.opc.org.

In response to an overture from a Presbytery, the GA also adopted a “Declaration on Justification,” which was subsequently disseminated to all the sister churches of the OPC. This statement concisely states that the OPC “i. declares its continued commitment to the teaching of the Word of God, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with regards to the doctrine of justification by faith alone; ii. reaffirms that faith, which is a gift of God, is the sole instrument of justification.” The doctrine of justification by faith alone was affirmed by quoting the relevant portions of the Westminster Standards which confess this Reformed doctrine. At the same time, the GA erected a study committee “to critique the teachings of the New Perspective on

Paul, Federal Vision, and other like teachings concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines.” As a confessional church, the OPC wants to defend and promote the historical Reformed doctrine on this point.

Finally, of further note is the fact that the OPC was currently in the process of revising their Directory of Worship, but this was not yet finalized.

5.2 72nd General Assembly – June 2005

The 72nd General Assembly of the OPC was held on June 1-8, 2005, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Two members of subcommittee East, Dr. R.A. Faber and Rev. R.E. Pot, attended part of this GA, where we were seated as fraternal delegates, and given the privilege of the floor on all matters as well as the opportunity to address the assembly with fraternal greetings. The agenda mostly consisted of reports from various OPC Committees, including a substantial report from the Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Worship, a project that had been ongoing for some time. The Committee appointed to study the doctrine of justification reported briefly that its work was still ongoing, and its mandate was extended for another year.

One of the most sensitive and difficult matters dealt with by this GA was the proposal of the Committee on Foreign Missions to intermit (terminate) the mission work in Japan. An overture was received from one Presbytery, urging that this work be continued. The OPC has carried out work in Japan for more than 50 years, and given that the Reformed Church in Japan is now relatively independent, it was decided to intermit the mission work there.

Of special interest to the Canadian Reformed Churches was the decision of this GA *not* to accept the invitation of our sister churches in the Netherlands (the GKN-V) to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship, in view of some concerns with respect to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, for example in connection with the GKN-V's report on divorce and remarriage. It appears that subsequent to this GA, some of these concerns have been addressed and cleared up, but the official Minutes of the next General Assembly are not yet available to us.

5.3 73rd General Assembly – June 2006

The 73rd General Assembly of the OPC was held June 2006 in Chicago Ill. The lengthy docket included such usual agenda items as the reports from the Committee on Foreign Missions and the Committee on Christian Education, the latter of which noted the continuous need to prepare the next generation of ministers. The Committee

for Home Missions and Church Extension reported that it was able to support 28 projects and new congregations in 2005. General Assembly heard of the relief efforts provided by this Committee, and further mandated it to respond to future natural disasters with similar aid.

Another important report was that of the committee established to critique the New Perspective on Paul, the “Federal Vision”, and other modern teachings affecting the Reformed and Presbyterian faith in North America. The committee submitted its findings, which include the observation that at the heart of these two teachings is the conflation of the doctrines of justification and sanctification, so that the role of good works is misrepresented. The so-called Federal Vision, though including a range of ideas, also errs in including obedience in the definition of faith.

Of the several overtures brought to General Assembly, one of note to the Canadian Reformed churches is the approved request that the Committee on Christian Education examine the feasibility of providing the churches with a Psalter-Hymnal. The Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Public Worship continues to consider proposed amendments to the Directory in the Book of Church Order, and hopes to complete its work by year-end.

6. Recommendations

Our committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To consider the synopsis of previous discussions with the OPC as the completion of this part of the mandate, and to publish this with the Acts for the benefit of the churches.
2. To mandate the CCCA:
 - a) To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules.
 - b) To continue discussions on the existing differences as mandated by Synod Chatham 2004, making use of the synopsis to build on previous discussions without duplicating them.
 - c) To endeavour to meet with the CEIR as often as is feasible for this purpose.

7. Appendices

1. Synopsis of past discussions with OPC – Subcommittee East
2. Report on meeting with CEIR of the OPC (7 April, 2005) – Subcommittee East
3. Report on visit to 72nd General Assembly of the OPC in Grand Rapids (June, 2005) – Rev. R.E. Pot
Forthcoming: Report on visit with CEIR of the OPC (November, 2006) – Subcommittee East

Appendix 1: Synopsis of past discussions with OPC

Topical Summary of Various Issues and Position Papers which have been written over the years between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches (1965-2004)

1. Introduction

Synod 2004 (Chatham) adopted the proposal (Art. 88) regarding CCOPC to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules; to maintain the contact with the OPC by the CCCA with the mandate to continue discussions on existing differences in confession and church polity; to endeavour to meet with the CEIR at least yearly; and **“to publish a synopsis of the discussions on the various issues and of the position papers which have been written over the past twenty years (p. 84).”**

At the September 2004 plenary meeting of CCCA the last-mentioned decision was interpreted, and it advanced to sub-committee East, which in turn clarified the article’s intent and purpose. To this end the sub-committee considered also two statements in Art 88 4.1 (“lack of knowledge about the discussions and papers”; “beneficial for the churches to receive the evidence of these discussions and their outcome”), the contents of letters from various churches to Synod, and the increasing contacts with other Presbyterian churches that maintain the same confession as the OPC. Especially the submissions to Synod 2004 regarding relations with the FCS, and Synod’s considerations appear relevant to the decision to publish a synopsis. Consideration 4.6 of Article 43 (re FCS) notes that “it would be helpful for the churches to have a synopsis” of discussions about the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession, “so that we can share the information for the benefit of all involved.”

The sub-committee also made the following preliminary observations: discussion papers were written and exchanged in a spirit of work-in-progress between CEIR and CCOPC, and were not perceived as final products or intended for release into the public domain. The archives of the committee comprise letters (more or less formal), draft position papers on various matters of doctrine, confession, church polity, practice, and inter-church correspondence. Whereas these documents are valuable to the working of the committee and to the continued good relations between the OPC and the CanRC, they do not represent a specific stage in the history of inter-church relations. On the other hand, the reports submitted by CCOPC to General Synod, and the decisions that have been made at Synod, are the official documents pertaining to the Ecclesiastical Fellowship between OPC and CanRC.

The sub-committee also noted that whereas Synod 2004 (Chatham) determined it beneficial to publish a synopsis of the discussions of the past twenty years, in fact the most substantial and consequential discussions took place prior to 1984. In order to fulfil the mandate to provide a useful summary of the various issues and position papers, therefore, the sub-committee decided that such a summary should include discussions from the beginning of relations between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, in 1965. Indeed, it is Article 141 of Synod 1965 (Edmonton) that decided to appoint deputies who were to engage in a frank discussion with their counterparts in the OPC regarding the differences in confession and church-polity, and to test these differences in the light of God's Word (p. 30-31). The purpose of such discussion, Synod 1968 (Orangeville) stated, was to determine whether the differences "are of such a nature that they would prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Art. 154, Recommendation E.2., p. 51).

The various issues and position papers were discussed and produced in the context of discussing the "Confessional and Church Political Divergences" between the CCOPC and the CEIR. These Divergences were evaluated in the report to Acts 1971, Supplement V, p. 64ff. and communicated by letter in March 1972; in CEIR letter (April 14, 1976); and in CCOPC letter October 13, 1978. Synod 1977 (Coaldale) determined that these divergences do not form an impediment to recognizing the OPC as Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1977, Art. 91, II, Consideration H, p. 41). A conclusive "Evaluation of Divergences" was submitted by CCOPC to Synod 1986 (Appendix IIB, Acts 1986, p. 142-151). Synod 1992 affirmed that "the divergences?... have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed within the framework of church unity" (Art 72, Acts 1992, p. 55). This was re-affirmed by Synod 1998 (Art 130, Acts 1998, p. 148-149). Thus the following synopsis is intended to provide a sketch of the history of the main topics treated in the relations between the OPC and the CanRC, and as a summary of the conclusions that were drawn.

2. Topics

In sum, the confessional and church-political divergences and topics of discussion may be listed under the following headings:

- A. Visible and Invisible Church
- B. Assurance of Faith
- C. Covenant of Grace
- D. Descent into Hell
- E. Sabbath Observance and Explanation of the Law

- F. Church Polity
- G. OPC and third-party relationships
- H. The Shepherd Case
- I. The Hofford Case
- J. The Blue Bell Controversy and Laurel
- K. "Fencing" the Lord's Supper (and Confessional Membership)
- L. Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

A. *Visible and Invisible Church*

The CCOPC in its Report to Synod 1971 (Supplement IV, C.1, p. 61) observes that there appears to be a distinction between a visible and an invisible church in Presbyterian teaching (Ch. 25.1, 2 of Westminster Confession; Larger Catechism, Question and Answer 62, 64). It understands, however, that not two churches are meant but two aspects of one holy catholic church. The letter of the CEIR (Appendix 6, CCOPC report to Synod 1977, p. 96) explains that the Westminster Confession does differ from the Belgic Confession in that it takes account of degrees of purity within the visible church. In its published letter to CEIR (Report to Synod 1980, Appendix 5, p. 194), the CCOPC observes that the Canadian Reformed churches reject the very distinction between visible and invisible church, and not merely the dangers that may be inherent in such a distinction. In the Report to Synod 1983 (Appendix VIII, p. 306-7), the CCOPC reports the decision by CEIR to formulate a statement that the distinction between visible and invisible church in the Presbyterian teaching does not impede or undermine the biblical imperative for the organic unity of the visible church. In sum, the divergence in the doctrine of visible and invisible church is not of such a nature that it should prevent the CanRC from recognizing the OPC as a true church (CCOPC Report Appendix IIB, Acts 1986 = Clarion 34.10 1985, Clarion 34.11 1985).

B. *Assurance of Faith*

An apparent difference between the federations concerns the question: is assurance an essence of faith? Pointing to Westminster Confession Ch. 18, par. 3, the CCOPC reported to Synod 1971 (p. 61, C3) that the Confession does not speak of the "sure knowledge and firm confidence" of the faith as known to the continental confessions, but of subjective assurance as distinct from the commitment to Christ (cf. Canons of Dordt, Ch. 1:16). The impression may be given, from Ch. 18 of the Westminster Confession and from the Larger Catechism, Question and Answer 81, that personal assurance is a grace that is added to faith (Appendix 5, Report of CCOPC to Synod 1974, p. 104). In its Report to Synod 1977 (Appendix 6, p. 95-101), the CCOPC includes a letter from CEIR noting that

whereas the Heidelberg Catechism defines faith in terms of contrast to Roman Catholicism, the Westminster Confession harks back to the writing of Martin Bucer, in which saving faith is portrayed as entrustment to Christ (Acts 16:31). In its letter to CEIR (Appendix 5, Report to Synod 1980, p. 196), the CCOPC points out that according to the Canons of Dordt, Chapter 5, Art. 9 (and Chapter 5, Art. 4), assurance is essential to the faith. While the Canadian Reformed stress on the assurance as rooted in the work and person of Christ gives strength to the believer, the OPC perspective of assurance as not an essence of the faith is not a hindrance to unity (CCOPC Report Appendix IIB, Acts 1986 = *Clarion* 34.10 1985, *Clarion* 34.11 1985).

C. Covenant of Grace

In its Report to Synod 1971, the CCOPC (Supplement IV, C4, p. 61) expresses discomfort with the phrase, in the Larger Catechism, Art. 31, that the “covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the second Adam and in him with all the elect as his seed.” It concurs, however, with Art. 166 on infants, who are deemed “within the covenant and are to be baptized.” The committee notes that the Kuyperian thesis of a presumptive regeneration as ground for the baptism of infants has never been accepted in the OPC. In Appendix 5, p. 104, of its Report to Synod 1974, the CCOPC notes that Article 31 of the Larger Catechism gives the impression that the Lord made His covenant with the elect alone as represented by Christ. The committee recalls the events in Synod Sneek 1942 (Gereformeerde Kerken) which compelled preachers to teach presumptive regeneration of children in the covenant. In turn, the CEIR notes in a letter recorded in the CCOPC report to Synod 1977 (App. 6), that the absence of an explicit treatment of the doctrine of the covenant in the Three Forms of Unity is a deficiency; it may be accounted for historically, just as the dual emphasis in the Westminster Confession is historically coloured. The CCOPC, in its letter to CEIR (Appendix 5, Report to Synod 1980, p. 197) defends the emphasis on the covenant as apparent in the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism. Moreover, the emphasis on the covenant as being with the elect and their children may be read as responding to anabaptism.

Thus the concept of the covenant with the elect does not exclude the truth of the covenant established with believers and their seed (Report of CCOPC Appendix 8, Acts 1983, p. 307). Whereas there may be weaknesses of expression in the Westminster Standards regarding the doctrine of the covenant, the apparent difference ought not to be an impediment to unity (CCOPC Report Appendix IIB, Acts 1986 = *Clarion* 34.10 1985, *Clarion* 34.11 1985).

D. *Descent into Hell*

The CCOPC observed in its Report to Synod 1971 that the Larger Catechism's interpretation of the Creed's confession about Jesus' descent into hell as His stay "in the state of death and under the power of death" (L.C. A. 50), is different than the one in Q&A 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which explains it as Jesus' suffering of hellish agony and pain "during all His sufferings but especially on the cross." Though different, the CCOPC considered that this interpretation "cannot be considered to be contrary with the Word of God, and is therefore not rejectable" (p. 66), and affirming to the OPC that "both interpretations have had a place in the teachings of the Churches of the Reformation" (Acts 1974, p. 105). The CEIR agreed that they "would not want to label as unscriptural" the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism on this point, and observed that the Larger Catechism "does not seek to give a confessionally binding interpretation of a clause in the Apostles' Creed, but rather elaborates its understanding of what is involved in Christ's humiliation after his death by reference to this historic document," and expressed the hope that "this would not become a significant point of disunity" between the CanRC and OPC (Acts 1977, p. 97). This was affirmed by both churches in further correspondence, since there is "basic agreement" in the confession about Christ's humiliation; cf. CCOPC letter to OPC, October 13, 1978, (Acts 1980, p. 198), CEIR letter to CCOPC, October 25, 1983 (Acts 1986, p. 141).

E. *Sabbath Observance & Explanation of the Law*

Deputies to Synod 1968 noted the extensive treatment of the commandments in the Larger Catechism, and suggested that "several expressions used in the presentation of the 4th commandment in Answer 116-121 are questionable" (Acts, 1971, p. 62). The CCOPC reported to Synod 1971 that Answer 102-104 spell out the meaning of the ten commandments "in such a detailed fashion that for the trees the wood is hardly visible", but although they "prefer the interpretation of the commandments as given in the Heid. Cat., they do not feel free to state that the explanation presented by the L.C. deviates from the contents of Scripture and Confession" (p. 66). The CCOPC addressed this with the OPC in a letter of March 1972, questioning the detail of exposition, and "whether full justice is done to the progress in the history of salvation in the explanation of the fourth commandment," and asking "to be informed about the binding character of the details of the interpretation of the commandments as presented in Answer 102-148 of the Larger Catechism." (Acts 1974, p. 105) In a letter of April 14, 1976, the OPC responded by affirming the ongoing significance of the fourth commandment, and noting that the phrase "especially on the sabbath" in Q&A 103 suggests a movement in the direction of the kind of Sabbath

observance “documented in the Westminster catechisms.” (Acts 1977, p. 97-98) The CCOPC responded to the CEIR on this point in a letter of October 13, 1978 (Acts 1980, p. 198) - to which the CEIR replied, in a letter (October 25, 1983), that “On the Sabbath we are strict on paper but you are less strict; in practice the reverse seems to be true perhaps that is a caricature, but there is some truth there too.” (Acts 1986, p. 141).

The emphasis differs in that the OPC stresses Sabbath-keeping (as creation ordinance) in teaching, the CanRC stresses it in practice (Report of CCOPC Appendix 8, Acts 1983). Whereas the committee observes influences of Puritanism in observance of the Sunday, the difference in emphasis is not an impediment to unity (CCOPC Report Appendix IIB, Acts 1986 = *Clarion* 34.10 1985, *Clarion* 34.11 1985).

F. Church Polity

Synod 1968 received a report from the CCOPC noting extensive discussion about differences in church-government between the OPC and CanRC. Several points “showed that considerable differences exist between the two churches in the implementation of the kingship of the Lord Jesus over His church. But as to the great principle of scriptural church-polity: the complete sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, as the Head over His body: the Church, and consequently of the Word of Christ as sole rule for doctrine and life, no difference existed” (Acts 1971, p. 62). Mandated to scrutinize these divergences in church polity, in their report to Synod 1971, the CCOPC examined some differences, such as the authority of major assemblies, “the special place of the presbytery among the Church assemblies” and “the special place of the ministers among the office bearers of the church” (p. 66-68). The CCOPC concluded that “there is no difference in the essential truth of Christ’s headship over His church and of the absolute authority which His Word should have in the government of the church” (p. 68). The divergencies in church polity nonetheless were to “remain the subject of further and frank discussion” (Acts 1971, p. 44), and accordingly in a letter of March 1972, the CCOPC interacted with Scripture and the Church Order to address the following differences with the OPC: 1. “a difference in understanding of the relation between the local Churches and the Church universal”, i.e., the CanRC’s Church Order “proceeds from the principle of the completeness and ‘autonomy’ of the local churches”, whereas the OPC’s Form of Government “is based on the principle that the church universal has precedence over the local Churches, which are actually part of it”; 2. The authority of elders restricted to the local church, in contrast to the place of ministers in OPC presbyteries; 3. The binding character of the decisions of the General Assembly and Presbyteries, in contrast to the CanRC practice described in CO Art. 31” (Acts 1974, p. 105-6). On April 14, 1976,

the OPC sent an extensive response on these three points (Acts 1977, p. 98-99), to which the CCOPC replied at length in a letter of October 13, 1978 (Acts 1980, p. 199-201), although the CCOPC has now learned that the principle of CO Art. 31 is clearly expressed in the OPC's new Form of Government (Ch. III, 5).

The emphasis differs insofar as the OPC perspective is from Church universal, and the CanRC perspective is from Church local. Thus the role of the presbytery is greater in the former, the consistory in the latter. Both honour Christ as the only Head (Report of CCOPC Appendix 8, Acts 1983). While there are considerable church-political divergences, especially in governance, the different emphases on church-local and church-universal in the CanRC and OPC should not be a hindrance, as the Head-ship of the Lord Jesus Christ is expressed in both structures (CCOPC Report Appendix IIB, Acts 1986 = *Clarion* 34.10 1985, *Clarion* 34.11 1985).

G. OPC and third-party Relationships

References are made to the principles behind third-party relationship in various reports and letters. When CEIR suggested that the CanRC's objections to membership in the RES was largely driven by emotional elements the CCOPC made it clear that fear for false ecumenicity was the main concern. Third-party relationships should be broken with those who do not show the marks of the true church and who are neither reformed or ecumenical. (Acts 1971, Supplement V, p. 70, 71). The request to sever questionable third-party relationships is "not for our sake but 'for the sake of the house of the Lord, our God' Psalm 112:9" (Acts 1974, Letter to the 39th General Assembly, p. 107).

In a letter to the CCOPC, dated April 14, 1976, CEIR explains their involvement with other churches through such organizations as the RES (Acts 1977, p. 100).

Synod 1983 mandated CCOPC to complete discussion re relationship of OPC with RES, CRC, and PCA and RPCES (this church joined the PCA). In the fall of 1981 the required three-quarters of the PCA presbyteries did not approve the application of the OPC to join the PCA (Report of CCOPC, Appendix 8 *Acts* 1983, p. 302). Report of CCOPC to Synod 1989 notes that OPC has withdrawn from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and contains a statement of resignation from the OPC to the RES stating they must resign for principled reasons (Addendum I, Appendix II, Acts 1989, p. 180). Historic relations with CRC resulted in continued contact; the 1989 report (Acts 1989, Appendix II) notes that the OPC's diminishing relations are heading towards a severance. Synod 1992 identifies OPC-CRC relations as one of the few remaining hindrances to full ecclesiastical fellowship

(Art 72, Acts 1992, p. 55). The Report of CCOPC to Synod 1998 observes that in July 1997 the OPC terminated its relationship with the CRC (Appendix 8, Acts 1998, p. 307-308).

H. *The Shepherd Case*

CCOPC was instructed by Synod 1983 to pay attention to the case (Acts 1983, Art 55, p. 41). While the issue appears to be Rev. Shepherd's teaching re justification and works, it is not relevant to ecclesiastical relations as Westminster Seminary is independent of the OPC, and as Rev. Shepherd has transferred to the CRC (Report CCOPC Appendix II, Acts 1986, p. 126-7). Synod 1986 concludes that as the Shepherd case has not been treated in ecclesiastical court, it is not a matter about which Synod can judge (Acts 1986, p. 60).

I. *The Hofford Case*

CCOPC is instructed by Synod 1983 to pay attention to the case (Art 55, p. 41). History of the case is presented in Appendix II of the CCOPC report in Acts 1986. The Complaint of Rev. Hofford *et al* appears in Appendix IIE of Acts 1986. Report of Advisory Committee #5 re Complaint appears in Appendix IIE, Acts 1986. CCOPC requests clarification re its jurisdiction in addressing this controversy (Art. 72, Acts 1992, p. 46-7). Appendix 2.4 Acts 2001 (p. 170) provides the last report of CCOPC, with the recommendation that this matter not be a stumbling-block to the inter-church relations.

J. *The Blue Bell Controversy and Laurel*

CCOPC reports on secession of Blue Bell on issue of fencing the Lord's Supper, as well as on the underlying doctrinal issues (Report CCOPC Appendix II, Acts 1986). CCOPC requests clarification re its jurisdiction in addressing this controversy (Art. 72, Acts 1992, p. 46-7). The difficulties in Laurel are noted also in Article 72 Acts Synod 1992 (p. 46-7).

K. *Fencing the Lord's Supper (and Confessional Membership)*

CCOPC is instructed by Synod 1983 to pay attention to the teaching and practice of "fencing" the Lord's Supper (Art. 55, p. 41). Synod 1986 instructs CCOPC to pass on its report on "fencing" of the Lord's Supper to CEIR and invite meetings about it (Art. 132, Acts 1986, p. 60). Discussions between CCOPC and CEIR are reported to Synod 1989 (Acts 1989, Appendix II, p. 175). CCOPC reports on discussion paper, "The Task of the Elders with Respect to the Supervision of the Lord's Supper" (Appendix II, Acts 1992, p. 167-69). The report further identifies two areas of difference: ecclesiological principle behind the Lord's Supper, and the role of the Word in verbal warning.

Prior to the 1992 Synod, the CCOPC subjoined to the discussion of “fencing” the Lord’s Supper the topic of Confessional Membership, and identified the differences in its report (Appendix II, Acts 1992, p. 169-170). Art. 72, Acts 1992 identifies supervision of Lord’s Supper and confessional membership as two of the only three remaining barriers to full ecclesiastical fellowship. Report CCOPC to Synod 1995 (Appendix 5, p. 160-61) observes that further discussion on the topic is warranted, but that it may be done within the context of ecclesiastical fellowship. CCOPC recommends (Appendix 5, Acts 1995, p. 163) that statement Lincoln 1992 (Acts 1992, Art. 72) function as guideline to arrive at agreement on “fencing” the Lord’s Supper and Confessional membership. This was decided by Synod (Acts 1995, Art. 106, p. 75). A Text of the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which concerns the “fencing” of the Lord’s Table and Confessional Membership, is included in the CCOPC Report (Appendix 8, Acts 1998), in which it is also recommended that agreement has been reached on the outstanding issues. Synod adopts an amended form of the text (Art. 130, Acts 1998). Synod 2001 rescinded the amended form of the agreement (Art 45, Acts 2001, p. 49) and returned to original text as proposed by the CCOPC. This proposed agreement was later accepted by the General Assembly of the OPC (see full text below: Relevant Documents).

L. *Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

Rules for Ecclesiastical fellowship were first discussed and approved in the context of relations with churches abroad; Synod Hamilton (1962), in Article 139, determined several rules. The application of some of these rules to the OPC was already the subject of discussion at Synod 1968 (p. 48,50). Synod 1974 learned (Article 149) that the OPC prefers a relationship of “fraternal relations” to the Canadian Reformed rules for correspondence. Synod 1977 determined that it would offer the OPC a temporary relationship called “ecclesiastical contact” with three rules: invitations to each other’s major assemblies; exchanging of minutes and Acts of major assemblies and of letters of concern; and diligent discussion with a view to achieving full correspondence. There have been changes since 1977, when Rules for Ecclesiastical Contact (principles on which the relations are conducted) were determined. The existing rules adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts 1992, Art. 50) are acceptable to CEIR. The OPC distinguished three kinds of relationship, which the CCOPC find acceptable (Appendix 2.4, Acts 2001, p. 171).

3. Relevant Documents

“Evaluation of Divergences”, submitted by CCOPC to Synod 1986 (Appendix IIB, Acts 1986, p. 142-151).

Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church. This OPC document appears as Addendum 2 of the CCOPC Report (Appendix II, Acts 1989). It received a response in the document that follows.

Some Remarks on the OPC Statement..... appears as Addendum 3 of CCOPC Report (Appendix II, Acts 1989).

The Task of the Elders with Respect to the Supervision of the Lord's Supper (Appendix II, Acts 1992).

Text of the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Appendix 8, Acts 1998); amended form adopted by Synod (Article 130, Acts 1998); rescinded by Synod 2001 (Art 45, Acts 2001, p. 49) which adopts the initial text as submitted by CCOPC to Synod 1998. Brief Historical Survey of the Contacts between the OPC and the CanRC

(Appendix 2.4 Acts 2001, p. 166f).

Text of the Proposed Agreement

Concerning Admittance to the celebration of the Lord's Supper

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

Concerning Confessional Membership

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it. It may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather it is agreed that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church policy which can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:3).

Appendix 2: Report on meeting with CEIR of the OPC (7 April, 2005)

On April 6, 2005, three members of sub-committee East, P.G. Feenstra, J. Jonker, and R.E. Pot, drove to Willow Grove, Philadelphia, for a meeting with the CEIR scheduled for the following day. Our meeting was hosted in the OPC Administration Building, and commenced at 9 am. In attendance as part of the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations were Robert B. Needham, George W. Knight, Thomas E. Tyson, G.I. Williamson, Jack J. Peterson, Mark T. Bube, Tony Curto, and Peter Wallace.

Tom Tyson opened and chaired the meeting. Tony Curto read Colossians 1:1-23, and share some reflections on these verses, after which Mark Bube led in prayer, and introductions were made. An agenda was established of topics for discussion.

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We expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet, and briefly reviewed the pertinent decisions of this Synod, especially those with respect to the OPC. It was noted that CCCA was mandated to have an ongoing discussion of differences in church polity and confession, especially on supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership. The CanRC have expressed a desire to see a synopsis of past discussions with the OPC on these and other issues, and have mandated the CCCA to prepare such a synopsis. The OPC brothers welcomed the suggestion of the CanRC brothers to present this synopsis to the CEIR at a future meeting for discussion. They noted that even where there are apparent differences in principle, often there are similarities in practice.

General Assembly

The CEIR reviewed some of the more significant decisions of their most recent General Assembly, including the revision of the Directory of Worship which is currently in progress. The 2004 General Assembly also dealt with an extensive report about the doctrine of creation, which affirmed the history of the book of Genesis. This was regarded as especially important for ecclesiastical examinations of candidates for the ministry. Although there are some differences of opinion within the OPC on questions such as the exact length of the days of creation, in ecclesiastical exams men are to be examined to ensure that their doctrine of creation, providence and Scripture is sound. For more on this, the relevant Articles in the GA Minutes can be consulted (Art. 118, 119, 120, 136). The decision to appoint a committee to study the doctrine of justification was also explained. The OPC is not questioning its position on justification, but wants to defend the historical doctrine that is summarized and confessed in the Westminster Standards. Some comments are made about the importance of echoing the confessions, and the danger of going into territory that potentially goes beyond the confessions.

NAPARC

The OPC pointed out some of the benefits that NAPARC has in distinction from the ICRC. For instance, at NAPARC discussions are held on issues of mutual concern, by giving the churches opportunity to discuss issues of concern or interest. It is more frequent than the ICRC, and is North American context specific, and gives possibilities for extra accountability and cooperation among faithful Reformed churches in the same continent. This is especially important when it comes to matters like mission and home mission, and in shining the light of the gospel in an increasingly hostile world. An additional practical benefit that the CEIR has found with NAPARC is that it allows meetings with inter-church committees, since you are already at the same location anyway.

Sister Church Relations

Some discussion was held about where our respective federations are with respect to the URCNA. The OPC is also working toward unity with the URC, and has invited the URCNA into ecclesiastical fellowship. They are presently in the process of developing six statements of unity with the URCNA. Just as with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the OPC recognizes that the URCNA has a somewhat different church polity and cultural background. It is noted that both the Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches share an ecclesiology which sees federational unity as an ideal, and that organic union should be aimed for when churches are in geographic proximity.

The OPC has been considering a request from the GKN-V to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship, but is presently studying some of their reports, and evaluating their hermeneutical approach. In this respect the OPC is eager to maintain the relevance of the unchanging Word of God in the modern world, and takes their ecclesiastical relations very seriously. They note that the Canadian Reformed Churches have closer ties to the GKN-V, and that being in ecclesiastical fellowship implies an important role in accountability.

The CEIR also gave some advice about making contact with the PCKA (Kosin). In their experience, they have found it very difficult to maintain fruitful contact with the PCKA, because of the cultural barriers.

Church Planting

Some discussion followed about church planting, particularly as it happens where churches are in geographical proximity. The Canadian Reformed brothers observed that our ecclesiology demands close consultation before proceeding to establish a church plant where there is already a faithful Reformed church. The OPC brothers agree that maintaining integrity is essential, for example by maintaining faithful discipline in inter-church relations. They note that membership transfer documents are serious because they originate from the elders in the church. If someone doesn't have a letter of transfer from another church, they should not hastily be accepted as members; in fact it is un-

wise to go by their oral testimony because they may be under discipline. There is agreement on this point, and it is noted that NAPARC also drew up a statement regarding this, especially as it applied to fugitives from discipline. The OPC also notes that it is their policy to consult with churches in the area before they begin a mission project, and they don't want to send home missionaries to places where other churches are working.

Closing

There was a brief discussion about the fencing of the Lord's Table, and the importance of the supervision of the consistory, but by this time we had already reached our scheduled closing time. Rev. G.I. Williamson closed the meeting in prayer, and a light lunch followed, with opportunity for fellowship and informal conversation. On our drive home, we could reflect on a fruitful meeting, where a brotherly and fraternal spirit prevailed, and a mutual desire to submit to God's Word and defend the Reformed faith was clearly evident.

- R.E. Pot

Appendix 3: Report on visit to 72nd General Assembly of the OPC in Grand Rapids (June 3-4, 2005) – R.E. Pot & R.A. Faber

Welcome

In view of their 72nd General Assembly, the OPC invited the Canadian Reformed Churches to send fraternal delegates. Dr. R.A. Faber and myself were delegated by the sub-committee East of the CCCA to attend. We arrived safely at the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, which served as the location of the 72nd GA. Our arrival coincided with the last minutes of lunch hour, so we were able to locate and greet Rev. J. Peterson of the CEIR, and shortly afterwards were directed to a special table reserved for fraternal delegates. Upon the resumption of the assembly, we were introduced by name, welcomed, and seated as fraternal delegates, which included the privilege of the floor on all matters.

The assembly itself was hosted in a large auditorium, with over half a dozen long rows of tables that seated nearly 140 commissioners (delegates from the churches), under the supervision of the moderator Rev. Bosgraf. Each of the 16 Presbyteries delegated commissioners in proportion to the number of churches in that particular Presbytery. Approximately 1/3 of these commissioners were ruling elders, the rest were ministers.

Format and Agenda

Given the involvement of so many men, a more rigorous parliamentary style was necessary to govern the meeting. In many respects, business was conducted in a very formal and precise manner, much more so than what we are used to at our broader assemblies. Nonetheless a spiritual atmosphere prevailed. Each time the GA reconvened after a break, this was done with the singing of praise to the LORD, and prayer. The conclusion of all business relating to a particular committee also culminated with prayer of intercession for the work of that committee. Despite the occasional diversions to points of order and debates on procedure, on the whole business was conducted in a brotherly spirit and harmonious atmosphere.

Of interest is the way in which the OPC made appointments to their committees. Nominations were received from the floor, and opportunity was given for the commissioners to make speeches calling attention to certain nominees, defending why these individuals should be considered. This was subsequently followed by an election to determine the appointments.

In advance of the GA we had received an agenda with supporting documentation, which consisted of an inch thick pile of paperwork, mostly devoted to reports from the various OPC committees. In various personal conversations it became apparent that the material on this year's docket did not contain any real potentially divisive issues. The previous GA had appointed a committee to criticize the new perspectives on Paul and federal vision, but this committee

had not yet completed its work, and presented only a brief report at this GA, so its mandate was subsequently extended for another year. Also on the agenda was a substantial report from the Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Worship, a project which had been ongoing for some time.

Mission

We witnessed the presentation of the reports from the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, and later also the Committee on Foreign Missions. Although written reports were submitted by these committees, (and advisory committees consisting of GA commissioners also made recommendations to the GA), it was striking that the GA also allowed for a very personal aspect in connection with these reports. Various missionaries received the floor to give personal anecdotes about their work, and at one stage this was combined with a slide show – these personal and anecdotal elements dominated, and there was not much deliberation or decision making required. Opportunity was also given to ask committee members personal and practical questions about the work. A real heart for the spread of the gospel was clearly evidenced, as well as a joy for this work, and a continued acknowledgement that it is the LORD who is the One who gathers His church. This enthusiasm for the gospel is clearly reflected in the significant cost and energy devoted to home mission and foreign mission. The work of mission receives generous financial support from the OPC, for instance the expenditure on foreign mission for 2004 was over \$1.5 million, although it is interesting that it appears that nearly 1/3 of the financial costs associated with this work goes towards administrative expenses. It is clear that the OPC is very experienced in the field of mission, and has well established policies and guidelines in place for carrying out and supervising this work.

Perhaps the most sensitive matter before this GA was the proposal of the Committee on Foreign Missions to intermit (terminate) the mission work in Japan. An overture was received from a Presbytery urging the continuing of this work. Although we were not present for the final debate on this overture, this was clearly an emotionally charged issue, in part because mission work had been carried out in this country by the OPC for more than 50 years. Nonetheless it was reported that the Reformed Church in Japan was now relatively independent. Financial considerations were also a factor.

Discipline

The bulk of the morning and afternoon sessions on the second day of our attendance was dedicated to an appeal, closely linked to a matter of censure. In the OPC appeals are as a rule dealt with publicly, and have the nature of a court case. Although there was some written material submitted in advance by all the parties concerned, the bulk of the information was conveyed to the GA by an oral presentation of the appellant, his local consistory, and the presbytery. The commissioners received the opportunity to ask questions of each in turn. Despite the presence of a formal and court-like atmosphere, it was en-

couraging to see how the OPC brethren took the matter of church discipline very seriously. It was refreshing to hear commissioners speak up strongly to defend the autonomy of the local church, and the significance of faithful church discipline. Reference was also made to the vows made at public profession of faith, where a member affirms to submit to the discipline of the local consistory. Bible passages such as Matthew 18 were also cited in the debate, which further attested a clear desire to be Biblical in the exercise of church discipline.

Fraternal Delegates

After supper on the first day, we received the opportunity to address the assembly. Dr. Faber spoke some appropriate words on behalf of our committee, thanking the OPC brethren for their hospitality, their desire to be faithful to God's Word, and the opportunities to engage in discussions about matters of mutual concern. Eagerness for developing closer relations was expressed, as well as appreciation for the privilege to experience the catholicity of the church, and the prayerful wish that the Spirit who binds the church in unity would also guide the deliberations of this GA. His words were warmly received.

Several other fraternal delegates were in attendance at the same time as us, including Rev. Ben Westerveld of the ERQ, Rev. Ray Lanning of the ARPC, and Rev. Casey Freswick of the URCNA, and each also received the opportunity to address the assembly. Of special note was the attendance of Dr. Kevin M. Backus, fraternal observer who addressed the assembly on behalf of the (General Synod). This church (now consisting of some 32 churches and about 3000 members) broke away from the OPC about one year after its inception, and had apparently been rather critical of the OPC through the years. Their recent initiation of contact with the OPC was received with gratitude and enthusiasm for future relations.

Hospitality

Throughout the course of our stay, we enjoyed excellent hospitality. We received excellent meals, which gave opportunity for informal discussions with various OPC commissioners on a one-to-one basis. In this context we also had several opportunities to greet and speak to members of the CEIR who were in attendance, including brs. R. Needham, J. Peterson, T. Tyson, and P. Wallace. On a personal level we were also warmly greeted by various individuals, many of whom expressed appreciation for our heritage. The ruling elders we spoke with appeared to be well informed and well acquainted with the theological controversies that the OPC has dealt with. Several brothers also were quite familiar with specific literature that has been prepared by Canadian Reformed ministers.

We left the assembly midway their afternoon session on June 4th, having spent well over a day at the GA. In short, this was a stimulating and fruitful visit, and may it equip us for continued fruitful contact with the OPC.

- R.E. Pot

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 4: Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

1. Mandate

General Synod Chatham 2004 gave the following mandate to the CCCA for its dealings with the RCUS (*Acts 2004*, Considerations 4.2-4.5, and Recommendations, p. 19-20):

1. *Re: Lord's Day observance.* ".....Synod considers that there is a need to interact further on the application of the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 103. It would be helpful and fruitful effort committees continue this interaction and speak together concretely about a scriptural and covenantal observance of the Lord's Day, also bearing in mind the RCUS *Constitution* which stresses the need to keep the Lord's Day holy (Arts. 113, 180)." Synod also indicates that "the committee can share more information concerning these discussions."
2. *Re: Fencing of the Lord's table.* Synod indicates the desire to receive more information on "the matter of the fencing of the Lord's table." It adds: "At the same time, the churches have information available on this matter in the *Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001* pp. 177-179."
3. *Re: Lord's Supper to shut-ins.* In Art. 35 of the Belgic confession we confess that "we receive this holy sacrament *in the congregation of the people of God*" (also see Art. 56 of the Church Order). Since both federations subscribe to the Belgic confession, it would be beneficial to pursue further interaction on the practice of administration of the Lord's supper to shut-ins. This practice should be evaluated in light of Scripture and confessions, also drawing on the principles and practices evident in our own history as Reformed churches."
4. *Re: RCUS Church Unity Paper:* "The CCCA should encourage the IRC to pursue the task of fine-tuning the RCUS Church Unity Paper since this is all part of the RCUS assimilating the Three Forms of Unity within their federation."
5. *Re: Theological College.* "In its discussions with the IRC, our committee should promote our Theological College in Hamilton, share the report on theological education produced for our contact with the URCNA and recommend that the RCUS make use of both."
6. *Promote contact between classes.* "To encourage Classes to continue to develop contact with the Classis of the RCUS bordering their area" (Synod Recommendations 5.5).
7. *Promote further contact with the RCUS.* "To encourage the churches to pursue actively our Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS via pulpit exchanges, visiting RCUS churches, and invitations to youth camps/conferences held by the various churches" (Synod Recommendations 5.6).

2. RCUS Synods attended by CCCA delegates

1. RCUS 258th Synod, May 10-13, 2004 (Appendix 1 - Br. A. Poppe)
2. RCUS 259th Synod, May 16-19, 2005 (Appendix 2 - Rev. K. Jonker)
3. RCUS 260th Synod, May 15-18, 2006 (Appendix 3 - Brs. J. Kuik and A. Poppe)

3. Fulfilling the Mandate of Synod

3.1 *Lord's Day observance*

At the meeting of Subcommittee West, May 19, 2004, br. Poppe reported on his visit to Synod 2004 of the RCUS (see attachment 1). Since another minister already quoted from the Acts of Synod Chatham concerning the RCUS, br. Poppe did not repeat this but spoke briefly about the abiding significance of the Fourth Commandment and encouraged them to have two worship services on the Lord's Day where this is not yet practiced in various locations. The younger ministers and those involved in mission settings seem to be more aware of the importance of this than some of the older ministers. We should also not forget that in some places where there is only one service, the Sunday is still full with Bible studies next to the one service. History also plays a role. Because of distances and lack of the kind of transportation that we have today, it was more feasible to have only one service. That has continued until today. Even now distances can still be a factor. The combined time they spend in church on a Sunday can still be more than the time we spend for two services.

At the CCCA Subcommittee West meeting on August 31, 2004, Rev. Jonker reported on his visit to Harvest Reformed Church in Minot, ND, on Aug.22, 2004. He met with various families and had good discussions with them as well as other members of the congregation. The order of worship shows that what we do in two services, they do in one. There are two sermonettes, one on the law and one on the Heidelberg Catechism, and then a full sermon on a text. The preaching was structured and the content was good. The service took more than an hour and a half. They are also studying how to fence the Lord's Supper better than in the past.

During the time spent attending the meeting of NAPARC, the Subcommittee West of the CCCA also had an opportunity to meet with the IRC (Interchurch Relations Committee) of the RCUS on November 10, 2004, to discuss topics as mandated by Synod Chatham 2004. During that meeting, the matter of Lord's day observance came up. The members of the IRC explained that it is not as if RCUS people only spend an hour a week in church. It is their desire

to keep the Lord's Day holy. How this is done differs. In various churches there are two services. Distance plays a role in regard to the number of services. In any case, the service is taken seriously. There is no slackening of attention in this regard. On the contrary. Aside from the worship services, there are Sunday school hours. Not everyone attends, but all are welcome. There are also Bible studies a few times a month. In some places, Catechism classes are held on Sundays, otherwise during the week. If people do not attend services, attention is paid to this by the elders.

The CCCA delegates pointed to the beauty of devoting the day to the Lord and His Word. Hebrews 10:25 and 1 Peter 2:2-3 are relevant in this regard, even though the Word of God does not state specifically that we must have two services. Reference was also made to the Old Testament, where we read of morning and evening sacrifices, as well as to the early synagogue.

Evaluation

The committee is of the opinion that the matter of Lord's Day observance has been addressed sufficiently. It takes note of positive developments and sees no reason to pursue specific issues further.

3.2 Fencing of the Lord's table

At the CCCA Subcommittee West meeting on August 31, 2004, Rev. Jonker noted in connection with his report on his visit to Harvest Reformed Church in Minot, ND, that the church is also studying how to fence the Lord's Supper better than in the past.

A meeting of the Subcommittee West of the CCCA with the IRC of the RCUS was held on November 10, 2004, to discuss topics as mandated by Synod Chatham 2004. One of the RCUS committee members at that time indicated a preference fencing the Lord's table as done in the Canadian Reformed Churches. He explained that without clear guidelines it is difficult to determine who should or should not be admitted to the Lord's table. If there were attestations, things would be easier. Now there is a heavy burden on the elders with potential for divisive results. E.g. what to do when someone from the CRC requests admission to the Lord's table, although the CRC no longer upholds the authority of the Word of God. How do you determine on a one-time basis who to admit? One of the RCUS delegates responded that this concern should be brought to classis for advice. Article 189 of the Constitution gives a guideline. However, the issue is how to interpret this.

On the part of the CCCA it was noted that celebration of the Lord's Supper is an important part of the life of the church, in particular for the members of the local congregation. There is a parallel with the

administration of baptism. However, it is possible to admit guests. Our Church Order differs from that of the RCUS in regard to how to go about this. The important thing to remember is that the sacraments are not the possession of the believer. They have been entrusted to the church. The difficulty encountered makes it clear that there is need of an objective standard. That is why it is indeed good to bring it to classis.

The advantage of an attestation is that there is a testimony from others rather than simply relying on the self-testimony of an individual. There is also the matter that you would not simply baptize the child of someone who walks in to ask for baptism without being a member of the local church. Is there a good reason for an essentially difference in approach compared with the Lord's Supper?

In the discussion, Acts 18:27 and 3 John 12 were mentioned as descriptions of the use of an attestation in Scripture. Although it is not prescribed, it is good to reflect on why this is written in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 16:3 also mentions letters of introduction or recommendation. Having letters was also a way of protecting the congregation.

Evaluation

It is clear that the practice of the RCUS in regard to admission to the Lord's Supper is not identical to ours. The brothers are aware of the need to maintain the sanctity of the celebration with regard to their own members and guests from outside their church and are endeavouring to do this. The committee has voiced its position and notes that the brothers are also open to reflection on our input in regard to this matter. It is of the opinion that sufficient information is available (including past submissions on this) for Synod to consider that this topic has been addressed sufficiently.

3.3 Lord's Supper to shut-ins

On this topic, see *Acts Synod Chatham* 2004 pages 18-19 (Observation 3.5 and 3.6), page 20 (Consideration 4.3), as well as pages 258-259. Synod Chatham requested that this matter be "evaluated in the light of Scripture and confessions, also drawing on the principles and practices evident in our own history as Reformed Churches.

It should be noted that discussion of this topic is not unique to our own federation of churches. An informative Study Committee Report called "The Administration of the Lord's Supper to Shut-ins" was made for Classis Central US of the URCNA, Meeting January 11, AD 2005 in Hills, Minnesota. It can be found on the internet at http://auxesis.net/polity/administration_of_the_lords_supper_to_shut-ins.php.

Scripture

The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ for the benefit of his followers, whom he commanded to eat of the bread and drink of the cup in remembrance of him (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:19-20; esp. 1 Cor 10:16-17 and 11:23-29; cf. also Jn 6:51-58). It should be noted that while the church at Jerusalem and elsewhere is referred to in the book of Acts in the singular (Acts 5:11; 8:1,3; 9:31; 11:22, etc.), this does not imply that the believers always gathered together at one location for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. There were assemblies in the temple courts (Acts 2:46), but reference is also made to "the breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42; 20:7,11; cf. 1 Cor 10:16) which apparently also took place in the homes (Acts 2:46). Paul's words in 1 Cor 10:16-17 and 11:23-29, indicate that in any case for the church in Corinth, the believers celebrated the Lord's Supper together as members of the body of Christ, since he distinguishes this Supper from the ordinary meals in the homes (1 Cor 11:22). The communal aspect is in the foreground (cf. the reference to "body" in 1 Cor 10:16-17, as well as the reference in 1 Cor 11:18,20,33 to the celebration taking place when the congregation comes "together" as a "church"). The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the church and it should remain recognizable as such.

Confessions and Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper

References to the Lord's Supper can be found in the Belgic Confession (Article 35), Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 68, 75-82), and the Canons of Dort (III/IV,17; V,14). The Lord's Supper is identified as a sacrament of the church. The Belgic Confession notes in Article 35 that "we receive this holy sacrament in the congregation of the people of God with humility and reverence as we together commemorate the death of Christ our Saviour with thanksgiving and we confess our faith and Christian religion." The Catechism makes no specific reference to where the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, but it does indicate that this must take place under the supervision of the elders (Q&A 82 and 85). The Canons of Dort only refer to the Lord's Supper implicitly, as it is included in the word "sacraments" that are among the "means" through which believers are strengthened in their faith.

History

The matter of where the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated has been discussed in the history of the Reformed Churches in various centuries. F.L. Bos, *De orde der kerk*, notes on page 233 that at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1574 it was decided that "the Lord's Supper shall not be celebrated where the form of the congregation is not present, that is, where there are not some elders and deacons, who as the servants of the Word pay attention to the reception and supervision of those who are admitted." Bos also quotes a deci-

sion of the synod of Middelburg in 1581, which becomes more restrictive. There the question was raised whether it would be possible to administer the Lord's Supper in the homes of those who have been sick for a long time, especially when "some form of the church would be gathered"? The answer was: "No. And that the sacraments shall not be administered except in the general assembly, at the place where the congregation usually gathers."

At a subsequent synod of Middelburg in 1933, the synod addressed the question of "communion for the sick" and affirmed that it would be not at all desirable to proceed to introducing this. However, an exception was already made by the Synod of Leeuwarden in 1920 with regard to celebrating the Lord's Supper in institutions. "The synod decides that a consistory of a Reformed church is allowed to administer the Lord's Supper in institutions within the area of the church if so requested, for the benefit of the members of the Reformed churches who are being taken care of there for a shorter or longer period of time and who cannot attend the usual meetings of the congregation without great difficulties, as long as the consistory is represented at this administration of the Lord's Supper and also other members of the Reformed churches who are associated with these institutions as nurses etc. participate in this administration of the Lord's Supper." (For the Dutch text, see Appendix 4.)

On December 2, 2004, the Subcommittee West of the CCA discussed this matter further, taking note of H. Bouwman's extensive explanation in *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* - Tweede deel, pages 393-399, concerning administering the Lord's Supper to shut-ins (see Appendix 5). It was also remarked that the Lord's Supper is already celebrated in homes where there is a Canadian Reformed "house congregation." The circumstances are rather similar (in a home) with the difference being that there is no one sick.

Church Order

Article 56 of our Church Order does not seem to leave room for administering the Lord's Supper to shut-ins. But it is not that different from Article 187 of the RCUS Constitution. They have the exception regulated in Article 190.

When asked about this during the meeting with the IRC of the RCUS on November 10, 2004, the brothers explained that it is not as if there is "private communion" in the RCUS. As made clear in Article 35 of the Belgic Confession, the sacrament is a sacrament of the church, not a private matter. The RCUS realizes this. Administering the Lord's Supper in the homes of shut-ins is an attempt to draw the sick into the fellowship of the church as much as possible. It is for chronically ill people, not for someone who happens to be sick on a given Sunday. Even when administered in someone's

home, the Lord's Supper is celebrated "in the assembly of God's people." Office bearers and congregation members are present. The Form is used. Since the early church met in homes, what would prevent a church to do this now for the benefit of certain members? It was suggested in the discussion that the text "Where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20) may be worth pondering in this regard.

We should not forget that even in the history of our own federation, office bearers have also supervised the celebration of the Lord's Supper where there has been a "house" congregation at a distance from a particular church. So the idea of celebrating the Lord's Supper in a home is not unknown to us in exceptional circumstances.

Evaluation

Given the fact that the RCUS maintains that the sacrament is indeed a sacrament of the church and that they ensure that even in a "home" setting the character of this sacrament is preserved, our committee does not see the need to pursue this further, leaving this matter up to the responsibility of local office bearers of the RCUS. As can be seen in Appendix 5, even Calvin did not object to such a celebration as long as it was acknowledged to be exceptional and fulfilled certain conditions: Due caution must be exercised to avoid superstition or a reliance on the sacrament itself for salvation. It should remain an exception. As also indicated by the Synod of Middelburg in 1581, "some form of the church" should be present (i.e. believers together with some office bearers) and the celebration should include an address or liturgy. In other words, it should be transparent that this is a ministry of the Church, with the Word being accompanied by the sacrament. We see no reason to conclude that the current practice in the RCUS differs essentially from this and are content to let the matter rest.

3.4 RCUS Church Unity Paper

The brs. Kuik and Poppe noted in connection with their visit to the RCUS Synod 2006 (see report in Appendix 3) that the committee dealing with the Church Unity paper was open to their input and has made positive progress. The RCUS committee has been instructed to bring the language of its report more in line with the confessions and is still working on this paper. The direction is positive.

Evaluation

The committee takes thankful note of the positive direction in regard to the Church Unity Paper and also of the willingness with which the RCUS brothers have worked with suggestions brought forward by the delegates from our committee.

3.5 Theological College

Regarding theological education, during the meeting with the IRC on November 10, 2004, the Subcommittee West of the CCCA pointed to the Acts of Chatham, page 224ff. The RCUS may benefit by taking note of this material in regard to their considerations regarding having a denominational seminary.

If the Theological College is to be recognized as an “approved” seminary a request for this should be directed on behalf of the CanRC to the stated clerk of the RCUS. The Senate and the Board of Governors of the Theological College have been contacted in this regard (see points 4.2-3 below).

Evaluation

The committee considers that its mandate concerning the Theological College has been fulfilled.

3.6 Promote contact between Classes

This has been done (see point 4.1 below).

3.7 Promote further contact with the RCUS

This has been done (see point 4.1 below).

4. Outgoing correspondence

Various letters were sent in fulfillment of the mandate given by Synod to the CCCA. As outgoing correspondence we note the following:

1. Letters were sent to the convening church for each classis in December of 2004 pointing to Recommendation 5, page 20 of the Acts of General Synod Chatham 2004, and including that recommendation. The churches in those classical regions were encouraged to continue to develop contact with the classes of the RCUS and to share their information with the CCCA.
2. E-mail to Dr. Gootjes on January 13, 2005, indicating that the Senate of the Theological College could approach the RCUS for recognition by the RCUS as an institution where theological training could be obtained.
3. In the minutes of the April 3, 2006 meeting of the Subcommittee West of the CCCA, it was noted that Rev. Jonker has approached the Board of Governors of the Theological College in regard to having the RCUS place our College on the list of approved seminaries.

5. Further topics of interest

5.1 Fraternal relations

The RCUS now has fraternal relations with the URCNA (Phase II,) but without entering into extensive unity discussions at this time).

5.2 Rev. N. Shepherd

At the meeting of Subcommittee West, May 19, 2004, br. Poppe elaborated on the discussion concerning the teachings of Rev. N. Shepherd, which the RCUS firmly rejects. At a subsequent meeting with the RCUS this issue may come up, since the RCUS would like to know where we stand with regard to his teachings. The problem is that he is not a minister in our federation and his teachings have no discernible impact in our midst. It is not clear to us why the RCUS is concerned about dealing with this and even want to admonish him. Why admonish someone over whom you have no jurisdiction?

Subcommittee West is of the opinion that in discussing the matter of Rev. N. Shepherd, it is important to keep the confessions in mind. Are they not sufficient in this regard? Be careful about scholarly or scholastic discussions and distinctions at major assemblies. Be confessional.

We acknowledge that the teachings of Shepherd are confusing, but they are not a "discussion item" in our midst. We do not see a need for extra statements in this regard. See the remarks made in this regard by Rev. Jonker at Synod Chatham (page 139) in response to Rev. Syms (page 136). It is also important to keep in mind what the task is of the major assemblies.

On November 10, 2004, the IRC of the RCUS gave a further explanation to the members of the Subcommittee West of the CCCA why there are concerns about the teachings of Rev. N. Shepherd. A book, edited by Andrew Sandlin, *The Backbone of the Bible* (Nacodoches, Texas: Covenant Media, 2004) has been published. It contains various essays, including two by Norman Shepherd. According to the IRC, he shows his colours more clearly there. The problem with him is that he is unclear but also redefines terms (e.g. justification and sanctification). The book has a foreword by John Frame referring to two denominations that have made "stupid" decisions in regard to Shepherd. Another article is on the Auburn controversy. Prof. Frame does not agree with everything, but is unwilling to dismiss Shepherd as outside of the framework of Reformed theology.

The discussion concerning Shepherd is no longer restricted to academia, but is also going on via the internet. Numerous people are affected within but also outside the RCUS. It is an issue within the broader Presbyterian world, since he taught at Westminster East. Since Shepherd's ideas affect the broader church world, the RCUS reached out to others with their stance. The RCUS was involved in the debate earlier and its position now is a continuation of this confrontation.

At a meeting of Subcommittee West on August 15, 2005, Rev. Jonker gave some further details concerning discussions in the RCUS on various theological issues and why this is even dealt with at their synods. At the RCUS Synod 2005, there was a critical paper brought forward on N.T. Wright's "New Perspectives on Paul." The office bearers of the RCUS seem to see themselves called to be "watchmen" in the larger Reformed community, sounding the alarm concerning authors who are not members of any of their own congregations. On the other hand, since the RCUS does not have its own theological seminary, it needs to be vigilant in order that influences from other churches do not creep in since its own ministers have received training in a variety of different theological institutions. In this way they ensure a unified perspective among themselves on different issues that could otherwise undermine their unity as a church federation. Nevertheless, as noted in the April 3, 2006 meeting of the Subcommittee West, "If theological issues are debated at Synod, especially if they are not brought to the assembly through minor assemblies, this can cause unrest in the churches."

5.3 NAPARC

During the meeting of Subcommittee West on November 10, 2004, with the IRC of the RCUS the topic of the NAPARC in relation to the ICRC came up, since the RCUS is a member of this organization. The brothers from the RCUS explained that the NAPARC had its first meeting in 1974. It predates the ICRC, which first met in 1982. NAPARC provides a platform for discussions that enhance mutual understanding and a way of working towards church unity.

To answer the question to what extent there is an overlap between the goals of the NAPARC and the ICRC, a list should be made to determine exactly why each organization exists and what is being done. Only then will it be possible to determine to what extent there is possibly an overlap. If it is felt that if there is a significant overlap, the ICRC could approach the NAPARC for integration. It is also important to realize that in any case three churches in the NAPARC are not members of the ICRC. There are also a number of churches that attend the NAPARC as observers and may become

members in the future. This can complicate an integration process of the two organizations.

5.4 Classis Supervision over Students for the Ministry

It was noted by the Subcommittee West of the CCCA during its November 10, 2004 meeting with the IRC of the RCUS, that the RCUS has an article in its constitution pertaining to students for the ministry: "ARTICLE 17. A student for the ministry shall request that he be taken under the care of the Classis to which the congregation of which he is a member belongs. When he presents the request to be received, the Classis shall inquire as to his fitness and, if he is found satisfactory, shall take him under its care and exercise supervision over his studies and deportment" (see Abstract of the Minutes - 258th Synod, pages 68).

In the Canadian Reformed Churches, contact between a classis and students for the ministry is usually restricted to the final phase of studies, leading up to the ecclesiastical exams and ordination. Since a student who successfully completes his studies and ecclesiastical exams will ultimately be serving the churches, it can be beneficial to reflect on how a classis could perhaps be involved in a student's development at an earlier stage. At present, only needy students receive special attention from classes throughout the Canadian Reformed Churches through Committees for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry.

6. Recommendations

The committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To express gratitude to the Lord for the positive developments within our contact with the RCUS;
2. To conclude that the matter of Lord's Day observance has been addressed sufficiently;
3. To take note of the discussions concerning admission to the Lord's Supper and conclude that the matter has been addressed sufficiently;
4. To take note of the explanation given by the RCUS and the CCCA concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper to shut-ins, and conclude that the matter has been addressed sufficiently;
5. To await a further report from the CCCA on the RCUS Church Unity Paper;
6. To consider the mandate in regard to the Theological College and the report on theological education fulfilled;
7. To thank the committee for its work in fulfilling its mandate re: the RCUS;

8. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS under the adopted rules.

7. Appendices

1. Report on RCUS Synod 2004
2. Report on RCUS Synod 2005
3. Report on RCUS Synod 2006
4. Extracts from F.L. Bos, *De orde der kerk - toegelicht met kerkelijke besluiten uit vier eeuwen*, ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Bres, 1950).
5. "What should we think of communion for the sick?" Extract from: Bouwman, H. *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht - Het Recht Der Kerken in De Practijk. Tweede Deel*.

APPENDIX 1

Visit to the RCUS 258th Synod (May 10-13, 2004) at Manitowic, Wisconsin

By br. A. Poppe

After a long drive (15 hours), I arrived in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. A worship service began after a brief introduction to some of the brothers and sisters. This service was led by the Rev. S.G. Syms and Rev. R. Pollema. The title was "Lest We Forget" and explained Joshua 23:1-16 and 24:28-31. Many brothers and sisters of the local congregation joined in this, as well as at other times. The congregation was also very much involved with providing food and lodging. Some of the delegates and also I ended up in a motel. This did somewhat restrict the contacts.

On Tuesday morning at eight o'clock sharp, the meeting started. The first point was the election of the executive officers.

Rev. Pollema was elected as chairman.

Rev. Treick was stated clerk.

Rev. J. Sawtelle was vice chairman.

Elder T. Griess was treasurer.

At 10 a clock each morning, a devotional was held, with singing, Bible reading, and an address on the following Scripture passages: Ephesians 4:17-32; 1 Chronicles 13:1-14; Matthew 5: 27-28.

Each time, the needs of the congregations as well as those of the Americans in military service were brought before the Lord.

Two delegates who are deaf were also present. They were helped by two interpreters all the time! There is at least one congregation in the RCUS composed of members who are deaf.

Part of Tuesday afternoon was used to give various churches the opportunity to bring greetings.

Various colleges and seminaries also made presentations. These included Dordt College, Hope College, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Heidelberg Theological Seminary, and Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has been removed from the list of approved seminaries. After many addresses, I also had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches (see handout).

As for the training of ministers, a majority and a minority report were presented. My impression is that the RCUS is slowly moving towards having its own seminary. There was some discussion of about potential problems in connection with oversight of the teaching staff. Having a denominational seminary

can be an advantage, but it can also present problems if certain professors get off track. So far, Heidelberg Theological Seminary has already received a positive evaluation by the Permanent Christian Education Committee of Synod (see pages 22-23 of the 2003 Abstract) and continues to occupy a favoured position because of the prominent role that Rev. Grossman plays in it.

There is an awareness that the RCUS lets others “pull the wagon” financially when supporting a seminary. The total amount of contributions to the various seminaries at this time is \$ 8.50 (USD) per communicant member. I mentioned the costs of our Theological College and also indicated the unifying effect that having one’s own seminary can have. It would have been good to see our Theological College represented at this occasion. Perhaps this can be done in the future by one of the professors or otherwise in writing.

The RCUS now use the Trinity Hymnal. Some expressed the desire for looking into developing their own hymnal. Given the size of this church federation this would be a very daunting task. I gave the Rev. Dale Stuart, that convener of this committee, a copy of our Book of Praise.

A very lengthy report was presented on the teachings of Rev. Norman Shepherd, whose teachings concerning justification were firmly rejected as contradicting our Reformed confessions.

The members of the RCUS have not established their own Christian schools. To ensure that the youth of the churches receive Christian instruction, an elaborate Sunday School curriculum has been developed, using the volumes of *Promise and Deliverance* by S.G. De Graaf as the core. This curriculum has been designed for various grade levels from kindergarten to grade 8 and consists of a total of 988 lessons. It is still being fine-tuned. The first year of the curriculum is already available on CD-ROM. The second year might not be available until the fall of 2004.

There was a lively discussion of about the care for retired ministers. Maybe we can send some of our materials about the Canadian Reformed super-annuation fund to them.

All in all, I think we may conclude that the contacts are good and beneficial. I did not miss the Manitoba snow at all! After a long drive, with the Lord’s protection, I arrived back home on Friday.

APPENDIX 2

Visit to the RCUS 259th Synod (May 16-19, 2005) at Shafter and Bakersfield (California)

The trip

On Monday morning May 16 I left Winnipeg at 9:00. The UA flight took me to Denver, then to Los Angeles (CA), from there to Bakersfield. It was a 7 hr. trip. Halfway through the trip, at Denver Airport, I met Rev. George Syms. We were able to rearrange our seating so that we could sit together on the flight to LA. Flying together gave us the opportunity to reflect on our work within the respective committees for interchurch relations. Rev. Syms expressed the desire to be involved in pulpit exchanges. He also informed me that the revised Church Unity paper would be presented to the next RCUS Synod. I suggested that since the Canadian Reformed representatives (often) attend the RCUS Synod from start to finish, they could be more involved than just having the privilege of the floor and attending committee meetings. They could, for example, lead a (table) devotional or even participate in the Wednesday worship service. We agreed that we should extensively report about our work and visits so that the respective churches can become more and more familiar with each other and can share their blessings with one another. We should continue to look for opportunities to make our fraternal relationship more meaningful. Discussing all these matters while flying to LA made the time just fly by!

Location

On arrival in Bakersfield, a member of Synod's organizing committee welcomed us and transported us to Shafter. Both cities, Bakersfield and Shafter, are situated in a valley with a flourishing agricultural economy. On our way to Shafter we drove through an area with many almond orchards, vineyards etc. The summers there are dry and hot. Such a climate could turn the area into a desert. However, the fields are watered through irrigation from a maze of canals which bring the water from the mountains to the farms. Until Tuesday evening Synod would meet in Shafter. From Wednesday until the end Synod would meet in the RCUS church in Bakersfield. The two RCUS congregations in these places usually join hands in church activities such as hosting Synods. Since there were not enough family homes for all delegates and representatives (about 90 people) the brothers had reserved a place for me in the California Inn at Bakersfield. The meals during this Synod were a delight and delicious, certainly refreshing because of the abundance of fresh fruit. The Shafter congregation had decorated the dining hall with Hawaiian ornaments. Such an effort certainly enhanced good fellowship in a festive atmosphere!

Atmosphere

The atmosphere among the RCUS brothers was truly governed by God's Word. In preparation for the Synod proceedings, a worship service was held on Monday evening at 7:00. Rev. J. Sawtelle from Minneapolis administered

the gospel. From Genesis 49 he showed how the Lord continues his plan of salvation through weak and sinful men.

Throughout Synod by devotions and another worship service on Wednesday evening, the delegates were continually encouraged and admonished to do their work in humbleness of faith. One should not be pre-occupied with personal opinions and hang-ups but serve the building up of the Church, to God's glory and to each other's well-being. Scriptural discipline combats human pride. The power of God's Word brought about an atmosphere of love, peace and unity among the RCUS delegates.

Proceedings

After the Monday evening worship service, roll call was held, and housekeeping matters were taken care of.

At 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, Synod started its official proceedings. Rev. V. Pollema was again elected as president, Rev. Jim Sawtelle as vice-president, and Rev. P. Treick was re-elected as stated clerk. The other positions of treasurer and editor of their church paper, the Reformed Herald, were filled by the same persons who held those positions before. Then the ordinary organization of Synod was taken care of: the adoption of the agenda, the appointment of standing committees, and the schedules of the times for sessions, for devotions and meals.

I was officially welcomed and seated as fraternal delegate with the privilege of the floor. I used this privilege sparingly as reported below. Other fraternal delegates received the same privilege; from the OPC Rev. Tom Tyson was the official delegate.

Rev. K.M. Cabbing Malebongo represented the mission church, Église Réformée Confessante au Congo [Zaire in the past] - ERCC . At the beginning of Synod Rev. J. Gangar was received as observer from the URCNA; on Wednesday he was replaced by another URC minister, Rev. Gary Findley. As is the custom in the RCUS, several other visitors were introduced and welcomed, as well as delegates from Dordt College and other educational institutions that are supported by the RCUS. On the agenda, Wednesday morning 10:30 was scheduled for the representatives to address Synod.

Four new ministers were welcomed and received. There was Rev. Eric Bristly, who had been in the RCUS previously but served in the OPC as minister. He rejoined the RCUS and is awaiting a call. In the meantime, he teaches at City Seminary in Sacramento and is engaged in publishing. Rev. Dan Rogers, who grew up in the Christian Reformed Church in Denver and was trained at MARS, was ordained in the Emmanuel church at Sutton SD; Rev. Matt Powell, who grew up in the RCUS, was ordained in the congregation at Ordway CO; and Rev. Lee Johnson, ordained in the church at Herried SD. There were no new churches to be received.

Reports

The executive of the RCUS reported about their work of the past years. The president's report is always an interesting document of information regarding the state of the RCUS. The president of the 258th Synod, Rev. Pollema, gleaned his material from the Classical reports. He observed that the churches have stayed faithful to the three marks of the true church. As far as the defence of the faith is concerned he noted, "Our Special Committee on Justification, with this year's focus being The New Perspectives on Paul, indicates our continued commitment to be 'watchmen on the walls of Zion,' exposing and fighting the assaults of Satan against the Church. Last year's report, in which we defended the historic Reformed (Biblical) view of justification, was sent to all denominations with which we have fraternal relations, to Dr. Norman Shepherd, and to the General Secretary of the CRC, as well as posted on the RCUS Web Page. The response has been varied, from no response to scathing criticism. Such is to be expected. Human pride always seeks to justify and defend its own ideas and reasoning. It appears that this issue has caused considerable upheaval within the Reformed community as well as division. But this should not surprise us. The apostle Paul clearly warns, 'Also of your own selves men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20:30)."

Rev. P. Treick as editor of the Herald reported among other things, "I have tried to produce a paper which deals with a variety of matters of interest to our readers - devotional issues, theological studies, and news items, and when room allows, something for the children."

The following special issues were studied and reported on to this Synod: Procedures for a denominational seminary; the New Perspectives on Paul with emphasis on N.T. Wright's teaching on justification; and a pension plan for RCUS ministers.

The ordinary permanent committees also reported on their activities. These permanent committees are Christian Education Committee, Interchurch Relations, Homes Missions, Foreign Ministries, Web Site, and Research eBooks.

The discussion about having an RCUS seminary, a pension plan as well as the support to Dordt College evoked much debate. The latter support was questioned by a number of delegates because of strong misgivings about the unreformed direction in which Dordt College is going. The address of Dr. Carl Zylstra, President of Dordt College, had not taken their concerns away.

Ministerial Aid

Unlike in the Canadian Reformed Churches where the local congregation supports its retired minister, in the RCUS the federation takes care of this responsibility through the Ministerial Aid Fund. Last year's RCUS Synod decided "That a committee be appointed to establish a 'Synodical Pension Plan' in addition to the Ministerial Aid Fund, to aid our ministers for their re-

tirement, and that this plan be circularized at least 30 days prior to the meeting of the 259th Session of the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States in order that it may be considered for implementation at the 259th Session.”

The Synod received a well-researched report. Its important point is that if a minister decides to participate in the approved Pension Plan, then its consistory is obligated to match the funds he contributes. This only concerns ministers who are registered as being employed by the church. Ministers who have registered themselves as self-employed are not eligible. A financial institution will administer the pension fund.

During the discussion the point of the church’s responsibility for the minister’s pension was debated. There was no unity regarding this point. Some regard the care for their ministers as diaconal help; others look more at this responsibility as the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches states in Art. 13, that the church, which he served last “shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister’s widow and/or dependants.” The report as a whole was adopted.

Seminaries

The Training for the Ministry of the Word received a lot of attention. The RCUS supports a number of institutions to which their young men can be sent for training. Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary SC and MARS have RCUS board members; New Geneva Theological Seminary CO, City Seminary of Sacramento CA and Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Vermillion SD have RCUS professors. Synod heard visitation reports and listened to representatives of these institutions.

For years there has been a strong desire in the RCUS for having a special RCUS seminary. Synod again was served by a well-researched and documented report. This report contained the Mission Statement of the RCUS Seminary, the Statement of Governmental Structure and the By-laws. An appendix was added which was a proposed Operational Handbook, providing additional guidance in the day to day functioning of a seminary. The report recommended proceeding with preparing to establish a RCUS seminary.

Not everyone was convinced of the need for having their own training. The Special Committee’s report for a Denominational Seminary therefore stirred a very lively debate. Strong supporters emphasized that it is a scriptural requirement for the RCUS to train its own ministers. They also pointed out that disunity in the church in the past and present must be blamed on the diversity of theological institutions the RCUS draws its ministers from. Others strongly disagreed with that argument and pointed out that there is a solid theological unity within the RCUS. They applauded the diversity in the training the men have received and pointed out that the RCUS governs the entry into the Ministry at the Classical level. Between these two polar positions are delegates who for pragmatic reasons oppose a RCUS seminary.

While delegates were busy fine-tuning the report, ensuring that it would be a genuine RCUS seminary, a motion was made to postpone establishing a RCUS seminary indefinitely. Many spoke against this motion since this action would again shelve this plan as has been the case for such a long time. Postponement was voted down. At the end, Synod decided to recommit this matter to the committee. Although the decision was not made to establish a RCUS seminary at the next Synod, the work toward it will go on. Considering the vote, there seems to be a slim majority for an RCUS seminary. However, the time is not yet ready to go ahead. So the RCUS is making headway in getting their RCUS training for the ministry. In this discussion I used the privilege of the floor, expressing that pragmatic reasons should not be followed. I also drew the attention of synod to our report "Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own seminary?" as it is printed in our Acts of Synod Chatham 2004, p. 224.

N.T. Wright

Synod dealt with another lengthy report with the title: "Wright is Wrong." The Special Committee to Study the New Perspective on Paul gave a critical review and evaluation of the "New Perspective on Paul with Emphasis on N.T. Wright's Teaching on Justification." The 38 page document came with the following recommendation:

That Synod adopt the following statement: "We judge that the teachings of N.T. Wright on justification are another gospel and call upon him to repent of his error."

The following grounds were provided:

- a. Wright removes justification from the core of the gospel.
- b. Wright undermines the full sufficiency of Christ's work by grounding justification also in the work of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Wright diminishes the centrality, necessity, and importance of perfect righteousness for eternal life by redefining it in terms of covenant.
- d. Through his wholesale rejection of imputation, Wright denies that the believer stands clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.
- e. Wright denies the finality of justification by faith.
- f. Wright makes the believer's works necessary for their ultimate justification when he defines faith in terms of faithfulness.

Without too much discussion the report was adopted. The adoption means that the committee will be continued and re-constituted to study the theology of the Federal Vision and report to next year's synod.

I asked several delegates why the RCUS deems it necessary to make statements on theological issues such as the teachings of Norman Shepherd and N.T. Wright. The reaction was that the RCUS does acknowledge that it does not have ecclesiastical jurisdiction over those men who are not RCUS ministers and professors. However, because of the diversity among the RCUS ministers being trained by different seminaries, those teachings pose a threat to them.

Ecclesiastical Relations

Worthwhile mentioning is what the Interchurch Relations Committee reported on the Canadian Reformed Churches. The report referred to our November meeting in Kansas City MO. "The committees discussed matters of mutual interest and concern, including fencing the Lord's Table, Fraternal addresses, Fraternal relations, GKN-Liberated, Lord's Day Observance, Shut-in Communion, RCUS Principles of Church Unity Paper, Can Ref Theological College, Hymnbooks/Psalters, Pension Plans, etc. It is to be observed that a good working relationship exists between the RCUS and the Can Ref and that there has been an increase in the interchange of Classis fraternal delegates."

Reports were given by delegates to the OPC General Assembly at Beaver Falls PA June 4-9, 2004; to the RPCNA Synod at Upland IN, June 19-25, 2004; and to Synod of the URCNA at Calgary AB June 15 - 18, 2004. The Synod was informed that there was no report to the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, since they meet tri-annually.

On Wednesday morning, fraternal delegates received an opportunity to address Synod. Rev. Tom Tyson brought greetings from the OPC. He interacted with a report from the RCUS delegate in which some incorrect information was given regarding some actions of the OPC. In his address, Rev. Tyson set the record straight. His address was well received. Synod was thankful for the clarification given.

Address

After him I had the privilege to address the brothers. I took as a lead theme: "Rubbing shoulders comes with great benefits." I started by referring to my address in 2003 in which the encouragement was given to be committed to work at one another's salvation and to do so with the mind of Jesus Christ. After having passed on the greetings from our churches I listed a number of benefits, which we get from rubbing shoulders with the RCUS. Our church horizons have widened through our contacts. As an example of this I mentioned that all our ministers were informed about the convening of this 259th RCUS Synod on May 16-19, and that their work has been "lifted up to the throne of grace" in our Canadian Reformed Churches. We enjoy the attendance and support of RCUS committee members and delegates at our ecclesiastical assemblies. Their delegates take active part in our work of Synod and Classis. From this contact our spirituality at our meetings has improved. At our assemblies we don't merely read Scripture anymore but also brief meditations are given about the passages read; we more frequently join in prayer, bringing the blessings and needs of congregations and federations before the Lord. Through our contact with the RCUS we have also been "forced" to study issues such as Lord's Day observance, the administration of the Lord's Supper to shut-ins, and other topics. I also mentioned the pulpit exchange we have with RCUS congregation at Minot as a fruit of our contact. At that point I also informed the Synod about the Mission Conference organized by our

Theological College in Hamilton. I read out the topics and the speakers. All those things show that our fraternal relationship is an active and living bond with one another, enabling us to learn from each other. After having listed the benefits of rubbing shoulders with one another, I brought forward another point: We should not only reap benefits but we also should truly appreciate the benefits. We have the ongoing responsibility to express our unity, to promote it, and to grow in that unity, maturing in Christ (Ephesians 4). In this respect I referred to their "songbook". I now quote my address to the synod. "As I have experienced, you are able to sing from your songbook with great excitement and from the heart. Obviously and understandably you love your songs. That is great and beautiful. However, I understand from previous visits to your synod(s) that you find your songbook lacking. I don't know the specifics of your findings. It could be that you find that your songbook does not have all the Psalms or the complete Psalms. That lack limits you in giving full praise to God, Who is the God of election and reprobation, the God of love and wrath. He is truly a faithful and just God. As a faithful church you staunchly and boldly defend the historic Reformed faith over against theologies which deviate from the faith of our confessions. Well, dear brothers, should that historic faith not also be expressed in corporate worship that is a full-fledged praise to our sovereign God? In the last year's report "Research Hymnals" I read, "the availability of singable, theologically sound, and confessionally accurate hymn books is very limited." I like to prove the opposite by referring (of course) to our book of Praise, readily available. I even took 10 copies with me for free distribution, readily available! Furthermore, I have some free books on Reformed Liturgy, home visiting, and on the Holy Spirit. Be quick to approach me before they are all gone." I concluded my address with thanks for the excellent hospitality they gave me and I commended them and their work to the Head of the Church.

At the end of Thursday Synod wrapped up all kinds of matters which are on the agenda of every Synod, such as the reports on Mission, Judicial matters, Christian Education, Publications, Minutes of Classis.

At about 10:00 pm on Thursday Synod was adjourned. No decision was made in regard to the place of next Synod.

APPENDIX 3

Visit to the RCUS 260th Synod (May 15-18, 2006) at Mitchell, South Dakota

By br. J. Kuik and A. Poppe

Early Monday morning (May 15th, 2006) we, br. J. Kuik and br. A. Poppe, traveled for 9 hours to Mitchell, South Dakota. Br. K. Wezeman from the G K N Liberated joined us on the car ride. On the way south we saw the results from the flooded fields. Many acres were not seeded and had water on them. Our first stop was at the border where br. Wezeman was checked out and even had to pay for this! After some hours of driving we stopped for coffee and enjoyed "slootwater koffie" as the Dutchman called it. After fuelling -up the car and ourselves one more we arrived in Mitchell. The motel where we were directed to was easy to find. As it turned out many of the delegates lodged also at the same motel. We had the first taste of the goodies for the next days at supper time.

Because we had been present at former Synods and classes, many contacts could be renewed and new ones made. On the opening evening Rev. L. Gross preached a sermon entitled: Babel- a symbol of our culture. Gen 11:1-9. He drew our attention that as Christians we are to think of and conduct ourselves as the city of God and not of man.

Each morning and evening devotions took place. As officers the Rev. Pollema was elected to be chairman and as vice Rev. J. Sawtelle. The clerk was again Rev. P. Treick. Br. T. Griess continues to be the treasurer. The president's report, which is a constitutional requirement designed to give an overall summary of the state of the church, was delivered by Rev. Pollema. In his address he mentioned also the need for an official RCUS seminary. A quote from his speech may help us to understand our brothers better. "However, having different seminaries has not promoted unity among us, nor has it instilled a denominational loyalty. Such is understandable given the nature of independent seminaries. Their purpose is to serve the broader Reformed community, rather than any one specific denomination. The result is a generic or ecumenical approach that allows for differing views. We are very critical of the broad evangelicalism that pervades so much of the church. What about being broadly Reformed? Are we ready and willing to sacrifice the distinctives that we hold dear, i.e. six-day creation, male-headship in the home and church including the vote in congregational meetings, the regulative principle (2nd Commandment) in worship, justification by faith alone, strict subscription to our creeds, not only for our officers, but also our communicant members, catechetical instruction including memorization, etc? If these things are important and true, should we not insist upon them being taught? *'Buy the truth, and sell it not; buy wisdom, and instruction, and understanding'* (Prov. 23:23)."

The reports from the committees appointed by the previous Synod came to the floor. About the seminary: There is now in place a governmental structure and by-laws were approved. This means that when a seminary is started or wants to become recognized they come under the oversight of the Synod. Another report came from a classis asking whether or not a minister is a member of his local congregation. Synod recommended that a minister be a member of a local congregation while keeping his ministerial credentials with the classis.

The report about "Federal Vision" was received and the committee has to expand on several aspects and give more documentation to the next Synod. Hopefully the brothers will restrict themselves to seeking wisdom from God's Word and the confessions. It is amazing how "up to date" our confessions are. Report from the Interchurch Relations Committee - Reformed Church in the United States. We were looking forward to this report as it is one of the points we have to pay attention to according to our mandate. Our Synod wants to see the language of the paper on church unity brought more in line with the language of the Three Forms of Unity. The Synod of the RCUS is apparently also convinced of this, since they mandated their committee to do what we asked for. The committee working on the Church Unity paper reported "...that it would facilitate our discussions to have the language of the paper more in line with the Three Forms of Unity. The Westminster Standards are not our confessional standards and yet it is appealed to as part of the reason for Principle #1. While your committee does not see a problem with referencing the Westminster Standards or any other standard, for comparative purposes, (as under Principle #2) it is not appropriate for us to ground any principle of church unity in a confessional standard that we have not officially adopted as a denomination." Accordingly, Synod mandated the brothers of this committee to do more work more on bringing the language in line with the confessions.

At this time Synod dealt with the invitation of the URCNA to enter Phase II relations with them, by instructing the RCUS stated clerk to write to the URCNA Synod, indicating "our desire to have fraternal or sister-church relations without committing to the process of ecclesiastical union." This was carried, since the URCNA had indicated that "...we can only realistically engage in one set of negotiations toward organic union at a time. We can hardly be writing a joint church order with the Canadian Reformed Churches and, in good faith at the same time, be writing another joint church order with some other federation of true churches" (quoted from the address of Rev. Ralph A. Pontier to the RCUS on behalf of the URCNA).

Synod also supported the reception of the Free Reformed Churches of North America into membership of NAPARC.

As always, many seminaries ask for Synod's attention and request financial support. This was given most of the time.

We had the privilege of the floor during Synod and made use of the opportunity to speak several times. During the breaks many contacts were made. The brotherly way in which the delegates dealt with each other during Synod was refreshing. It was also good to hear about the care for needy widows and widowers. The books which we displayed were thankfully taken along. On Thursday afternoon we left for our trip home where we arrived safely late in the evening.

May the Lord also bless this work for the promoting of His Kingdom.

APPENDIX 4

Extracts from: Bos, F.L. *De orde der kerk - toegelicht met kerkelijke besluiten uit vier eeuwen*. `s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Bres, 1950.

Page 233: "Men zal geen avondmaal des Heeren uitreiken waar geen forme van gemeente is, dat is, waar niet enige ouderlingen en diakenen zijn, die zowel op de aanneming en regering dergenen die toegelaten worden achthebben als de dienaren des woords" (Dordrecht 1574).

Page 234:

"Of men ten tijde des avondmaals aan de zieke belijdende leden die lang te bed gelegen hebben, het avondmaal in hun huizen bedienen zal, vooral zo daar enige vorm van kerk verzameld ware?

Is geantwoord, neen; en dat men de sacramenten niet bedienen zal dan in de algemene verzameling, ter plaatse waar de gemeente gewoonlijk samenkomt" (Middelburg 1581).

"De synode besluit in zake krankengemeente de besliste uitspraak te doen, dat het geenszins wenselijk is tot het invoeren der krankengemeente als kerkelijk gebruik over te gaan" (Middelburg 1933).

"De synode besluit, dat het aan de kerkeraad ener gereformeerde kerk geoorloofd is op eventueel ingekomen verzoek het heilig avondmaal te bedienen in stichtingen, die op het grondgebied dier kerk liggen en wel ten bate van de leden der gereformeerde kerken, die aldaar korter of langer tijd verpleegd worden en die zonder grote bezwaren de gewone samenkomsten der gemeente niet kunnen bezoeken, mits de kerkeraad bij deze avondmaalsbediening vertegenwoordigd is en ook andere leden der gereformeerde kerken, die als verplegers enz. Aan deze stichtingen verbonden zijn, aan deze avondmaalsbediening deelnemen" (Leeuwarden 1920).

APPENDIX 5

What should we think of communion for the sick?

Extract from: Bouwman, H. *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht: Het Recht Der Kerken in De Practijk. Tweede Deel*. Kampen: Uitgeverij De Groot Goudriaan, 1985.

Translated by Rev. A.J. Pol.

Page 393:

d. What should we think of *communion for the sick*? In the early Christian church it was the custom that what was left of the love-meal and the Eucharist was brought to the poor, the strangers, and the sick.¹ The celebration of the Lord's Supper, originally connected with the love-meal, not only took place in the midst of the entire congregation, but also in the small circles of those congregations. However, gradually the love-meal was completely separated from the Eucharist and the only ceremony that was called Eucharist was held under the leadership of the bishop. Already at an early stage the concept of "sacrifice" was applied to the gifts of love. This was not yet dangerous as long as the Lord's Supper was still a real meal, but

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this changed when the *agapae* (love-meals) were separated from the Eucharist and the leaders of the congregation were regarded more and more as priests, a theurgical or magical power was attributed to the sacraments, and in the Western church the thought of transubstantiation was taught. According to Roman Catholic church doctrine, when the priest speaks the words of institution the signs in the Lord's Supper change into the body and blood of Christ, and Christ is not only present in the elements while they are used but also outside of use of the elements. The signs of the Lord's Supper must therefore also be kept in a holy place and the holy sacrament must be worshipped. The consequence of the development of the view of the sacrament was that the sacrament of the last rites for the sick was brought into their homes, in order to eliminate the remnants of sin, strengthen the sick in the throes of death and to sanctify them.²

Luther roundly condemned the communion for the sick, but Melancthon regarded it as permissible if only the family was present. The Lutheran Church has always maintained house communion or communion for the sick. In some of the national churches there were wavering conditions in regard to the question whether next to the sick also healthy people, namely family members,

¹ Justinus, Apol. I. 65, 67; Karl Müller, Kirchengeschichte, 2 Aufl., I. 106

² Heinrich, Kathol. Dogmatik, § 2352-2356.

may be present. Brenz defended this in the Church Order of Württemberg of 1536 in this way, that in this case it is as with a guest who could not attend the wedding because of his disease, and that one then brings something of the meal to him at home.³

The ceremonial order of Württemberg of 1668 states that it is permissible to invite to the communion not only the sick or those in the final stages of pregnancy, but also the elderly and people living far away. Besides this communion for the sick, however, communion outside of the church is not regarded as permissible in the Lutheran Church.

In the Reformed churches there has always been a difference of opinion about communion for the sick. In the Reformed church of Basel, communion for the sick was allowed. Calvin administered the Lord's Supper to the sick in Strasburg and disapproved of it that various Reformed churches refused to do this. When Duke Christof of Württemberg wanted to introduce Lutheran ceremonies in his country and in the county of Montbéliard, which belonged to his country, the ministers who lived there, including Tossanus, asked Farel and Calvin for advice. Calvin wrote on October 7, 1543: "concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper I am of the opinion that one may permit the custom of the communion for the sick

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where it is necessary and fitting, and that one should not be all too opposed to giving the Lord's Supper to criminals before their execution when they wish this and seem to be sufficiently prepared to receive it. But only under the condition that it really is a communion, that is to say that the bread is broken in the fellowship of believers." On December 1, 1562, Calvin wrote Olevianus in Heidelberg: "The Lord's Supper serves to strengthen faith as a pledge that is received from the hand of Christ, that assures us that we belong to his body and are nourished by his flesh and blood to the hope of eternal life. Enjoying the Lord's Supper equips us for the spiritual struggle that we must go through. When a believer sees that he must leave this world it is unavoidable for him to be made fearful and be assailed by all sorts of temptations, and he will rightfully desire to equip himself in order to be able to handle this struggle. May one rob him of this completely unique means of salvation that strengthens his confidence in such a way that he can cheerfully face the struggle and gain the victory? It is harsh to prevent someone who is sick, who is an invalid for some time, and near death, from confessing and testifying to his upright agreement with the church. This gives a bad example. After all, the Lord's Supper is now a symbol of the higher unity of the children of God. Although I have only briefly touched on this matter, you can already see which grounds have brought me to this opinion that one should not keep the sick away from the communion. However, I don't want to cause a com-

³ Richter, Kirchenordnungen I. 269.

motion about this. You know that another custom prevails in the church of Geneva. I'm satisfied with that because I do not think it is good to quarrel about this. The theologians who judge that administering the Lord's Supper to the sick is not in accordance with the command of the Lord argue that the Lord's Supper has been instituted as a sacred meal to nourish believers together. I gladly admit to the truth of this sentence. But although a pure celebration of the Lord's Supper cannot be separated from fellowship, one may not regard the communion for the sick as a deformation, because it is not really a private communion. After all, it is in truth only a part of or an appendage of the public celebration. For the rest, I do admit that one must be careful with the communion for the sick that no superstition creeps in and that the hope of salvation is not attached to the external symbol, but also that no ambition comes into play or curiosity interferes. So I would want the Lord's Supper for the sick to be celebrated only infrequently and as an exception, and not without precise

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knowledge of the actual circumstances. And in order that the celebration does not stray from the institution of Christ or even deviate in the slightest from it, I regard it as desirable that it be celebrated only in the circle of believers and not without an address or liturgy, just like with the public celebration.

Calvin's evangelical thought has not been followed by all Reformed people. The English churches and similarly also the Reformed churches in the Palatinate, Strasburg, Basel, Hungary, Poland, and Scotland⁴ permitted communion for the sick. But the Reformed churches of Züürich, Geneva, France, and the Netherlands, opposed it. And while Calvin, Farel, Oecolampadius, Peter Martyr, Zanchius and H. Alting, were for it, Bullinger, Musculus, Aretius, Beza, and Danaeus, were against it.⁵ The reasons why people preferred to set aside communion for the sick entirely were because of the idolatrous honour shown to the sacrament when the priests brought it to the sick in a solemn procession, and the superstitious significance that was attached to receiving this sacrament. The Synod of Middelburg (1581, Part. qu. 52), gave a very consistent answer when asked for advice by the churches of Overijssel and Gelderland: "No. The sacraments shall not be administered except in the general assembly, at the place where the congregation usually gathers." But it is also apparent that the Synod of Middelburg did not mean by this that communion for the sick is to be condemned fundamentally and in an absolute sense. One of the churches asked whether, where it is customary to administer the Lord's Supper to the sick, the minister who administers it is always obliged to participate in the communion. The Synod responded to this question in the affirmative. This shows that in some Reformed churches the com-

⁴ In Scotland, communion for the sick is permitted, but it is only administered infrequently.

⁵ R. Kübel, R.E.² 5, Art. Hauscommunion; Acta Gen. Syn. van Utrecht, p. 198-202; *De Bazuin*, 1923, No. 44; Palmer, *Pastoraaltheologie*, 1866, pp. 412f.

munion for the sick was being practiced and that this was not fundamentally impermissible. This was also the judgment of the synods of Gelderland (1602, art. 30) and of South-Holland (1602, art. 29). The Synod of South-Holland concurred with the judgment of Middelburg (1581), namely that the communion for the sick is not advisable in public and free churches, but since the question of the Synod of Gelderland directed to the Synod of South-Holland originated from the churches under the cross in Cleves (or “Kleve,” a city in the north-west of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, AJP), where meetings of the congregation could be held in the houses of sick people who desired the Lord’s Supper, the Synod of South-Holland could go along with the Synod of Gelderland to administer the Lord’s supper to the sick with the condition that such secret assemblies of the churches for that

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purpose would not be convened outside the usual time when the Lord’s Supper would be held. When the Lord’s Supper took place in a home where a sick person was bedridden, there had to be a form of the ministry of the Word. And it was not allowed to take place “without communicant members participating.” So the possibility of administering the Lord’s Supper in individual homes was kept open. In the same way the national Synod of Dort in its 175th session, left it in the freedom of the consistories and classes in cases of necessity to administer baptism in private, that is outside the assemblies of the congregation.

Voetius explained⁶ that the Reformed churches do not have the custom of administering the Lord’s supper to those who are sick or dying “because the institution of Christ and the first Supper and its repetition and explanation (1 Cor. 10:16,17; 11:20-29) portray for us an assembly, a fellowship, a sort of feast or meal.” We may not arbitrarily deviate from this institution of Christ, as the Roman Catholics do, having separate masses where only the priest is present, or by also extending the sacrament to the sick outside the presence of the congregation, or as the Greeks do, administering the Lord’s Supper everywhere, during a trip, in a field, and on the field of battle. There may not be separate administrations of the Lord’s Supper where the Lord’s Supper is administered to one person separately and without distributing the bread and the cup. In exceptional cases, in secret churches, and when first planting a church, it is possible to permit something that cannot take place in an organized church.

However, this is not to say that the valid use of the Lord’s Supper depends on a certain building, for an administration of the Word and sacrament can of course take place in a private dwelling. Everything depends on whether this

⁶ Pol. Eccl. I. 758; M. Vitringa, Doctr. VIII. 356; B. De Moor, Comm. V. 660; H. Hering, Art. Begriff Gottesdienst, R.E.³, 7, 5, 6.

administration takes place according to a decision of the council of the church and in the presence of the consistory or of some of its members, and whether other members of the church are also present and participate in the communion. This is needed so that the order which has been established by Christ is maintained, the communion with the body of Christ can be enjoyed, and superstition avoided. Beza and Musculus were of the same opinion as Voetius in this regard. However their sentiment was that this could only be permitted in a very special case, so that it would not become a custom of him, as also advised by Zanchius.⁷

In regard to communion for the sick, Calvin advanced the rule that it should only be permitted as a very special exception. This rule should still be followed by the churches. And where there is such a communion,

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it should not take place in any way other than according to the institution, in an assembly of the congregation convened in the home of the sick person, under the leadership of the minister and elders designated for this. That which can be approved of in the churches under the cross in a very special case, in days of persecution, may not apply for the instituted churches in normal times. Household communion as it takes place in pietistic and some sectarian circles with or without an ordained minister is a very serious deviation from the institution of the Lord's Supper. But if there is a form of church, a lawful assembly convened by the church in which elders and congregation members participate, so that the normal way of celebrating the Lord's Supper is preserved, such a communion for the sick cannot be regarded as fundamentally impermissible.

We can therefore also agree with the proposal made by the committee at the Synod of Utrecht (1923, appendix XXIV), "that in itself it is not impermissible or in conflict with the Word of God that the Lord's Supper is administered in the home of someone who is sick or elderly, who has been deprived of the sacrament for a long time, as long as the following conditions are observed:

1. That it be clear that the desire for this does not come from a superstitious idea and estimation of the external sign, but only out of a serious need to strengthen one's faith by receiving the Lord's Supper;
2. That such a celebration of the Lord's Supper remain an exception in that the consistory decides on each case individually;
3. That at such a celebration of the Lord's Supper the consistory shall be represented by at least two elders; that members of the household who are entitled to it and if possible also other brothers and sisters shall participate; and that the normal way of celebrating the Lord's Supper, customary in our churches, shall be followed."

⁷ Epistolarum Lib. I. 111.

The General Synod of Middelburg (1933) decided in connection with incoming requests to make the following firm pronouncement, that it is not at all desirable to proceed to introducing communion for the sick as an ecclesiastical practice (Art. 131 of the Acts).

e. In this way it is also decided that when a request comes from members of the Reformed churches who are being cared for in *an institution for the ill* or in a hospital, it is not fundamentally impermissible to consent to a request to administer the Lord's Supper there, as long as the consistory is represented and the opportunity to participate in this celebration of the Lord's Supper is also given to the nurses, etc.. In a certain sense the same thing already takes place in large city churches where the Lord's Supper is administered at more than one place, each time

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for another part of the congregation. The fact that the sick who are being nursed in such institutions need the strengthening of their faith even more than normal members of the congregation to bear the cross that has been placed upon them should serve as a further recommendation. According to this advice the Synod of Utrecht (1923) therefore also decided:

1. "That it is permissible for the consistory of a Reformed Church upon request to administer the Lord's Supper in institutions that are within the area of that church, for the members of the Reformed churches who are being nursed there for a shorter or longer time and who cannot attend the usual assemblies of the congregation without great difficulties, provided that the consistory is represented at this administration of the Lord's Supper and also other members of the Reformed churches, who are associated with these institutions as nurses etc., participate in this administration of the Lord's Supper.
2. That also those who are being taken care of, who do not belong to one of the Reformed churches, can be admitted to this administration of the Lord's Supper when no opportunity exists for them to participate in the Lord's Supper in the church of which they are members themselves, provided that they make their desire known in time to the consistory, and the consistory has assured itself that they have been admitted to the Lord's Supper in their church, that they agree with us in the essentials of the Christian religion and are without reproach in their lifestyle. At the same time, as long as they participate in the Lord's Supper as guests, they must also be willing to submit to the supervision of the consistory."

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 5: Igreja Reformadas Do Brasil (IRB)

1. Mandate

Synod Chatham 2004 mandated the CCCA “to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the IRB under the adopted rules” and “to mandate the CCCA to maintain contact with the IRB either directly or indirectly.” (Acts of Synod 2004, P. 24, 4.3 and 4.4)

Since Synod Chatham 2004 there have been difficult times which resulted in the restructuring of the IRB federation. They now meet three times per year in a National Synod. These will usually take place during March, July and October. The July synod will deal with relationships with other churches and other “international” issues. Fraternal delegates from other church federations will be invited to this synod. (*Mission News* Volume 1, May 12, 2006, *Clarion* Volume 55, No. 10, May 12, 2006)

The CCCA continued its contact with the IRB via the sending church’s mission in Brazil. From 2004 to the present all contact was via Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey. We sent a letter of greeting and encouragement to Synod July 2004 and July 2006 of the IRB. These letters were translated and read by members of the Maranatha visitation team. We also asked the visitation team to speak on our behalf on any relevant matter that might come up and to send us a written report of their discussions and observations.

We received an official response from the clerk of both IRB Synods.

2. Reports

A full report rather than a summary is included below with the intention of making the contact with the IRB come alive. We need to somehow move from an official and formal contact to a more interactive relationship.

2.1 Report on Synod 2004

It was a pleasure to visit the 3rd National Synod of this very young federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil, held from July 26-29, 2004 in the church building of Camaragibe, PE. Since undersigned, br. A. Nap and Rev. C. Van Spronsen, were both in the Recife areas for other reasons around the time of the Synod and both can communicate in Portuguese, the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas (CCCA) requested us to represent them at this Brazilian ecclesiastical assembly.

A prayer service was held on Monday evening, conducted by Rev. K. Wieske, missionary in the Recife area. He chose as text

Mat.16:24,25 and implored God's blessing upon the work of the Synod and the Brazilian Churches.

The next morning Synod was opened by the chairman of the Church at Camaragibe, elder Levi. He requested the singing of Psalm 134, read Acts 20:17-33 and led in prayer.

The federation consists of two Regional Councils (classes), North and South which each delegated six brothers. The mission congregation at Maceió, not yet being an instituted Church, sent observers. The executive was chosen, resulting in elder Moizés (Maragogi) being the chairman, Rev. Flávio (Colombo) vice-chairman, br. Elias (Maceió) clerk and br. Fracisco (Colombo) second clerk. The missionaries A. de Graaf, E. Venema and K. Wieske were also seated at the table. Besides the Canadian delegates there were also two brothers from the Netherlands, Rev. P.K. Meijer and br. Ben Bolt. All were given the opportunity to address the assembly. As your delegate I read the Portuguese translation of the letter your secretary had prepared for this purpose.

First some general remarks. The Brazilian brothers follow the practices of our Churches, appointing committees and distributing the materials over them. This worked fine except that towards the end their proposals received very little discussion before being adopted.

Synod lasted only three days even though it was scheduled for five. This could be a good sign but in their situation it was not. The main reason was that almost all the committees appointed by the previous Synod were not able to finish their tasks and therefore did not have reports on their activities or proposals. There were just too many committees and too few people and resources to do all the work of making a new federation function along the lines of longer established Reformed Churches. It is like moving into a new house (personal experience!) and immediately wanting to have everything in order and in place. One will have to concentrate on one area at a time and allow time for things to develop. Most of these brothers are very busy and involved in their local congregations, almost all of which are vacant and therefore placing high demands on the elders. Those who are capable are often overloaded. I received the impression this Synod realized the need of lowering some of their expectations and prioritizing the matters on their agenda.

Yet one experiences the earnest desire to be faithful to Scriptures and to continue in the Reformed tradition in a Brazilian setting. One senses a warmth and enthusiasm for the work of the Lord and deep gratitude for all He has granted them.

Some of the decisions taken are the following:

1. The last Synod had decided that for better contact amongst the Churches a paper would be beneficial. This appeared as “O Candeeiro” (The Candlestick). However, it was difficult to maintain due to lack of material and cooperation. This Synod decided to end this project and recommend that the Churches send information to their website.
2. A proposal to have standing committees from one geographical area was defeated. Synod urged the members to find ways to overcome the geographic and technical problems.
3. The Church at Recife had proposed to establish a “registered trademark” for the name of the Churches to avoid others presenting themselves with the same name. This proposal was defeated since it could take away from the local autonomy. Cost also was a factor.
4. The absence of a report from the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (CCIE) stagnated the workings of Synod in several ways. The committee apologized and still gave an oral report of a meeting of the Committee of Three (C3) held on July 21st with representatives of the Churches. (The C3 is a joint committee of the sending bodies of the Netherlands, Hamilton and Surrey, that conduct mission in Brazil, and cooperate in financial support.)
5. Synod adopted a standard model for attestations.
6. There was no report from the committee on the “Book of Praise”. It was decided to let this matter rest for now, giving priority to other matters.
7. The Dutch Churches, having contact with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), have encouraged the IRB's to join in tri-party discussions with the IPB. Synod decided to charge the Committee for Ecclesiastical Relations within Brazil to proceed with such a meeting. They will also investigate other federations of the Reformed faith in Brazil.
8. Concerning Theological Training: the temporary Ad-Hoc Training will come to its end in 2005. A new committee is appointed with the task to: a) Investigate the possibility of cooperation with the seminary of the IER (Evangelical Reformed Church) and the IPB started in Curitiba; b) Orientate new students; c) Organize a new Curriculum for Theological Education together with the missionaries, if this appears necessary; d) Contact the C3 to receive financial support for a new Ad-Hoc project, if this would be necessary. Unfortunately there was no report of the present Ad-Hoc Training available for Synod.
9. A proposal to have a set stipend for ministers was rejected since this belongs to the jurisdiction of the local Churches.
10. It was decided to establish a national website for the IRB.
11. As mentioned, there was no report from the Committee for Contact with churches Abroad (CCIE). A new committee was appointed with the mandate to: a) Maintain contact with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Lib.), the Canadian Reformed Churches and

especially with the C3; b) To seek supports from these Churches in order to become member of the ICRC; c) To make an inventory of all the projects which receive financial support from the foreign Churches through the C3; d) To investigate the CLIR (Latin Confraternization of Reformed Churches); e) Supervise the sending of reports to the C3; f) To inform the Churches about the timeframe for financial requests set by C3; g) To indicate who will audit each project supported by the C3.

12. The Regional Council South presented a proposal to initiate a mission work in São José do Rio Preto (between Curitiba and Unai). Although Synod expressed the desirability of such a project, the proposal needed much more work as well as a lowering of the expected costs. The Churches were encouraged to continue the work of evangelization in their immediate area.
13. A report was presented of the Committee for Reformed Literature (CLIREF). This work is to be continued with the support of the C3.
14. The next National Synod is scheduled for the last week in July 2006, in Unai.

Although we notice “growing pains”, this should not take away any of our gratitude for and admiration of what the Lord is all doing in Brazil in a relatively short period. There are now some ten places where the Reformed Churches of Brazil are worshipping the Lord regularly every Sunday. There are two Brazilian pastors, three seminary students doing their final term of internship and another two who should finish their studies in a year’s time. The Churches are becoming increasingly Brazilian but at the same time urge us to continue to support them with missionaries as well as resources. It should be a privilege for us to be able to do so.

So far the financial support is being channeled through the C3 which is composed of representatives from the sending bodies/churches conducting mission work in Brazil, even though a good part of the assistance is not directly mission work anymore. In the Netherlands this support has become more a part of the BBK (their CCCA). In my humble opinion the day may come that we must also look more in that direction: one federation of Churches assisting another federation.

The bond with our Churches is strongly felt and they are most grateful that the Lord used our Churches to establish their Churches. May the bond of faith continue across continents and oceans!

Also on behalf of br. A. Nap,
Rev. C. Van Spronsen

2.2 Personal Report from a committee member

Jacob Kuik (member of CCCA Sub-committee West) was in Brazil for two weeks in April 2005 on a personal holiday. His observations

fully support what has been received from the above reports. He observed that the missionaries are often overloaded and unable to devote sufficient time to all the matters requiring their attention. In discussion with young office-bearers in Recife, Maragogi and São José he heard of a real need for more support for these young and inexperienced office-bearers. It would be good to have office-bearers' conferences without giving the missionaries more work. There is also a need to continue and expand the Theological Training of Brazilian young men.

2.3 Report on Synod 2006

Due to the bankruptcy of Varig Airlines (Brazil) there was some disruption of travel at the time of Synod 2006 IRB. Rev. C. Van Spronsen was present at Synod but other members of the visitation team could not make it. An official report will take some time.

2.4 Report from Rev. Van Vliet

In a personal note to the committee, Rev. Van Vliet, the chairman of the sending church, expressed thankfulness for what the Lord has done and continues to do in Brazil. He pointed to the challenges the church in Brazil faces in teaching the Scriptures as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity to people from diverse backgrounds such as Pentecostal, Congregational and Roman Catholic. Another challenge is obtaining solid Biblical instruction for the children of the church. Unemployment continues to affect also many members of the church. In all of this the needs of the missionaries and their families should not be overlooked. Rev. Van Vliet noted that our work in Brazil is far from done, and the brothers and sisters in Brazil need more than just financial support; they want to share in the rich blessing we have received from the Lord through the generations.

3. Recommendations

The committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To express gratitude to the Lord for the continued desire and effort within the IRB to serve Him in sincerity and truth;
2. To mandate the CCCA to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the IRB under the adopted rules via the sending churches for mission in Brazil;
3. To mandate the CCCA to make use of other opportunities for contact with the IRB as they may present themselves (e.g. visits from Canada to Brazil and vice versa by church members).

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 6: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

1. General Information

Already in 1983, the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa sent an overture with very favourable information about the RPCNA to the Canadian Reformed Synod convened in Cloverdale in 1983. Synod Cloverdale advised the church at Ottawa to bring the matter to a subsequent Synod through classes and Regional Synod. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons this did not happen.

Years later, after the RPCNA joined the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), Rev. J. VanRietschoten focused attention on this group of churches in a series of articles in the "Observation Deck" of *Clarion*.¹ He noted that the RPCNA had discontinued its relation with the Christian Reformed Church. He also pointed out some differences between us and the RPCNA. Its congregations are characterized by adherence to the Westminster Confession. In parallel columns together with the Westminster Confession, the RPCNA has a Testimony² by means of which it has sought to apply Scripture to contemporary issues that were unknown in the 17th Century. In its worship services, the congregations sing only Psalms, without musical accompaniment. Rev. VanRietschoten also mentioned the *National Reformed Association*, a political organization in which the membership and executive largely come from the RPCNA. This organization is dedicated to exerting a Reformed influence on politics. Rev. VanRietschoten concluded: "All in all there is much kinship between the *Canadian Reformed Churches* and the life and practice in and around the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*. The differences that exist are worthy of further study."³

The general mandate given by the Canadian Reformed Churches to its Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA) includes the following: "Respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in the Americas."⁴ As a result, when an invitation was received from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)⁵ to send a visitor delegate to attend its Synod 2005, a decision was taken to respond

¹ *Clarion*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Feb. 5, 1999 and No. 6, March 19, 1999.

² Documentation concerning the faith and practice of the RPCNA is available in their "Constitution" on the internet at: http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/conv_constitution.html and can be downloaded.

³ *Clarion*, Vol. 48, No. 6, March 19, 1999, 137.

⁴ Acts General Synod Neerlandia, Alberta, 2001, p. 87; Acts General Synod Chatham, Ontario, 2004, p. 27.

⁵ For further information see the website: <http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/>

to this positively. From June 27-30, 2005, Rev. A.J. Pol visited the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. (His report can be found in Appendix 1).

A considerable amount of information about the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) can be found on the internet, where it has an official website.⁶ Further details as to what this church stands for and how its life is organized can be found in a publication with the title: "The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Being Its Standards Subordinate to the Word of God." The further subtitle indicates its contents: "The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Testimony, the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Worship of God, Together with Official Vows and Forms."⁷

Recent Contact and Correspondence

1. March 1, 2004 – Invitation from Dr. Bruce Stewart (secretary of the Interchurch Relations Committee / IRC) to send observers to the RPCNA Synod to be held June 19-25, 2004 in Upland, Indiana.
2. May 21, 2004 – Email sent to Rev. Bruce Parnell, chairman of the IRC responding to the invitation dated March 1, 2004.
3. June 3, 2004 – CCCA approved letter to Dr. Bruce Stewart. Letter of Christian greeting to be read at the RPCNA Synod, June 19-25, 2004.
4. September 18, 2004 – Email to Dr. Bruce Stewart and Rev. Bruce Parnell asking for feedback and information about their Synod of June 19-25, 2004 and trying to make arrangements for a meeting between our respective committees during NAPARC, Nov. 2004 in Kansas City.
5. Oct. 28, 2004 – Email sent as a follow up to the email of Sept 18, 2004.
6. Email response from Rev. Bruce Parnell to our emails of Sept 18 and Oct 28, 2004. Discussion about meeting while we are at NAPARC Nov. 2004, in Kansas City.
7. Nov. 2, 2004 – Email to Rev. Bruce Parnell re the above.
8. Nov. 3, 2004 – Email from Rev. Bruce Parnell re the above.
9. Nov. 9-10, 2004. NAPARC Kansas City. Met informally with the delegates from the RPCNA during this time. Shared information to lay a basis for future contact.

⁶ <http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/>

⁷ RPCNA, The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Being Its Standards Subordinate to the Word of God, The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Testimony, the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Worship of God. Together with Official Vows and Forms (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2004). This "Constitution" of the RPCNA can also be found as a PDF document on the internet at: http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/conv_constitution.html

10. Jan. 24, 2005 – Email from Rev. Bruce Parnell asking for a follow up on books that he ordered from Premier Printing as a result of material that we handed out at NAPARC.
11. March 7, 2005 – Invitation from Dr. Bruce Stewart to send observers to their Synod to be held June 27-30, 2005 in Beaver Falls, PA.
12. July – Aug, 2005 – Report from Rev. A. J. Pol on his visit to Synod 2005 of the RPCNA, which he attended as an observer on behalf of the CCCA.
13. Mar 16, 2006 – Letter from Dr. Bruce Stewart with invitation to send observers to their Synod to be held June 26-30 in Beaver Falls, PA.
14. May, 2006 Informal contact by brs. Art Poppe and Jacob Kuik with Rev. Bruce Parnell during the RCUS Synod in Mitchell, SD.
15. June 6, 2006 – Email to Rev. Bruce Parnell re invitation to their Synod of June 26-30, 2006 and a letter of greeting sent to be read at that Synod. Also sent a complimentary copy of the Genevan Psalms in Harmony by Claude Goudimel.
16. June 15, 2006 – Email to Rev. Bruce Parnell and Dr. Bruce Stewart re follow up to the above.
17. June 26, 2006 – Email from Dr. Bruce Stewart in response to ours of June 6th and 15th. Received a hearty thank you for the copy of the Genevan Psalms in Harmony.
18. Aug 3, 2006 – Letter from Rev. Pol to Dr. Bruce Stewart asking for more information and clarification on some concerns that were raised by Sub-committee East including the origin and status of the “Contemporary Testimony”.
19. Aug 14, 2006 – Email and letter from Dr. Bruce Stewart to Rev. Pol responding to the above. Their IRC is not scheduled to meet for some time so an official response may not be received before Synod Smithers 2007.

2. RPCNA: Name and history

Like the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America traces its roots back to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. Its system of church government is “Presbyterian,” with local congregations being under the authority of the elected elders.

The roots of the RPCNA go back to the Covenanters, Presbyterians in Scotland who participated in public covenanting. In doing so, they upheld the “crown rights” of Christ as King over the church as well as the state, and protested against government interference in the life of the church. This position is spelled out in the “Solemn League and Covenant,” a treaty with English parliamentarians signed in August, 1643.

The sovereignty of Jesus Christ over church and state failed to be officially recognized in 1691, when Presbyterianism became the Established Church in Scotland. As a result, the early Covenanters formed the Re-

formed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and also in Ireland, where many fled to avoid persecution.⁸

Some dates that stand out in the history of the RPCNA are as follows. The first Reformed Presbyterian congregation was established in North America in 1738. Since then, congregations have been formed in the United States and in Canada. A Reformed Presbytery was constituted in 1774, and dissolved again in 1782, when the majority of the Reformed Presbyterian Church merged with the majority of the Associate Presbyterian Church to form the Associate Reformed Church, (later known as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church). In 1798, the "Reformed Presbytery of the United States of North America" was constituted, with the first Synod taking place in 1809.⁹ There was a split from this body in 1840 led by Rev. David Steele, who founded a small denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanted), commonly referred to as the "Steelites."¹⁰ A congregation belonging to that group can be found in Edmonton, Alberta. The organization "Still Waters Revival Books"¹¹ is connected to it. Another split from the RPCNA took place in 1892.

Consistent with past history, the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over church and state continues to be upheld as a foundational principle of the RPCNA¹² At various times in conversations with people of the RPCNA one can hear reference being made to "Christ's mediatorial kingship." What is meant is something that is actually quite familiar to continental Reformed theology, namely that Christ is King and Mediator, and he not only rules over the Church, but also over the nations.

2.1 Statistical Data

The RPCNA is divided into seven Presbyteries: Alleghenies Presbytery, Atlantic Presbytery, Great Lakes - Gulf Presbytery, Japan Presbytery, Midwest Presbytery, Pacific Coast Presbytery, and St. Lawrence Presbytery.

⁸ For some further details, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RPCNA>. Even more details about the history of the RPCNA can be found in a book written by W. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Church in America* (Baltimore: Hill & Harvey, Publishers, 1888). This book can be downloaded from the Internet at http://www.rpcna.org/conv_resources.html in the form of PDF files.

The North American history of the RPCNA is also described by David M. Carson in *A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America to 1871*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, Inc.), a Ph.D. dissertation written in 1964 for the University of Pennsylvania. He has also given a more abbreviated description of RPCNA church history in: *Transplanted to America...A Popular History of the American Covenanters to 1871*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications). This book can be ordered through the internet at the following website: <http://www.psalms4u.com/>.

⁹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, I-1

¹⁰ Thank you to Rev. T. Reid, librarian and history professor of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, who drew attention to this group and who has also provided other relevant details for this paper on the RPCNA. The "Steelites" have a website: <http://www.covenanter.org/>.

¹¹ <http://www.swrb.com/>

¹² RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-69 - A-78.

According to the Report of the Stated Clerk, dated December 31, 2003, the membership of the RPCNA consisted of 6,259 members, of which 4,440 were communicant members and 1,819 baptized members, distributed over 77 congregations and 6 mission churches.¹³

2.2 Meetings of the RPCNA

Meetings of the Presbytery normally take place two to three times per year. Presbytery Conferences are held each summer. A Synod is convened annually. Every four years there is an International Convention. The last one was held at Calvin College, July 24-30, 2004.

2.3 Evangelism and Mission Work

The RPCNA website provides the following information on mission work of the RPCNA.

The Board of Foreign Missions motivates and leads the denomination to fulfill the Great Commission by planting strong churches outside North America and by ministering to nationals wherever they may be. Over the years, Reformed Presbyterian missionaries have been active in Australia, China, Cyprus, Japan, Manchuria, and Syria. Upon recommendation of their sessions, others have served in specialized foreign ministries under the oversight of other agencies.¹⁴

A link to another website gives a further explanation:

The Board of Foreign missions of the RPCNA is appointed by the Synod for the purpose of encouraging and promoting the health, growth and multiplication of Reformed Presbyterian Churches by establishing vigorous and truly biblical, indigenous churches in other lands, especially where RPCNA presbyteries do not have jurisdiction.

The Board aims to establish biblical churches comprised of God's people who confess saving faith in Jesus Christ as their only hope in this life and the life to come, and who commit themselves to love and serve him faithfully as the scriptures direct. In considering requests for developing new missions, the Board

¹³ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod and Yearbook of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America - 2004* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2004), 32. A list of locations of the congregations of the RPCNA can be found on the internet at the following website: http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/cong_loc.php.

¹⁴ http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/agen_mission_foreign.html

will show preference to situations in which members of the RPCNA are, or will be available as, field workers.¹⁵

2.4 Theological Institutions

The RPCNA has its own seminary, called the “Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary” in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is a conservative, Reformed institution that has received accreditation from the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as well as from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The Seminary has five full-time professors and eight adjunct professors. Students can obtain a Master of Divinity or a Master of Theological Studies degree there. Information about this seminary can be found on the Internet at: www.rpts.edu. The website emphasizes that: “Since its inception, the Seminary has been under the direct control of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and has been governed through a Board of Trustees, elected by that body.” It also stresses that “The Seminary is committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and to the Reformed Faith as summarized in the Westminster Standards and in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.”

In 2010 the Seminary hopes to celebrate its 200th anniversary! Evidence of the supervision of the Seminary was also apparent at Synod 2005, where Dr. Richard C. Gamble was interviewed quite thoroughly for the position of Systematic Theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, which is located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dr. Gamble has been teaching at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.¹⁶

Aside from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the RPCNA also has the Ottawa Theological Hall, in Ottawa, Canada, and Kobe Theological Hall, in Kobe, Japan. These Theological Halls are not accredited institutions, but various courses are taught by professors who are flown in. Facilities are limited and classes are given in the evenings. After receiving a diploma from such a Theological Hall, students can pursue further studies at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh to obtain a recognized degree.

¹⁵ <http://www.rpforeignmissions.org/>

¹⁶ More information about him can be found at the following website:
http://www.rpts.edu/pres_news_article.asp?articleid=11

3. Adherence to Scripture and Reformed Confessions

On its website, the RPCNA expresses its beliefs as follows:

Our beliefs all stem from a full commitment to the authority of the Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God. This means that we believe in the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We acknowledge our total inability to save ourselves and, in faith, depend on Christ alone as our Savior. We acknowledge Him as Covenant Lord in every area of life, and we vow together to advance His Kingdom on earth.

We believe that God desires His Church to set forth clear statements of her system of doctrine that can be supported from Scripture. We therefore accept as our creed, or subordinate standards, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. In addition to these doctrinal statements, we adhere to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, which is our continuing application of God's written word to the world and the church of today.

We believe that God's Word clearly sets forth how He is to be worshiped. The reading and exposition of the Word of God are the central focus of our worship. Our musical praise employs God's Word only, thus making use of the divinely inspired Book of Psalms of the Bible. In keeping with the New Testament Church's directive for heart worship, we sing without the aid of musical instruments.¹⁷

The RPCNA expects those in ecclesiastical offices to uphold the doctrines of Scripture as set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and applied in its *Testimony*. How this is put into practice can be seen in the "Queries for Ordination, Installation, and Licensure," listed in its Constitution. These questions are applicable for all the office bearers:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and life?
2. Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only Redeemer of men, and do you confess Him publicly as your Saviour and Lord?
3. Do you believe that it is the duty of Christians to profess publicly the content of faith as it applies to the particular needs of each age and situation, and that such public profession, otherwise called covenanting, should be made formally by the churches and other institutions

¹⁷ http://www.rpcna.org/conv_beliefs.html

- as well as informally by each believer according to his ability?
4. Do you believe in and accept the system of doctrine and the manner of worship set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures?
 5. Do you believe it to be the teaching of Scripture — that church and state are distinct and separate institutions; that both are under the mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that the permanent form of church government is presbyterian?
 6. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations, and that in loyalty and obedience to Him, it is our duty to follow the noble example of the faithful confessors and martyrs of Jesus in their witness for divine truth, and in their sacrifices and labors to establish the Kingdom of God on earth?
 7. So far as you can know in your own heart, is it the call of Christ, the glory of God and the welfare of the church, and not any selfish object, that moves you to undertake this sacred office?
 8. That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you promise, in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church —
 - (*to deacons*): to lead the congregation in the ministry of mercy, to practice the grace of scriptural stewardship, to cultivate it in the congregation, and to endeavor to handle the Lord's money in a manner which is efficient and above reproach?
 - (*to elders*): to watch over the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation, to endeavor to win others to Christ, to visit the afflicted and to attend the meetings associated with your office?
 - (*to persons certified to preach, or to licentiates*): to seek diligently to become an able expositor of the Word, an understanding and helpful counselor, a true minister of God?
 - (*to ministers*): to bring to your congregation the fruits of earnest study of the Word, to maintain a testimony for the Kingdom of God, to endeavor to minister to others and win them to Christ, to watch for souls as one who must give account?
 9. Do you promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of this church, and engage to follow no divisive courses from the doctrine and order which the church has solemnly recognized and adopted; and do you promise to submit to all the brotherly counsel which your brethren may tender you in the Lord?¹⁸

¹⁸ RPCNA, *Constitution*, G-2 - G-3.

3.1 Membership

The RPCNA consists of baptized members and communicant members who have made public profession of faith and have accepted the Covenant of Church Membership. Baptized members and prospective members undergo instruction to prepare them for communicant membership. The Constitution of the RPCNA also notes: “No one should be admitted who is ignorant of the plan of salvation, or who gives no credible evidence of having been born again, or who assumes an attitude antagonistic to the principles set forth in the standards of the Church.”¹⁹ The Interchurch Relations Committee of the RPCNA pointed out that if, for example, someone would request membership who holds to believers only baptism they would, according to the fourth vow of the Covenant of Communicant Membership, still be obliged to submit to the teaching and government of the church (see par. 3.2 below).

People who regularly attend the worship services and support the church without being members are called “adherents.”

If a member moves from one congregation to another within the RPCNA or to another church, he or she is given a certificate of transfer of membership upon request.

3.2 Public Profession of Faith

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms as well as the Testimony associated with the Confession are more than just “paper documents” in the RPCNA. This can be seen in the “Covenant of Communicant Membership” that members must subscribe to in order to become communicant members of the church. It can also be seen in the attention given to the instruction of covenant children as they grow up. Parents are urged to take this very seriously in their homes.

The RPCNA opposes what is commonly referred to as “Paedo-communion.” The Constitution stipulates in section G-1 that those who wish to become communicant members of the church are to be examined by the session and in the presence of the session as well as in a public worship service indicate their assent to the following “Covenant of Communicant Membership.”

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life?
2. Do you believe in the one living and true God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures?

¹⁹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, D-2.

3. Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God; profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service? Do you promise that you will endeavor to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?
4. Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?
5. To the end that you may grow in the Christian life, do you promise that you will diligently read the Bible, engage in private prayer, keep the Lord's Day, regularly attend the worship services, observe the appointed sacraments, and give to the Lord's work as He shall prosper you?
6. Do you purpose to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all the relationships of life, faithfully to perform your whole duty as a true servant of Jesus Christ, and seek to win others to Him?
7. Do you make this profession of faith and purpose in the presence of God, in humble reliance upon His grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?²⁰

In response to a question about the age at which young people could make public profession of faith, the Interchurch Relations Committee responded: "Communion is not to be served to anyone who has not made a credible profession of faith and acceptance of the Covenant of Church Membership before the Session. Since we believe that Jesus went up to the temple at the age of 12, communicants' classes frequently are conducted with that age in mind though the majority of our children are older when they come before the Session. There are some cases where the Session may receive someone younger than 12 if the child is mature for his age and clearly exhibits understanding of his profession."²¹

When a new congregation is to be instituted, all communicant members are expected to give assent to the "Covenant of Church Membership" as well as to the following pledge:

Do you solemnly covenant with God and with one another that you will live together in brotherly unity as an organized congre-

²⁰ RPCNA, *Constitution*, G-1 - G-2.

²¹ E-mail from Dr. Bruce Stewart, March 3, 2006.

gation on the basis of the Constitution of the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*; that you will be obedient to the courts that are over you in the Lord; and that you will, by a godly life, seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole?²²

3.3 *Baptism*

In Chapter 29.8 of its Testimony, the RPCNA explicitly rejects the idea that persons are regenerated by baptism.²³ Baptism is administered to believers and to their children as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

Believing parents are expected to answer six questions in regard to the baptism of their child:

1. Do you believe this child is a possession of God entrusted to your care?
2. In this light, do you promise to provide for his/her temporal well being, to teach him/her to love God and His Word, the Bible, and to provide him/her with a God-centered education?
3. Do you promised to teach him/her of his/her sinful nature, of the plan of salvation which centers in Jesus Christ, and his/her own personal need of a relationship with Christ?
4. To the end that he/she may grow in the Christian life, do you promised to pray for him/her, and to train him/her to read the Bible, to pray, to keep the Lord's Day and to understand the nature of the church, the value of its worship in fellowship, and his/her need to seek communicant membership in the church?
5. Do you promise to lead him/her, by her example and parental discipline exercised in love, to seek first to Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the relationships of life?
6. Do you make these promises in the presence of God, in humble reliance upon His grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?²⁴

3.4 *Christian Education*

The RPCNA stresses the importance of Christian education. In its Testimony, it states:

Where necessary and possible, Christian parents should cooperate in supporting or establishing schools whose curriculum presents a biblical world and life view, and place their children in

²² RPCNA, *Constitution*, D-5, par. 8.

²³ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-96.

²⁴ RPCNA, *Constitution*, F-7.

them. This requires maintenance of the highest academic quality along with Christian orientation in every subject and activity.²⁵

It also stipulates:

Parents should take care to counteract any unbiblical teaching given to their children, whether in public or Christian schools. As youth increase in their knowledge and discernment, the home and the Church should help them to examine what is presented in school, to distinguish between God-given truths and human theories, and to integrate the facts learned with a Christian view of man and the universe.

Isa. 8:20.²⁶

Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, is owned by the RPCNA. Attention is given at Synod to ensuring that there is as much Reformed influence as possible in the instruction given at Geneva College, since this church is not able to fill all the vacancies at the college with its own members. It does what it can to ensure that in any case the instruction in core subjects relating to the Scriptures is consistent with the positions held by the church. Geneva College is accredited by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, the recognized accrediting agency in that region of the USA. Several of its programs, such as education and engineering, are also accredited by specialized associations in those fields.

3.5 **Sunday Observance**

The RPCNA takes Sunday observance very seriously. In "The Directory for the Worship of God" adopted in 1945, it stipulates in chapter 1.5:

Sanctification of the Day requires preparation beforehand that all necessary labor be reduced to a minimum and the Sabbath kept free for its intended purpose. It requires diligent attendance upon the public ordinances of God's house unless providentially hindered; and that the hours apart from public worship and works of necessity and mercy be used in activities helpful to the spiritual life. These may include reading the Bible and devotional literature; instructing and catechising the children in the home; preparing to take part in religious services; singing Psalms; and visiting the sick.²⁷

²⁵ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-85

²⁶ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-85.

²⁷ RPCNA, *Constitution*, F-2.

The impression given by the Interchurch Committee of the RPCNA is that the RPCNA as a whole is firmly committed to upholding the authority of Scriptures in the life of the congregations. Two services are held each Sunday in the majority of the churches. Where this is not the case, it is often because the congregation members are spread out over a large area. Sermons in the morning are preached on an Old Testament or New Testament text. The afternoon service can be more catechetical in nature or guided by such themes as preparation for the election of office bearers. The session decides on matters such as this. The second services are often a little less formal. There is then opportunity for input in singing and prayer requests.

Sunday Schools (often called Sabbath Schools) are held for all members throughout the year, although there may be a "vacation" in the summer. The instruction in these "Schools" is usually given after or before the morning worship service in almost all congregations. Sometimes members are divided according to age groups. There is a graded series with contents determined by a Christian Education Committee. Attention is given to studying the Westminster Confession or a Bible book.

3.6 Liturgy

The order of the elements of worship in the RPCNA is left up to the decision of the local session. Those elements can be found in section F. of "The Directory for the Worship of God" of the Constitution. After spelling out some General Directions, attention is focused in Chapter 2 on "Parts of Public Worship." Those parts are identified as the singing of praise, explanation of the Psalm sung, prayer, the offering, reading of the Scriptures, the sermon, and the benediction. Chapter 3 focuses on "the Administration of the Sacraments." Other chapters are devoted to "Special Ordinances," "Other Spheres of Worship," and "Other Ministerial Functions."

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the RPCNA is that like the Free Church of Scotland, with which we already have ecclesiastical fellowship, it holds to exclusive psalmody without instrumental accompaniment. The underlying principle can be found in Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96 of our Heidelberg Catechism, namely that we are not to worship God "in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word." According to them, this implies that if something in connection with worship is not commanded, it is forbidden. There is no reference in the New Testament to musical instruments being used in the worship services. Therefore the RPCNA restricts itself to singing without the use of instruments. It also interprets Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 as referring to the book of

Psalms. The RPCNA advances biblical as well as historical arguments to support its position.²⁸

The RPCNA does not see its exclusive psalmody position as an impediment for it to have a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with other churches that seek to be faithful to Scripture. The members of the Interchurch Committee did explain that a failure to accept exclusive psalmody would form a barrier to complete church unity, given the fact that they would otherwise be compromising their own position on this issue. This is understandable.

From our perspective, exclusive psalmody on the part of the RPCNA would not necessarily be an insurmountable obstacle to complete church unity. But this church would want to discuss its perspective with us, since their position is stricter than ours. Similarly, there would be interest in discussing the differences between our confessions and theirs as well as our system of church government and theirs.

So far in our contacts with churches of Presbyterian origin we have recognized that these differences are obstacles to full unity. Nevertheless this has not prevented us from acknowledging that we do have enough common ground with them to establish a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Remaining differences remained to be discussed within that framework, a framework in which we already acknowledge one another's desire and effort to be faithful churches of Jesus Christ.

3.7 Lord's Supper

In "The Directory for the Worship of God" in the RPCNA Constitution the following is stipulated in regard to the Lord's Supper:

- 10.a. The Lord's Supper is to be administered only to those who have been baptized, and are communicant members in good standing in some true branch of the visible church.
- b. No person shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper whose manner of life is notably inconsistent with his Christian profession or who is unknown to the session in charge of the Table. Casual visitors are not to be invited to commune.
- c. Every session must guard the purity of the Sacraments by exercising diligent and continual oversight of those under its care, never assuming that church membership alone is suf-

²⁸ See the position paper "The Worship of the Church - A Reformed Theology of Worship," *Minutes of the Synod - 2003*, pp. 91-113; "The Psalms in the Worship of the Church," *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, pp. 91-115, and the "Minority Report on Psalmody Issues, Synod's Worship Study Committee, 2004," *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, pp. 179-186.

ficient basis for admission to the Sacrament. Those who seek to commune but are not under care of the session must be examined.²⁹

The Interchurch Relations Committee indicated that the examination with a view to the Lord's Supper is announced a week in advance.

It is interesting to note concerning the Lord's Supper in paragraph 13 of "The Directory for the Worship of God": "The use of tables, which has come down from the past, has helped to guard the purity of the ordinance and should not lightly be set aside."³⁰

The Interchurch Relations Committee indicated: "We have uniformity in our full commitment to the authority of Scripture and the system of doctrine and manner of worship set forth in the Westminster standards and the Testimony of the RPC. There are some variations in application. In some congregations, people go forward to sit at a table to receive the Lord's Supper; in most cases, the elements are served to people where they sit in the pews. In order to commune, non-members must be members of an evangelical church, and give a credible confession of faith to the Session. Some sessions would require that a quorum of elders is needed to examine candidates for communion; other sessions would allow several elders to meet with candidates and report back to the session. Some congregation have the observance of the Lord's Supper twice a year; some 4 times, some 6 times, some 12 times, and some every week. Some congregations have a Table Talk (a meditation on appropriate Scripture) following the distribution of the elements; some just have silent meditation and prayer."³¹

Discussions have taken place in our own midst concerning sacramental wine. It is therefore worth noting that Synod 2003 of the RPCNA appointed a committee to study the scriptural evidence for the type of wine to be used in the Lord's Supper. This committee was instructed to ascertain whether the Scriptures require the use of alcoholic wine in the Lord's Supper and how to apply the answer to this question in congregations where there are opposite convictions in the matter.³² The committee noted contradictory statements on these issues and observed that "One's prior conviction about wine, then, is what tends to determine how people view the question of what was in the sacramental cup."³³ After mentioning

²⁹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, F-8.

³⁰ RPCNA, *Constitution*, F-8.

³¹ E-mail from Dr. Bruce Stewart, March 3, 2006

³² RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, 75.

³³ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, 76.

opposing positions concerning whether Proverbs 23:29-35 addresses the use or the abuse of wine, the committee stated: "In addition to Proverbs 23:29-35, the committee specifically plans to examine such passages as Proverbs 20:1; Matthew 11:18-19; Matthew 26:27-29; and perhaps John 2:1-11 and Ephesians 5:18 in their contexts." Synod decided to continue this committee for one more year and add to the committee "members who have concern for the distinctly pastoral dimensions of the problem and, at the same time, are able to contribute to the technical aspects of our study by applying lexical and exegetical skills to the committee's work."³⁴

3.8 *Some Further Items of Interest*

Many churches nowadays have allowed the authority of Scripture to be undermined in its midst either by propagating or accepting doctrines or lifestyles that are contrary to Scripture. In this regard it is interesting to note some of the ways in which the Testimony of the RPCNA seeks to address contemporary issues. It emphasizes, for example, that the theory of evolution "is unscriptural" and rejects the idea "that man evolved from any lower form of life."³⁵ It rejects "the teaching that the Fourth Commandment is no longer binding under the New Testament."³⁶

Christians should walk in the light. Their beliefs, purposes, manner of life, and their rules of action and conduct should be based on the Word of God and should not be concealed. Oath-bound societies usually involve an improper requirement of secrecy, aims which are immoral, intimate fellowship with unbelievers or participation in unbiblical worship. Membership in such organizations is inconsistent with a Christian profession, however good their announced purposes may be.

1 John 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:5; Matt. 5:14; 2 John 1:7-11; John 3:20-21; Eph. 5:8-14; Matt. 15:9.³⁷

In line with its concern that Christians should lead a godly lifestyle, the Testimony stresses that "Christians should avoid enslavement to alcohol, tobacco or any habit-forming drug. The Scripture strongly condemns drunkenness as a sin." It then goes on to state that "To prevent damage to our neighbor, to provide mutual help and godly living, and to strengthen each other in living a disciplined life it is altogether wise and proper that Christians refrain from the use, sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages." It also issues strong warnings against the use of tobacco and of drugs "for pleasure or escape from moral responsibility."³⁸

³⁴ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, 77.

³⁵ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-19 - A-20.

³⁶ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-64.

³⁷ RPCNA, *Constitution*, F-8

³⁸ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-91 - A-92.

4. System of Church Government

The RPCNA rejects hierarchy in the church involving authority centered in one individual or in a hierarchy of bishops. Local churches are governed by the body of elders, known as the “session.”³⁹ The RPCNA is careful to note that “The session is the court having original jurisdiction over the members of a congregation. It consists of at least two resident elders selected by the congregation.”⁴⁰ The Interchurch Relations Committee stated: “It would be up to each session to decide who might occupy the pulpit.”⁴¹

Churches in a region are organized into a Presbytery by Synod when they request this. Sessions send delegates to the meetings of Presbytery, which are normally held at least once a year.⁴² Sessions send certified delegates to each meeting of Synod, which also meets annually. The Synod is referred to as “the highest court of the church, and is the body of organic union, cooperation, and mutual helpfulness, between the presbyteries. It is responsible for the continuing reformation of the church in maintaining the subordinate standards of the church in harmony with the Scriptural truth and order. Its decisions are final, but its authority is limited by its subordinate standards.”⁴³

4.1 Offices

In Chapter 25.7, the Testimony affirms:

Christ has appointed in His Word a particular form of government for the visible church. It is government by elders (Greek: presbyters) and is therefore called Presbyterian. Each congregation should be ruled by a session of ordained elders, elected by the membership of the congregation.⁴⁴

The RPCNA distinguishes between a “ruling elder” and a “teaching elder” (known as “ministers of the Word” in Canadian Reformed Churches). In Chapter 25.8, the Testimony stipulates that “The office of elder is restricted in Scripture to men.” The emphasis on the word “elder” should be noted, since the Testimony states in the same article that “Women as well as men may hold the office of deacon.”⁴⁵ In Chapter 25.11 it becomes clear how this is justified. “The diaconate is a spiritual office subordinate to the session and is

³⁹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-102.

⁴⁰ RPCNA, *Constitution*, D-29.

⁴¹ E-mail from Dr. Bruce Stewart, March 3, 2006.

⁴² RPCNA, *Constitution*, D-32.

⁴³ RPCNA, *Constitution*, D-36.

⁴⁴ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-87.

⁴⁵ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-87.

not a teaching or ruling office. The deacons have responsibility for the ministry of mercy, the finances and property of the congregation, and such other tasks as are assigned to them by the session.”⁴⁶

The Directory for Church Government indicates that “ruling elders” and deacons are to be examined by the session with regard to their soundness in the faith and their commitment to the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. “Teaching elders” first receive training for the ministry and undergo examination by the Presbytery in order to become licensed to preach. Further examination by the Presbytery must take place before an elder-elect who has received a call can be ordained. Prior to ordination, the candidate must answer the prescribed Queries for Ordination.⁴⁷ As to the course of training for the ministry in the RPCNA, Rev. Tom Reid, a professor at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, gave the following explanation in an e-mail:

“Ministers must have an M.Div. degree (or its equivalent), although extraordinary circumstances are recognized as sometimes occurring. I can think of two ministers, one no longer in the RPCNA, who were approved without the M.Div. in the past generation (The one who remains with us is a Ph.D. in history and one of the most prominent theologians among us!) All candidates must have both Biblical languages and follow the prescribed exams, which are fairly rigorous.”⁴⁸

4.2 Church Discipline

The RPCNA regards discipline as the responsibility of every church member, but also stresses the role of the elders. The application of discipline begins with the preaching of the Word, but elders are also personally responsible for the spiritual lives of the congregation members. Where discipline must be applied by the church the purposes are: “primarily, to reclaim the sinning member; then to deter others from similar offenses; to maintain the honor of Christ and the purity and peace of His Church; to maintain the truth of the gospel; and to avoid the wrath of God coming upon the church.”⁴⁹

The process of church discipline in the RPCNA is quite similar to that in that Canadian Reformed Churches, where the rule of Matthew 18 applies unless a sin is known generally or cannot be solved privately. Discipline begins in the local congregation. When discipline is exercised officially, the session functions as a “court.” If they are convinced that they have been wronged, members may appeal to the “higher” church courts (Presbytery or Synod).

⁴⁶ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-87.

⁴⁷ See the “Queries” listed above in paragraph 3.

⁴⁸ E-mail from Rev. T. Reid, September 5, 2005.

⁴⁹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, E-3.

In chapter 4.1 of the “Book of Discipline” the following is noted:

1. There are five formal degrees of censure. These are admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. These formal censures shall be used if the sin is confirmed, and if censure is appropriate, or the sinner is confronted but does not repent. These formal censures shall be put in writing, with a clear statement of the sin, and, if possible, conveyed to the sinner personally by one or more members of the court.⁵⁰

A church session may also decide to remove someone from church membership without formal censure. Examples of this would be if a person no longer attends church and is not interested in continuing to be a member, or requests to be removed from membership. In such cases the person is warned “that outside the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” and given a “Certificate of Dismissal.” If a member cannot be located or contacted, he or she may also be removed from the membership of the church.⁵¹

It is good to note a word of caution given in the “Book of Discipline” in connection with church discipline:

- e. Because the multiplication of processes tends to weaken the authority of discipline the court shall not use formal processes for slight offenses.

Scripture: 1 Thess. 5:14; Titus 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6; Matt. 18:17-18; John 20:23; 1 John 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:10; Matt. 19:22.⁵²

5. View of the Church

The Testimony of the RPCNA includes a statement in Chapter 25.4: “There is a visible and an invisible aspect of the Church, but these are not two churches.”⁵³ It also explains that:

Divisions that separate believers into denominations mar the unity of the Church and are due to error and sin. It is the duty of all denominations which are true churches of Christ to seek reconciliation and union. Such organizational unity, however, should be sought only on the basis of truth and of scriptural order. It is the duty of every believer to unite with the branch of the visible church which adheres most closely to the Scriptures.

Acts 15:22-29; 1 Cor. 10:17; Eph. 4:4-6; Acts 17:11-12.⁵⁴

5.1 Ecclesiastical Relations

Ecclesiastical Fellowship

The RPCNA uses the terminology of “Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship” to refer to churches with which it has relations. These

⁵⁰ RPCNA, *Constitution*, E-5.

⁵¹ RPCNA, *Constitution*, E-6.

⁵² RPCNA, *Constitution*, E-7.

⁵³ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-86.

⁵⁴ RPCNA, *Constitution*, A-89.

relations are subdivided into three categories: "Full intercommunion," "Fraternal relations" and "Observer Churches." Full intercommunion involves the recognition of one another's ministry, order and discipline, bringing with it "the regular interchange of delegates and exchanging of pulpits and personnel..." while "fraternal relations" is somewhat less intensive, involving:

- "a. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies (including privileges of the floor)
- b. Occasional pulpit fellowship (Local option)
- c. Intercommunion (Controlled by each session/consistory)
- d. Joint action in areas of common responsibility
- e. Communication on issues of joint concern
- f. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity (including respect for the discipline of churches with whom we are in Ecclesiastical Fellowship)" (*Minutes of Synod*, 1974, p. 114).⁵⁵

"Observer churches" are churches with which there is little practical contact and "as yet no formal ecclesiastical fellowship."⁵⁶

The RPCNA has "full intercommunion" with the Reformed Presbytery of Australia; Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland; Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland; and Trinity Community Christian Fellowship of Cyprus (a Reformed Presbyterian Church). It maintains "fraternal relations" with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church; Korean American Presbyterian Church; Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Church in America; the Reformed Church in the United States and United Reformed Churches of North America.

There are "historical intermittent" relations with the American Presbyterian Church, and the Free Church of Scotland (Synod of North America). According to Dr. Bruce Stewart, secretary of the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RPCNA, this means the RPCNA "did at one time enter into fraternal relations with them," and still has "much in common with them," "but there is not a regular exchange of fraternal delegates or correspondence. It is an area we need to evaluate more closely."⁵⁷

Ecumenical Organizations

The RPCNA is a member of the following interchurch organizations: the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC); the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC); and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).

⁵⁵ Interchurch Committee, *A Manual of Interchurch Relations for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America - 1999* (Pittsburgh:1999), 11.

⁵⁶ Interchurch Committee, *A Manual of Interchurch Relations*, 12.

⁵⁷ This E-mail, dated October 1, 2005, was part of a response to some questions addressed to him.

The RPCNA has been a member of the NAE for more than 50 years. Varying opinions on the merits of participation in this organization were discussed at Synod 2003 of the RPCNA. While some in the RPCNA feel that they should not be members, Dr. Stewart notes that “many of us feel that there are major issues where we can cooperate with other Evangelical Christians and toward which we can give valuable input.”⁵⁸ A statement of faith of this organization was regarded as “sound.”⁵⁹ Ongoing participation has been defended on the grounds that through it “we have a vehicle to co-labor with those with whom we have a common faith in Christ and a commitment to the infallible Scriptures.” It was decided to continue membership in the NAE for three years and then “re-evaluate our position.”⁶⁰ Some positive evaluation was given in a “Report of the 2004 NAE Convention and Board Meeting,” which was discussed and accepted at Synod 2004. There, it was noted: “Had the NAE persisted in the course which would have involved us in the ‘New Ecumenism’ as the former President was apparently leading, we could not have consistently continued as members. But there has been a decisive change.”⁶¹

Procedures for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Having relationships with various churches necessitates the establishment of clear guidelines. In this regard is interesting to note what duties the RPCNA has established for its Interchurch Committee.

1. To appoint a teaching or ruling elder to bring fraternal greetings to the major assemblies of the churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship; and receiving and reviewing the report of each delegate. Delegations will generally be sent *every other year*.
2. To invite and to receive the fraternal delegates from each denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship, hosting them and presenting them to Synod. Such delegations will be received generally *every other year*.
3. To foster links with other RP churches, by providing for the annual reception of a delegate from the RPCI (at their discretion), and the *quadrennial* reception of the delegate from the RP churches in Australia, Cyprus, and Scotland (at our expense).
4. To exchange official Minutes with those denominations with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship and such others as Synod may approve from time to time.

⁵⁸ E-mail from Dr. Stewart, October 1, 2005.

⁵⁹ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod and Yearbook of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America - 2003* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2003), 80. The “Statement of Faith” of the NAE can be found on the internet at:

http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.statement_of_faith.

⁶⁰ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2003*, 80-81.

⁶¹ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, 73.

5. To appoint delegates to NAPARC, ICRC and NAE as required, to report to Synod on the proceedings of these bodies and to advise as to how we may be helpfully involved in their work in behalf of the advance of God's Kingdom.
6. To observe and to study other branches of the visible church, so as to keep the Reformed Presbyterian Church informed as to the work of God among our brothers and sisters in the Lord and to warn against any drifts toward error and apostasy in the body of Christ.
7. To meet, as directed by Synod, with delegations of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with a view to consultation, cooperation and coalescence, in furtherance of the goal of the practical unity of the visible church.⁶²

The above-mentioned procedures established by the RPCNA, when seen in connection with their guidelines for fraternal relations, are very similar to what the Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted as "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship."⁶³ It should be noted, however, that Synod Lincoln of the Canadian Reformed Churches listed two rules which the RPCNA do not have: "3. The churches shall consult with each other when entering into relations with third parties" and "6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken."⁶⁴

5.2 *RPCNA Approach to Organic Union*

The Interchurch Committee of the RPCNA indicates the following in a report concerning the "RPCNA Approach to Organic Union" that was adopted at Synod 2004:

There would be five major factors to be considered in our organic union with other denominations:

1. **Theological** - This would involve commitment to the authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and life.
2. **Confessional** - This would involve commitment to the Westminster Standards and the Testimony of the RP Church as being agreeable to and founded upon the Scriptures.
3. **Procedural** - This would involve acceptance of the Directories of Worship, Government and Discipline of the RP Church.

⁶² Interchurch Committee, *A Manual of Interchurch Relations*, 12-13.

⁶³ See *Acts General Synod Lincoln, ON, 1992, of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 1992), 33.

⁶⁴ *Acts General Synod Lincoln*, 33.

4. **Organizational** - This would involve the integration of church courts, boards, committees and institutions.
5. **Cordial** - This would involve the attitudes of each body. Only the Scripture is infallible. In seeking organic union we need "to cultivate and exercise Christian charity." There must be a willingness to listen and consider change, and a willingness to take time to resolve or to allow areas of difference. Denominations committed to the authority of Scripture and to the Westminster Standards may have differences in interpretation or application. Differences do not need to be divisive. It needs to be asked: Can that difference be resolved through study together? Is it a difference that both bodies can live with amicably? Or does it preclude organic union? Our most significant statement about organic union is found in the Covenant of 1871: "That believing the Church to be one, and that all the saints have communion with God and with one another in the same Covenant; believing, moreover, that schism and sectarianism are sinful in themselves and inimical to true religion, and trusting that divisions shall cease, and the people of God become one catholic church over all the earth, we will pray and labour for the visible oneness of the Church of God in our own land and throughout the world, **on the basis of truth and of scriptural order**. Considering it a principal duty of our profession to cultivate a holy brotherhood, we will strive to maintain Christian friendship with pious men of every name and to feel and act as one with all in every land who pursue this grand end. And as a means of securing this great result, we will try by dissemination and application of the principles of truth herein professed, and by cultivating and exercising Christian charity, labour to remove stumblingblocks, and to gather into one the scattered and divided friends of truth and righteousness." (Section 4)

The basis for this statement is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (25), where characteristics of the visible church are given. In that context, our Testimony (25:4) states, "Divisions which separate believers into denominations mar the unity of the church and are due to error and sin. **It is the duty of all denominations which are true churches of Christ to seek reconciliation and union.** Such organizational unity, however, should be sought only on the basis of truth and of scriptural order."

In 1954, a Committee appointed by the Synod "On Practical Steps Towards Implementation of Section 4 of the Covenant of 1871" reported, "The Covenant of 1871 commits us as a church to a practical implementation of **the scriptural ideal of organic union** of the Christian Church throughout the world on the basis of truth and scriptural order." The Committee's recommendation "That Synod set up a **permanent Committee on Church Union**" was adopted. The recommendation was also adopted that this Committee begin negotiations with six other Calvinistic

denominations **“with a view to ultimate organic union on the basis of mutual confession of scriptural truth.”**

In 1969, **a union was consummated** with the Associate Presbyterian Church.....

In 1972, Synod approved “exploring ways, along with the OPC and the RPCES, in which our churches could bring **the unity of our common faith to its fullest expression.**”

In 1978, Synod adopted the Concept of Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship recommended by NAPARC.

In 1979, **A Committee on Theological and Practical Steps Toward Church Union** quoted from J.G. Vos, “that Scripture is strictly normative in four areas: namely **doctrine, worship, discipline and government.**” Synod recommended that our Interchurch Committee invite other church bodies to study with us in these four areas. To follow this up, the Interchurch Committee was instructed to “present to the Synod **concrete proposals regarding church union** to be implemented in the coming year.”

In 1980, the PCA initiated church union talks with the OPC, the RPCES and the RPCNA in which the idea of the Psalm-singing Synod as part of the GA was discussed, but the final J and R proposal did not include that provision.

In 1988 and 1989 the Standard approved extensive plans for discussions and concurrent meetings with the OPC, and voted that we work toward organic union.

The above references show that we do have a sincere desire to express our unity with our Reformed brethren in ultimate organic union. We have a historic and primary concern to be faithful to Scripture. It may be that the word “ultimate” gives us an excuse merely to hold up our distinctives and be content with “interchurch relations” rather than “union.”⁶⁵

The fact that the above statements were adopted at Synod 2004 shows that the RPCNA takes its relationships with other churches very seriously. These relationships are not a formality, but stepping stones along a route where complete unity is the ultimate goal.

5.3 The “Testimony”

As mentioned in Paragraph 3, in addition to the Westminster standards, the RPCNA adheres to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, which they regard as their

⁶⁵ RPCNA, *Minutes of the Synod - 2004*, 71-73.

“continuing application of God’s written word to the world and the church of today.” In their opinion, organic union with other churches would involve: “commitment to the Westminster Standards and the Testimony of the RP Church as being agreeable to and founded upon the Scriptures” (see paragraph 5.2 above). This position has given rise to some correspondence between the CCCA and the IRC of the RPCNA. In an e-mail dated August 3, 2006, the following five questions were submitted to the IRC.

1. What is the origin and status of the Contemporary Testimony in the RPCNA? Could you clarify this for us? From the RPCNA’s web-site, we gather that it was adopted in 1980, and that it is a confessional document on an even higher level than other confessional standards. The RPCNA’s observation that “*earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones*” implies that the Contemporary Testimony is your most important confessional document, and on some points it deviates from other confessional standards (for example, A73 explicitly rejects part of the Westminster Standards with respect to the civil magistrate.) Does this not result in an extra confessional binding which could close the door to confessional church unity with other Reformed (including Presbyterian) Churches that only adhere to the Westminster standards and not the Contemporary Testimony? One point that has our attention is that the Contemporary Testimony makes confessionally binding a view of the covenant which not all Reformed Churches share. A29#5, A40 seems to imply that God’s covenant was only with the elect, rather than with his people as a whole. This is a restrictive statement that goes beyond what is stated about the covenant in our confessional standards. Do you not agree that God establishes His covenant with believers and all their children (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39) and that there is not only a blessing but also a curse of the covenant, namely for those who do not keep it (Ps 103:18; 1 Cor 10:5; Heb 4:2)? If the covenant is only with the elect, does it not become impossible to speak of the covenant being broken? The Contemporary Testimony makes many good points with which we could agree with respect to contemporary issues such as evolution, gambling, purgatory, reincarnation. However, the further certain points get defined, the more such a Testimony can lead to a parting of the ways rather than serving the cause of unity. Extra-confessional documents are not a minor matter, and have important consequences for church unity, as our history of relations with the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America shows. So in short, if the Contemporary Testimony is not a confessional document, this needs to be explained. On the other hand if it is a confessional document, we will need to discuss and evaluate its content more closely.
2. In what way can the RPCNA reassure us / convince us that the

RPCNA is committed to upholding the Word of God and the Reformed faith “not only in doctrine *but also in practice*”? How consistently do you work with your confessions and documents? Could you suggest ways in which we can ascertain this? There are many churches today that are Reformed in name and subscribe to Reformed confessions, but do not live up to their confessional documents. Experience tells us that we must be cautious, and to also provide clear and consistent evidence to our own churches that the RPCNA lives up to her confessions in practice.

3. What other sources than the confessional standards and the decisions of Synod could be used as sources for supporting the observations and conclusions of our Report? We agree that we must judge a church firstly by her confessional standards and official decisions, but at the same time the more sources we have the better.
4. We are curious about interest from the RPCNA officially as a whole in pursuing contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches in particular. The documentation we have seen shows that the RPCNA takes church unity seriously. But we would be interested to know what you as a church federation think about the Canadian Reformed Churches in particular, and whether (or to what extent) you are interested in pursuing unity with us. Is there interest in pursuing contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches only from individuals, or also from local churches at the grass roots level? (Some Canadian Reformed Churches are “neighbours” to those of some of yours in Ontario, Washington, and in Colorado).
5. We have noted that the RPCNA does not have “full intercommunion” with the OPC (churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship). Is there any documentation explaining the reason for the state of the current relationship with the OPC? Are there prospects for closer unity? If not, why not?

In a letter dated August 9, 2006, attached to an e-mail sent on August 14, 2006, the response from Dr. Stewart, the secretary of the IRC included the following: “Thank you also for raising additional questions which will help in our mutual understanding of our respective positions. You have shown both graciousness in listening and seriousness in considering concerns that have arisen.” He also indicated: “The questions you raise show the thoroughness of your study and have implications for us in our concern for the unity of the body of Christ.” And further: “We deeply appreciate your concern that our pursuit of unity will be ‘functional and fruitful’, and will ‘not just result in more committee mandates to discuss divergencies.’” However, since the next meeting of the IRC is scheduled for March, 2007, there was no opportunity to give a detailed response to the questions.

5.4 Exclusive Psalmody an Obstacle to Pursuing Unity?

The RPCNA is committed to exclusive psalmody. This would be an obstacle in the process of pursuing full organic unity. But should this prevent us from acknowledging that we still have much common ground with the RPCNA? Acknowledging common ground has nothing to do with a Kuyperian pluriformity of the church idea. We recognize that we all still have reason to ask the Lord to grant us further insight in order that the unity that we already have spiritually may grow as we increase in understanding his will.

6. Considerations

The CCCA considers the following:

1. Christ prayed that his followers would be one in faith (Jn 17:20-23). It is our duty to observe where he has been bringing about faith, uniting his followers by the power of his Word and Spirit. It is also our duty to express this unity and promote it where we can and may (Eph 4:2-6; see also what we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, and the Belgic Confession, Articles 27-28).
2. The Canadian Reformed Churches have been seeking to obey Jesus Christ in its contacts with other churches. This has been a motive for playing a founding role in the ICRC. It continues to be a motive in exploring the existing contacts within that organization, of which the RPCNA is a member. By being members of the ICRC ourselves, we have already embraced as one of the stated purposes of this organization the intention: "to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches," a goal expressed as one of the purposes of the ICRC.
3. The RPCNA holds to the doctrines of Scripture as confessed in the Westminster Confession, the Larger and Shorter Catechism, and in a Testimony which seeks to give a contemporary application of scriptural truths. As far as can be ascertained at this time, it faithfully administers the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, as instituted by Christ, and guards the sanctity of the Lord's Table. It also is committed to exercising discipline according to the Word of God.
4. The RPCNA already has established relationships with the RCUS and the URCNA, churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship.
5. The RPCNA acknowledges that divisions between churches are the result of "error and sin." It seeks to pursue unity on the basis of scriptural truth that is acknowledged and confessed together.

7. Recommendations

The committee recommends that Synod decide to mandate the CCCA:

1. To explore further what we have in common with the RPCNA and to assess if and when a decision can be made regarding ecclesiastical fellowship with this church;
2. To keep the churches with which ecclesiastical fellowship has already been established informed of all progress made in this regard;
3. To submit its report to the next General Synod.

Appendix 1

Report on a Visit to Synod 2005 of the RPCNA

By Rev. A.J. Pol

A Warm Welcome

Synod 2005 was held at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania from June 27-30, 2005.⁶⁶ It was convened on the campus of Geneva College, an institution belonging to the RPCNA. Delegates were met at the airport in Pittsburgh and brought to the campus. It turned out I was not the only visitor or fraternal delegate. Among those present were Rev. George Syms of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and Rev. Harry Zekveld of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

The Synod was attended by more than 100 delegates representing congregations of the RPCNA. Nevertheless, the large number of delegates did not seem to negatively affect the quality of the discussions in the process of decision making. The items on the agenda were dealt with efficiently and with sufficient thoroughness.

I was well received at Synod and warmly welcomed personally by many delegates who expressed their great appreciation at having a visitor from the Canadian Reformed Churches in their midst. It was remarkable that various ministers were also somewhat familiar with the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and had various questions about us. I asked Rev. Tom Reid about this, since he is the librarian at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary and also teaches there. He responded that when he teaches Church History, he also covers the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), showing the connection with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

It was not entirely surprising to hear about Rev. Reid's interest in the history of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. My first contact with him dates back to more than 25 years ago, when I visited the Faculté Libre de Théologie Reformée, a Reformed Seminary in Aix-en-Provence, France, during the time that he was a student there. Subsequent to that he visited me while I

⁶⁶ A summary of this 174th Synod of the RPCNA written by Drew Gordon, editor of the Reformed Presbyterian Witness, can be found on the internet at: <http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/2005synod/062705.html>.

served as a pastor in The Hague, The Netherlands and we have kept in touch since then. It was good to meet again face to face at Synod.

On Tuesday evening, June 28, I was invited to address Synod on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. I highlighted our commitment to uphold the infallible Word of God as summarized in our Three Forms of Unity, and our desire to reach out to other Reformed churches that confess and maintain the Reformed faith. In this connection I referred to our unity talks with the URCNA, our founding role in the International Conference of Reformed Churches and our more recent presence as observers at the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). I also mentioned that our Theological College has served to educate students from Canada as well as abroad. Other points that I emphasized were our commitment to strengthening the church through consistent catechetical instruction of the youth, and our efforts in missions and evangelism. Since the RPCNA is quite active in this regard, the Canadian Reformed Churches would welcome insights that we could benefit from. In conclusion I expressed the desire that our contacts will serve to encourage and strengthen us in the faith to the glory of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

Commitment

Throughout the proceedings I was struck by evidence of a strong, conscious commitment to the Reformed faith on the part of the delegates and the congregations they were representing. This was not only evident among the older pastors, but also among the younger delegates, who showed themselves to be articulate and knowledgeable. What also struck me was that a number of delegates expressed appreciation for the writings of various Canadian Reformed authors and some were also familiar with *Clarion* and *Reformed Perspective*.

On the floor of Synod, the atmosphere was characterized by the awareness that the discussions and decisions had to take place in the light of Scripture. This was also emphasized during the opening address by the Retiring Moderator of the previous Synod, the Reverend Ralph E. Joseph. He focused on Psalm 1, highlighting the difference between godly and ungodly decision-making. On each subsequent day of Synod, Dr. Wayne Spear preached a series of devotional messages on "The Offices of Christ," dealing with his offices as Prophet, Priest, and King.

Throughout Synod there was also a strong emphasis on prayer. This was not only something that took place at the opening and closing of sessions, but throughout the proceedings. As various items were dealt with, there was frequent intercessory prayer. Before the adjournment of the session on Wednesday evening, an hour was devoted to intercessory prayer in small groups, twenty minutes each being devoted to the family, church, and nation, each theme being separated from the next by the singing of selections respectively from Psalms 127, 48, and 45 as well as Scripture readings from Genesis 18:19, Ephesians 5:22-33, and 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

Like Canadian Reformed synods, this Synod addressed matters pertaining to the life of all the churches in common. However it also devoted time to listening to reports from each Presbytery (consisting of what we would call churches of a particular “classis”) on highlights in church life and challenges being faced by its congregations. This was followed by intercessory prayer by an elder for each Presbytery. Reports from the Foreign and Home Mission boards as well as other agenda items were dealt with in a similar fashion.

Further Impressions

The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary,⁶⁷ which trains candidates for ministry in the RCNA as well as elsewhere, has a vacancy in the chair of Systematic Theology. Dr. Richard C. Gamble was nominated by the Seminary to fill this vacancy, and was interviewed at Synod on a wide variety of issues for about 40 minutes. Following his interview, he also presented a very interesting guest lecture on the subject of “Postmodernism and the ‘Demise’ of Truth.” The process involved in selecting a new professor for the Seminary highlights the fact that this institution is supported by the churches and also operates under the authority of the RPCNA. A vote took place toward the end of Synod and Dr. Gamble was elected for the position of Professor of Systematic Theology.

One of the items that was different from what Canadian Reformed Churches have on their agenda was a report called “Understanding the Times,” which was a document intended to help office bearers and church members to discern the trends of the times in order to interact with them in a critical way in their ministry. This report was not simply accepted for information, but was discussed as to its merits and also received some constructive criticism.

As mentioned earlier, Geneva College belongs to the RPCNA. At Synod, the Geneva College Board of Corporators brought forward “the need for more Reformed Presbyterian professors and especially administrators on the staff as an expression of the church’s ownership of the college.”

It was also interesting that the Board of Education & Publication reported on a request for 1000 complete Psalters received from a Presbyterian congregation in Singapore. In the meantime, work continues on a revision of the Psalter in order to make it as faithful as possible to the original text of Scripture and to ensure that the wording is accessible and not antiquated.

Even though the RPCNA has its own melodies for singing the Psalms, attention was also paid to singing some of the Psalms with a Genevan setting. How nice it would be if a publication of our Anglo-Genevan Psalms could be made available with four-part harmony for the benefit of interested individuals and

⁶⁷ This institution was established in 1810 and therefore hopes to celebrate its *200th anniversary* five years from now. It is remarkable that an institution that has been in existence for so long continues to be committed to upholding the Word of God as expressed in Reformed confessions.

churches. The hymns that we sing can be found in various hymn books, but our Psalms are truly unique and worth sharing with others. A publication of the Anglo-Genevan Psalms could also be of benefit for those wishing to sing the melodies of the Psalms in harmony or hear them played on an organ or piano. If an official “book” publication in four-part harmony would be too costly for the end-user, perhaps we as Canadian Reformed churches should consider publishing such an edition as a PDF file for distribution on the Internet through our Canadian Reformed website. If this generates enough interest, a later publication in book form could be contemplated.⁶⁸

Meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee

During Synod I received the opportunity of having a lunchtime meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RPCNA. I had prepared a list of questions to gain some insight into the history of the RPCNA and its commitment to Scripture and the Reformed faith. Some of the items discussed were the history of the RPCNA, its confessions and subscription to those confessions, its church life, conditions for membership, supervision of the Lord’s table, order of worship, exclusive psalmody, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, ecclesiastical fellowship with other churches, and church order. Rev. George Syms of the RCUS and Rev. Harry Zekveld of the URCNA joined me and also provided extra input during the meeting. It was a good team effort which helped provide material for a report for the Canadian Reformed Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA) concerning the RPCNA. In due time, through the CCCA, the Canadian Reformed Churches will therefore receive a further opportunity to get to know the RPCNA better.

⁶⁸ Since reporting on this Synod in 2005, a book containing the Genevan Psalms in four-part harmony has been published: *The Genevan Psalms in Harmony*, by Claude Goudimel, edited by Theresa E. Janssen (Inheritance Publications: Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada/Pella, Iowa, U.S.A., 2006).

CCCA Report to Synod Smithers 2007

REPORT 7: The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

1. Mandate

General Synod Chatham 2004 received a letter from the church of Grand Valley which interacted with the CCCA's report concerning NAPARC:

The church at Grand Valley states that the CCCA has not, in any particular way, shown how the basis, purpose or function is relevant to the Canadian Reformed Churches. They question the need to be involved in another "supra-denominational organization" besides the ICRC. Grand Valley recommends Synod "to instruct the committee to desist from this development until compelling reasons be offered for courting membership in NAPARC." (Observation 3.1, p.26)

Synod considered:

"Although the Committee considers membership in NAPARC beneficial for some of our ecclesiastical relationships, the church at Grand Valley is correct in questioning the need for another organization beside the ICRC. It is true that there is significant duplication in the purposes, function and membership of NAPARC and the ICRC. Analogous to the regional mission conferences of the ICRC, the possibility could be explored for NAPARC to be integrated into the ICRC in a similar fashion." (Consideration 4.2, p.26)

General Synod Chatham 2004 thus gave the CCCA the mandate: (p.26)

"to continue to send an observer to NAPARC, with the instruction to initiate discussion on the matters brought forth in Consideration 4.2."

2. Meetings

In November 2004 four members of CCCA attended the annual meeting of NAPARC. On this occasion Rev. K. Jonker, br. J. Kuik, br. A. Poppe and Rev. A. Pol travelled to Kansas City. The following year br. J. Jonker attended the meeting that was held in Flat Rock, North Carolina. It is our intention to send at least two members of the CCCA to the meeting that is scheduled to be held in Laval Quebec in November, 2006.

3. Is membership in NAPARC beneficial?

Throughout our meetings of NAPARC we kept in mind the question whether membership in this organization would benefit our churches given the fact that we are already members of the ICRC.

Consistently in our committee meetings with the ERQ, OPC and RCUS we have received strong encouragement to become members of NAPARC.

Similar encouragement has come from the URCNA. The OPC pointed out some of the benefits that NAPARC has in distinction from the ICRC. For instance, at NAPARC the churches receive the opportunity to discuss issues of mutual concern or interest. It is more frequent than the ICRC, and is North American context specific. NAPARC gives possibilities for extra accountability and cooperation among faithful Reformed churches in the same continent. This is especially important when it comes to matters like mission and home mission, and in shining the light of the gospel in an increasingly hostile world (see OPC section of this Report, Appendix 2: Report on meeting with CEIR of the OPC).

Our Committee concurs with the views expressed by CEIR of the OPC. An additional practical benefit that was also mentioned is that NAPARC allows meetings with inter-church committees, since members of these committees are already at the same location.

Furthermore, the sessions of NAPARC have proven to be very useful for providing a forum for meeting other Reformed churches.

Through the encouragement of other churches and regular attendance of NAPARC as observers, the Committee is convinced membership in NAPARC could benefit the CCCA in its work.

4. Recommendation

The committee recommends that Synod decide to give the CCCA the mandate to apply for membership within NAPARC.

5. Appendices

1. Report on visit to the NAPARC (November, 2004) - Rev. A.J. Pol
2. Address to the NAPARC (November, 2004) – Rev. K. Jonker
3. Report on visit to the NAPARC (November, 2005) – J. Jonker
4. Address to the NAPARC (November, 2005) – J. Jonker
5. Forthcoming: Report on visit to the NAPARC (November, 2006) – Subcommittee East

Appendix 1: Report on visit to the NAPARC (November, 2004) **- Rev. A.J. Pol**

Name and purpose

The letters NAPARC are an abbreviation of the name of an organization: North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. Like the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) that the Canadian Reformed Churches already belong to, the NAPARC includes both Presbyterian and Reformed Churches and therefore makes mention of the Three Forms of Unity as well as the Westminster Standards in its basis. The purpose of the NAPARC is to enable “the constituent churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice” (see the website:).

Attendance

As members of the CCCA-West (the “western” section of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas) the Revs. K. Jonker, A.J. Pol, br. J. Kuik, and br. A. Poppe traveled to Kansas City for the annual NAPARC meeting. They were billeted with congregation members of the RCUS in Kansas city. This gave the brothers a welcome opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of brothers and sisters there as well as to have further interaction with Rev. G. Syms, a local RCUS pastor there.

The official meeting took place from November 9-10. Seated around the tables were representatives from the following churches: Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Église Réformée du Québec, Korean American Presbyterian Church, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Reformed Church in the United States, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Invited observers were the Canadian Reformed Churches, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Free Reformed Churches of North America, Heritage Netherlands Reformed Church, Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin), Presbyterian Reformed Church, and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). The URCNA have requested membership in the NAPARC, and will be formally accepted when their request has been approved within three years by two thirds of the major assemblies of the member churches.

Proceedings

A large part of the proceedings consisted of reports from the member churches and from the observer churches. In those reports, information was brought forward concerning the history and highlights in the life of the churches. This is part of a process of getting to know each other, providing a platform for further discussion and mutual help. After each report was given, a prayer of intercession and thanksgiving was offered for that church. This highlighted the fact that information concerning the life of the churches should not be received only “for information purposes” but also for the sake of acknowledging our common need to depend on God for spiritual stability and growth in Christ.

During the meeting, various communications from member churches were also brought forward regarding issues that had been dealt with in their midst. Examples of this are: resolutions on justification, on marriage and sexuality, and a pastoral letter on racism.

The Presbyterian and Reformed churches that send delegates to the NAPARC also have the opportunity for arranging meetings for their respective inter-church relations committees. In this way the NAPARC provides a venue for these committees to do their work as mandated by their respected general assemblies or synods in an efficient way.

Rev. K. Jonker gave a speech to the assembly on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, including information about relevant decisions of Synod 2004 in Chatham and focussing attention on the Theological College.

Informal contacts

The formal setting of NAPARC meetings has its value. But the opportunities that the NAPARC provides for informal contact and interchanges with delegates are probably at least as important. In the Acts of General Synod Chatham 2004, for example, you can see on pages 22-23 that Synod wanted the CCCA to pursue contact with the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA - Kosin). After all, this is a sister church of the Korean Presbyterian Church (Kosin) in Korea, with which we already have a sister church relationship. If we have a relationship with the KPC in Korea, it makes even more sense to have a relationship with fellow believers who have found a home in North America and established a church here. The CCCA indicated that its efforts to contact some of the Canadian addresses on its list of Korean pastors in North and South America had been fruitless. At the NAPARC we were able to speak to delegates from the KPCA (Kosin), establish initial contact and exchange addresses. This should enable us to seek further contact in the future.

Some time ago the CCCA received the *Minutes of the Synod and Yearbook of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America 2003*. The RPCNA has congregations in Canada and in the U.S. They are very committed to the Reformed confessions and have as one of their "distinctives" that only Psalms are sung during their worship services. During one of the meals it was possible to get acquainted with their delegates and exchange further information. It will be interesting to get to know them more.

During a break, a delegate from another Korean church, the Korean American Presbyterian Church asked me for further information about our Theological College. He explained that they send their students for the ministry to Westminster Theological Seminary, but that travelling so far away was a problem for some of their students in Canada, particularly in the Toronto area, where they have a number of churches. He was quite pleased to find out from the speech given by Rev. K. Jonker that we have a Theological College in Hamilton, not far from Toronto. My impression is that if possible, he

would be eager to have some students attend the Theological College rather than find their own way at some other institution that might not be committed to teaching the Reformed faith.

Helping each other

What is the use of knowing about each other? Getting to know other churches that are seriously committed to promoting the Reformed faith on the North American continent is important. The issues that we face are not unique to ourselves. Meeting delegates from other churches in such a forum as NAPARC is a much more personal and effective way of communicating than by means of writing letters. Much help can be given through an exchange of information and cooperation.

As we deal with various issues, we can learn from each other. Here is an example. Browsing through the Minutes of the Synod of the RPCNA, I saw that they had to deal with a request that “a study committee be established on the sacramental use of fermented and non-fermented wine” (page 9, and 169-171). You may be aware of the fact that this issue has also had the attention of our Regional Synod West. In contrast with our practice of having wine instead of grape juice, the RPCNA congregations have the practice of avoiding the use of (alcoholic) wine. This is related to their concerns about alcoholism as well as the fact that their young people publicly profess their faith at a younger age. So it will be interesting to see what their study committee comes up with.

Having received funds from businesses in the classical region of Manitoba for this purpose, we also had a book table with free books for the benefit of churches attending the NAPARC. The publications we offered included such books as the Acts of General Synod Chatham 2004, Book of Praise, With Common Consent, Bound yet Free, The Glorious Work of Home Visits, The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy, Everything in Christ, and The Spirit and the Bride. We appreciate the business donors who ensured by their generosity that these gifts would not become an extra burden on the budget of the CCCA.

RCUS

Attending the NAPARC also provided the CCCA with the opportunity to have a meeting with the Inter-church Relations Committee of the RCUS. This meeting was part of our mandate given by Synod Chatham. We were thankful to have a fruitful discussion about matters brought forward by Synod as well as other topics, and look forward to further interaction with this committee as well as exploring how as sister churches we can build each other up.

Ultimately, this must be the goal of our endeavours: seeking the glory of Christ, the Head of the church and working with a view to the coming of God’s Kingdom. May His blessings rest on our efforts in His service in the local congregations as well as in contacts with fellow believers elsewhere.

Rev. A.J. Pol

Appendix 2: Address to the NAPARC (November, 2004) – Rev. K. Jonker

Dear brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

We bring greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. A few churches in the United States also belong to our federation. They call themselves American Reformed Churches.

Thanks for receiving us for the 3rd time as observing delegates. This time we are present with four delegates. We use the NAPARC meeting as an opportunity to have face-to-face discussions with our sister churches who are represented here. This shows our desire of taking ecumenical relationships seriously. At the same time our presence shows that we like to carry out the mandate our churches have given us in regard to NAPARC.

Statistics and distinctives

In 2002 we gave an introduction of the Canadian Reformed Churches to this council. Then we provided you with some statistics and distinctives. Our federation has a membership of around 15,000 members. We are thankful to report that a substantial part of our membership is formed by covenant youth. Our members maintain own schooling, from kindergarten to theological training and teachers' training as well.

Our preaching can be characterized as redemptive-historical, Christ centred preaching with the call to have comfort in Him in life and death. Catechism preaching usually takes place in the second worship service. Our churches firmly believe in catechizing the covenant youth. Weekly catechetical instruction is given to our young people to prepare them to respond to their baptism by making public profession of faith in unity with the ecumenical Creeds and as this faith is expressed in the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt. So, our churches actively pursue confessional membership. General pastoral care is given through home visits the elders bring to the members at least once per year. Personal and congregational Bible Study is encouraged and practiced within our Churches. The one congregation more than the other is actively engaged in reaching out with the gospel.

In all these activities of our Reformed faith the churches support and encourage one another through an annual church visitation. This care takes place on behalf of our Classes. In all its practises the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain the good order as they have accepted this in their Church Order. This order is still strongly based on the ancient Church Order of Dordt 1618-1619. According to this Church Order we consider the consistory as the governing body of the local church. The other ecclesiastical assemblies (Classes, Regional Synods and General Synods) are convened to support each other in love and unity. We are thankful to report that all our church work could go on under the providing hand of the Head of the Church. He comforted us when we met difficulty and disappointment. He also greatly encouraged us by giving us His abundant blessings.

General Synod Chatham 2004

In February of this year 2004 our churches met together in General Synod at Chatham, Ontario. A quick look at the content of the Acts of this General Synod shows that a great portion of its agenda was taken up by the ecumenical contacts our churches maintain with Reformed churches, which have their roots in The Netherlands, and with the ICRC churches. Being reformed also requires a high concern regarding a good Bible Translation in order that the voice of God is clearly heard. At the same time it is of great concern to us that the voice of God's people in giving praise to God is also clearly biblical. That's why the items such as Bible Translation and the Book of Praise are also on the agenda of a General Synod. As said before our churches maintain their own theological training. The Board of Governors of our Theological College at Hamilton ON report to General Synod. General Synods make appointments of staff members. Synod Chatham 2004 needed to appoint a new professor due to the illness of Prof. Dr. Jack DeJong. Dr. Arjan J. DeVisser was appointed in his place. Deep sadness about the deteriorating health of Dr. DeJong was mixed with thankfulness that the Lord continues to provide a teacher in the disciplines of diaconology and ecclesiology. General Synod Chatham also had to deal with a few appeals. Overall the Acts of this General Synod shows that generally speaking our churches enjoy the blessed peace our Lord Jesus Christ has obtained for us.

NAPARC

Now I have come to the point that is of most interest to you. Our committee reported on the meetings of NAPARC in 2002 and 2003. We introduced NAPARC to our churches by passing on data such as NAPARC's basis, purpose, function, authority and its faithful keeping to its constitution as we could observe. We especially made mention of NAPARC's aim to work for organic union among its member churches. In view of this aim NAPARC is collating data of the distinctives of the member churches. In our evaluation we mentioned the following: "Now that the ERQ has joined NAPARC, three churches with which we have close contact are members of the Council. The action, which NAPARC took pertaining to the CRCNA, shows this council does wish to maintain its confessional basis. We cannot object to this basis, as it is similar to the basis of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) of which the Canadian Reformed Churches are a charter member.

So, membership may be useful to provide support to our sister churches OPC and RCUS in NAPARC, to express greater unity with the ERQ with which we seek Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and to fulfill the biblical calling to foster unity with other Reformed churches. Our membership of NAPARC is also possible in that we could subscribe to its scriptural basis and constitution."

Our committee, however, did not feel it justified as yet recommending membership since we are just starting to know of NAPARC. General Synod Chatham was appreciative about our work of introducing NAPARC to the churches.

However Synod agreed with the sentiment from within our churches, which questioned the need for another organisation beside the ICRC. There is, Synod stated, “significant duplication in the purpose, function and membership of NAPARC and the ICRC. Analogous to the regional mission conferences of the ICRC, the possibility could be explored for NAPARC to be integrated into the ICRC in a similar fashion.” That consideration formed the ground for the mandate Synod Chatham gave to us as committee, that we should continue to observe your meetings and initiate discussion on the matters raised by Synod:

- what is the need for NAPARC beside the ICRC?
- is NAPARC open to explore the possibility for NAPARC to be integrated into the ICRC in a similar fashion as the ICRC mission conferences are held?

By way of this report about our Canadian and American Reformed Churches, we respectfully place these questions before you and implore of you to respond to them so that we will be able to serve our churches on these points.

In conclusion: Tribute to Prof. Dr. Jelle Faber

From the above your Council hears that God continues to bless our churches. He cared for us as members of Christ. He added members through birth and the regenerating power of the gospel. As the God of life and salvation He also took members home. More and more the pioneers (the first workers within our federation) are gathered to the glorious congregation before God’s heavenly throne. One in particular I like to mention. On September 30, 2004 our brother Jelle Faber departed from us at the blessed age of 80 years. During his life as Pastor and especially as Teacher at our Theological College, Prof. Faber liked to emphasize the catholicity of the church. No wonder that this faithful servant of the Lord was also a hard worker for the true ecumenicity of the Church. He was a fervent promoter of establishing contact and unity within the ICRC and with churches in the Americas. He practiced what he preached, being truly catholic, i.e. Reformed catholic.

Dr. Faber explains the catholicity of the church as follows (in his *Essays in Reformed Doctrine*, p.74 ff. The word “catholicity” is of Greek origin. It is composed of the pronoun “kata” and the adjective “holos.” “Holos” means “whole,” “that which constitutes a whole.” “Catholic” therefore means “relative to the whole,” “common,” “general.” “Catholic” is that which exists in its fullness.” Faber then shows that this word can indicate a spatial dimension, a temporal and a geographical dimension.

Yet, that’s not even the whole meaning, Faber explores it further and discovers that “catholic” also has the meaning of “perfect,” “complete”, “in fullness,” “exactly as it has to be.” “Perhaps - he says - the best translation yet is: “all-encompassing.” The church, therefore, as our Reformed confessions express, cannot be man’s work but it

is full the divine work of God Triune. That is the glory in the church because of which the church can never be destroyed. This “indelectibilitas” of the church was also a theme of Faber’s teaching as the truth of God’s Word. The Lord will complete His catholic work in Christ, carrying out His agenda: only a short time and then the present hidden glory of God will completely shine through the whole of the church. That is our hope!

Brothers, “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen (Hebr.13:20-21)

Thank you,

On behalf of my fellow delegates, Jake Kuik, Andrew Pol and Art Poppe,
Klaas Jonker

Appendix 3: Report on visit to the NAPARC (November, 2005) – J. Jonker

On Monday 31st of October I left together with Rev.J Bouwers, Rev.H. Zekveld and elder Chuck Dykstra, of the United Reformed Churches from Strathroy ON to drive to Flat Rock North Carolina for a meeting of NAPARC on Nov.1 & 2.

We arrived there at about 9:00 pm and joined the brothers from the RCUS for some social time and relaxation.

On Tuesday morning several of the churches had meetings together with others they have relationships with, or are in the process of establishing relationships. The Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) was one of the churches that I was hoping to have contact with were not present this year. This federation of churches is a part of the Korean Presbyterian Church in Korea which we have a sister relationship with. They have been very difficult in having any discussions with. Last year there was some communication and it was hoped to do this again this year.

The meeting started at 1:30 on Tuesday. The United Reformed Churches were received as members. Each of the member denominations had a report of their churches, as to their membership. They all gave information as to how things are going in their churches, and what they are doing as mission projects. After each denomination spoke a delegate from another denomination was asked to pray for that denomination.

After the member churches were finished the churches that were invited to come as observers were given an opportunity to speak. A copy of what I spoke can be found below. The meeting went till about 5:30.

That evening there was a banquet and an evening of singing Psalms in which most participated.

This was led by Dr.Gabriel C. Statom who is the director of music at the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales Florida. The Church there has compiled a collection of psalms designed to fill the void in the area of psalm singing, and wanting to reflect the Reformed faith and carry on the tradition of psalm singing along with hymns in the style of the reformers.

They have taken texts and tunes from sources such as the Genevan Psalter, the Scottish Psalter, the 1912 Psalter, the Trinity Psalter and the ARP Bible Songs.

On Wednesday morning we had breakfast at 7:30 so the meeting could start at 8:00 in order to adjourn at 11:30 am. Old business which they dealt with were reports from the different committees.

The co-ordination committee came with a recommendation to encourage those churches who had not yet studied and adopted positions relative to Woman in the Military, to do so and to consider the work of the four NAPARC

churches that had already adopted positions opposing women in military combat. After further discussion and amendments the recommendation for the churches to vote on next year is "The Word of God gives no warrant expressed or implied that woman are to be conscripted into or employed for military combat roles but rather they are to be defended by men and kept from harm's way that they might fulfil their biblical callings and duties under God." The Committee to plan the Celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 2009 reported that they plan a two day celebration in either Orlando, Dallas or Nashville.

A report of foreign and home missions spoke of the benefits of the meeting they had as to knowing where others have church plants, and giving ideas as to each others missions, also as to what works and what doesn't.

The Free Reformed Churches of North America applied for membership in NAPARC. After some discussion it was left for the churches to vote on. The meeting was closed at 11:30 am with singing and prayer.

There was an overture from the OPC regarding a change to the bylaws.

After having lunch we were able to leave at 12:30. We got back to Strathroy at midnight.

As CCCA (Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas) we have the mandate from Synod Chatham to observe these meetings to initiate discussions on the possibility of NAPARC to be integrated in the ICRC. After the visit brought last year it became clear that this is not possible. NAPARC was there long before ICRC and there are churches who are members of NAPARC and not of ICRC. Membership in NAPARC could benefit us as the activities of each organization could complement each other. Membership could also assist us in our biblical calling to foster unity with other faithful Reformed churches who are not members in ICRC. We could then also speak with others on things like church planting i.e.: target areas.

- J. Jonker

Appendix 4: Address to the NAPARC (November 1-2, 2005) – J. Jonker

Dear brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

On behalf of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches I bring you greetings.

Thank you for inviting us as churches and for giving us the opportunity to speak to you again this year. I believe this is the fourth time that delegates from our Churches are present here.

Our churches take ecumenical relationships seriously and we are therefore careful about the relationships we establish. About four years ago we as Canadian and American Reformed Churches offered relationships to a number of churches besides the ones which have traditionally been our sister churches. As a result, we started to have pulpit exchanges with churches such as the OPC, URC, and the RCUS. These are new developments that take getting used to. But we experience them as positive changes. A couple of weeks ago, we could read on the Canadian Reformed website that our churches are now even calling ministers from such denominations, i.e.: from the RCUS and the Free Church of Scotland.

As members of the Canadian Reformed Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas, we are observing your meetings to see if membership in NAPARC will be useful next to the ICRC, since there are similarities between these organizations. The OPC, ERQ, and the RCUS churches who are part of your membership, have encouraged us to participate in NAPARC as they see a growing need for this.

The next General Synod of our churches will be dealing with a response from our committee to questions concerning the need to join another organisation besides the ICRC. This Synod to be, is scheduled for May 2007 in Smithers BC.

Last year two questions were brought by our delegates, and you were asked to respond. The questions were: 1. What is the need for NAPARC beside ICRC? 2. Is NAPARC open to exploring the possibility of integration into the ICRC?

So far, we realize that NAPARC was there before the ICRC and also that several members of NAPARC are not members of ICRC. We also understand that membership in NAPARC could benefit us. The activities of each organization can complement each other. Membership in NAPARC could assist us in our biblical calling to foster unity with other faithful Reformed churches who are not members of ICRC.

The ICRC does not have annual meetings to facilitate contacts between Reformed and Presbyterian. To leave such contacts to every four years may not be as useful in our denominational discussions on issues that are maybe of common interest and concern with all Churches that are present here. We would appreciate any further input in response to our thoughts on these matters.

As we see it, one area where further cooperation could benefit all NAPARC member churches is more communication among each other regarding church planting. Our churches are concerned about the choice of target areas for church planting (i.e.: Is there already an existing true church of Jesus Christ in that area?)

We started a discussion on this with the CEIR of the OPC at a meeting which we had with them in April of this year. They agreed that there should be more consultation with existing churches in the areas of church planting. We believe that we have the duty to join a church where it can be seen that it is a faithful Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our witness to the community should be one (John 17:20-26; Eph. 4:1-6; and Belgic Confession, Articles 27-29). Our forces against all evil should be a united force, and if we recognise each other we should not be in separate battle fields. The world around us should not be looking at us and saying that if the Reformed or the Presbyterians cannot get along, they just start up yet another church.

Another issue to discuss and I think is linked to this one is church hoppers or church shoppers. And I add: Should discipline stop at our church borders? Can we carry on discipline among churches that are not related denominationally?

These are maybe some of the issues that we feel could benefit us, and which also is possible when reading the Basis of your Council, as published on your website.

Finally, it would be nice if the NAPARC website could be updated with more information as to what it offers. We are just looking for as much information as we can get. The last report of meetings was 2002.

Last year there were four members of our committee here. We had planned to have more delegates here this year but due to other commitments and circumstances this was not possible, so I alone will have to report this year's events. The Lord willing next year we may be present with four observers in order to make up a final proposal to our next Synod, for membership in NAPARC. Hopefully meeting with you during your sessions and speaking with the delegates here this year and again next year we may see the needs of this organization for our churches to be members.

May the blessings of the Lord be upon you and may your labours be for the ongoing gathering of the Catholic Christian Church which is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. May the present hidden Glory of God completely shine through the whole of the Church and may we be joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith. (Belgic Confession, Art. 27)

Thank you,
John Jonker