

**Reports to  
General Synod Smithers  
2007**

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**Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad  
of the Canadian Reformed Churches  
(CRCA)**



**COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD  
OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES (CRCA)**

**REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD SMITHERS 2007**

Esteemed brothers,

General Synod Chatham 2004 decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), and the Presbyterian Church in Korea under the adopted rules. This Report gives an account of the activities of the Committee since Synod Chatham. This is followed by a report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches. There is also information on churches seeking Ecclesiastical Fellowship with us. The Report concludes with some miscellaneous items.

The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship adopted by General Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts Lincoln 1992*, Article 50, p. 33) are as follows:

1. *The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.*
2. *The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).*
3. *The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.*
4. *The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.*
5. *The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches. In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:*
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.*
7. *The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.*

Due to the fact that different members of the Committee composed different sections of this report, the reader may notice some differences in style of writing and structure of the material. We hope that it does not detract from the overall report.

The following list of abbreviations will be helpful for the reader:

- CRCA – Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
- FCC – Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
- FCS – Free Church of Scotland
- FRCA – Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- FRCSA – Free Reformed Churches of South Africa
- GGRC-NTT – Calvinist Reformed Churches in the South-east region (of Timor) [Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis in Nusa Tenggara Timur]
- GGRI-NTT – Reformed Churches of Indonesia in the South-east region (of Timor) [Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia in Nusa Tenggara Timur]
- GKH – Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored) [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Hersteld)]
- GKN – Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt)]
- ICRC – International Conference of Reformed Churches
- IRCK – Independent Reformed Church in Korea
- PCEA – Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
- PCK – Presbyterian Church in Korea
- RCNZ – Reformed Churches of New Zealand
- URCM – United Reformed Churches in Myanmar

## 1. Free Church of Scotland (FCS)<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Mandate

Synod Chatham decided:

- 1.1.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS and FCC under the adopted rules;
- 1.1.2. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 1.1.2.1. To continue to monitor the situation in the hope of gaining greater clarity and report to the next synod;
  - 1.1.2.2. To assure both the FCS and FCC that they have our prayerful support and to encourage both sides to reconcile;
  - 1.1.2.3. To continue the discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity in the light of Considerations 4.5 and 4.6 (*Acts Synod Chatham 2004*, Art 43).

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<sup>1</sup> For the Free Church of Scotland (Majority or residual) this report will use FCS. For the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the report will use FCC, which is the shorthand used by that church.

## 1.2. Correspondence concerning FCS

- 1.2.1. A letter dated February 18, 2004 was received from Rev. James Maciver, clerk to the Ecumenical Relations Committee, apologizing for not sending a letter of greeting to Synod Chatham due to a death in the family.
- 1.2.2. A letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent informing the FCS that Synod Chatham decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS. We also informed the FCS that Synod Chatham decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCC because Synod could not judge the division between the FCS and the FCC due to lack of clarity. We informed the FCS that Synod mandated the CRCA to continue to monitor the situation in hope of gaining greater clarity, and to report to our next Synod. We assured the FCS that it has the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches and encouraged it to reconcile with the FCC. We informed the FCS that Synod Chatham mandated the CRCA to continue the discussion of existing differences in confession and church polity between our two federations, and that the FCS would hear more about this from us. We also expressed our understanding for the reason why the FCS did not send a letter of greeting to Synod Chatham.
- 1.2.3. A letter dated February 26, 2004 was received inviting us to the General Assembly of the FCS to be held in May 2004.
- 1.2.4. Letters and e-mails were sent in June 2004 to our counterparts in the FRCA, FRCSA, GKN, OPC, RCUS, and URC, asking whether they would be willing to share with us information and documentation that would help us gain clarity on the division that occurred between the FCS and the FCC. This was in accordance with the suggestion of Synod Chatham (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 43, Consideration 4.3).
- 1.2.5. A letter dated June 14, 2004 was sent to the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas, asking for any documents that would be helpful in our discussion with the FCS and the FCC concerning differences in confession and church polity between our respective federations.
- 1.2.6. A letter dated June 14, 2004 was sent offering our apology for not sending a delegate or even a letter of greeting in connection with the General Assembly of the FCS held in May 2004 and explaining that this was due to the period of transition after Synod Chatham.
- 1.2.7. On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the FCS.
- 1.2.8. A letter dated June 16, 2004 was received requesting more details about Synod Chatham's reasons for not adopting the CRCA's recommendation about the FCS and the FCC.
- 1.2.9. An e-mail dated July 6, 2004 was received from the RCUS

Interchurch Relations Committee chairman Rev. G. Syms indicating that they have no information about the FCS division.

- 1.2.10. A letter dated November 15, 2004 was sent informing the FCS that as a committee we are not able to provide more details about Synod Chatham's decision with respect to the division within the FCS because we are only aware of the considerations recorded in the *Acts*.
- 1.2.11. We received the *Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland 2004*.
- 1.2.12. A letter dated February 17, 2005 was received inviting us to send a fraternal delegate to the FCS General Assembly to be held May 23-27, 2005.
- 1.2.13. A letter dated March 14, 2005 was sent offering fraternal greetings to the FCS gathered in its General Assembly 2005.
- 1.2.14. A letter dated March 14, 2005 was sent to the FCS, inquiring about continued discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity (see *Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 43, Recommendation 5.4.3).
- 1.2.15. From the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations we received on April 7, 2005 a compilation of OPC General Assembly reports from 2000 to 2004 about the FCS split.
- 1.2.16. An e-mail dated March 28, 2005 was received from the FCS, forwarding the court decision about the FCS split.
- 1.2.17. We received for our information Rev. W. den Hollander's report on the North American Synod 2005 of the FCS as prepared for Classis Central Ontario June 2005.
- 1.2.18. A letter dated June 22, 2005 was sent requesting that the FCS mandate its delegates to the ICRC Pretoria to discuss with our delegates the FCS split, differences in confession and church polity, and anything else that might be of mutual interest or concern.
- 1.2.19. An e-mail dated Nov 9, 2005 from the FCS was received explaining that the FCC has not yet dropped the court appeal against Lady Paton's decision.
- 1.2.20. The *Principal Acts* of the General Assembly held in May 2005 were received.
- 1.2.21. A letter was received, dated January 27, 2006, with enclosures, from the BBK (section 3—Europe and North America) of the GKN, containing their deputies' report, and various materials, concerning the division in the FCS.
- 1.2.22. A letter dated March 1, 2006 was received from the FCS inviting the CanRC to send a fraternal delegate to the General Assembly to be held in May 2006.
- 1.2.23. An email was received with attached press release, "Free Church offers 'One Church Solution,'" along with a copy of



the Minutes of the Proceedings of a special meeting of the Commission of the General Assembly, held March 23, 2006. The Commission dealt with a report of the Stewardship and Policy Committee which had received a communication from the FCC to the effect that the FCC had abandoned its appeal in the courts.

- 1.2.24.** A letter of fraternal greeting dated April 24, 2006 was sent to the General Assembly 2006 of the FCS.

### **1.3. Correspondence concerning FCC**

- 1.3.1.** A letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent informing the FCC that Synod Chatham decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCC. We also informed the FCC that Synod Chatham decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS because Synod could not judge the division between the FCC and the FCS due to lack of clarity. We informed the FCC that Synod mandated the CRCA to continue to monitor the situation in hope of gaining greater clarity, and to report to our next Synod. We assured the FCC that it has the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches and encouraged it to reconcile with the FCS. We informed the FCC that Synod Chatham mandated the CRCA to continue the discussion of existing differences in confession and church polity between our two federations, and that the FCC would hear more about this from us.
- 1.3.2.** We received the *Acts of the General Assembly May 2003* of the FCC.
- 1.3.3.** We received the *Yearbook 2004* of the FCC.
- 1.3.4.** We received an e-mail dated May 31, 2004 from the FCC with an attached excerpt of the General Assembly 2004. The FCC noted receipt of our March 8, 2004 letter and expressed appreciation for the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches and also expressed willingness to be reconciled to their former brethren on the Scriptural basis of truth and righteousness.
- 1.3.5.** A letter dated June 14, 2004 was sent asking the FCC for a copy of a documentary video of the events of January 2000 and a copy of Murdoch Murchison's and Iain H. Murray's book on the division, *When Justice Failed in Church and State: An Explanation of the Division in the Free Church of Scotland*.
- 1.3.6.** On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the FCC.
- 1.3.7.** A letter dated June 25, 2004 was received from the FCC in response to our letter of June 14, 2004. The FCC indicated that the documentary video about the division would not be ready

for some time. The FCC provided a link to an electronic copy of Murchison's and Murray's book, *When Justice Failed...*

- 1.3.8. A letter dated March 14, 2005 was sent to the FCC, inquiring about continued discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity (see *Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 43, Recommendation 5.4.3).
- 1.3.9. A letter dated March 19, 2005 was received inviting us to send fraternal delegates to the FCC General Assembly to be held May 23-27, 2005.
- 1.3.10. A letter dated March 19, 2005 was received informing us that our letter of March 14, 2005 about discussions concerning differences in confession and church polity would be dealt with at their June 21, 2005 committee meeting.
- 1.3.11. A letter dated March 21, 2005 was sent conveying fraternal greetings to the FCC gathered in its General Assembly 2005.
- 1.3.12. A letter dated June 14, 2005 was received via e-mail from the Assembly Clerk of the FCC indicating that the General Assembly noted the continued contact maintained with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- 1.3.13. A letter dated June 14, 2005 was received via e-mail from the Assembly Clerk of the FCC indicating that the General Assembly thanked the Canadian Reformed Churches for the letter of greeting to the General Assembly and reciprocated Christian greetings.
- 1.3.14. A letter dated June 22, 2005 was sent requesting that the FCC mandate its delegates to the ICRC Pretoria to discuss with our delegates the FCS split, differences in confession and church polity, and anything else that might be of mutual interest or concern.
- 1.3.15. An e-mail letter dated June 27/05 was received from the FCC informing us that it will be most pleased to meet with Canadian Reformed delegates at ICRC Pretoria 2005 to discuss the division and whatever other matters that are of mutual interest.
- 1.3.16. A position statement for ICRC Pretoria 2005, dated September 2005, was received, explaining the FCC's perspective on the division in the FCS.
- 1.3.17. A letter dated March 16, 2006 was received from the FCC inviting the CanRC to send a fraternal delegate to the General Assembly to be held in May 2006.
- 1.3.18. An e-mail dated March 27, 2006 was received from the FCC with an attached document in response to the FCS's "one church solution."
- 1.3.19. We received the *Principle Acts of the General Assembly 2005* of the FCC.
- 1.3.20. A letter of fraternal greeting dated April 24, 2006 was sent to the General Assembly 2006 of the FCC.

**1.3.21.** A letter dated June 12, 2006 was received from the FCC with an extract of the Minutes of the General Assembly 2006, indicating that they received our letter of greeting sent to the General Assembly 2006.

#### **1.4. Continuing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with both the FCS and the FCC.**

Synod Chatham decided “to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship” with both the FCS and the FCC. This was communicated to the FCS (1.2.2) and to the FCC (1.3.1).

It must be said that in regards to the FCC this was not strictly our *continuing* the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Rather, it was doing something *new* in terms of *establishing* or *initiating* ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC. This needs some attention.

To review: the status of our relation with the FCC after Synod Neerlandia 2001 was made clear in Consideration 4.5.3 of the Acts of that Synod (p.28): Synod Neerlandia considered that “under the circumstances that the FCS (Continuing) has seceded without a clear-cut justification for doing so, it would not be proper to show equality by continuing ecclesiastical fellowship with both.” Hence, Synod Neerlandia came to the conclusion, in its Recommendation 5.1.1 (p.28 of the Acts) “to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland (Majority) under the adopted rules while continuing to monitor the situation with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in order to come to greater clarity on the matter.” This meant there was no ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC coming out of Synod 2001. There was a relationship of contact only, in which ‘monitoring’ and ‘seeking greater clarity’ were the operating words of the relationship.

The CRCA, having done some further investigations between 2001 and 2004, came to Synod Chatham with the recommendation (1.7.3 of its report): “. . . to consider the matter to have been investigated sufficiently and therefore not to continue contact with the Free Church Continuing” (p.274, Acts Synod Chatham).

Synod Chatham disagreed with the recommendation of the committee. However, Synod Chatham did not merely go in the direction of maintaining *contact*, but rather decided to go the full distance to *ecclesiastical fellowship*. Since Synod Chatham stated that we were *continuing* ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC, it seems that Synod Chatham assumed that ecclesiastical fellowship was already in place. It does not appear that Synod Chatham realized it was in reality *initiating* rather than *continuing* ecclesiastical fellowship with

the FCC. Clearly the record shows there was no ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC before 2004. The relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship was *initiated* with the FCC in 2004.

This course of events led to the correspondence recorded under 1.2.8 and 1.2.10 above: the FCS wondering what happened to change our relationship with the FCC, and the CRCA not being able to give any answer beyond what is found written in the Acts under the Considerations of Synod Chatham.

Though the course of events leading up to our presently having ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC was rather irregular, the CRCA nevertheless pursued the course Synod Chatham had decided upon. Moreover, the CRCA recommends that we do continue the relation of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC. On the other hand, Synod Smithers may have to acknowledge that we did not apply rule #3 for ecclesiastical fellowship, namely, that “the churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties”—the FCS obviously did not know, nor understand, what we had done with respect to the FCC.

### **1.5. The relationship between the FCS and the FCC**

Previous reports of the CRCA, to Synod 2001 and Synod 2004, will give much of the history of the 2000 schism in Scotland and the subsequent relationship between the FCS and the FCC. The following includes some of the more recent developments.

The FCC had initiated a court action against the FCS which was still ongoing during the time that Synod Chatham met. The court action concerned the “name or assets” of the FCS. The court action stemmed from the FCC’s claim to be the lawful continuation of the FCS.

The hearing before the court was scheduled for October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Before that date, a meeting (initiated by counsel on both sides of the case) was held between representatives of the FCS and the FCC in Carberry, August 17-20, 2004. The purpose was “to sit down as two bodies and look to see whether there is a constitutional right in our Church of continued protest” (see further below on what is meant with this). The Commission of Assembly (the interim body which acts on the authority of the GA and is accountable to the next GA) of the FCS then met on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004, specifically to deal with relations with the FCC and to issue proposals for settlement; the Commission of Assembly of the FCC met September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to consider the proposals of the FCS and to reply with further conditions for settlement. This was an effort to settle before the court hearing in October. The settlement out of court was not attained. The legal action of the FCC continued in the courts.

The Court of Session, over which Lady Paton presided, finally issued its judgment on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The court decided that the FCC had “not departed from any fundamental tenet of the Free Church of Scotland” and that “from the point of view of adherence to fundamental beliefs and faiths [the FCC] have not forfeited any entitlement to the assets and property held in trust for the Free Church of Scotland.” This judgment of the court confirms previous evaluations that the FCC is not in existence because of confessional or doctrinal differences with the FCS. The “beliefs and faiths” of the FCC can still be identified as being the same as those of the FCS. Though the ruling of the court does not have to weigh heavily in this matter, it is still encouraging to hear also from the direction of the court.

The CRCA was more interested in the court’s judgment of the church political reasons for the existence of the FCC. The FCC seems to have staked quite a bit on what is termed the “right of continued protest.” By this is meant that before the schism of 2000, while there was still a united body, those in the FCS who were opposed to the decisions of the General Assembly/ies believed they had the right to continually protest against those decisions in the church courts/assemblies, including through an organization called the Free Church Defence Association. The FCS does acknowledge a right of *dissent*; the civil court, however, was to decide whether the right to dissent is at the same time a “right of *continued protest*” in the church courts. In this respect, the court found no evidence of such a right in the constitutional principles of the FCS. Those who stood opposed to the decisions of the Church in the years leading up to the 2000 schism could go on with dissent, but should not have gone on with continued protest. The court found in favor of the FCS.

Soon after the judgment of Lady Paton, there followed a May 3, 2005 meeting in Inverness between representatives of the FCS and FCC. At this meeting, among other things, it was stated by the FCC: “We still firmly believe that we have no Scriptural warrant for separation in perpetuity but we recognize from your public statements as well as the view expressed by some of our wounded people that this is not immediately possible.” At the same time, the FCC continued to hold out its claim to property and assets. Following the General Assembly of the FCC in 2005, which left the option for its Legal Advice & Property Committee to continue on a legal course, the FCC did lodge an appeal in the courts against Lady Paton’s ruling.

In October of 2005, the FCC applied for membership in the ICRC in Pretoria. At the same conference, the OPC submitted a proposal by which the ICRC would play a facilitating role in bringing about reconciliation between the two churches. Because of the ongoing court action of the FCC against the FCS, the ICRC did not accept the application of the FCC. The ICRC further urged the FCC to

drop its action in the civil courts and urged the FCS and FCC “to seek biblical ways of reconciliation.” The ICRC did not adopt the OPC’s proposal for ICRC involvement in the reconciliation of the churches.

After the ICRC, there was movement within the FCC to work out what the ICRC had urged upon it. The ICRC did provide an impetus in the right direction. Though initially there was not agreement within the FCC to proceed with dropping the court action, by March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the FCC “unilaterally withdrew legal action against the residual (majority) body of the Free Church of Scotland and made proposals for an equitable settlement of the dispute between their former brethren and themselves.” The FCC, in dropping its appeal, had also drafted a document “Proposals for Settlement,” by which it had offered a negotiated settlement.

The FCS responded (March 23, 2006) with the offer of a “One Church Solution.” In effect, this would require all who have left the FCS to return and “show repentance for their divisive actions.” The FCS did leave a second alternative for those who would find coming back impossible, a “Two-Church Solution”: the FCC would be recognized as a separate denomination, but all buildings would be returned to the FCS and frozen bank accounts released. Further legal processes related to the dispute were to be worked out between the two churches.

This response of the FCS was met with “astonishment and disappointment” by the FCC, which quickly issued a press release on March 27, 2006. The offered *negotiated* settlement (“Proposals for Settlement”) which the FCC had drafted had apparently been ignored by the FCS. The press release concludes: “While the FCC proposals for settlement are still on the table and the FCC are willing to talk with their separated brethren at any time, it is unlikely that there will be further movement until after their General Assembly meets in May of this year. The Free Church Continuing Legal Committee are firm that existing buildings and assets held by the minority will be held by them in perpetuity.”

In connection with monitoring the relationship between the FCS and the FCC, the CRCA did receive some communication and information from two of our sister churches. The OPC sent information (1.2.15) which dated up to 2004, most of which the CRCA had seen before and used in its previous evaluations for the report to Synod Chatham. The GKNv (1.2.21) also sent a package of information which included some documentation as well as the BBK’s evaluation and recommendation to Synod Amersfoort 2005. The RCUS (1.2.9) wrote to tell us they had no information. We did not receive communication from other sister churches. We can conclude

generally that the materials from the sister churches are helpful. However, they do not necessarily give more clarity. It is evident that the sister churches also struggle with coming to a good understanding of the brokenness in the sister churches in Scotland.

From what we have described above, the CRCA can conclude that the course of events in the churches in Scotland over the last three years is disappointing insofar as the struggle came into the civil court, and then continued there for as long as it did. However, though we may be disappointed, we should not be overly alarmed. That the civil court can rule in temporalities pertaining to the church is something acknowledged by both the FCS and the FCC. Of course, it remains disappointing and grievous when a dispute between brothers comes to that point.

Along with the civil court struggle, however, there is evidence of real effort by both sides to take seriously the command of the Lord for reconciliation as it has also been urged by sister churches of the FCS and FCC, as well as by the ICRC. For example, the FCS manifests a real attempt at settlement in its September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004 Commission of Assembly statements and agreements; the FCC shows the same in its March 7, 2006 Proposals for Settlement. Neither side has given up the way towards reconciliation, though the way to final reconciliation and settlement has been, and still may be, laborious.

It is not the recommendation of the CRCA that we take a position in the current ongoing dispute, since the FCS and the FCC are clearly still ready and willing to work towards a common goal. Considering also other things that will follow in this report, we ought to continue ecclesiastical fellowship with both the FCS and the FCC. There may be times where we are discouraged by what we read and hear in the dispute. But while the situation is still developing, and in the right direction overall, it is not wise for us to make conclusions when solutions are still being actively pursued by the FCS and FCC. The FCS and the FCC must be encouraged and exhorted to continue on the path they are on, to come to a God-pleasing, Christ-honoring conclusion. We must pray continually for the Head of the Church to bring the disputing Scottish churches together for his honor and for a witness to the world of God's gracious reconciliation work.

## **1.6. Prayerful support and encouragement to reconcile**

Synod Chatham mandated the CRCA to assure both the FCS and FCC that they have our prayerful support and to encourage both sides to reconcile. The correspondence under 1.2.2 and 1.3.1 shows that this has been done.

## 1.7. Discussion of differences in confession and church polity

Synod Chatham mandated the CRCA to continue the discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity in the light of Considerations 4.5 and 4.6 (*Acts Synod Chatham 2004*, Art 43). Taking Synod Chatham's consideration 4.6 first (re synopsis of the discussions of differences): under correspondence 1.2.5 above, it is evident that the CRCA did make the initial effort to communicate with the CCCA in order "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." The CRCA did not pursue the matter further with the CCCA, and has at this stage not received a synopsis of the discussions with the OPC concerning differences in confession and polity.

With respect to Synod Chatham's Consideration 4.5 (re actually discussing the differences), the CRCA did seek and have an opportunity for discussing the differences of confession and church polity with the FCS and FCC. Discussion was face to face and not through correspondence.

### Discussion with the FCS:

The correspondence recorded above (1.2) will show that on March 8, 2004 we sent a letter (1.2.2) to inform the FCS that Synod Chatham had mandated us to these discussions. A follow-up letter (1.2.14) was sent to the FCS on March 14, 2005, and again on June 22, 2005 (1.2.18); the final letter indicating that we sought an opportunity at the ICRC in Pretoria. Though nothing was received on this matter from the FCS in the way of correspondence, in Pretoria we did have occasion to meet and discuss. One CRCA member, as well as three other CanRC representatives met with four representatives of the FCS. The CRCA representative at that meeting reported the following to the CRCA:

Our invitation for the discussion was dealt with at their General Assembly in Sept. 2005, but the timing had not allowed for a written response to the CRCA prior to this get-together.

We explained our practice of fencing the Lord's Table during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The FCS delegates shared that the need for fencing is shared by their denomination. Members are urged to examine themselves in the week before the administration, in part by means of pre-communion services. The number of these depends on the congregation, especially in places where communion is celebrated more frequently. The services may start on the Thursday; each church has at least one on the preceding Saturday. It is customary that any one



who wishes to make profession of faith will meet with the Kirk Session (ruling elders) during these pre-communion days.

The possibility exists to allow others to participate in the celebration. People who are committed as shown by their action and attendance, yet have not joined up as members, are allowed to participate upon their request, provided prior examination and approval of the Kirk Session is secured. Guests from other FCS congregations may come with a card or token (cf. our attestations). Other visitors are urged to approach the minister or an elder in advance, or are met by one of these on the Sunday. The decision whether or not to admit anyone as a guest ultimately rests with the Kirk Session of that congregation. As a result, this person may be granted permission on the basis of his oral attest.

The FCS does not know confessional membership. They will extend membership to people with Baptist or Pentecostal convictions, however, such persons are restricted from being elected to the offices in the church. Our practice of doing profession of faith after receiving years of catechetical instruction is unknown to them. They instruct their children in special programs, comparable to Sunday school classes, and allow children to become communicant members when they express this desire even at an early age, sometimes as early as age 8 -12. These youngsters must first follow a class for communicants. They are not admitted on the basis of the Sunday School training or because they have communicant parents; rather, the reasoning is that the Holy Spirit works differently in people of different ages. The admission of children to communicant membership is still relatively infrequent. It is therefore doubtful that the denomination adheres to the paedocommunion position, since the FCS requires a credible profession of faith for children, adults or those from a different confessional background who desire to make profession. Professing one's faith also implies the extension of membership, and such is required for one to be elected to the offices. Sometimes people have waited until they were in their fifties before they professed their faith. Although it is more common to have young people wait till their late teens, the present practice sees a tendency for younger adherents to present themselves. (Adherents are regular worshippers who lose this designation when they become communicant members or no longer join in worship.)

In this connection we discussed the view of the covenant. We see our children as covenant children. The FCS regards them as covenant children through the faith of their parents. The Westminster Standards, as expressed for example in the Directory of Public Worship is quoted to support this position: children are "Christians and federally holy before baptism and therefore

they are baptized.” Thus they are formally and publicly admitted into federal membership of the church by their baptism as infants and are known as adherents, but require a credible profession on their own part before they are admitted to the Lord’s Supper. The delegates thus expressed reservations about our view of children as members of the covenant, having been sanctified in Christ through their baptism, as possibly leading to formalism on account of considering baptism as the regenerating force, rather than expecting this to result from the work of the Spirit.

In turn we were asked what process we have in place for people who desire to join our churches. One of our representatives responded to this and explained the various options. “Would we deny membership to someone who would disagree with the Belgic Confession?” was replied to by another delegate.

One of the FCS ministers explained the situation of his congregation in a large university city. Approximately one-third of the congregants have come from Baptist congregations and many others originate from evangelical backgrounds. He will speak to them about these matters and urge them to accept the doctrines the FCS upholds, without forcing them to change their views. The parents, who have been baptized, will be accepted as members; the children are considered “federally holy”, the same designation as baptized members.

We were informed that the FCS has a number of congregations in North America. Three of these are located in Prince Edward Island, while there is one in Toronto and another one in Detroit. There used to be one in Vancouver as well, but it is no longer in existence. The CRCA is aware of this presence through the “Observer Report” published in *Clarion*, by Rev. W. DenHollander, who attended their GA meeting on May 19, 2005.

We are thankful for the opportunity to speak about these things in Pretoria and would like Synod to consider this part of the Committee’s mandate to be concluded (see further below).

### **Discussion with the FCC**

The correspondence above (1.3) will show that on March 8, 2004 we sent a letter (1.3.1) to inform the FCC that Synod Chatham had mandated the CRCA to discuss differences of confession and church polity. A follow-up letter, dated March 14, 2005, was sent (1.3.8), to which a response was received, dated March 19, 2005 (1.3.10): the FCC would deal with our desire for discussion in their June committee meeting. We sent a letter (1.3.14), dated June 22, 2005, indicating that we would like an opportunity at the ICRC in

Pretoria; to this the FCC readily agreed (1.3.15). In Pretoria, one CRCA member, as well as three other CanRC representatives, met with four representatives of the FCC. Our CRCA representative at that meeting reported the following to the CRCA:

Our discussions in Pretoria took place in a very congenial manner. The delegates of the FCC had agreed to meet beforehand (see Letter June 27, 2005), and prior to our get-together, we had provided them with copies of the Divergences paper. We agreed to a discussion in which historical developments, practical applications and present practices could be raised, so a greater understanding and better appreciation of one another's views and situation would evolve.

The matter of the fencing of the Lord's Supper table was the first matter raised. The FCC believes that fencing is necessary. Exhortation according to Galatians 5 or other appropriate Scripture passages precedes the celebration. The announcement is made a week prior to the observance. In the week leading up to it, different services are organized. On the Thursday two services are held in most congregations (the cities may be the exception) with the central themes of humiliation and the indwelling of sin, requiring the ongoing need for repentance and prayer. Many country-churches traditionally held a question meeting on the Friday—which is largely restricted to the Gaelic areas nowadays—followed by a preparation service on Saturday. Members receive a token during this time which is handed in when they attend the celebration on the Sunday. The celebration is open to guests, who have presented themselves to the Session beforehand, and who will be allowed to partake upon a “credible” profession, where no contradiction with regard to doctrine and practice is detected. After the fencing warning from Gal. 5:19 – 23 and singing from Ps. 118 or another psalm, the minister calls those who have been granted their token, imprinted with the name of the congregation and “Do this in remembrance of Me.” The celebration takes place much in the same way we conduct ours and is normally concluded with the singing of some verses of Ps. 103. In the evening an evangelistic service is held with a message directed towards those who were not at the Lord's Table. A Thanksgiving service follows on the Monday after the celebration.

We wondered about the demands such an elaborate arrangement places on the local pastor. We were assured that the assistance of two or more ministers of the other congregations is sought. The local pastor does not normally preach in any of these “Communion season” services, and the fact that this is done only twice a year makes it less onerous when compared

to our four or six celebrations annually. When we asked how their practice differs from that in the FCS, we were told that the FCC has not changed its customs, and that they as delegates declined to comment on current FCS practice.

The matter of infant baptism and membership received attention next. Baptism is granted to the children of communicant members. If the father is a member, he will be asked to take the vows. If only the mother is a member, she is to make the vow and the father may be asked to concur. In specific instances children of parents of whom neither one has done profession of faith may be baptized. Such a situation could arise when both parents lack the assurance of being called, in spite of leading a God-fearing life. The Kirk Session will allow baptism to proceed in such cases. Children are regarded as members in a limited sense. As they grow up, they are considered adherents until they profess their faith after a saving experience of the grace of God. There is no specific age at which this is expected; there must be an honest desire to make this commitment, and it rarely occurs before they are 14. This profession is the same as that required of an adult. It involves a full examination to ensure the individual has a mature understanding and shows the practical evidence of a saving faith. Consequently, there is no reason to label professing one's faith at this young age paedocommunion. While the FCC has a systematic program of instruction, the experience is that many of the young people in the system leave home to go to university or move elsewhere. They may continue receiving instruction at their new place of residence or disappear. The request for doing profession of faith is made to the Kirk Session, and records of the communicant members are kept in its register. The explanation of our setup evoked the ready admission that we are more successful at retaining our young people.

Confessional Membership was our next topic. It was explained how we in the CanRCs envision that whoever has professed his faith is expected to uphold the confessions of the church to which he has pledged his agreement. The FCC practice, like that in the OPC, allows for differences of opinion. People holding Baptist views are permitted membership, and through discussion, attempts are made to convince them to accept the FCC doctrine of paedobaptism. It is possible that such parents, when a child is born, may not ask for the administration of the sacrament. The issue will be addressed, but the parents will not be forced to comply. A man holding such views, or any other male who does not subscribe to the Westminster Confession, will not be eligible to be elected to the office of elder or deacon. Our practice of instruction, agreement and the possibility of having it result in disciplinary action was mentioned.

With regards to the schism in the FCS, we wondered how it was possible to reconcile the fact that both the FCS and the FCC can present themselves at the ICRC as two separate entities, yet being so similar in background and approach. The delegates attempted to explain that this results from the difference in perception of the FCS representatives in comparison to the way they view them. They still consider them to be faithful ministers and churches of the Lord, in spite of the differences which exist. As such, they have no difficulty to cooperate in certain activities, e. g. funerals, where a minister of both denominations or other Reformed ministers may be called on to take part in the proceedings. Young people will attend and mingle at the same youth meetings by common consent. When asked about marriage, we were told that this is a matter for the minister only; the Session is not involved.

This tied in to what had been explained earlier. The American Presbyterian approach, as held by the OPC, differs much from the FCS system. The OPC has its Book of Church law. When you break the rule or rules expressed in this Book of Church Law, you are wrong and therefore subject to the consequences (Comparable to our Church Order). The Scottish system has a Book of Practice (as distinct from a book of *law*). The core legislation goes back more than 300 years. The book gives guidelines how these laws, passed by General Assemblies, can be applied appropriately, and allows for flexibility and interpretation, provided these actions fall within what the General Assemblies have permitted over the years as being in line with the regulations. As a result there are many challenges: "I did what the guide said!" Yet, a different approach might have been equally valid. For example, there are three or four different ways to elect elders. Matters of discipline, however, have been laid down in certain procedures. No major changes can be effected immediately, unless these have been ratified by the presbyteries for their view and suggestions.

We are thankful for the opportunity to meet with the FCC representatives in Pretoria. Also here the Committee would like Synod to consider that its mandate re discussion of differences has been satisfactorily concluded.

In this respect, the Committee would like to draw special attention to the following concern/request: If Synod decides to renew the mandate for continued discussion of differences, the Committee requests Synod to be very specific about what needs to be discussed and what the precise goal of those discussions would be. The Committee can already envision the very real questions that we are faced with 'where the rubber hits the road': "So what do we talk about next time?" "How should our discussion be the same or different

from last time?” “And what should be the result of our discussion?” Also, the matter is complicated by the fact that different persons from one committee are speaking to different persons on another committee each time we meet—committees change and it is difficult for everyone to be up to date. These are real complicating factors which Synod would do well to consider. We request Synod not to underestimate the difficulty of holding mandated discussions about differences when there is no clear goal. It is a blessed goal to grow together in the unity of faith. However, the Committee believes that the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship are sufficient in providing a broad context for that to happen. We do not need a special mandate to grow in the unity of the faith. In connection with this, it should also be said that we are not seeking organic unity with the churches in Scotland. We have a relationship with them—ecclesiastical fellowship—which consists of mutual recognition as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this relationship each federation can maintain its own identity and practices, as shaped by each federation’s history and culture. For these reasons the Committee will not be recommending that Synod Smithers mandate continued discussions re differences of confession and polity.

(It must be added that, since the FCS and the FCC are both quite busy with internal matters, we must be sober in our expectations for what sort of time and energy there is to discuss what we may find interesting but not crucial.)

## **1.8 Gleanings from the Acts of General Assemblies**

We received from the FCS the Principal Acts of the General Assemblies held in 2004 and 2005. From the FCC we received the Principal Acts of the General Assemblies held in 2003 and 2005 – we do not have the Principal Acts of the 2004 General Assembly.

### **FCS Principal Acts of General Assembly**

#### **2004**

The Principal Acts show that the General Assembly dealt with, among other things: the proposal to establish a Reformed Presbyterian Church in Sweden; supply preachers; a Child Protection Policy; the appointment of a National Youth Coordinator; a revised committee structure, with the Stewardship and Policy Committee overseeing four committees; communications with the FCC; appointing a Committee on Worship; admission of ministers from non-Presbyterian churches; appointment of meetings for prayer, because the FCS was facing the prospect of defending itself in court against the action taken by the FCC; ecumenical relations; report from the public questions committee.

Under ecumenical relations, there is only a brief statement: General Assembly noted “with disappointment the finding of General Synod Chatham, 2004, regarding relations with the Free Church of Scotland and the ‘Free Church Continuing.’” Behind this is the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee to General Assembly, which stated: “The committee was pleased” with the recommendations of the report which the CRCA was sending to Synod Chatham, 2004 regarding the FCS and the FCC. However, “the [Ecumenical Relations] Committee was disappointed . . . to learn that the Synod had adopted an amendment” to the effect that “Synod cannot judge the division between the FCS and FCS(c) at this time” which resulted in the CanRCs continuing ecclesiastical fellowship with both the FCS and the FCC. The statement of the General Assembly followed the Ecumenical Relations Committee recommendation, which was to express disappointment with what we had done.

### **FCS Principal Acts of General Assembly**

#### **2005**

The Principal Acts show that the Assembly dealt with, among other things: supporting the application of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC; relations with the FCC, following the ruling of the civil court, and seeking ways to settle the dispute with the FCC; the use of the Scottish Paraphrases in public worship, and decided that the use of them is not a matter of discipline; the admission of ministers and probationers from other churches; categories of relationship with other churches which are: 1. mutual eligibility, 2. fraternal relations, 3. recognition, 4. acknowledgement; the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee which reported to the General Assembly that the CRCA had not been able to add more detail about what Synod Chatham had decided re the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with both the FCS and FCC.

The General Assembly gave the broad mandate to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations “to promote relations with other Churches and religious bodies, and with delegates to and from these to the General Assembly, and to take steps to promote and protect the position of the Free Church of Scotland with respect to her place in the wider Church . . . .”

### **FCC Principal Acts of General Assembly**

#### **2003**

The Principal Acts show that the General Assembly dealt with, among other things: the admission of two churches, one in Metro-

politan Washington, DC; the support of the OPC and Free Reformed Churches of North America with regards to “re-establishing our status within” the ICRC; full recognition of the FCC granted by the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, which the General Assembly noted with “deep appreciation”; various letters of greeting from churches; appointment of a fraternal delegate to the OPC General Assembly of 2003; support for the Lord’s Day Observance Society; letter of greeting from the Trinitarian Bible Society; Christian education—both Sabbath school and day schools; relations with the state; training for the ministry, for which a seminary has been set up in Dores; relations with the FCS, defending against accusations from the FCS, property issues, and court action against the FCS.

Under ecumenical relations: “The General Assembly note the courteous interest shown in our situation by the Canadian Reformed Churches.”

### **FCC Principal Acts of General Assembly**

#### **2005**

The Principal Acts show that the General Assembly dealt with, among other things: finances; the manner of conducting business in the church courts and committees; ecumenical relations; training for the ministry and regulations and procedures concerning the application for admission to the ministry; missions; letter from the OPC re the ongoing concern with regard to the division; response to the civil court’s judgment; reports from, among others, publications committee, education committee, public questions committee, and committee on psalmody.

With respect to ecumenical relations, the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee is most brief with respect to the CanRCs. There is only one line of recommendation: “The Committee maintain active contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches.” The General Assembly stated: “The General Assembly note the continued contact maintained with the Canadian Reformed Churches.” Regarding the letter we sent: “The General Assembly thank the Canadian Reformed Churches for their letter and reciprocate Christian greetings.”

With respect to the OPC letter, the Assembly stated the following: “They [i.e., the General Assembly] assure the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the continuing desire of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to be reconciled, on the basis of truth and righteousness, to the brethren from whom they are now separated, failing which reconciliation an equitable settlement which would



recognise the ministerial status of ministers of both bodies and which would make equitable provision for the material needs of their congregations, ministers, missions and administration.”

## 1.9. Conclusion

It has been reported to previous Synods that the dispute in Scotland is a dispute between brothers in the Lord who seek to remain faithful to the Word of God in submission to the only Head of the church. The schism in the FCS, though grievous, did not come about as a result of confessional or doctrinal differences. Rather, the schism came about through a sharp disagreement in the application of church law or practice in a specific instance. Since the time that the division in the churches occurred, the CRCA sees that neither the FCS nor the FCC has departed from the truth of God’s Word, which truth both churches hold and defend and proclaim. Through limited discussion with representatives of both churches, and through perusal of the available General Assembly Principal Acts, it is evident that these churches continue on the old path.

As it is, we have rather abruptly entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC in 2004, with little explanation. We should acknowledge that fact readily, and then quickly add that this acknowledgement does not necessitate radical consequences, such as breaking off the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC. As circumstances have developed, we must be flexible enough to live with the decision of Synod Chatham and work positively within this framework, praying towards the day when, the Lord willing, we can again speak of, and to and with, the one FCS.

Regarding the ongoing division, it must be noted with thankfulness that both the FCS and the FCC have made serious efforts towards reconciliation, even though those efforts have not come to the desired goal. In the course of working towards reconciliation, neither church has resisted the attempts of sister churches and the ICRC to give encouragement and exhortation towards the good goal. As long as the FCS and FCC efforts continue in a serious way, though there may be discouragements on the way, we should continue to monitor the developments, giving encouragement and exhortations towards reconciliation, praying for the Lord’s help and grace in their time of need, while we reserve judgment about the details which the Scottish brothers have to work out. We might also acknowledge that, having exhausted the resources which would lend clarity to our grasping the reason for the division in the sister churches in Scotland, we are limited in pursuing the course of seeking further clarity. It would be best to conclude that gaining further clarity is becoming impossible, and is not crucial to our proceeding with the sister churches in Scotland.

As opportunities arise, discussions about differences in confession and church polity, which may lead to growing together in unity of faith, can find a context in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship; such discussions do not need a specific mandate.

### **1.10.Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod Smithers 2007 decide:

- 1.10.1. To acknowledge that Synod Chatham 2004 inadvertently entered into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC, which in effect also compromised our adherence to rule #3 of the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship.
- 1.10.2. To nevertheless continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with both the FCS and the FCC under the adopted rules.
- 1.10.3. To acknowledge that we have sufficient clarity to know how to proceed with both the FCS and the FCC, while acknowledging that further clarity on the causes of the division between them is not crucial and might very well remain elusive.
- 1.10.4. To express thankfulness for the earnest efforts which have been made by both the FCS and the FCC towards reconciliation; to exhort the FCS and the FCC to continue to make such earnest efforts towards reconciliation, for the honor of Christ the one Head of the Church; and to urge the FCS and the FCC not to be discouraged by the difficulties on the path towards that goal.
- 1.10.5. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 1.10.5.1. To convey the decisions under Recommendations 1, 2, and 4 to both the FCS and FCC, assuring them of our continued prayerful support.
  - 1.10.5.2. To continue to monitor the situation in the sister churches in Scotland and report any important developments to the next Synod.

## **2. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)**

### **2.1 Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided:

- 2.1.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules;
- 2.1.2. To express appreciation to the FRCA for their continued support of the Theological College.

## 2.2. Correspondence

- 2.2.1. As mandated by Synod Chatham (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 52, Recommendation 5.3), a letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent expressing appreciation to the FRCA for their continued support of the Theological College.
- 2.2.2. On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the FRCA.
- 2.2.3. Br. Hoogstra received the *Acts* of the FRCA's Synod 2004, as well as the Committee report concerning churches abroad prepared for Synod 2004.
- 2.2.4. A letter dated February 6, 2006 was sent asking for input from the FRCA with respect to the request of the PCEA, the RCNZ, the GGRC-NTT, and the GGRI-NTT to enter into sister-church relations with the CanRC.
- 2.2.5. A letter dated February 18, 2006 was received from the FRCA inviting us to send delegates to their Synod to be held in July 2006.
- 2.2.6. An e-mail dated March 27, 2006 was received from a deputy of the FRCA with information about the PCEA in answer to our request for information.
- 2.2.7. We received two copies of the report by the Australian deputies for Synod West-Kelmscott 2006.

## 2.3. Reports by Deputies For Relations With Sister Churches as submitted to Synod Rockingham 2003.

From this submission we wish to highlight some of the recommendations as they pertain to the Canadian Reformed Churches. Some comments are noteworthy, e.g. p.6, where we read:

“Our churches continue to call ministers and candidates from Canada for work as minister or missionary. That is a positive point, showing the value of this relation. However, it is disturbing that it seems very difficult to have such ministers/candidates accept the calls. Meanwhile our own students, with one exception, thus far do not return to Australia, but stay in Canada or elsewhere. That too is disturbing for at the present we have many vacancies to be filled.”

They also point out some of the developments in our federation which do not parallel those in theirs (p.7). These are:

- (a) Recognition of Presbyterian churches which maintain the Westminster Standards. Certain features as the fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership, children in the covenant, pulpit supply, etc. do not constitute impediments but remain matters under discussion; (b) Recognition of churches which do not have two worship services, but keep the Sunday as a special day, a day for worship; (c) Allowing and promoting local congregational initiatives in pursuit of

unity with the URCNA, resembling the course followed by the Dutch sister churches; (d) Continued membership in the ICRC; (e) The decision to possibly add new hymns as is done in The Netherlands.

These developments should not be seen as signs of deformation, since the Can. Ref. Churches continue to adhere to their Reformed basis. Yet, consistency in dealing with contacts and relations requires monitoring these developments and demands personal contact to be of help to one another. This was accepted by the Synod of Rockingham of 2004, and followed up in the visit and address to Synod Chatham 2004 by Br. G. B. Veenendaal.

#### **2.4. Acts of Synod Rockingham 2004 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.**

This synod met in July 2003 to deal with its regular business and reconvened in October 2003 to deal with a number of appeals from churches and individual members.

##### **Synod Rockingham decided:**

- 2.4.1. To continue sister relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to the established rules;
- 2.4.2. To monitor developments with the CanRC for mutual benefit, according to our rules;
- 2.4.3. To authorize the deputies to send one delegate to the 2004 General Synod of Chatham.

##### **They made these decisions on the following grounds:**

- a. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order;
- b. Some developments within the CanRC parallel those in our Dutch sister churches. We should stay informed, monitor these developments and be of help to each other. In this way there is also consistency in the way we deal with our Sister Churches;
- c. We value our bond with our American/Canadian sister churches; we can learn from each other, and should keep in good contact with them. Personal contact at synodical level reinforces this.

##### **There were other matters of interest for our federation as well.**

Synod decided not to accept the recommendation of the deputies to print an Australian version of the Book of Praise at this time. Yet, it charged the deputies to “ascertain the desirability and necessity for publishing its own version and monitor the ongoing developments in the Canadian Book of Praise re: the updating of language of psalms and hymns, the confessions, and liturgical forms, espe-

cially considering the CanRC's ongoing contact with the United Reformed Churches."

A change to Art. 45 of the Church Order was adopted to reflect the new reality of having two classes and a Synod which convenes every three years instead of two. The new article allows for a Synod to be convened before the appointed time at the request of a classis. Revisions of other articles, necessitated by the division into the two classes, were adopted also.

The proposal to ordain a person trained with a diploma of Theological studies for foreign mission work only, *as an exception*, was adopted.

The request to appoint deputies to investigate the advisability of a Second Appeal 'Court' (cf. Regional Synod) was adopted.

It was decided to "Request the churches to contribute the proceeds of three full collections per year for our own theological library and theological training." This decision follows the resolution to continue the support for the Theological College in Hamilton, and the recognition that "our own seminary may be out of reach for the present time but not to *despise the day of small things* (Zech. 4:10), and thus keep this matter in the mandate for deputies, ad art. 17, C.O."

**There also were a number of decisions regarding sister-church relations which are of interest to us:**

PCK Kosin – Overtures were made to discontinue or phase out the relationship, but Synod decided to make another attempt at strengthening the bond through possibly a personal visit to the PCK General Assembly, and to accept the offer of Dr. S. G. Hur to assist in the contact and dialogue with the PCK. The deputies were instructed to assess the viability of continued contact in their next report to Synod.

GKN – Maintain the sister-church relationship, but interact with the deputies on the matters of fourth commandment, hymns, military chaplains administering the Lord's Supper, the blessing elder, the contact with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK= equivalent of Free Reformed Churches in North America) and the contact with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK=Buiten-verband Churches)

FRCSA – Continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

RCNZ – The Synod 2000 decision–in-principle to offer a fraternal relationship in 2003 proved divisive and was defeated. (The RCNZ had already refused this offer.) The federation was again confirmed as a true and faithful federation of churches, but its ties with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia continued to be a stumbling block towards closer unity.

Synod decided more time was needed to study the matter of this triangular relationship and its implications.

GGRI-NTT – Maintain the sister-church relationship and support.

GGRC-NTT – Continue the contact with and the support for this federation because of its sister-church relations with the GGRI. Stress should be placed on further development and encouragement towards unity of these two federations in close proximity in Indonesia-W. Timor.

PCEA – It was decided to re-engage the PCEA in discussions by proposing vis-a vis meetings of delegates and sending two representatives to its next Synod. An overture to mandate the deputies for contact with the PCEA to express concern about Dr. S. E. Ward's book *Foundations in Genesis 1-11 Today* was defeated. The deputies were instructed to investigate the matter further and report back.

Free Church of Scotland, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland – The deputies had recommended to offer sister-church relations to the EPCI and RPCI, and to work towards this with the FCS. Synod decided to suspend the contact until the FRCA is in a position to do justice to sister-church relationships in view of resources and further clarity could be reached in relations closer to home. This was a practical decision and no judgment that these churches are unfaithful. It simply reflects the inability of a small federation to exercise its responsibility by concentrating on churches which are geographically and historically closer.

Reformed Free Churches of the Philippines – Maintain contact and offer well-considered and responsible support.

The second session of Synod Rockingham (held in Oct. 2003) mainly dealt with appeals against Regulations of Classis North, as well as appeals against a minister's interpretation of a number of sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism and some Scripture passages, and the subsequent decisions by the consistory and classis.

A number of items had to be dealt with in closed session since these concerned sensitive matters for which expert advice had been sought.

## **2.5. Reports of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad to Synod**

### **West-Kelmscott 2006.**

Soon after Synod 2003, the Australian deputies lost their convener, when Rev. C. Bouwman accepted a call to Canada. This resulted in their recommendation to ask Synod to appoint an alternate for that position as well as for that of the general secretary. Some rather

difficult decisions had to be made on relations with a number of churches, especially regarding extending Ecclesiastical fellowship. It led to a few majority/minority reports on these matters. A planned Jumbo meeting had to be cancelled when it appeared several deputies were unable to attend. Many agenda items were appeals regarding the issue of “Forgiveness of Sins,” the matter dealt with during the second session of Synod Rockingham 2003.

## **2.6. Acts of Synod West-Kelmscott 2006.**

Synod West-Kelmscott of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia met from July 10, 2006 – July 20, 2006 in Armadale, W.A. The Canadian Reformed Churches were represented by the brothers H. E. Hoogstra and H. Leyenhorst. A copy of the address to Synod is published as an appendix.

### **Synod West-Kelmscott decided:**

- 2.6.1. To continue sister relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to the established rules;
- 2.6.2. To monitor developments with the CanRC for mutual benefit according to our rules.
- 2.6.3. To authorize deputies (in cooperation with the Deputies for Training for the Ministry) to send one delegate to the next General Synod (2007 in Smithers).

### **These decisions were made on the following grounds:**

- a. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order;
- b. We value the bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the synodical level reinforces our contact with them. (cf. Art. 17 – Training for the Ministry).

### **The following matters are of interest to us as well:**

Many Australian churches had indicated their desire to have their own version of the Book of Praise. New deputies were appointed to investigate the copyright issue, cost of printing, the developments with the updating of psalms and prose and expansion of the hymn section and how this work could be shared. They have to serve the churches with a detailed plan/proposal half a year before the next synod.

The matter of Theological Training resulted in continued support for the colleges in Hamilton and Kampen, as well as investigating the possibilities of extension courses (IT), and starting their own training center. Close contact will be maintained with Hamilton and the possibility of having the FRCA included in the Pastoral Training Program should be considered. The desire to host a lecturer from one of the seminaries of the sister churches every three years met with approval.

The deputies appointed to examine ways to institute an appeals court submitted three different proposals. (The FRCA, due to its size, has no Regional Synod to hear appeals against the decisions of minor and major assemblies.) All three suggestions were discussed and defeated; no new deputies were appointed.

An overture to change the name from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to the Australian Reformed Churches was defeated.

**The following decisions were made regarding the sister churches:**

It was noteworthy that for the first time in the history of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, all sister churches were represented by at least one delegate. The brothers from the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands-Restored were accorded privileges in accordance with Rule 6.2 of the Rules for Synods as per delegates from churches with temporary ecclesiastical contact.

Lanka Reformed Church – This church was brought to the attention of the FRCA by the CRCA of the CanRC. The Church of Byford sought to establish sister-church relations with this small denomination, but Synod decided it was not a church according to Art. 1 & 36, C.O. and encouraged the F.R.C. Byford to continue its mission work there.

PCK – Kosin – The presence of deputies created more optimism for improved communications. The relationship will be maintained.

GKN – Synod expressed gratitude for the interaction of its deputies with the Dutch deputyships. The Amersfoort decisions on the Fourth Commandment and Sunday largely allayed its concerns. Its strong Scriptural stance regarding God's teachings against divorce and remarriage, as well as the rejection of the orders of worship on the basis of the Ordinarium and the leerdienst (teaching service) were thankfully noted. The failure to give explicit guidance regarding the danger of moving in a direction that allows divorce for reasons beyond adultery and willful desertion, and the continued proliferation of hymns, were regretted. The matters of the Sacraments in Military Situations will be studied further, since the FRCA's previous concerns had not been adequately addressed. Unity talks with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken will be monitored, and those with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken should require that the latter insist on pursuing the Scriptural and Confessional binding of its practices in relation to opening all offices to women, and the C. O. to combat independentism. Appreciation was expressed for the appeal Synod Amersfoort sent to the GKH to seek the unity demanded by the Lord. (John 17). Ecclesiastical Fellowship will be continued with the GKN.



GKH – Synod expressed grief that a schism occurred in 2003. It decided to postpone a definitive judgment on the claims of the GKH, and to request further investigation by the deputies whether or not the decision to “liberate” was lawful and to defend the honour and reputation of the Dutch sister churches. While Synod could not accede to the GKH request to enter into sister relations, they would maintain official contact with these churches so that they can work for reconciliation between the GKN and GKH on the basis of truth and love.

GGRI-NTT – The sister-church relations and varied means of financial support would be continued, including the plans to re-establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba (with assistance from the GKN). Encouragement would be offered to both the GGRI and GGRC to fully practice the unity they already recognize. The deputies were also instructed to request the CanRC to support that effort as well as direct the result of their mission work to the GGRI-NTT.

GGRC – NTT – Contact with and support for this federation will be maintained, and encouragement for unity and cooperation regarding joint Theological Training with the GGRI-NTT will be pursued.

FRCSA – The sister church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa would be maintained.

RCNZ – Synod declined the request of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The relationship between the CRCA (Christian Reformed Churches of Australia) and the RCNZ remained the stumbling block for extending the offer. The denomination will be encouraged to admonish that federation for allowing women in office. Practical support for membership issues, mission and education will be recommended to consistories.

PCEA – It was decided to discontinue the discussions with the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia. After more than a decade of talks, no progress could be reported. Also, the toleration of the views expressed by Dr. Roland Ward on Gen. 1 -11 formed a further impediment.

The Reformed Free Churches of the Philippines and the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines had not responded to the FRCA's attempts for contact; further efforts would no longer be made.

## **2.7. Observations**

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Scriptures, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.

In spite of its limited membership numbers, the FRCA show diligence in the promotion of the Gospel through extensive mission activities, either done on their own or in combination with other churches.

The common language of the FRCA and the CanRC gives rise to co-operation in a number of fields. Theological education is one of these. It is gratifying to note the continued support of the FRCA for the Theological College in Hamilton, in spite of the fact that they would dearly love to establish their own training center. Furthermore, their use of Hamilton to prepare persons from Indonesia for the ministry, and possibly in a leadership role for theological instruction in their native country, is highly laudable. Their use and interest in the Book of Praise is another which should be stimulated.

There are various matters of mutual concern the CanRC shares with the FRCA. Regular visits, and thereby personal contact as was experienced at the 2006 synod, would serve as encouragement for both federations in determining their response to the challenges of the present.

## **2.8. Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod decide the following:

- 2.8.1. To maintain the existing relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules;
- 2.8.2. To thank the FRCA for their continued support for the Theological College in Hamilton and recommend that the Board of Governors investigate the possibility of including the Australian churches in the pastoral training program;
- 2.8.3. To suggest that the Deputies for the Book of Praise maintain regular contact with the Australian committee in order to advise them of our direction.
- 2.8.4. To direct the CRCA to send a member to attend Synod Legana 2009 to foster mutual support and understanding of the issues faced by both federations;
- 2.8.5. To encourage the Canadian Reformed Churches operating mission work in the region of Australia to contact the deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in order to increase the working relationship between our churches with regard to mission and leadership training.

## **3. Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)**

### **3.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided:

- 3.1.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa under the adopted rules;

- 3.1.2. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 3.1.2.1. To recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of financial assistance to aid them with their extensive mission work and in their labours among the concerned members in other church federations;
  - 3.1.2.2. To invite the Board of Governors of our Theological College to seek ways and means to offer assistance to the FRCSA for theological training, such as extending academic support through guest lectures and the like by the Faculty of our College in Hamilton, Ontario;
  - 3.1.2.3. To request the reasons why the FRCSA have revoked sister church relations with our sister churches in Korea and report to the next Synod.

### 3.2. Correspondence

- 3.2.1. A letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent to the Board of Governors of the Theological College about offering assistance to the FRCSA for theological training.
- 3.2.2. A letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent to the FRCSA, informing them of Synod Chatham's decision to recommend the FRCSA to the Canadian Reformed Churches as worthy of financial assistance in the extensive mission work undertaken and in the labours among concerned members in other federations. We also informed them that Synod Chatham mandated the CRCA to invite the Board of Governors of the Theological College to seek ways and means to offer assistance to the FRCSA for theological training. We requested that they share with us the reasons why the FRCSA revoked sister-church relations with our sister churches in Korea. Moreover, we requested a copy of their *Acts of Synod 2002*.
- 3.2.3. In May 2004, shortly after Synod Chatham 2004, a package of correspondence to the FRCSA, including our Report to Synod Chatham and an invitation to send a delegate to Synod Chatham, was returned by mail. This explains why there was neither a delegate nor a letter of greeting from the FRCSA at Synod Chatham.
- 3.2.4. On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the FRCSA.
- 3.2.5. An e-mail dated November 15, 2004 was sent to the FRCSA, requesting a copy of the *Acts of Synod 2002* and *Synod 2004*. We also requested that the FRCSA consider convening their next Synod around the time of the ICRC which would be held in Pretoria.
- 3.2.6. We received a copy of the *Acts of the Ad Hoc Synod Johannesburg, April 27, 2001* and the *Acts of the Synod Johannesburg, April 29 – May 3, 2002*. These were hand-delivered by Rev. C. Kleyn in January 2005.

- 3.2.7. We sent an e-mail dated January 17, 2005 about sending a fraternal delegation to the FRCSA's Synod in May 2005 and asking for the exact date that their Synod will be convened.
- 3.2.8. We received an e-mail on January 20, 2005 informing us about the dates of the FRCSA's Synod.
- 3.2.9. A letter dated March 14, 2005 was sent with greetings to the General Synod of the FRCSA to be convened in May 2005.
- 3.2.10. An e-mail letter dated March 18, 2005 was received inviting us to send a delegation to the FRCSA Synod to be held in May 2005.
- 3.2.11. A report dated June 22, 2005 was received from Dr. C. Van Dam about his visit to the FRCSA Synod, with an appended section from the FRCSA *Acts* referring to his visit.
- 3.2.12. We received an e-mail letter dated July 13, 2005 indicating a change of mailing address for the FRCSA committee and informing us that Rev. R.M. Retief was released from the congregation of Springs because that congregation ceased to exist due to size.
- 3.2.13. An e-mail dated August 25, 2005 from Rev. D.M. Boersma of the American Reformed Church at Denver, CO explaining why the FRCSA ended the relationship with the PCK and the GGRI-NTT. Rev. Boersma had been secretary of the FRCSA committee prior to his move to the USA.
- 3.2.14. An e-mail dated April 10, 2006 was received with attachments requesting financial support for the mission work of the FRCSA and asking that this be forwarded to all congregations within our federation.
- 3.2.15. A letter dated April 24, 2006 was sent to all Councils of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches passing on a communication from the deputies of our South African sister churches requesting financial help for their mission work. The material from South Africa was put on the CanRC website since there were technical difficulties with sending it as an attachment.

### **3.3. Acts of the Ad-hoc Synod Pretoria March 12, 2005**

This Ad-hoc synod was called to deal with the matter of Theological Training. English was used as the main language for the first time while the Afrikaans and Sotho contributions would be translated as required.

The Church of Cape Town requested this special meeting to discuss its concerns regarding the perceived incorrect interpretation of the Synod Johannesburg 2002 decisions by the curators charged with the Theological Training. The direction, as contained in the proposals of their interim report of January 2005, needs to be revised. Also,

the present arrangement, after the departure of two lecturers, was putting too heavy a burden on the minister of Cape Town. Subsequently the consistory decided to withdraw the services of their pastor. The synod debate resolved the issue of interpretation, but no further action could be taken in the absence of the final recommendations of the curators. Communication between the curators and the senate would need to be addressed as well. It was determined to further study the matter and leave the decisions for the scheduled Synod Pretoria of May 23 – 26, 2005.

### **3.4. Highlights of the Acts of Synod Pretoria 2005**

This regularly scheduled synod was properly constituted and dealt with a variety of matters and discussed a number of issues important for the FRCSA. The Canadian Reformed Churches were represented by Prof. Dr. C. VanDam. A copy of the address can be found as an appendix.

Synod decided to appoint an unpaid administrator for federative matters, whose task it would be to assist the calling church for the next synod and specific tasks assigned by synod. The actions of Classis A to dissolve the congregation of Springs for lack of growth and declining membership received approbation and synod empowered the deputies ad Art. 11 to carry out the approved arrangements. Their BBK (=CRCA) was instructed to restrict its activities to existing sister churches, and to communicate with representatives of Africa at the ICRC meetings, due to limited manpower and resources. The adjustments to the Church Order, to reflect the present FRCSA reality in both the Afrikaans and English, were adopted. The revision of the Liturgical forms was assigned to deputies, while the modification of the Rules for Synod in both the Afrikaans and English language was approved. The deputies for Liturgical Music were charged to test the modified Totius version of the psalms, before sending this version to the churches for their evaluation. They were also asked to contact the RCSA to seek cooperation in the production, evaluation and publication of this.

#### **The following decisions were made regarding sister church relationships:**

The federation decided to maintain its sister church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), and the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Vrijgemaakt) (GKN), yet keep an eye on worrisome developments (no specifics listed) in the latter.

GKH - The request by the GKH (Newly Liberated) for sister church relations was declined on the basis of a) their incorrect in-

terpretation of synod decisions, b) the already existing ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKN . Instead an appeal would be sent to this new federation to reconsider its schismatic action and follow the church-orderly route. The information booklet which compared the synod actions and subsequent interpretations by the two parties plus comment, which formed the basis of synod's decision, would be sent along.

RCNZ - The situation with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand will be kept as is while information will be gathered through the FRCA.

PCEA - The deputies will remain informed about the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia, but not intensify the contact.

N. America - Stay informed about the churches in N. America through the CanRC.

ICRC - Maintain the membership in the ICRC. Send delegates to the ICRC Mission Conference 2007 in Kenya to interact with delegates of other African churches.

FCSA - Delegate observers to the synod of the Free Church of Southern Africa, and invite this federation to send delegates to the FRCSA's next synod.

J.K.C.- Maintain the contact with the Johannesburg Korean Church and intensify the contact with the missionaries of the Nam-Chun (PCK) for possible cooperation in the Theological training.

RCSA - Keep the local churches informed on the matter of talks between the FRCSA and the Gereformeerde Kerke Suid Afrika (Reformed Churches of South Africa, the so-called Dopper kerken). The deputies were also charged to ask the RCSA to give a confessionally-based opinion on their relationship with the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk and Nederduits Hervormde Kerk. Express the FRCSA's view on a number of matters, i.e. hermeneutics, the role of the confessions, membership in the South Africa Council of Churches, and permitting women to hold the office of deacon according to Scripture and Confessions and ask the RCSA to make the same pronouncements. This was deemed to be important in view of the FRCSA quest to promote cooperation and unity.

It is at this juncture that our committee wishes to apologize for misreading a decision of Synod Zuidhorn 2002. In its report to Synod Chatham, the CRCA reported that Synod Johannesburg 2000 del-

egated a representative to Synod Zuidhorn of the Dutch sister-churches to inform the GKN of the FRCSA's objections to establishing sister-church relations with the RCSA, and that the GKN ignored this request and warning not to establish sister-church relations with the RCSA. In fact, the GKN heeded this request and warning, and did not establish sister-church relations at Synod Zuidhorn. We sincerely apologize for our error in reporting and have also conveyed this to the deputies of the GKN.

Other - The deputyship for the concerned (verontrustes = disenfranchised), the members who left their denominations because of increasing liberalism in doctrine was discontinued, since most of these had found another church home, and the few who are left could be taken care of by local churches.

### **Theological Training**

The decisions of May 26, 2005 reiterated that theological training is a matter from the churches, by the churches, for the churches. The original set-up would require changes due to the withdrawal of Rev. E. Viljoen as lecturer. The new structure may see the appointment of a director who could be charged to oversee all of the federation's theological training. Meanwhile deputies were appointed to study the requirements, financial implications, etc. of such a design and person. In the interim period the studies of the Sotho-speaking students will be placed under the auspices of the Pretoria-Maranata Church, and that of the Cape area students under the direction of Cape Town, while newly-appointed deputies will supervise their training. White students will be advised to study at one of the colleges of the sister churches in Hamilton or Kampen.

The appointed deputies recommended in March 2006 to work towards a new structure. In Stage One, a person from the Institute for Reformed Theological Training (IRTT), assisted by regional coordinators and in cooperation with the deputies, draw up a profile of their "desired end product", and design ways and means to obtain such in addition to the responsibilities which each party in the training and supervision would play. This committee is to present this in writing to the churches before August 2006, and request the calling church to convene an Ad-hoc synod before Oct. 2006 to deal with the matter.

### **3.5. Observations**

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the adopted confessions and Church Order as is demonstrated in the Acts of Synod and the reports to Synod Pretoria.

The Lord's blessings over the extensive mission work are confirmed in the establishment of various mission points and the growth toward independence by some of the mission congregations.

Our visits to South Africa have proven beneficial in promoting mutual understanding in the need for support of various kinds as these relate to e. g. the spreading of the gospel, the work among AIDS patients, and maintaining educational institutions among the recent converts.

The difficulties experienced by the FRCSA in terms of its Theological training underlines the need for our prayerful and actual support in assisting the federation to find a workable solution.

### **3.6. Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that Synod decide:

- 3.6.1. To continue Ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCSA under the adopted rules;
- 3.6.2. To recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued and increased prayerful and financial assistance, to help them with their extensive mission work as well as the compassionate pursuits among the disadvantaged;
- 3.6.3. To continue to invite the Board of Governors of our Theological College to encourage and aid the FRCSA in their quest to redesign their Theological Training by serving them with advice, and by extending academic backing through guest lectures, as well as assisting students who may enroll here with the necessary language and social support.

## **4. Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK)**

### **4.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided:

- 4.1.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the PCK under the adopted rules;
- 4.1.2. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 4.1.2.1. To continue the discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity in light of Consideration 4.3 and 4.4 (*Acts Synod Chatham 2004*, Art. 59);
  - 4.1.2.2. To pay special attention to the fencing of the Lord's Supper during these discussions;
  - 4.1.2.3. To continue to strengthen communication with the PCK and as best as possible monitor the growth and trends in the PCK.



## 4.2. Correspondence

- 4.2.1. A letter dated April 19, 2004 was received from the PCK, summarizing important decisions of the 53<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly held September 22-26, 2003.
- 4.2.2. A letter dated June 24, 2004 was sent to the PCK, informing them about Synod Chatham's decisions concerning the PCK. A copy of the *Acts Chatham 2004* was enclosed.
- 4.2.3. An e-mail dated November 11, 2004 was received from the PCK, acknowledging receipt of *Acts Chatham 2004* and commenting briefly about the PCK's practice concerning participation in the Lord's Supper.
- 4.2.4. A letter dated March 14, 2005 was sent to the PCK, inquiring about continued discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity as well as the fencing of the Lord's Supper (see *Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 59, Recommendations 5.3.1 and 5.3.2).

## 4.3. Meetings in Pretoria, South Africa

A meeting of Canadian Reformed delegates with delegates from the PCK was held in Pretoria, South Africa on October 10, 2005. Dr. Paul Bae and Rev. Tae Yun attended as delegates of the PCK. The intent of the meeting was to discuss differences in confession and church polity, with special attention given to the fencing of the Lord's Supper.

The delegates were not aware of the concerns that we have or of the communication that has been sent. The discussions did not bring forward any new information. The delegates did make statements concerning their practice of Lord's Supper and attestations, both at the meeting and in a follow-up e-mail. Attendance at Lord's Supper is limited to those who have done profession of faith. Young people are allowed to profess their faith from age fourteen onward. Communicant members may participate if they are faithful in attendance and display a Christian lifestyle. Those who are under discipline are withheld from the table until they have shown repentance. Visitors who request admission are questioned on a number of matters to affirm their faithfulness before they are invited to attend. At the time of celebration, the pastor gives a verbal warning that those attending must be baptized and must not have led a sinful and unworthy lifestyle. When members move to another church they are to be given an attestation, with or without annotation. (The implementation of this rule has proven to be difficult.) The information received was similar to that as reported to Synod Chatham 2004. The differences in confession and church polity are mostly cultural and historical and are similar to those of our other Presbyterian sister churches.

#### **4.4. Meeting in Armadale, Australia**

A meeting of two Canadian Reformed delegates with Professor Hae Moo Yoo was held on July 14, 2006 in Armadale during Synod 2006 of the FRCA. Prof. Yoo has been appointed as the delegate for contact with the Reformed Churches. He expressed concern with the current state of relations and made the commitment to improve relations between our federations. The PCK has not focused on these relations, but they have stated that this will change. Prof. Yoo has accepted our invitation to attend Synod 2007 in Smithers. He did recognize the difficulty with the language difference. There is limited cross visitation between our churches, and when their members come to North America they usually search out a Korean church in which to worship.

#### **4.5. Observations**

There has been very limited communication since Synod 2004. The meeting at the ICRC did not bring forward any new information.

The language difference continues to be an impediment to good communication. All business of the PCK is done in Korean, and very little is translated into English.

A summary of important decisions of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly was received. No communication concerning the 52<sup>nd</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup> or 55<sup>th</sup> Assemblies has been received.

We have had discussions concerning the Lord's Supper, confessional membership and church polity with the PCK delegates, as reported, and we conclude that the PCK feels that the discussion is complete. In this relationship, as with other Presbyterian churches, we agree that each federation can maintain its own identity and practices, as shaped by each federation's history and culture.

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) concluded that the relations with the PCK were not functioning, and they have ended relations with the PCK.

The FRCA has continued relations with the PCK, recognizing that a visit to Korea by one of their delegates has resulted in improved communication.

#### **4.6. Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod:

- 4.6.1. Consider the information in this report and previous reports and evaluate if the sister-church relationship with the PCK is functioning in a positive manner;

- 4.6.2. Decide that the discussions on the existing differences in confession and church polity are complete and, if more discussion is required, that Synod be specific about what needs to be discussed and what the precise goal of these discussions would be;
- 4.6.3. Mandate the committee to monitor the commitment for improved relations and report to the next Synod on the state of relations;
- 4.6.4. Decide that, if there is no improvement in relations before the next Synod, the next Synod end relations with the PCK;
- 4.6.5. Mandate the committee to communicate with the PCK and inform them of Recommendations 4.6.3 and 4.6.4.

## **5. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (GKN – Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland)**

### **5.1 Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided:

- 5.1.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN under the adopted rules;
- 5.1.2. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 5.1.2.1. To convey to the GKN our concern with regard to the proportion of Psalms and Hymns;
  - 5.1.2.2. To study the results of the deputyship “Fourth Commandment and Sunday” and report to the churches;
  - 5.1.2.3. To continue the discussion with the GKN regarding the new Marriage Form, bearing in mind Considerations 4.5 and 4.6 (*Acts Synod Chatham 2004*, Art. 44), and report to the churches;
  - 5.1.2.4. To seek clarity into the legitimacy of the recent “Vrijmaking” and monitor further developments;
  - 5.1.2.5. To inform both the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the group that has departed in the recent “Vrijmaking” that they have our prayerful support in the hope that they will, by God’s grace, come to reconciliation;
  - 5.1.2.6. To communicate to the churches the need for prayerful support for the situation in the Netherlands;
  - 5.1.2.7. To report to the next Synod on the mandate given in the *Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001* Art. 80, Recommendations 5.3.1 and 5.3.3.

## 5.2. Correspondence concerning Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)

- 5.2.1. In January 2004, we received documents from the Dutch deputies, which they had sent to Synod Chatham.
- 5.2.2. A letter dated January 14, 2004 was received from the GKN, soliciting input on the study by their synodical deputies dealing with Marriage and Divorce in preparation for Synod Amersfoort 2005.
- 5.2.3. We received a package dated January 14, 2004 which included the *Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002* on CD as well as the *Acts of all General Synods held within the last ten years*.
- 5.2.4. An e-mail dated January 28, 2004 was sent to the Deputies for Marriage and Divorce, indicating that we could not respond to the study on Marriage and Divorce by their deadline of March 1, 2004.
- 5.2.5. A letter dated February 2, 2004 was received from the Deputies for Marriage and Divorce, indicating that we had until March 31, 2004 to respond to their study.
- 5.2.6. In a letter dated March 8, 2004, we conveyed the decisions of Synod Chatham pertaining to Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN. We informed the Reformed Churches (Liberated) that they have the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the hope that they will come to reconciliation with the group that departed in the recent "Liberation" ("Vrijmaking") (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.5). We also requested information to help us gain clarity into the legitimacy of the recent "Liberation" and to enable us to monitor further developments (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.4). Furthermore, we asked about procedural matters concerning how we can best communicate with our Dutch committee counterparts. In addition, about our relationship with the Dutch committee, we wrote the following:

At our Committee meeting on March 6, 2004, we discussed various matters pertaining to our relationship with you as deputies. We would like to apologize to you concerning the confusion about who was responsible for the article in *Clarion* dealing with the visit by Rev. J. Huijgen and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde to Synod Zuidhorn 2002. We apologize for leaving the impression that this was Rev. Huijgen's personal article, while in fact he wrote it also on behalf of Rev. VanderVelde and published it only after the Committee approved it for publication. Therefore, the entire Committee bears responsibility for the article. We understand that as a result of the confusion we left, you wrote your defence of the GKN publicly in the pages of *Clarion*. We also ac-

knowledge that you gave our Committee sufficient advance notice that your article would appear in *Clarion*.

Moreover, we would like to highlight the following consideration of Synod Chatham: "It is regrettable that the report on Synod Zuidhorn 2002 contains several unproven statements concerning the GKN. Carman West is correct that such statements may come across as a generalization that does not do full justice to our sister churches as a whole. Synod regrets the pain this may have caused (cf. the address by the Dutch delegate, as it is found in the appendices (*Acts*, Art. 44, Consideration 4.8)." As Committee, we take these words to heart and will strive to speak and write with more discernment and care. Brothers, we hope that this clears the air in our relationship as deputies.

Furthermore, we as yet must express to you that we do accept your apology concerning the fact that our study of your latest Marriage Form was presented as an agenda item at Synod Zuidhorn 2002. We also understand that it was not your intention to have our study received there as an official agenda item.

- 5.2.7. We sent a letter dated March 8, 2004 to the GKN's Deputies for Marriage and Divorce, asking for the official version of their report rather than the popular version. We also informed them that we would not be able to meet their March 31, 2004 deadline.
- 5.2.8. We received a report from the GKN, dated December 2003, about the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar.
- 5.2.9. An e-mail dated March 29, 2004 was received from the Deputies for Marriage and Divorce in answer to our letter of March 8, 2004. They wrote that they would send us a full report on this topic, as sent to Synod Amersfoort 2005.
- 5.2.10. We received *Lux Mundi* vol. 22 (3,4) September/ December 2003.
- 5.2.11. In a letter dated June 22, 2004, we conveyed to the Dutch deputies the concern Synod Chatham expressed with regard to the proportion of Psalms and Hymns in the *Gereformeerde Kerkboek* [the equivalent of our *Book of Praise*] (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.1) and asked that this concern be conveyed to their next General Synod. We also conveyed to the Dutch deputies that Synod Chatham was satisfied that the Biblical basis of marriage is not weakened in the new Marriage Form concerning the husband/ wife relationship. We noted that Synod Chatham commented on the fact that the new Form does not address the task of the wife in her family and household, and we asked why this is so (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Consideration

4.5, Recommendation 5.4.3). We also asked for clarification on what the intention of the Marriage Form is with respect to the phrase “when the Lord provides the possibility thereto” in connection with receiving children. We asked whether this refers to not being able to receive children or whether this gives opening to secular views concerning having children (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Consideration 4.6, Recommendation 5.4.3).

- 5.2.12.** On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the GKN.
- 5.2.13.** A letter dated January 17, 2005 was sent apologizing for the error in our Report to Synod Chatham 2004 by which we stated that the GKN ignored the request and warning of the FRCSA not to enter into sister-church relations with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA).
- 5.2.14.** We received a letter dated January 2005 inviting us to send a fraternal delegation to Synod Amersfoort 2005.
- 5.2.15.** We received *Lux Mundi* vol. 23 (1,2) March/ June 2004 and vol. 23 (3,4) September/ November 2004.
- 5.2.16.** We send a letter dated March 21, 2005 requesting a response to our questions about the new Marriage Form, as raised in our June 22, 2004 letter.
- 5.2.17.** A letter dated August 9, 2004 was received on March 22, 2005 in answer to the matters raised in our June 22, 2004 letter.
- 5.2.18.** An undated document was received on March 22, 2005 with detailed information in answer to our June 22, 2004 letter with questions about their new Marriage Form.
- 5.2.19.** On April 7, 2005 we received ten copies of a booklet published by the Committee for Relations Abroad of the GKN, entitled *Not Beyond What is Written: Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession?*
- 5.2.20.** We received copies of *Lux Mundi* March 2005.
- 5.2.21.** A letter dated October 18, 2005 was received outlining decisions of Synod Amersfoort 2005 as they pertain to the task of the Dutch deputies (BBK).
- 5.2.22.** A letter dated January 27, 2006 was received with enclosed documents pertaining to the FCS split.
- 5.2.23.** A letter dated February 6, 2006 was sent asking for input from our Dutch sister churches regarding some concerns with respect to the GGRC-NTT.
- 5.2.24.** We received a letter dated June 9, 2006 with an enclosed CD with the Acts of the General Synods of 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002/2003, and 2005.
- 5.2.25.** We received copies of *Lux Mundi* June 2006.

### 5.3. Acts Synod Amersfoort – 2005

Synod Amersfoort convened on March 11, 2005 with a prayer service. After the election of officers to form the Moderamen and eight advisory committees, synod recessed until a division of duties and a time schedule was devised for the extensive agenda. As in the past, synod would meet in plenary sessions only on Fridays and Saturdays, while the Moderamen would inform the delegates by Tuesday which matters would be discussed that week. Synod took time out for holidays for its members during the summer and reconvened in August. The final session was held on September 7, 2005. The Canadian Reformed Churches were represented by Br. H. E. Hoogstra and Rev. J. Huijgen. (The address to Synod Amersfoort is published as an appendix.) Synod had to deal with an extensive agenda, which was comprised of many appeals, some major studies of topics which had been introduced at previous synods, various proposals, some overtures, and the appointment of a new professor for the Theological University in Kampen. A Letter of Appeal was sent to the former members, who had separated from the GKN in 2003, presently known as The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands – Restored (GKH).

The trends which have developed over the last decennium, as evidenced by the type of study topics assigned to a number of deputyships and the resulting reports submitted to the following synods (Berkel-Rodenrijs, Leusden, Zuidhorn and Amersfoort), have created unrest. The modus operandi of the Dutch major assemblies has changed and this has undoubtedly created some feeling of alienation. The GKN federation with 125,000 members has undergone a change of ground rules for dealing with matters at synod level. Many deputyships (28) have been appointed, all with the task to serve an upcoming synod with advice. The emphasis seems to be on drawing on the strength of specialists rather than on grassroots involvement. Local churches and individual members have the opportunity for input into the proposals of the deputies; their suggestions and criticisms will be weighed, and may or may not be incorporated into the final submission to the major assembly. The delegates, by region, are assigned a number of issues, including all relevant materials and letters of appeal. They advise synod at the start of its dealing with the issue as to whether or not an appeal should be upheld or rejected. In that case the information may be given to the deputyship for incorporation into the final proposal which also includes the suggestions and amendments from the floor.

This is in contrast to our methods, where deputies submit their reports to the churches half a year before the start of the synod. The church councils and members have the opportunity to criticize and/or endorse the recommendations of these deputies. After having been constituted, Synod appoints committees from among its delegates to deal with the proposals and letters received. They

make recommendations to the whole assembly. Further discussion and revision is possible before final decisions are made.

The following three issues were assigned for further study by our Synod Chatham 2004:

**Proportion of Psalms and Hymns in the *Gereformeerd Kerkboek***

The Committee's letter to the Deputies BBK (the equivalent of our CRCA) of the GKN, dated June 22, 2004, conveyed to these deputies Synod Chatham's concern regarding the proportion of psalms and hymns in the development of the *Gereformeerd Kerkboek*. Synod Chatham's consideration 4.3 (p.40-41 of the *Acts of Synod Chatham*) was included in the communication to the Deputies BBK.

The Deputies BBK indicated in their August 9, 2004 letter that they would convey Synod Chatham's concern about the number of hymns to their upcoming General Synod, Synod Amersfoort 2005. In the BBK Deputies' report to Synod Amersfoort 2005, the deputies included Synod Chatham's Consideration 4.3, thereby ensuring that Synod Amersfoort would be informed of our concern in our own words. The deputies considered it helpful for Synod Amersfoort to know that Synod Chatham had also made a decision to limit the number of hymns for the *Book of Praise* to 100.

It is worth quoting the BBK Deputies' evaluation of our concern as they served advice to Synod Amersfoort: "As deputies BBK we are of the opinion that the concern of the CanRC is misplaced and that their own decision is weaker than that of the GKV. Chatham says of Zuidhorn's decision that it 'could lead to hymns overshadowing the Psalms'; it could, but it does not need to. The direction of Zuidhorn is different, because Zuidhorn also made the decision that the psalms deserve priority within the worship service. That decision fully addresses the concern. By adherence to that decision it is possible to leave open what should be the maximum number of hymns [in the *Kerkboek*]." The Deputies BBK advised Synod Amersfoort: "To point out to the CanRC that the decision of GS Zuidhorn regarding the priority of the psalms sufficiently guarantees the valued and preferred place of the psalms in the worship service." (Deputies BBK Report to Synod Amersfoort, p.49).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Als deputaten BBK zijn wij van mening dat de zorg van de CanRC niet terecht is en dat hun eigen besluit minder sterk is dan dat van de GKV. Zo zegt Chatham dat het besluit van Zuidhorn 'could lead to hymns overshadowing the Psalms,' het kan maar het hoeft niet. De lijn van Zuidhorn is anders omdat in Zuidhorn ook besloten is dat de psalmen prioriteit dienen te hebben binnen de eredienst. Deze afspraak komt het bezwaar volkomen tegemoet. Met inachtneming van deze afspraak is het mogelijk om het aantal gezangen open te laten. Wij adviseren de synode: de CanRC er op te wijzen dat een uitspraak over de prioriteit van de psalmen zoals gedaan door GS Zuidhorn voldoende waarborg levert voor de waardering van de psalmen in de eredienst."



It does not appear from the *Acts* of Synod Amersfoort that Synod directly interacted with Synod Chatham's concern or with the BBK Deputies' remarks about our concern (see Article 164, *Acts*, Synod Amersfoort, ch.XI, p.23). However, gleaning from the *Acts* of Amersfoort, we should note the following: At that synod, at one point specific mention was made (by one of the elder delegates) of limiting the number of hymns to 150 total, in order to keep a balance between the number of psalms and the number of hymns. This means that the matter of balance, proportion, was specifically dealt with at synod, even if not directly in terms of Synod Chatham's words. The Deputies for Church Music (who were present at synod for this discussion) replied to the effect that it is not really a matter of the maximum number of hymns in the *Kerkboek*, but about the balanced selection of psalms and hymns for the worship service. Said the deputies: even 150 hymns can supplant the psalms (see under Article 91, *Acts*, Synod Amersfoort, ch.V, pp.41-42).<sup>3</sup>

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Synod Zuidhorn, 2002-2003 decided as follows (note that this is a *decision* of Synod):

"Synod emphasizes that in Art. 67 CO the psalms come first. The psalms, as songs given by the LORD in his Word to his people, have, in their rhymed form, always had the place of honor in the Reformed liturgical tradition. Principally also hymns, based on other select portions of the Old and New Testament, belong to the Reformed liturgical tradition, although through the ages the collection has remained small. Now that the churches are busy expanding the number of hymns, it is good to say expressly that our intention is not that the hymns drive out and supplant the psalms in the worship service and in the heart of the believers" (Decision 11, Article 89, *Acts*, ch.4, p.60).

Giving further light on this decision, and immediately after this decision, Synod stated:

"The concern has been expressed both by church members and by sister churches abroad that the large number of new hymns will supplant the 150 psalms. Along with the psalms, the hymns place on our lips passages and thoughts from the New Testament and the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Christ. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the authors of the psalms of the old covenant, must also lead the authors of church songs in all the truth of the Word."

[*Besluit 11*:

"De synode wil onderstrepen dat in art. 67 KO de psalmen voorop staan. De psalmen, als door de HERE in zijn Woord aan zijn volk gegeven liederen, hebben in berijmde vorm in de gereformeerde liturgische traditie altijd een ereplaats gehad. Principeel behoren ook gezangen, gebaseerd op en puttend andere gedeelten van het Oude en Nieuwe Testament, tot de reformatorische liturgische traditie, hoewel de bundel eeuwenlang klein geweest is. Nu de kerken bezig zijn het aantal gezangen uit te breiden, is het goed uit te spreken dat het onze bedoeling niet is dat de gezangen de psalmen in de erediensten en in het hart van de gelovigen verdringen."

*Toelichting*:

"Zowel door kerkleden als door zusterkerken in het buitenland wordt de zorg uitgesproken dat het grote aantal nieuwe gezangen de 150 psalmen zal verdringen. In de gezangen worden, naast de psalmen, gedeelten en gedachten uit het Nieuwe Testament en de vervulling van de Schrift in Christus ons op de lippen gelegd. De heilige Geest, die de dichters van de psalmen van het oude verbond inspireerde, moet ook dichters van kerkliederen in alle waarheid van het Woord leiden." ]

<sup>3</sup> "Het gaat niet om het aantal, maar om de evenwichtigheid van de selectie. Ook 150 gezangen kunnen de Psalmen verdringen."

Perhaps it is here that the Deputies BBK see the decision of Synod Chatham as being weaker than the decision of Zuidhorn (see above). Synod Chatham endorsed the approach of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* which included, among other things: “set the limit [of the number of hymns for the *Book of Praise*] at 100 hymns since the Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed Churches” (*Acts*, Article 115, Observation 6.1.1 and Consideration 6.2.1, p.120). Synod Chatham thereby made a direct equation between the number of hymns in the church’s song book and the proportion of hymns in the church’s worship service as though that equation were a given. Or, in other words, the number of hymns in the songbook will automatically determine the proportionate selection of psalms and hymns in the worship service. However, Synod Chatham did not expressly state that no matter how many hymns there are in the songbook (65 or 100), the psalms should have priority of place and predominance in the worship service. It is, after all, conceivable that even a limited 100 hymns in the *Book of Praise* would still allow hymns to supplant psalms in the worship service. The Deputies BBK see the decision of Synod Zuidhorn as more considered: not the number of hymns in the *Kerkboek* is of ultimate concern, but the number of hymns chosen for the worship service. To address that concern, Synod Zuidhorn made special provision in a decision: psalms deserve the place of priority in the worship service.

The CRCA is of the opinion that we must consider carefully what the Dutch churches are doing and what they are not doing. While it is true that the total number of hymns to select from has been, and is still, growing, it is not so that the sister churches deny the importance and the priority of psalms in the selection for the worship service. *In fact, a decision was made by Synod Zuidhorn to protect the priority of place for psalms in the worship service.* It is important that we make the right distinctions in this regard. Increasing the total number of hymn selections in the songbook is not automatically or necessarily increasing the number of hymns actually selected for the worship service. This is especially not the case if a Synod Zuidhorn decision is in place to prevent that from happening. If it were indeed the case that more hymns in the church’s songbook would lead necessarily to more hymns in the worship service (supplanting the psalms), then Synod Chatham should have had a more considered approach when envisioning and allowing an increase by 35 of the number of hymns in the *Book of Praise*.

Though it might well be observed from a distance that increasing the number of hymns in the churches appears to increase the number of griefs, the CRCA is nevertheless convinced that pursuing the concern over the number of hymns in the Dutch churches’ songbook in

terms of the proportion of psalms and hymns in the *Kerkboek* is not a fruitful avenue. The Committee requests Synod Smithers to judge this part of the Committee's mandate concluded.

### **The New Marriage Form**

Synod Chatham 2004 mandated the CRCA to continue the discussion with the GKN regarding the new Marriage Form. In a letter to the deputies of our Dutch sister churches, we noted that Synod Chatham commented on the fact that the new Form does not address the task of the wife in her family and household, and we asked why this is so (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Consideration 4.5, Recommendation 5.4.3). We also asked for clarification on what the intention of the Marriage Form is with respect to the phrase "when the Lord provides the possibility thereto" in connection with receiving children. We asked whether this refers to not being able to receive children or whether this gives opening to secular views concerning having children (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Consideration 4.6, Recommendation 5.4.3). We received a document with detailed information in answer to our questions about the new Marriage Form.

About the matter of having children, the Dutch deputies themselves summarize it as follows: "The phrase 'when the Lord provides the possibility thereto' was inserted into the form to take into consideration that having children via the natural way is not always possible. It should be noted that the Form explicitly states that spouses are called to parenthood and thus the phrase being queried is not to be understood as providing an escape route. The principle is 'those who are married are called to be parents' but in fulfilling this calling one is dependent on the possibilities which the Lord provides."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, with respect to our question about the task of the wife in her family and household, the Dutch deputies summarize it as follows: "What was previously considered to be the task of the wife in her family and household is in the new form considered to be the task of both spouses. Hence it has been transferred to the section which lists the duties of both spouses: 'share the responsibility and care for your family.'" The deputies write that the Form was revised because it should not give the impression that the task of the wife only concerns itself with motherhood, while work outside of the home is reserved for the husband. Both men and women have gifts from the LORD, which may be developed. Adam and Eve were created to work together in God's creation. The deputies point to Proverbs 31, which presents a wife and mother active in many ar-

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<sup>4</sup> Since the Dutch deputies corresponded in English, these are direct quotations from their letter.

eas. In addition, the deputies point out that fathers also have an important task in the family. Husband and wife are both responsible for a good division of duties in the family.

We are satisfied as to the explanation of the phrase “when the Lord provides the possibility” in connection with having children and as to the explanation about why the new Marriage Form does not address the task of the wife in her family and household.

### The Fourth Commandment

Synod Zuidhorn 2002 mandated a committee to study the matter of Sunday as day of rest. The committee produced an extensive report of almost 100 pages, entitled *Sunday, glorious day of the Lord*.<sup>5</sup> The report provides a study of biblical-theological aspects pertaining to the fourth commandment, an overview of how the fourth commandment was dealt with throughout the history of the Christian church, as well as ethical aspects pertaining to the fourth commandment. The report makes clear that important exegetical questions have been answered in various ways and that the history of the church shows a wide-ranging approach to the fourth commandment.

For our purposes, the most important chapter of the report is the last one (chapter 18), which analyzes the decisions of Synod Leusden 1999 and Synod Zuidhorn 2002. Very familiar to us as Reformed believers is the idea that from the literal text of the fourth commandment and from the whole of Scripture there is for the church of the New Testament a prohibition to work on Sunday. Synod Leusden, however, declared that the view that Sunday as day of rest is not founded upon a divine command cannot be condemned (*Acts Leusden 1999, art. 25, p. 28*). The deputies explain that some people concluded in light of this decision that therefore Sunday as day of rest is merely a human regulation and that therefore it is permissible to work on Sunday. But the intention of Leusden was not to say that it does not matter whether one works on Sunday but that there can be different opinions as to the *basis* for Sunday as day of rest. The point of Leusden was that there should be room for brothers and sisters who say that Sunday as day of rest is not based directly on the fourth commandment. These brothers and sisters hold that through the leading of the Holy Spirit the Christian church recognizes Sunday as day of rest according to the example of Israel's Sabbath, and that Sunday as day of rest is based on a responsible choice of the Christian church.<sup>6</sup> Just as there is no direct com-

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<sup>5</sup> In Dutch: *Zondag, HEERlijke dag*.

<sup>6</sup> About Synod Leusden 1999 see especially pp. 90,91; about Synod Zuidhorn 2002 see especially pp. 91, 92.

mand in the New Testament to baptize infants, so there is no direct command in Scripture to celebrate the first day of the week as day of rest.<sup>7</sup> But in both cases — whether Sunday as day of rest is based directly on the fourth commandment or on a responsible choice of the Christian church — Sunday is seen as day of rest. The deputies explain that Synod Leusden was not about Sunday not involving a command of the LORD, but about Sunday not being traceable as a direct command of God in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> The deputies explain further that however one approaches Sunday rest, both approaches involve a command to rest on Sunday; this certainly transcends the idea of a merely human regulation.<sup>9</sup> Synod Zuidhorn 2002 tried to clarify the decision of Synod Leusden 1999 and clearly spoke about recognizing and celebrating Sunday as a complete day of rest.

Based on the above, the deputies point out in their report to Synod Amersfoort 2005 that both Synod Leusden and Synod Zuidhorn held the position that the LORD wants us to rest on Sunday and that we should refrain from unnecessary work on that day. According to both Synods, Sunday is the day of rest and worship.<sup>10</sup>

Synod Amersfoort 2005 formulated a brief document entitled “Sunday, glorious day of the Lord. A resource” summarizing its position on the fourth commandment and how it ought to function today.<sup>11</sup>

This document clearly presents Sunday as the day of rest.<sup>12</sup> To illustrate this, we offer some quotations from this document: The document begins by stating: “We, as Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, are under the authority of the fourth command-

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<sup>7</sup> If your deputies understand it well, according to this view, Sunday as day of rest is at most based *indirectly* on the fourth commandment, which speaks about the seventh day as day of rest.

<sup>8</sup> “Het ging er in Leusden niet om dat de zondag geen gebod van de HEER zou zijn, maar dat die niet als een rechtstreeks gebod van God in het Nieuwe Testament te traceren valt” (p. 91).

<sup>9</sup> “Hoe je de zondagsrust ook benadert, beide lijnen die in dit verband aan de orde komen, gaan uit van een *gebod* tot zondagsrust. En dat gaat ver uit boven de gedachte van slechts een menselijke instelling” (p. 91).

<sup>10</sup> See the conclusion on p. 93 of the report.

<sup>11</sup> This document can be found at under *Acts Amersfoort 2005 Important decisions (Acta Amersfoort 2005 Belangrijke besluiten)*. In the original Dutch, the title is “Zondag, HEERlijke dag – Een handreiking.” Though the English translation that we are using is officially approved, the Dutch original alone has official status. However, since the English translation was officially approved, we did not think it necessary to provide the original Dutch in footnotes. Doing so, would have made this section more cumbersome. This document was also published in English in *Lux Mundi* 25 (1) March 2006, a periodical published quarterly by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. It also subsequently appeared in *Clarion* 55 (9) April 28, 2006.

ment as part of the Ten Commandments and all instruction contained in the Holy Scriptures” (1).<sup>13</sup>

The document’s “Section of instruction” outlines some temporary aspects of the fourth commandment, such as the *seventh* day being the day of rest, and goes on to say that there are also lasting aspects of the fourth commandment, such as how labour and rest alternate (3.2). Synod also writes about “...the Creator of all that lives who has given the rhythm of working and resting to people who are created in his image...” (6). After Christ’s resurrection, the first day of the week receives the spotlight. Sunday is now the day for the church, and the document says that “The command to **rest**<sup>14</sup> from one’s own work and exertion needs to be made concrete. Especially on Sunday we learn to find rest in the accomplished work of our Creator and in the accomplished sufferings of our Saviour” (4). Furthermore, we read: “We want to do justice to the actual resting and **remembering** of God’s works. We do so when we celebrate the Sunday and reserve that day for the meeting together of the congregation” (4). Moreover, “We encourage one another to keep this day free as much as possible from professional labour and from any other activity which would keep us from the worship services of the Lord, from meeting together as a congregation and from the rest which characterizes this day. We do justice to the fourth commandment when God’s people enjoy this day of the Lord by distancing themselves from all ordinary activities (Is. 58:13)” (4).

The document’s “Practical-ethical section” starts by making the point that in our busy modern society it is “...high time that we go back to learn from the Creator who made **labour and leisure**” (2.1). Synod goes on to say that “...it is healthy that the Creator introduced a day of rest into the rhythm of the week (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12). In line with God’s example and command we are to come to rest, learn to enjoy life and look back on the work that has been accomplished. In this way God is honoured as the one who does all work. It all depends on his blessing, not on our performance” (2.2). Furthermore, “By resting we make it clear that we realize that

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this resource document is not intended to function as a binding statement. Regional Synod Gelderland had proposed to make an official declaration about the relationship between the fourth commandment and the celebration of Sunday. Synod Amersfoort did not want to make a binding statement which goes further than what is already stated in our Reformed confessions (*Acts Amersfoort 2005*, Art. 25). That the resource document is not a binding statement is also evident from the careful wording of Synod’s decision “.....to recommend it to the attention of the churches.....” (“.....in de aandacht van de kerken aan te bevelen.....”) with the goal of “.....giving it a place in the instruction of the congregation.....” (“.....die een plaats te geven in het onderwijs van de gemeente.....”) (Decision 2, *Acts Amersfoort 2005*, Art. 22).

<sup>13</sup> The numbers in brackets are the section numbers of the document.

<sup>14</sup> The bold highlighting of this and following words is of Synod Amersfoort.

we have been freed from slavery, also from our own sins, performances and economic laws. By celebrating the Sunday, we give expression to the recognition that Christ is Lord also of the day of rest (Mk. 2:28). When he says, 'Do not be anxious about the day of tomorrow', this certainly applies to the Sunday (Mt. 6:34). On the day of rest we learn to enjoy his care, just as Israel learned it through the gift of manna" (2:5). Moreover, "In line with the example of the Early Church, we too need the second worship service to enjoy the Sunday as a whole and as a congregation" (2.8).

From the above, it should be clear that Synod Amersfoort 2005 spoke clearly about Sunday as the day of rest and worship. This document, as well as the Dutch deputies' analysis of the decisions of Synod Leusden and Synod Zuidhorn pertaining to the fourth commandment, put to rest the concerns that your committee reported to Synod Chatham 2004 about this matter.

### **Other Issues**

It is at this juncture that our committee wishes to apologize for misreading a decision of Synod Zuidhorn 2002. In its report to Synod Chatham, the CRCA reported that Synod Johannesburg 2000 delegated a representative to Synod Zuidhorn of the Dutch sister-churches to inform the GKN of the FRCSA's objections to establishing sister-church relations with the RCSA, and that the GKN ignored this request and warning not to establish sister-church relations with the RCSA. In fact, the GKN heeded this request and warning, and did not establish sister-church relations at Synod Zuidhorn. We sincerely apologize for our error in reporting and have also conveyed this to the deputies of the GKN.

### **Divorce and Remarriage**

The Deputies for Marriage and Divorce of our Dutch sister churches have written a booklet about divorce and remarriage at the request of their previous Synod Zuidhorn 2002.<sup>15</sup> Synod Amersfoort 2005<sup>16</sup> adopted the general approach of the deputies, although Synod did not adopt all the details of the deputies' approach. The general approach is that in matters of divorce and remarriage Christians

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<sup>15</sup> *Divorce and remarriage? An impulse towards a new approach to divorce, discipline and remarriage.* This is a popular version of the divorce report which was written for the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002-2003. This booklet was written by the Deputies for Marriage and Divorce at the request of Synod Zuidhorn and includes aspects of the discussions at that Synod. This booklet was received in English from the Dutch deputies. It was serialized in *Diakonia* (June 2004 and September 2004). When referred to, the first page number is that of the booklet, the second that of *Diakonia*.

<sup>16</sup> The *Acts Amersfoort 2005 Important decisions (Acta Amersfoort 2005 Belangrijke besluiten)* are available at [www.gkv.nl](http://www.gkv.nl). Not all of the proceedings are included on the website, but the important decisions are included.

ought to have a lifestyle that is in keeping with the style of Christ's kingdom (Decision 1). The style of the kingdom is not the way of dissolution of marriage but the way of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (pp. 2, 10; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 10, 15). It is the way of recognizing that Christ hates divorce. It is about recognizing that marriage is a passing reality as we are on the way to the fullness of the kingdom (p. 12; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 17). The style of the kingdom involves not letting "...our lives and happiness depend upon the earthly circumstances in which we find ourselves, but in the seeking of God's kingdom..." (p. 12; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 17).

The style of the kingdom is determined not only by looking at the so-called divorce texts but by bringing the whole of Scripture into the picture (p. 1; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 9). "In weighing the questions around divorce, more Scriptural data need to be used than simply the direct guidelines about marriage and divorce. The whole of Scripture raises its voice." (p. 4; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 10). The deputies point out that in the past the Reformed churches have worked with two grounds for divorce: adultery and willful desertion. However, due to the complexity of marital difficulties leading to divorce, the deputies argue for an approach which does not work with "grounds" but which focuses on the wider teaching of Scripture about marriage and divorce (p. 10; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 15).

Furthermore, the deputies write: "In order to apply the clear teaching of Christ about the kingdom in concrete present day situations of divorce, the church must be aware of how she should deal with the factors that characterize current divorce problems. The church must form a judgment over whether it is fair to apply the rule that follows from the teaching. She must also assess whether application will result in worse consequences than not doing so. It can be that she has to accept divorce and even remarriage" (p. 18; *Diakonia*, September 2004, p. 43). We read further on that the deputies are of the opinion that "...the churches must do justice to the new situations that are not mentioned in the Bible. In this they must not limit themselves to analogies and two grounds for divorce. What must be considered is how the style of the Kingdom can best be maintained in new divorce situations. In our broken reality, sometimes we need to choose for the lesser evil" (p. 23; *Diakonia*, September 2004, p. 47).

With reference to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7, the deputies write in their booklet: "There is no reason to limit these unforeseeable situations to those which appear in the Bible, or analogies of these. For this reason, we must not mould his words in I Corinthians 7 into a ground for divorce, but as an example of a possible way of operating" (p. 10; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 15). It is stated that in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul makes an incidental exception to Christ's rule about the indissolubility of marriage when Christ said that divorce



and remarriage was not how God intended things to be in the beginning (Matthew 19:8). “Paul is thus not talking about a new revelation of a (second) ground for divorce – willful desertion. In the reformed tradition, too much has been made of this” (p. 15; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 19). We read further: “What Paul mentions here, is a pointer for new and unforeseen situations, wherein the application of the rule of indissolubility would lead to unjust and wrong consequences. We also want to maintain an analogy but not only by searching for the similarities between what Paul refers to and our situation. The analogy is that other situations can arise, in which Christ’s rule about the indissolubility, cannot be applied at the drop of a hat, because the situation in the original context was not in the picture. *The analogy then, is that, just like Paul, we ought not apply the rule that emerges from the Lord’s teaching* [emphasis is that of the Dutch deputies]. In such situations, divorce can be the ‘lesser evil’” (p. 15; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 19). Moreover, we read: “We do not need to limit this exemption to the rule to situations that appear the same as the situation which Paul describes (analogous to). It is not only when something looks like ‘willful desertion’ that the rule can be broken” (p. 15; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 19). When dealing with various marital situations, “...the church has to ask herself if in certain situations, it is always possible to follow the way of the Kingdom. In situations where this is not possible, the church must be frank, and say with Paul in I Corinthians 7: in this case we make an exception to the rule and in the brokenness of this life, try to live as close as we can to the style of the Kingdom” (p. 23; *Diakonia*, September 2004, p. 46). While the deputies recognize the unique position of Paul as apostle, they state that we can learn from Paul’s methodology (p. 16; *Diakonia*, June 2004, p. 20).

While recognizing the complexity of marital difficulties leading to divorce in some cases, your committee is concerned that referring only to “the style of the kingdom” and no longer referring to “grounds” for divorce will lead to more easily accepting divorce in situations of marital difficulty. In light of concerns from within their own churches about this approach, Synod Amersfoort 2005 stated that the deputies had clearly explained that the focus on “the style of the kingdom” is not meant to replace God’s commandments or the concrete words of Scripture but to be the framework for them (Under Decision 1). While Synod Amersfoort stated that the intention of this approach is not to replace the commandments of God and specific words of Scripture, this approach could lend itself very easily to that. It sounds more vague and could result in a more vague attitude toward divorce and remarriage.

Your committee is also concerned about the way in which the deputies suggest using what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7. By suggesting that we may make our own exceptions just as Paul did,

the deputies also in this way suggest an approach which could result in a vague approach to divorce and remarriage. We should not underestimate that the sinful human heart will be inclined to make the most of this approach for its own benefit. Furthermore, and even more importantly, although the deputies acknowledge Paul's special position as apostle, the approach itself detracts from Paul's special position as apostle. With this approach, what difference is there in practice between us and Paul?

Our concern regarding vagueness about and potential tolerance of divorce and remarriage is underlined by the fact that Synod Amersfoort instructed the deputies for the revision of the Church Order to consider whether greater flexibility in the exercise of church discipline with respect to cases of divorce and remarriage can be reflected in the article of the Church Order on discipline (Decision 4b). In light of the complexity of situations leading to divorce, the booklet written by the deputies suggests different ways of admonishing people. For example, "The church council can inform the church of the steps taken by those involved in a divorce, disapprove of these in light of God's Word, but leave them to their own responsibility. This can be done via publication in the church paper or via announcement" (p. 27; *Diakonia*, September 2004, p. 49). The deputies recommend such an approach in situations where the church is not dealing with hardened sinners but people who have a lack of understanding and a weak faith. The deputies explain that this is not "...about dispensing with church discipline but about a refining of its application by which means we wish to serve two goals simultaneously: a. more justice done to those involved, b. more justice done to the public character of the sin" (p. 27; *Diakonia*, September 2004, p. 49). While your committee recognizes the complexity of marital discord, we are concerned that such a revision of the Church Order will lead to and legitimize a more lenient attitude toward divorce and remarriage.

Furthermore, Synod Amersfoort 2005 decided that as a rule another marriage after divorce will not be confirmed in the church ("kerkelijk bevestigd")<sup>17</sup> (Decision 3). Synod decided this in keeping with the recommendation of the deputies. In this way, the church stresses the Scriptural norm that marriage should not be broken. Moreover, this decision also arises from the complexity of some situations, especially when part of the history of a situation is unknown to the member's present congregation. Synod, however, did decide that consistories do retain their own responsibility as to whether a second marriage is permissible and can be confirmed in the church.

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<sup>17</sup> This terminology may be confusing to Canadians. In the Netherlands, a couple is officially married at City Hall and the marriage is confirmed by the church in a special service.

Moreover, Synod recommended that every consistory offer pre-marital instruction classes and that every consistory strongly encourage those preparing to get married to attend such instruction. Synod considered that thorough preparation for marriage is of great importance and can serve to prevent divorce.

In addition, Synod appointed a Council of Advice (“Raad van Advies”) to advise consistories in matters of divorce and remarriage (Decision 7a).

### **Other Matters**

New Bible translation - Synod Amersfoort 2005 recommended the New Bible Translation (NBV) for the churches. This translation replaces the Groot Nieuws Bijbel, and may be used along with the Staten Vertaling and the Nieuwe Vertaling.

Guests at the Lord’s Supper – Members of churches outside the federation, who do not belong to a sister church, may be admitted on the basis of their testimony. Consistories must examine these people prior to the celebration. Those who enter a building to discover the sacrament will be administered, will not be admitted since neither discussion nor proper self-examination took place. Administration of the sacrament was also approved for private homes to those stricken with long-term illness, provided the home would be connected to the church building via audio-visual means and a supervising elder be present.

Pastoral Assistants - It was decided to make allowance for the appointment of “Church labourers,” non-elected persons who assist office bearers in their tasks. Qualified persons will be contracted and be instructed in the required tasks.

TU Kampen - Some issues regarding the Theological University (TU) in Kampen demanded consideration. A new professor was appointed for instruction in Greek and Latin. Another structure of government was adopted. This Board of Governors operates besides the Board of Supervision, which remains responsible for the confessional character and scholarly level at the TU. A third level of governance, the Judicial (Deliberative) Body, will serve as a discussion platform between the churches and the university. It was decided to apply for government subsidy for the TU up to 50% of the annual budget, provided no strings would be attached to this funding. Mentorship training was put into place, as were rules to govern ministerial appeals.

Military Personnel and the Sacraments - Greater room for the administration of both baptism and Holy Supper was created for the

military servicemen, including those not necessarily belonging to the GKN. Previously the allowance was for people in war zones. The new rules permit the administration to be considered also for those who are in remote areas, isolated from normal church life for an extended period of time.

Asylum Seekers – Synod approved the granting of permission to extend full membership and the use of the sacraments for asylum applicants prior to these new believers securing permanent refugee status from the government, according to art. 58 and 60 C. O.

Revisions – Deputyships were given the mandate to revise the Church Order, by means of the request that a more systematic and well-organized version be proposed. The call for more contemporary renditions of the various Subscription Forms was approved, which documents should exclude the clause concerning the walk-of-life of office-bearers, since this is already expressed in the Forms for Ordination.

Integration of Persons with Disabilities – It was decided that a task-force be set up to develop catechetical and Bible Study methodologies, and to advise the local churches regarding the integration of people with handicaps into congregational activities in addition to the existing adapted worship services.

Homosexual Relations – Synod rejected the request to appoint a deputyship to study this matter and advise churches on a common approach to dealing with cohabitation, and so avoid the injustice of varied local practice. Instead, the churches were urged to make use of their own study and reflection, as well as seeking advice (including that from lecturers at the T. U.) along the lines of art. 41 and 44 C.O.

Women in the Church – A new deputyship was created to do a problem-analysis regarding any questions and problems that may exist in the churches with respect to the theme “Women in the Church”. The deputies, in consultation with lecturers of the Theological University, were asked to base their findings on empirical research and present these along with a well-founded Scriptural response to the next synod.

Liturgy –Another list of 120 hymns was released for use in the churches. The advisory committee served synod with the recommendation not to uphold the appeals of the large number of appellants. The deputyship provided synod with an analysis of a substantive list of hymns of which inclusion had been questioned by churches and individual members because of the wording and content of the verses. Synod decided to send this “blanket defence” to all who had objected to a number of hymns rather than dealing with

each appeal separately. The mandate for a final selection, including revival songs, was given, this final selection to be approved at Synod Zwolle-South 2008. ( See also # 5.2.11. above) Synod declined to adopt the Ordinarium, since there was sufficient freedom to implement various aspects in the Lord's Supper services.

The proposal to define the character of the second worship service by means of a prescribed order of worship and matters to be included in the required content was defeated. The decision of Synod Zuidhorn 2002 regarding art. 65 and 67 C. O. was thereby maintained. It expresses that the churches are not bound to a complete and precise order of worship and a limited selection of hymns; church councils are allowed to deviate from these restraints in exceptional circumstances, but this must be explained to the congregation.

Two new forms were adopted for baptism and one for profession of faith.

Ecclesiastical Unity – The existing “Framework for Local Dialogue” was found wanting and will be thoroughly revised. Two new documents, “Regulations for local Contact and Cooperation with a Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk” (our equivalent - Free Reformed Churches in North America) and “Regulations for Local Contact and Cooperation without Federal Agreement (zonder Landelijke Overeenstemming)” were adopted. These documents lay down the ground rules for approving and exercising local unity talks and, if agreement is reached, for issues of recognition of each other on the basis of Scripture and Confessions. The Federative Growth model, adopted by Synod Zuidhorn, would then become the regulative principle and govern pulpit exchange, mutual acceptance of attestations and church discipline, and permission to celebrate the Lord's Supper. These developments mandate the need to inform the congregation right from the start, and churches in the same classical region on a regular basis. No allowance is made for proceeding to the formation of one congregation.

Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) (cf. Free Reformed Churches in North America) – Gratitude was expressed for increased growth toward mutual understanding and unity. Existing differences with regard to liturgical differences, and other matters and developments, need further discussion and investigation. Requests to deal with the writings of Dr. B. Loonstra regarding the authority of the Scriptures (BC art. 2-7) were rejected. The official discussions resulted in a declaration in which he removed his earlier controversial statements on the Holy Spirit, and the historicity of Ascension and Pentecost. (A later book on homosexuality resulted in several church appeals. Dr. Loonstra distanced himself from these writings, ordered a further printing ban and resigned as curator of the Theolog-

ical University – CGK of Apeldoorn in October 2005.)

Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK) (The so-called “buiten-verband” churches) – Meaningful discussions were noted and gratitude was expressed for the declaration of their national Meeting Lelystad 2004 in regards to the matters of doctrine and life in ecclesiastical assemblies. This same meeting, however, accepted it to be Biblically-responsible to allow sisters to serve as elders and ministers. Synod Amersfoort decided that this forms a serious barrier for mutual contact, and charged its deputies to discuss this and boundaries of criticism on the confessions as well as deviations from Scripture. Local cooperation and unity talks require classical agreement to effect joint worship services and Lord’s Supper celebration, and for pulpit exchange.

Evangelism and Mission – A Dutch version of the Emmaus course was adopted. New evangelism projects and methods were approved and the support for mission work in cooperation with other organizations was encouraged. The report submitted by the deputies for Support for Congregational Renewal (Steunpunt Gemeente Opbouw) was endorsed. It proposes to assist congregations in developing their vision and mission statements and to devise ways and means to express these through meetings and courses. These will assist in focusing the ideas and attention of the members, especially the youth, and facilitate the need to be actively involved.

Sister church relations – Synod welcomed delegates from 25 sister churches and offered the opportunity for the representatives to address the gathering. The offer of Ecclesiastical Fellowship was extended to and accepted by another five churches, including the Free Church of Scotland-Continuing. The OPC and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) decided to study their offer before agreeing to this relationship.

Appeal - Synod Amersfoort sent an appeal to the new federation of churches, now known as the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands – Restored. This appeal, of which the full text in English can be found on the website called on the members of the new federation to re-unite with their brothers and sisters and so exercise the unity of faith the Lord Jesus calls for in John 17:

“Esteemed sirs and brothers,

.....

“For years we have broken bread together and drunk from one cup, the cup of the new covenant in Christ’s blood. Together we have been heartily encouraged by the gospel and by God’s

covenant. .... For this reason it feels even worse than an amputation that we are no longer united around pulpit, baptism font and Lord's table. It is a disunity which grieves the LORD and which damages our witness to the world. This motivates us as a Synod to address you.”<sup>18</sup>

The letter from Synod Amersfoort goes on to show how the GKN, having been accused of becoming a pluralistic church, has instead remained Catholic Reformed. The churches still confess the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. They want to discover what God's will is in all circumstances of life, including for this age and in this culture, hence reformation involves turning back to God's Word in all its breadth. The GKN may have all manner of church statements, agreements, and arrangements to help build up and govern the church, but these are not of the same order as God's Word and the confessions. They remain committed to the Reformed confessions and desire to measure their church life against this standard. Mercy, decisiveness and trust are thus reflected in the synodical decisions to show God's patience with the bruised reed and smoking flax. The love and care of Christ is characterized by the manner in which grace is shown to sinners and the variety of gifts is recognized. On this basis the GKN makes its plea:

“We ask of you and your ecclesiastical assemblies to consider this appeal before the face of God. We are prepared to explain our appeal to your Synod at any time. We have given authority to our deputies for church unity (assisted by the moderamen of the Synod in Amersfoort Centre) to do this.

.....

“In all sincerity, we express the hope that our separation shall not turn out to be permanent, but that we will search for and find each other as Christians and as churches.

“We sincerely pray for God's blessing over you and the wisdom of His Spirit in your considerations and decisions.

“With sincere brotherly greetings,”

.....

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<sup>18</sup> We are quoting from the English version of their letter which can be found on the website [www.gkv.nl](http://www.gkv.nl). It can also be found in *Lux Mundi* (published quarterly by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) 24 (4) December 2005.

## 5.4. Observations

There is no evidence that the GKN as a federation followed an unscriptural route, nor allowed for a decline in the influence of Scripture and the confessions. Also the Church Order remains in place and governs the decisions and the prescribed practices. The change in procedure and vision and the additional allowances for liturgical modifications are considered to be in line with the Biblical command by some. Yet these same matters rattle the confidence of others, those who feel more comfortable with a prescribed order and the tried-and-true proven set of rules and regulations. The changes are threats to the ways in which things have always been done; the speed at which some of these are perceived to have been foisted on congregations have become unsettling for many. They feel that their objections do not receive a proper hearing. Yet, several members seem quite content to leave the decisions and the ratification of the synodical decisions up to the ones-in-the-know.

The GKN readily admits that it is not easy to be church in this day and age; the spirit of individualism and relativism, of materialism and instant gratification makes its influence felt on their members. The charismatic movement has also required the churches to formulate a Reformed defense. They have sought to examine these matters and additional issues in the light of God's Word. The process was difficult and made them realize the challenge of having to demonstrate publicly, to both the world and to other churches, what it means to be Reformed in today's society. The federation covets the support of others, so that in the unity of God's Word and Spirit, they can express their witness to the world.

## 5.5. Recommendations

Your committee recommends that Synod 2007 decide:

- 5.5.1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN under the adopted rules;
- 5.5.2. That Synod judge the CRCA to have concluded its mandate in conveying to the GKN Synod Chatham's concerns about the proportion of psalms and hymns in the Gereformeerde Kerkboek, and that in light of our better understanding of the decision of Synod Zuidhorn, the concerns are sufficiently alleviated;
- 5.5.3. That Synod decide that the CRCA has fulfilled its mandate in continuing the discussion with the GKN regarding the new Marriage Form and in reporting to the churches about this;



- 5.5.4. That Synod mandate the CRCA to convey to the GKN that Synod Smithers is satisfied as to the Dutch deputies' explanation of the phrase "when the Lord provides the possibility" in connection with having children and as to the explanation about why the new Marriage Form does not address the task of the wife in her family and household;
- 5.5.5. That Synod declare that the CRCA has fulfilled its mandate with respect to studying the results of the deputyship "Fourth Commandment and Sunday" and reporting to the churches;
- 5.5.6. That Synod mandate the CRCA to convey to the GKN that the document "Sunday, glorious day of the Lord. A resource," as well as the Dutch deputies' analysis of the decisions of Synod Leusden 1999 and Synod Zuidhorn 2002 pertaining to the fourth commandment, put to rest the concerns that the CRCA reported to Synod Chatham 2004 about this matter;
- 5.5.7. That Synod express its thankfulness for the fact that the Dutch sister churches stress the Scriptural norm that marriage is an institution created by God and should not be broken. Furthermore, that Synod mandate the CRCA to express concern about the new approach to divorce and remarriage, specifically with respect to "the-style-of-the-kingdom" approach without reference to "grounds" for divorce, the analogy of Paul, and the suggested revision of the Church Order about discipline in cases of divorce and remarriage;
- 5.5.8. To take note of the manner in which the GKN has changed the way in which it deals with communications of the deputies of sister churches, expecting our deputies to enter into correspondence with their BBK when the opportunity presents itself;
- 5.5.9. To express appreciation for the way the GKN has sought to engage the GKH in unity talks by means of the appeal from Synod Amersfoort.

## **5.6. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored) (GKH – Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Hersteld))**

### **5.6.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham instructed the CRCA:

- 5.6.1.1.** To seek clarity into the legitimacy of the recent "Vrij-making" and monitor further developments;

- 5.6.1.2. To inform both the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the group that has departed in the recent “Vrijmaking” that they have our prayerful support in the hope that they will, by God’s grace, come to reconciliation;
- 5.6.1.3. To communicate to the churches the need for prayerful support for the situation in the Netherlands.

## 5.6.2. Correspondence

- 5.6.2.1. In a letter dated March 8, 2004, we informed the group that departed from the Reformed Churches (Liberated) that it has the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the hope that it will come to reconciliation with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.5). We also requested information to help us gain clarity into the legitimacy of the recent “Liberation” [“Vrijmaking”] and to enable us to monitor further developments (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.4). Since we did not have any official contact persons, we asked dr. P. van Gorp to pass this letter on to those members of the newly instituted churches of the recent “Liberation” who are dealing with churches abroad.
- 5.6.2.2. On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the newly instituted churches of the recent “Liberation.” We asked dr. P. van Gorp to pass this on to those responsible for dealing with churches abroad.
- 5.6.2.3. We received a letter dated February 4, 2005 from the newly liberated group, explaining their reasons for liberation, asking us to acknowledge them as the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, asking us to exhort the GKN to repent, and asking us to end the sister-church relations with the GKN if the exhortation is not heeded. Three appendices consisting of “Call to Reformation,” “Let us Repent,” and “Deed of Liberation or Return” were attached.
- 5.6.2.4. A letter dated March 15, 2005 was sent to the deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad of the Gereformeerde Kerken c/o br. H. Bos (newly liberated group), expressing the wish that br. H.E.

Hoogstra and Rev. J. Huijgen could meet with them while on their trip to the Netherlands as fraternal delegates to Synod Amersfoort 2005.

### 5.6.3. Seeking further clarity

The two CRCA members who were delegated to visit Synod Amersfoort 2005 arranged to make additional visits during their stay in the Netherlands to seek further clarity on the background of the split which occurred in 2003. They met with the Deputies BBK of the GKN, the Deputies BBK of the GKH, three retired ministers of the GKN, and four of the GKN ministers who took a leading role in providing a forum (The Manifest) for publishing articles regarding concerns which lived among the church members of the GKN. These conversations, along with an examination of the materials received from the GKH and GKN (the GKH letter of Feb.4, 2005, the GKH brochures “Call to Reformation”, “Let Us Repent” and “Deed of Liberation,” as well as *Not Beyond What Is Written*, a defense published by the Deputies BBK of the GKN in the spring of 2005), served us with further information. In addition, the two CRCA delegates to the FRCA Synod West-Kelmscott 2006 met with three members of the Deputies BBK of the GKH in Armadale, Australia.

The information gleaned leads us to the following understanding of the events surrounding the split. A group, which was/is identified with the name *Reformanda*, a magazine and association established in 1991, had warned against certain trends and synodical decisions in the GKN. In 2003, due to their strong dissatisfaction with the decisions of Synod Zuidhorn (which upheld decisions of Synod Leusden), they sent a letter (along with two enclosures, “Call to Reformation” and “Let Us Repent”) to the GKN churches, calling them to repentance and allowing the consistories six weeks to respond. When the response of the GKN churches was not satisfactory in their estimation, the “Deed of Liberation or Return” was signed. The schism thus became a fact on September 20, 2003.

It is good to note that the reaction of other concerned members of the GKN did not follow the same path. A few ministers, who had been contributors to *Reformanda*, refused to cooperate with the schism. It was their considered opinion that the appeal process for decisions made at the synods of Leusden and Zuidhorn had not yet been exhausted. They understood that as long as new grounds could be brought forward, there was still room to appeal decisions with which they

were dissatisfied. These men, too, had plenty of concerns, but they were of the conviction that one should only leave the Church when one knows false doctrine has been adopted, and participation in such a church would require one to proclaim that error. These concerned ministers did not feel that the situation of the Dutch churches required radical action.

Meanwhile others (The Manifest) were publishing (and continue to publish) articles to keep the GKN community informed about what they saw as threatening the Reformed way of life. It was also their expressed view that appeals were indeed possible, and that their task and duty in the GKN would continue for as long as they could preach the full counsel of God. All decisions made at Synod Amersfoort would receive their scrutiny. Should their consistories be unable to ratify the decisions of Amersfoort, they would then be forced to take a stand – by considering the way of appeal, or perhaps making the choice of leaving. Even though these men did not agree with the methods and the timing of the ‘newly-liberated’ group (now GKH), joining the ‘newly-liberated’ at a later stage was considered a responsible option. This would depend on how things progressed in the churches and in their major assemblies.

#### **5.6.4. Request GKH**

Some time after the schism of September 20, 2003 we received a letter, dated February 4, 2005, in which the GKH requests “to continue contact with you as sister churches.”<sup>19</sup>

The letter makes the following claim to express the legitimacy of the GKH: “In order to do justice to the claim of the Lord on His church there remained no other way than exhort the people to Liberate themselves from the Synod decisions ratified by their consistories, according to art. 31 of the C.O. and Art.28 of the B.C.” It is clear that the GKH considers the GKN a false church. Thus: “In this letter along with the attached information we want to prove our legitimacy as being the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.” We are requested by the GKH to admonish the GKN and continue with the GKH as sister churches. In fact, their communication of February 4, 2005 urges us to exhort the GKN on the basis of the GKH allegations and to break off sister relations if the GKN would not repent.

In evaluating this request from the GKH, we must understand and acknowledge that the relationship with the GKN is and

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<sup>19</sup> The GKH wrote this letter to us in English.

has been based on the mutual agreement of the adopted rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Rule 1 states: "The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy and be watchful for deviation." This rule has been operative. The CanRCs have maintained this direction, and have, over the years expressed thankfulness for the faithful course followed by the GKN, while, at the same time, we have expressed concerns and examined developments where we determined that to be necessary. Such close attention has not led to the conclusion that the GKN is unfaithful. As churches we have also been careful to guide our relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN by what we learn in official documentation of assembly decisions, not by articles appearing in papers and magazines, or personal observations.

More recently, since the time of the schism began in September 2003, Synod Chatham 2004 has again recognized the GKN as a true church and continued the sister-church relationship with this federation, even while certain concerns would be relayed to the GKN and were investigated by the CRCA. As can be determined from our report concerning the GKN, the Committee again does not see the need to conclude what the GKH has decided. Rather, the Committee has come to the conclusion that in a number of areas of concern, the GKN, through its brochure *Not Beyond What is Written*, and via decisions of Synod Amersfoort 2005, has some considered and responsible replies-to-concerns, which must be heard and taken to heart and may not be dismissed. We can again advise that the CanRCs continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN. This will impact directly how we respond to the request of the GKH.

#### **5.6.5. Appeal Synod Amersfoort 2005 and reply Synod Marienberg 2006 (GKH)**

Synod Chatham 2004 mandated the CRCA to express to the GKN and the 'newly- liberated' group (GKH) that they have our prayerful support in the hope that they will, by God's grace, come to reconciliation. This message was conveyed to both church federations. Synod Amersfoort 2005 sent an Appeal to the upcoming synod of the GKH, Synod Marienberg 2006. It was an appeal for reconciliation. In the meantime, Synod Marienberg has replied, declining the offer. The GKH concluded:

“We would gladly accept your offer if it had been shown that the members of the GKN saw the need to return to the Scriptures, confession and Church Order. Then we would be very happy to meet as soon as possible for a discussion regarding reunification. How beautiful that would be. How sincerely we would thank the Lord for that!

Unfortunately, we do not see the possibility at this moment” (Translation ours).<sup>20</sup>

This reply shows that the GKH continue to see the GKN as false churches which have departed from the Scriptures, confession and Church Order. The Committee again does not see the evidence that would lead to such a conclusion. In this regard, we are concerned that the GKH is in danger of not carefully examining what has actually been decided by GKN synods.

#### 5.6.6. Final evaluation

We have examined the submissions of the GKH and compared these with the defense of the GKN as expressed in the booklet *Not Beyond What Is Written*. In addition, we have also studied the decisions of Synod Amersfoort as they relate to our Mandate of Synod Chatham by which a number of concerns were to be investigated. We must conclude that we cannot accept the allegations of the GKH as presented in their statements.

The GKH has made the assertion that the GKN is no longer entitled to the claim of being true church. Our analysis of the official documents of the GKN demands that we continue to recognize this federation as true church of our Lord Jesus Christ. While we accept the statements made in the GKN Appeal to the GKH regarding the imperfections in the GKN, we also must accept the GKN's desire to be faithful to God, which is surely evidenced. We must therefore reject the allegations of the GKH, and express regret that unproven accusation has been made and illegitimate actions have been taken with respect to the GKN.

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<sup>20</sup> “Van uw aanbod zouden we graag gebruik maken, als gebleken was, dat men in de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijemaakt) weer de noodzaak zag van terugkeer naar Schrift, belijdenis en KO. Dan zou het ons een grote vreugde zijn om zo spoedig mogelijk te komen tot een gesprek gericht op hereniging. Wat zou dat mooi zijn. Wat zouden we de Here daarvoor hartelijk danken!  
Helaas zien wij deze mogelijkheid op dit moment niet.”

### 5.6.7. Recommendations

The CRCA recommends that Synod:

- 5.6.7.1. Express sadness over the schism in the GKN which began in 2003;
- 5.6.7.2. Urge the federation to pray for the restoration of unity between the GKH and GKN;
- 5.6.7.3. Not accept the GKH request to acknowledge these churches as sister churches;
- 5.6.7.4. Mandate the CRCA to communicate 5.6.7.1., 5.6.7.2. and 5.6.7.3. to the Deputies BBK of the GKH and maintain contact with them.

## 6. International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

### 6.1 Mandate

Synod Chatham decided:

- 6.1.1. To mandate the CRCA:
  - 6.1.1.1. To continue to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches in the ICRC and send a delegation to the Conference scheduled for October 12-19, 2005 in South Africa;
  - 6.1.1.2. To inform the Secretary of the ICRC that the Constitution Art. IV.1.a. should be left unchanged since there are no new grounds;
  - 6.1.1.3. To submit a Report of the 2005 ICRC to the next Synod, with an evaluation and recommendations.

### 6.2. Correspondence

- 6.2.1. In a letter dated March 8, 2004, we informed the Secretary of the ICRC about Synod Chatham's decision that Article IV.1.a. of the Constitution should be left unchanged since there are no new grounds (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 52, Recommendation 5.3.2).
- 6.2.2. We received the Semi-Annual Newsletter # 14, October 2003.
- 6.2.3. A letter from the Secretary of the ICRC, dated March 31, 2004, provided us with some updates, website information (), and information about the conference to be held October 12-19, 2005 at Pretoria, South Africa.
- 6.2.4. We received a letter dated April 2, 2004 from the ICRC Secretary, acknowledging receipt of our March 8, 2004 letter

- informing the ICRC about the Canadian Reformed Churches' desire to leave Article IV.1.a. of the Constitution unchanged.
- 6.2.5. On June 24, 2004, a copy of *Acts Chatham 2004* was sent to the Secretary of the ICRC.
  - 6.2.6. We received the ICRC Semi-Annual Mission Newsletter (No. 15, April 2004).
  - 6.2.7. We received the ICRC assessment for 2004 in the amount of \$1040.00.
  - 6.2.8. In an e-mail dated January 17, 2005, we requested Rev. C. VanSpronsen to be part of the delegation representing the Canadian Reformed Churches at the ICRC to be held at Pretoria in October 2005.
  - 6.2.9. In an e-mail dated January 18, 2005, Rev. C. VanSpronsen accepted the invitation to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the 2005 ICRC in Pretoria, South Africa.
  - 6.2.10. We received a letter dated April 26, 2005 from the Secretary of the ICRC with a package of information for the ICRC Conference to be held in Pretoria.
  - 6.2.11. We received a letter dated April 29, 2005 with the ICRC assessment for 2005.
  - 6.2.12. The assessment for 2005 was mailed to the treasurer of the General Fund for payment.
  - 6.2.13. Copies of three presentations to be delivered at the ICRC Pretoria 2005 were received.
  - 6.2.14. A copy of a proposal from the 2005 General Assembly of the OPC regarding the FCS and FCS (C) to be presented at the ICRC Pretoria 2005 was received.
  - 6.2.15. A copy of the report from the Missions Committee prepared for ICRC Pretoria 2005 was received.
  - 6.2.16. A position statement for ICRC Pretoria 2005, dated September 2005, was received from the ICRC Secretary, explaining the FCS (C)'s perspective on the division in the FCS.
  - 6.2.17. A letter dated January 18, 2006 was received from the Secretary of the ICRC with some general information.

### 6.3. ICRC 2005, Pretoria, South Africa

The sixth quadrennial meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was convened in Pretoria, South Africa, from October 13 – 19, 2005. A prayer service, led by Rev. C. Kleyn of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, preceded the official opening on Oct. 12, 2006.

The central theme of the conference was "The Lordship of Christ." Presentations on this theme were made by Prof. Dr. A.J. DeVisser (CanRC): "The Lordship in the Life of the Believer", Prof. Dr. J. W. Maris (CGKN) "The Lordship of Christ in the Church", Rev. Y. Dethan



(GGRC) and Rev. D. Robertson (FCS) who separately highlighted aspects of this in their papers “The Lordship of Christ Proclaimed in the World”. A general discussion was held after each presentation and a workshop led by each speaker followed later on.

Applications for membership had been made by five denominations/ federations. Of these, three new members were admitted: the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA), the Reformed Churches of Spain (IRS) and the Reformed Confessing Church in Congo (ERCC), bringing the total number to 25 member churches. Another 12 churches sent observers or visitors.

The following amendment to the ICRC Constitution (Art.IV.1.a) had been sent to all the churches for their approval. Only the CanRC had responded, rejecting the change. The amendment was resubmitted for comment, and must be approved by two-thirds of the major assemblies of the member churches before it may be adopted in 2009. The proposed change is:

*IV. 1 Those churches shall be admitted as members which:*

1. *adhere and are faithful to one or more of the confessional standards stated in the Basis, as each church has adopted one or more of these as its own standards, or adhere and are faithful to Reformed Confessions which are equivalent in content to the Confessions listed in the Basis (Art. 2), and which confession (or confessions) shall be proposed to be added to Art. II of the Constitution.*

The conference heard a report about the success of two Regional Mission conferences, held in Thailand and the Congo in 2003. A new mandate for the Missions Committee was adopted.

The decision was made to encourage Regional ICRC meetings, e.g. of the member churches in North America, and to combine these with the Regional Mission Conferences. In general, the funding for such conferences should come from the region, rather than through the ICRC assessment.

Those in attendance heard accounts of present acts of persecution by some members of African churches, and the plea for ongoing intercession on their behalf was made to the conference.

Two past members of the Interim Committee, Rev. M. VanBeveren (CanRC) and Rev. J. J. Peterson (OPC), were thanked for faithful service. The appointments of Rev. B. DeGraaf (CGKN), chairman, B. Hoyt (RCNZ), vice-chairman, Rev. Dr. P. Naylor (EPCEW),

recording secretary, Rev. C. VanSpronsen (CanRC), corresponding secretary, and Br. H. A. Berends (Can/Am. RC), treasurer, were confirmed.

The Reformed Church of New Zealand was appointed to host the 2009 conference.

The delegates Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Br. H. E. Hoogstra, together with the co-authorized brothers Dr. A. J. DeVisser and H. A. Berends, formally met with representatives of various Presbyterian churches for the Synod-mandated discussion of the existing divergences with regard to the fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership, matters relating to the Church Order., and the view of the Covenant.

More (in)formal meetings were conducted with representatives of other churches who expressed interest in such meetings in writing in the past (GGRI-NTT, GGRC-NTT, URCM-Myanmar) or at their oral request (IRC-Korea, RC-Japan) during the conference.

#### **6.4. Considerations**

The theme and papers presented provided rich ground for discussion. The fact that various aspects were highlighted by members of the established as well as the younger churches helped to speak to the whole spectrum. The Regional and Mission conferences may assist in this respect.

It is recommended that a copy of the *Proceedings* be consulted for a complete text of these papers as well as full coverage of other matters which were dealt with at the conference.

We submitted our objections to the proposed change in the ICRC Constitution. Since our grounds for the objection have not changed, we should resubmit our previous decision.

The officers of the ICRC Executive are called upon to attend many additional meetings during the breaks at the conference. We had requested two CanRC members of the ICRC executive to serve as fellow representatives with our delegates to assist in various discussions with other churches in Pretoria. We did this to save costs so that we would not have to send more delegates. However, this tactic did not prove so prudent because of the workload of the ICRC executive members at the conference. The CRCA considers that it would serve the churches better if a delegation of adequate representation could be sent to the next ICRC. These delegates would be able to dedicate themselves to the optimal use of opportunities for discussions with other churches.

The information gathered during the discussions with the various Presbyterian denominations reveal that the divergent approach to certain matters is largely a result of church-historical and cultural development. Since the purpose of our relationship is not a merger but a fellowship in which we all maintain our own identity and practices, the need to discuss these further has become a moot point.

## **6.5. Recommendations**

The committee recommends that:

- 6.5.1. Synod reiterate the decision on the proposed change to Art. IV.1.a of the Constitution of the ICRC (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 52, Recommendation 5.3.2, p. 48).
- 6.5.2. Synod decide to mandate the CRCA:
  - 6.5.2.1. To continue the participation of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the ICRC and send a two-man delegation to New Zealand in 2009;
  - 6.5.2.2. To convey Synod's decision on Art. IV.1.a. of the Constitution to the corresponding secretary of the ICRC;
  - 6.5.2.3. To use the opportunities presented at the conference to interact with and gather information from delegates of other denominations and federations;
  - 6.5.2.4. To submit a report of the 2009 ICRC to the next Synod with an evaluation and recommendations.

## **7. Indonesian Churches**

### **7A. Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia Propinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT)**

#### **7.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided to mandate the CRCA:

- 7.1.1. With respect to the GGRI [Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia in Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT), The Reformed Churches of Indonesia in the Southeast Region], to continue the contact and diligently correspond with the GGRI, to make more information available to the churches and to report to the next Synod, in the hope that Ecclesiastical Fellowship can be established (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 100, p.100, Recommendation 5.3.1.)

## 7.2. Correspondence

- 7.2.1. A letter dated December 14, 2005 was sent to the GGRI-NTT, indicating Synod Chatham's decision with respect to their request for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- 7.2.2. Via an e-mail dated April 5, 2006 a letter was received from the GGRI-NTT about establishing Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC.

## 7.3. Introduction

The GGRI-NTT churches are the result of the mission work of the GKN, in particular the activities of Rev. Goosen in the 1950's. The federation numbers 17 congregations with about 5000 members, which are mostly located on the island of Sumba (14), plus two on Savu, a small island close by, and one in West-Timor. The GGRI is served by nine active pastors and 13 evangelists, five of whom hope to be examined at the end of November 2005 and be ordained to the ministry. A few more congregations are being started up on Sumba. Most of the ministers have been trained in the Sekola Theologica Reformasi of Sumba, which closed in 2000 for lack of lecturers. Some of these lecturers were the Revs. J. Boersema, J. Klamer and H. Knigge (all of the GKN), and Rev. A. J. Pol (now of Carman-West), along with a number of Indonesian ministers. The wish to re-open the college has recently come true. With a new agreement for funding in place between the GKN and the FRCA, the theological training center reopened in Aug 2006. Rev. Pila Njuka, who trained at our Theological College in Hamilton, is one of the lecturers.

The federation maintains the Bible as the infallible Word of God. In addition to the three ecumenical creeds, it has adopted the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism. Their churches are governed according to the Church Order of Dort, which has been translated from the Dutch and revised in places to fit the local situation. For example, the churches have Classes every six months and do not have Regional Synods. Instead, they convene a General Synod every two years. Their liturgy resembles ours and has been translated from the Dutch liturgy. Many churches meet twice each Sunday but some hold only one service since the members need to walk quite a distance to attend the worship service.

The federation has sister relations with the GKN and FRCA, from which they receive educational and financial support. The churches are financially weak because most of their members are poor. The FRCA has established a protocol with the GGRI-NTT requiring all requests for support to be processed through the delegates of both federations. The GGRI also has Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GGRC-NTT.

Rev. Pila Njuka of the GGRI-NTT met with a CanRC delegate to the ICRC in Pretoria, S.A. He expressed the desire of his federation that the GGRI-NTT and the GGRC-NTT would work towards unity. Aside from their history, there are no doctrinal issues, only minor differences that kept them apart. A similar statement was made by Rev. Yan Pariamalinya, whom the CRCA delegates to Synod West-Kelmscott met in Armadale, Australia. A meeting was arranged with the Deputies Indonesia of the FRCA in which the Australian brothers reiterated what their Synod 2006 had just decided.

#### **7.4. Observations**

From the reports of our sister churches and the meetings of our representatives with those of the GKN and FRCA, it is clear that the GGRI-NTT is a federation of churches faithful in confession and practice in accordance with God's Holy Word.

The GGRI-NTT has sister-church relations with, and is supported by, the GKN and FRCA. They also have Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GGRC-NTT, and their delegate has stated that there are no doctrinal differences between their federations.

Communication is not a problem since some of their representatives are able to write and speak English. They have a genuine desire to join in ecclesiastical relations, as stated in their letter of April 5, 2006: "it is our conviction that what unites us is much more than what separates us."

The GGRI states as benefits of sister relations:

- 1) The CanRC would be able to partake in helping the spread of the gospel and building up the GGRI-NTT in the direction of becoming more self-sufficient organizationally as well as more mature in the application of Reformed doctrine.
- 2) By establishing a sister-church relationship, both church federations will get to know each other better. We will be able to pray for each other, bringing the burdens and struggles of our churches before our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3) By means of advanced theological instruction that maintains Biblical doctrines, the CanRC can help the GGRI-NTT sponsor future leaders for building up the GGRI-NTT.

#### **7.5. Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that:

- 7.5.1. Synod accepts the invitation from the GGRI-NTT to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship;

7.5.2. Synod mandate the CRCA to inform the GGRI-NTT and the FRCA of this decision and make formal arrangements for this relationship.

## **7.B. Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis in Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRC-NTT)**

### **7.6. Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided to mandate the CRCA:

**7.6.1.** With respect to the GGRC-NTT [Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis in Nusa Tenggara Timur, The Calvinist Reformed Churches in the Southeast Region], to continue the contact and investigate further the GGRC-NTT, also in light of the discussions of the FRCA with the GGRC-NTT and make the information available to the churches (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 100, p.100, Rec. 5.3.2.).

### **7.7. Correspondence**

**7.7.1.** In May 2005, Rev. A. Souman and br. R. Scholtens gave us a written report of their visit with deputies of the GGRC-NTT.

### **7.8. Introduction**

This federation is not as young as the CRCA made it look in its report to Synod Chatham. Institution occurred on Dec.17, 1950 by Rev.Daud Dumanau and some friends, and the churches are therefore as old as those of the CanRC federation. They have been a separate entity from the GGRI-NTT since their beginning. Since 1950 the GGRC-NTT has subscribed to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, while the Belgic Confession was adopted later.

The churches of the GGRC are mainly located on the islands of West Timor, Roti, Sabu and Kupang in Indonesia. The federation consists of eleven churches and five mission posts. The membership of 2000 is served by seven ministers and five evangelists. The ministers have been trained at the Sekolah Theologia Reformasi (closed in 2000 ) by lecturers that included the Revs. Knigge, Klamer and Pol.

The GGRC federation is financially independent, but has received support from the GKN for its church building program and from members and several churches of the FRCA and CanRC for an orphanage and a school system, the Reformed Education Foundation of Noelbaki (YPRN).

The federation experienced a split in 1995 when the GGRC wanted to stay with the Reformed faith and practices. The original name of the federation was the GMM, and changed to the GGRM which has been registered as such with the Department of Justice and Human Rights. It was renamed the GGRC in 2003. Presently there is a dispute with one of the leaders of the church, the Rev. Eli Fanggi-dae, who with his congregation maintains the name GGRM, and has taken the GGRC to court over the rights to the name and the legal charter.

Members of the CRCA, the Revs. J Huijgen and C.J. VanderVelde, met with Rev. Y. Dethan in 2004 while the latter was visiting Ontario. Rev. A Souman and Br. R. Scholtens visited the GGRC churches in May 2005 as our representatives, while on a visit there for the church at Smithville, and provided our committee with a written report. Rev. Y. Dethan and Rev. Y. Teti met with Br. H. Hoogstra in Pretoria, S.A. in 2005, and written information was also gathered from Rev. A.J. Pol and the FRCA Deputies for Indonesia. The brothers H. Hoogstra and H. Leyenhorst sought further information from the Australian deputies while representing the CanRC at Synod West-Kelmscott 2006. This Synod adopted the position to continue the contact with the GGRC, continue with various means of support, monitor and encourage the unity developments between the GGRI and GGRC, and encourage the GGRC to cooperate with the soon-to-be started theological training of the GGRI by way of prayer and by sending their students there for training.

Rev. E. Dethan has been sent out as a missionary to West Timor by the Church at Smithville, Ontario. Aside from being related by blood, there appears to be a good understanding between Edwar and Yonson as they cooperate in various ways to promote Kingdom work. Edwar has two mission posts, one in Dalan Tuck with about 40 members, at a distance of approximately 20 minutes by car, and one in Boneane with 30 members, about a three-hour drive from Tarus, where Yonson serves. Another post at Tamplong, with 11 members, an hour away, is being worked on. The GGRC pastors regularly preach at these centers, and also the elders from this federation will assist when needed. In turn, Edwar will do seminars for the GGRC, the young people and women societies meet together, and some of the children of the mission attend the YPRN schools. The FRCA decided at Synod West Kelmscott 2006: "To direct Deputies Relations Sister Churches, in our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, that while doing mission work among our sister churches in Indonesia, they direct the result of their work to be joined in the bond of the GGRI and along with us encourage the GGRC to put to practice the unity they recognise by being joined into one bond of churches".

## 7.9. Observations

The GGRC is a federation with a Reformed basis that strives to be faithful to God's Word. They have adopted the Reformed confessions and church order. They have a sister relationship with the GKN and the GGRI. The representatives of the GGRC have stated that history, geography, language and certain practices cause a stumbling block to unification with the GGRI.

Both the GKN and FRCA send delegates and workers to Indonesia on a regular basis and have recommended that the GGRI-NTT and GGRC, at minimum, cooperate in theological training and if possible work towards federative unity. The FRCA Synod 2006 decided to continue contact and maintain the support that they have given to the GGRC.

The Smithville Canadian Reformed Church has a mission field in Timor and has contact with some of the members of the GGRC.

There is some uncertainty about the legal status of the GGRC and the litigation over the registration of the name. The committee has had recommendations from the various delegates that we have been in contact with to both enter into sister relations and to delay such action.

## 7.10. Recommendations

The CRCA recommends that:

- 7.10.1. Synod Smithers delay entering into a sister-church relationship until the legal proceedings have been resolved and unqualified support can be obtained for Ecclesiastical Fellowship from our Australian sister churches;
- 7.10.2 Synod mandate the committee to maintain close contact with this federation:
  - 7.10.2.1. To encourage the GGRC to resolve its dispute with the GGRM;
  - 7.10.2.2. To promote efforts towards federative unity with the GGRI;
  - 7.10.2.3. To encourage the GGRC to cooperate with the FRCA, GKN and GGRI in the establishment of joint theological training with the GGRC;
- 7.10.3. Synod encourage our churches to work together in supporting the mission efforts of Smithville and channel the support which is needed to clear the way to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GGRC-NTT.



## **8. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)**

### **8.1. Mandate**

The committee was instructed “To investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship outside the Americas.”

### **8.2. Correspondence**

- 8.2.1. An e-mail dated January 20, 2005 was received from Rev. W. Peter Gadsby of the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, asking whether the Canadian Reformed Churches are interested in formal Fraternal Relations with the PCEA.
- 8.2.1. A letter dated February 7, 2006 was sent to the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the PCEA, asking for more information about the PCEA in light of their request to have sister-church relations with the CanRC, and informing them that we are asking for input from the FRCA.
- 8.2.2. An e-mail dated February 14, 2006 was received from the PCEA in answer to our letter dated February 7, 2006.

### **8.3. Introduction**

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) is the oldest Presbyterian denomination in Australia. It consists of twenty-seven congregations organized into fourteen charges. There are three presbyteries and the Synod of Eastern Australia meets annually. A continued and close relationship exists with the Free Church of Scotland. They also have sister relations with our sister churches in the Netherlands. Further information is available on <http://pcea.asn.au>.

A request for closer relations was received from the PCEA on January 20, 2005. This request was based on the decision at Synod 2004 of the PCEA “to pursue formal Fraternal Relations with churches which are members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches.” A letter from the committee attempting to set up contact and requesting more information resulted in a reply from Rev. W. Peter Gadsby expressing surprise that we knew little of the PCEA. He suggested that we check out their website and informed us that they have had “discussions with the FRCA since the late 70s”. We contacted the deputies of the FRCA and it was from them that we received most of our information.

The discussions between the FRCA and the PCEA has resulted in

mutual recognition as true churches but talks have not progressed very far. At Synod 2006 the FRCA decided “To thank the PCEA for the discussions which our deputies could have with their deputies, but to regretfully inform them of our decision to discontinue contact with them.” The main problems for the FRCA were the fencing of the pulpit (they allow ministers of many denominations to preach in their churches) but especially the teachings of R.S. Ward as it pertains to Genesis 1-11. They are also concerned with how the federation deals with varying doctrinal views of (their) preachers.

The CRCA delegates visited with the FRCA deputies at Synod West Kelmscott 2006 to discuss the PCEA. They requested advice and also examined the most recent correspondence between the Australian deputies and R.S. Ward.

#### **8.4. Observations**

Our common membership in the ICRC was the motivation for the request for closer relations between the PCEA and the CanRC. While the CRCA delegates requested a meeting with the PCEA deputies, no meeting took place since their denomination was not represented at Synod West Kelmscott 2006.

Although there have been talks between the PCEA and the FRCA for many years, the FRCA decided to end discussion at Synod 2006. The CRCA has taken direction from our sister churches in Australia because they have much knowledge and experience in their discussions with the PCEA.

#### **8.5. Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that:

8.5.1. The CanRC do not enter into relations with the PCEA;

8.5.2. Synod mandate the CRCA to inform the PCEA and the FRCA of this decision.

### **9. Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)**

#### **9.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham considered:

**9.1.1.** That more information should be made available to the churches regarding the RCNZ. This should be done in consultation with the work of the FRCA, GKN and via the ICRC.

#### **9.2. Correspondence**

**9.2.1.** An e-mail dated July 14, 2005 was received from Rev. J. Poppe of the FRCA informing us of the section of the RCNZ

report dealing with establishing a sister-church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

- 9.2.2. A letter dated September 26, 2005 was sent to the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, indicating that we are studying their offer to work towards establishing a sister-church relationship.
- 9.2.3. A letter dated February 7, 2006 was sent to the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, indicating Synod Chatham's decision not to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at this time, requesting more information about the RCNZ, and informing them that we are asking for input from the FRCA.

### 9.3. Introduction

The RCNZ is a federation of twenty-two churches located throughout both the north and south islands of New Zealand. There are approximately 3700 members. The Churches have their origin with the Reformed immigrants from the various Reformed Churches in Holland. Over time Presbyterians from New Zealand joined the churches and most of the current growth is from South Africa and Korea. Ministers have been called from The Netherlands, North America and Australia, but many of the current ministers were trained at the independent Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia. The college receives the bulk of its support from the RCNZ and the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA). The RCNZ has veto power in the appointment of professors. Candidates are required to serve a one year internship in the churches before they are eligible for call.

The churches have two services on Sundays. Most of the churches use the NIV translation of the Bible with the balance using the NASB. They are not satisfied with the present Psalter Hymnal and are in the process of selecting songs, including recent compositions, our Book of Praise and selections from the New Scottish Hymnal (FCS) for a future publication of their own song book. The Lord's Supper practice is comparable to that in the URCNA.

The churches have been visited by members of the CanRC including support visits by the late Br. T. VanderVen and Prof. Dr. C. VanDam. The RCNZ enjoys a cooperative relationship with our Mission Board of Toronto for mission work in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Rev S. t'Hart has visited the RCNZ churches three times. The RCNZ is also looking at new mission ventures in their region and currently support a worker who is instructing locals in the South Pacific in Christian radio broadcasting.

As delegates, the brothers H. Hoogstra and H. Leyenhorst visited

the churches in New Zealand in August 2006. Two meetings were held with representatives of the RCNZ and two churches were visited on Sunday. It was obvious that they were Reformed and had displayed a strong desire to have relations with faithful Reformed churches. They see the CanRCs as a resource for Reformed information, books, teachers and ministers. The delegates also discussed the relations and talks that the RCNZ has with the FRCA and CRCA with delegates from the RCNZ and the FRCA.

#### 9.4. Observations

An invitation to enter into relations was received shortly before Synod Chatham 2004 and synod decided not to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at that time.

Br. H. Hoogstra and Rev. C. VanSpronsen met with two delegates of the RCNZ at the ICRC in Pretoria on October 11, 2005. Information was received on the work the RCNZ is doing as well as the relations that they have with other federations including their cooperative relationship with the Church in Toronto in their mission work in Port Moresby.

The RCNZ has requested sister-church relations with our sister churches in Australia (FRCA). This request has not been granted because of the relations that the RCNZ has with the Christian Reformed Church in Australia (CRCA). The RCNZ placed their relationship with the CRCA under strain at Synod 2005. In a letter received from the FRCA dated February 12, 2004 they stated that they had no concern with the CanRC entering into relations with the RCNZ, but requested that we support their concern with the relations that the RCNZ has with the CRCA. In a meeting with the FRCA deputies in Armadale in 2006, our Australian counterparts reiterated these statements. In their letter they wrote the following:

“The RCNZ is consequent in its interchurch relations. It does not hesitate to admonish a sister church when needed and if necessary break off relations. This has happened regarding the GKN (synodical) already in the 80’s and also more recently with the Christian Reformed Churches of North America. ....The ongoing relation by the RCNZ with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia presents a problem of triangular relations within Australia. The practical aspect of this problem is: having a sister church relationship with the RCNZ at present would mean a minister of the RCNZ visiting Western Australia could preach on the same Sunday in the morning in one of the FRCA churches and in the afternoon in one of the CRCA churches. We hope you understand the problems this would cause to us. Nevertheless, although third party relationships are important, we don’t believe we can extend that beyond one

country. . . . We were asked for advice from the Dutch deputies prior to them entering sister relations with the RCNZ. We did not express any objections. . . . In addition, we wanted the Dutch, and now we ask you as well, to encourage the RCNZ to take seriously and act upon the FRCA's concerns and objections about the deformation in the CRCA."

The RCNZ has relations with our sister churches in the Netherlands and is currently having discussions with the United Reformed Churches of North America.

The RCNZ is a faithful Reformed church and subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity as well as to the Westminster Confession and the Church Order of Dordt. Updated translations of some of the confessions and forms were presented to Synod 2005 but no action was taken. The revised translations were for the most part copies of the Canadian Reformed versions.

## **9.5. Recommendations**

9.5.1. That Synod recognize that the RCNZ is a faithful church of God and accept the invitation of the RCNZ to enter into sister-church relations according to the established rules.

9.5.2. That Synod mandate the CRCA to:

9.5.2.1. Communicate to the RCNZ Synod's decision under 9.5.1.

9.5.2.2. Visit the next Synod of the RCNZ in order to formalize relations and visit the churches.

## **10. United Reformed Churches in Myanmar (URCM)**

### **10.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham 2004 decided to give the CRCA the following general mandate:

**10.1.1.** To investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship outside the Americas.

### **10.2. Correspondence**

**10.2.1.** A letter dated January 21, 2004 was received from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, chairman of the Contact Committee of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar, introducing these churches to us and seeking a sister-church rela-

tionship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

- 10.2.2** An e-mail dated August 9, 2004 was received from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang on behalf of the Contact Committee of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar with the same purpose as the January 21, 2004 letter.
- 10.2.3** We received an e-mail dated September 8, 2004 from Rev. C. VanSpronsen, Secretary of the ICRC, forwarding an e-mail he received from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang about sponsoring the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC. We also received a copy of Rev. VanSpronsen's response.
- 10.2.4.** A letter dated November 15, 2004 was sent to Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, chairman of the Contact Committee of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar, informing him that we cannot recommend the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC because a recent Synod decided that we may only do so for churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship. We assured him that we were reflecting on the documentation introducing the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar to the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- 10.2.5.** A letter dated January 14, 2005 was received from the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar acknowledging receipt of our letter dated November 15, 2004. They informed us that they found two church federations to sponsor them for membership in the ICRC and asked us to support their request for membership
- 10.2.6.** An e-mail dated January 31, 2006 was received from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, chairman of the Contact Committee of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar, providing information about the URCM, requesting Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and asking that we sponsor them for membership in the ICRC at the 2009 Assembly.
- 10.2.7.** A letter dated April 24, 2006 was sent to Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang of the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar (URCM) informing him that we decided not to recommend that Synod Smithers 2007 establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the URCM at this time and advising him that his churches should find another sponsor for membership in the ICRC.

### 10.3. Introduction

The CRCA received a request for closer contact and a possible move towards Ecclesiastical Fellowship from the URCM in 2004. Further information was sought to become better acquainted with this so-far unknown federation. The URCM resulted from a split in the Evangelical Free Churches of Myanmar in October 1993. Its constituent assembly was held in March 1995, at which time the UCRM name was officially adopted. The basis of the UCRM is the infallible Word of God as interpreted in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards of 1647.

The federation adopted a Church Order of 112 articles in 2002, a combination of the C.O.'s of Dort and the RCNZ. The federation now numbers 25 churches, divided over three classes and a total membership of 2000 (2005). It has its own Covenant Theological Seminary, offering B.Th and B.Min. studies.

The URCM has formed the Myanmar Reformed Churches Fellowship with three other national federations. Attempts to establish fraternal relations with some other churches, e.g. the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland-vrijgemaakt (GKN) and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have not yet met with success.

The application for membership in the ICRC in 2005 failed on the grounds that the churches are still rather young and have a tendency to fragment on leadership issues and a weakness in sponsorship.

### 10.4. Considerations

Two visits were made to the URCM by representatives of our Dutch sister churches (GKN) and the RCNZ. Information gathered from the reports on these visits (2003 and 2005) verify much of the information as presented above.

A reading of the documents outlining the history, the basis, governance and set-up of the federation gives reason for gratitude for Christ's church-gathering work in this remote area of our world.

Personal contact between Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang (founder and president of the URCM) and Rev. San Lui and the CanRC delegate to the ICRC conference in Pretoria, S.A. confirm the sincerity and urgent desire for establishing closer relations and assistance in leadership training in the Reformed faith and doctrine.

The decisions of the GKN and RCNZ to hold off on extending the offer of fraternal relations should caution our federation which has little intimate information on the overall church situation in far-away

Myanmar and so prevent a relationship which may not prove to be very meaningful.

## 10.5. Recommendations

The Committee recommends that Synod decide:

- 10.5.1. To deem the URCM worthy of our prayerful support;
- 10.5.2. To monitor the Myanmar situation through the churches (GKN and RCNZ) which are presently involved with the contact and development of leadership training of several churches in Myanmar;
- 10.5.3. To decline the request for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and thereby the request to sponsor the federation for membership of the ICRC;
- 10.5.4. To authorize the CRCA to convey Synod's decisions to Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang.

## 11. Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK)

### 11.1. Mandate

Synod Chatham 2004 gave the CRCA the following general mandate:

“To investigate diligently all the requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship outside the Americas” (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art.100, p. 100).

### 11.2. Correspondence

- 11.2.1. We received an e-mail letter dated April 21, 2006 from the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK) requesting Ecclesiastical Fellowship and asking what information they should provide to get a process underway leading to Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- 11.2.2. An e-mail letter dated April 24, 2006 was sent to dr. N.H. Gootjes asking for information about the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK).
- 11.2.3. An e-mail letter dated April 24, 2006 was sent to Rev. W. den Hollander asking for his observations as he visited a congregation of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK).
- 11.2.4. An e-mail letter dated April 24, 2006 was sent to Rev. Heon Soo Kim of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea



(IRCK) in response to his e-mail letter of April 21, 2006 in which his federation of churches expressed the desire for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

### 11.3. Information

Two ministers of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea requested a meeting with our delegates to the ICRC conference in Pretoria, South Africa. Subsequently, Rev. C. Van Spronsen and Br. H. Hoogstra, representatives of the CanRC, met with Rev. B. Chung and Rev. H. Kim of the IRCK on Oct. 19, 2005.

The Independent Reformed Church in Korea was started in the early 1960's by Dr. Hong Chun Kim. Unhappy with the direction in which the Presbyterian churches in Korea were heading, he decided to head off on his own so he could preach the whole counsel of God. This also provided the opportunity to escape the influences of the ecumenical movements of the World Council of Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches at first, and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod later on.

From the early beginnings, the IRCK has been based on the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, along with the ecumenical creeds. While the Belgic Confession is highly honoured, it has not been formally adopted as one of the standards. The denomination is governed according to the principles contained in both the Church Order of Dort as well as the Westminster Standards as set forth in its Constitution. The IRCK has its own songbook, which contains 133 hymns, composed by the late Dr. H. C. Kim, while psalms in the Genevan tune settings are being translated into Korean presently.

The denomination is rather small: there are four churches with a total membership of approximately 550 people. There are five ministers; three were trained at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, one at Hapdong in Korea and one was admitted on Art. 8. Asked why they are not part of the PCK (established in 1907), they responded that the confessional differences keep them separated. They are certainly well aware of the standards and principles of the Canadian Reformed Churches through the contacts with the late Dr. J. Faber, Dr. N. H. Gootjes, and others. The IRCK conducts missionary activity among the Koreans in the Toronto, ON area.

The IRCK stresses Reformed education to lay a strong foundation for its churches. Many books and articles by Canadian Reformed people have been translated into the Korean language (e.g. K. Deddens, R. Faber, F.G. Oosterhoff, C. VanDam, K. Sikkema, T.M.P. VanderVen, N. H. Gootjes) for study required of their teachers and

for parents. Support for the development of Reformed thinking is also promoted through leadership training for office bearers and teachers by one of the deputies of the FRCA.

#### **11.4. Considerations**

The IRCK may be new to the members of our federation, but contact with professors and ministers of the CanRC has been ongoing, as well as participation of IRCK members in Reformed educational endeavours. The denomination has introduced itself at the last two ICRC meetings.

The desire to be faithful churches of our Lord becomes evident in the oral and written communications and printed materials produced by the IRCK. The Reformed basis, the Church-orderly organization, and the emphasis on Reformed education demonstrate a strong commitment to live according to Biblical principles.

The CRCA has obtained oral and written information regarding the IRCK from one of their pastors as well as from others who are very familiar with this denomination. Other requests for endorsement are still awaited.

#### **11.5. Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod Smithers decide:

- 11.5.1. Not to accept their request for sister-church relations, but to wait until more information has become available;
- 11.5.2. To ask the CRCA to relay this to the IRCK and to maintain contact with the denomination.

### **12. General Mandate and Budget**

#### **12.1. Mandate**

Synod Chatham decided to give the CRCA the following general mandate (*Acts*, Article 100, 5.4, pp.100-101):

- 12.1.1.** To investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship outside the Americas;
- 12.1.2.** To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Assemblies, Synods, or meetings of other churches outside the Americas;
- 12.1.3.** To serve Synod 2007 with a report with suitable recommendations, to be sent to the churches six months prior to the next General Synod.

## 12.2. Correspondence

- 12.2.1.** An e-mail dated December 21, 2003 was received from Rev. Adriaan Swarts of the Afrikaans Protestant Church, requesting “ecumenical discussions.”
- 12.2.2.** An e-mail dated June 15, 2004 was sent to Rev. Adriaan Swarts, directing him to take up contact with the FRCSA.
- 12.2.3.** A letter dated March 8, 2004 was sent to all Councils/ Consistories of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, requesting prayer for the FCS and the FCS (C) (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 43, Recommendation 5.4.2); requesting prayer for the situation in the Netherlands in the hope that the Reformed Churches (Liberated) and the group that departed will, by God’s grace, come to reconciliation (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 44, Recommendation 5.4.5); recommending the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of financial assistance to aid them with their extensive mission work and in their labours among concerned members in other church federations (*Acts Chatham 2004*, Art. 33, Recommendation 5.2.1).
- 12.2.4.** A credential dated January 2004 was received from the GKN for Rev. R.C. Janssen and drs. K. Wezeman, delegates to Synod Chatham 2004.
- 12.2.5.** A credential dated April 2004 was received from the GKN for Prof. Dr. G. Kwakkel.
- 12.2.6.** A credential dated July 20, 2004 was received from the GKN for Rev. R.C. Janssen.
- 12.2.7.** A credential dated October 2004 was received from the GKN for Rev. J. Plug.
- 12.2.8.** A credential dated November 8, 2004 was received from the FRCA for Rev. C. Bouwman.
- 12.2.9.** A credential dated November 8, 2004 was received from the FRCA for Rev. I. Wildeboer.
- 12.2.10.** A credential dated December 29, 2003 was issued for Rev. K. Jonker.
- 12.2.11** A credential dated February 4, 2004 was issued for Rev. R.J. Eikelboom.
- 12.2.12** A credential dated July 27, 2004 was issued for Rev. S. ‘t Hart.
- 12.2.13.** A credential dated September 27, 2004 was issued for Rev. C. Bosch.
- 12.2.14.** A letter dated November 15, 2004 was sent to br. Gerry VanderSluis, treasurer of the General Fund, with the assessment for the ICRC membership and requesting that he pay this.
- 12.2.15.** The *Acts of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland 2004* was received in January 2005.

- 12.2.16.** A credential dated March 2005 was issued for br. H.E. Hoogstra and Rev. J. Huijgen as fraternal delegates to Synod Amersfoort 2005 of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN).
- 12.2.17.** A credential dated March 2005 was issued for br. H.E. Hoogstra and Rev. C. VanSpronsen as delegates to the ICRC 2005 at Pretoria, South Africa.
- 12.2.18.** A credential dated March 14, 2005 was issued for br. W. Pleiter, authorizing him to meet with the FRCA's Deputies for Relations with Other Churches while on a trip to Australia in 2005.
- 12.2.19.** A credential dated March 2005 was given to br. A. Scholtens and Rev. A. Souman, stating that the CRCA had requested these brothers to gather information on Reformed churches while in Timor.
- 12.2.20.** A credential dated May 11, 2005 was given to Dr. C. Van Dam, stating that the CRCA had requested Dr. Van Dam to serve as a fraternal delegate at the FRCSA Synod 2005 and to speak to that assembly on its behalf.
- 12.2.21.** An e-mail dated August 20, 2005 was received from the Evangelical Reformed Ministries Sri Lanka.
- 12.2.22.** A letter dated August 23, 2005 was received from the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States with two enclosed position papers, one adopted by the 258<sup>th</sup> Synod and the other adopted by the 259<sup>th</sup> Synod held in May 2005.
- 12.2.23.** A credential dated September 26, 2005 was issued for br. H.A. Berends, indicating that the CRCA has invited him to participate in the private discussions with representatives of other churches about ecclesiastical matters of mutual interest and concern that will be co-ordinated by br. Hoogstra and Rev. VanSpronsen while at the ICRC Pretoria 2005.
- 12.2.24.** A credential dated September 26, 2005 was issued for Dr. A.J. de Visser (same as for br. Berends above).
- 12.2.25.** In September 2005, the study paper on the divergences between Presbyterian and Reformed confessions and church polity was sent to Dr. A.J. de Visser.
- 12.2.26.** A credential dated February 8, 2006 was issued for Rev. D.G.J. Agema.
- 12.2.27.** A credential was issued for br. H.E. Hoogstra and br. H. Leyenhorst as fraternal delegates to the General Synod 2006 of the FRCA.
- 12.2.28.** A credential was issued for br. H.E. Hoogstra and br. H. Leyenhorst, authorizing them to engage in discussion with representatives of the RCNZ while on a stopover in New Zealand.
- 12.2.29.** A credential dated May 31, 2006 was issued for Rev. R.E. Pot.

### 12.3. "... investigate diligently all the requests received ..."

The Committee would like to draw attention to what Synod 1998 said regarding the scope and nature of the Committee's work. Before 1998, the CRCA was responsible for all contacts outside the federation, both in the Americas and in the rest of the world. Synod 1998 brought about a restructuring, creating the CCCA (for the Americas) alongside the CRCA (now for overseas contacts). Synod 1998 considered

#### Consideration B.

"The CRCA is correct when it suggests that it would seem more realistic and responsible for our sister churches to concentrate their efforts on establishing relations with faithful Reformed churches in their parts of the world and for the Canadian Reformed Churches to do the same in North and South America."

#### Consideration C.

"Restructuring the work of the CRCA should not detract from our ecumenical calling. Therefore Synod upholds the consideration of Synod Lincoln 1992, Article 128 III D, namely that 'a regional approach towards contact with other churches does not exclude the worldwide calling, and cannot avoid worldwide contacts, although by reason of proximity, resources and other practical factors, priority should be given to the ecumenical calling in the church's home environment.'"

Synod 1998 then gave the following description of the work of the CRCA: "This Committee will continue functioning as the present Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (that is those outside of North and South America) with whom we presently have a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship." Further, Synod 1998 stated: "A request for contact will be followed up in consultation with a sister-church in the part of the world from which the request originates."

The Committee understands by this that the mandate (of Synod Chatham 2004) to "investigate diligently all requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship" must be guided by the good principle that we allow the sister churches in various parts of the world to do their work as it pertains to churches in their region who are seeking ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRCs. If the sister churches do intend to enter into a third party relationship, then it would come to our attention, since the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship provide for this. It would not be prudent for the CRCA to "investigate diligently" what the sister churches can do much better and ought to

do first. This approach honors our present sister-church relations, and acknowledges realistically the limits of the CRCA.

It should also be said that a good amount of soberness and humility ought to govern our ecumenical relations. That Christ Jesus knows his churches worldwide, and that his churches know him who is the only Savior and Head, is the essence of the church and the local churches. It is not essential or required that we in our corner of the world know all of Christ's churches worldwide. Nor should we inadvertently be conveying the idea that unless we have ecclesiastical fellowship with a church somewhere in the world ("unless we officially know them and they know us") it cannot be Christ's church. Putting too much emphasis on the goal of ecclesiastical fellowship around the globe may certainly give the impression that we think we must know the churches as Christ knows them and they must know us as they know Christ. Distant ecclesiastical fellowships may be useful and helpful but even then to a limited extent and in different degrees. It may be necessary to reflect on what it is that we seek to accomplish with multiple worldwide ecclesiastical fellowships. What exactly do the churches see as the 'worldwide calling' (Synod 1992)? How is that measured? At what point will we acknowledge that we have limits, and that we are taking on ever growing responsibilities which are increasingly beyond our grasp? The catholicity of the church is a beautiful thing to confess, precisely because Christ is the Head of the church who can oversee it all from his heavenly throne. We do not have, nor do we need to have, such oversight. It is also important to realize that difficulties beyond our understanding and beyond our ability to investigate and oversee, as well as simple communication difficulties, can arise which put question marks on certain relations of ecclesiastical fellowship. It is difficult to deny that there are relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship for which the question can legitimately be asked: but what does ecclesiastical fellowship really *mean*?

It is the Committee's request that Synod Smithers consider carefully the limits of what we can and should do as churches in the world, and that Synod not mandate something as general as "investigate diligently all requests . . . ."

Further, the Committee requests Synod to realize the limited resources of the Committee when it comes to investigating and evaluating issues and challenges in our present sister-church relations. It has become clear that where there is strife and schism in sister-churches abroad, the causes of the strife and schism are various difficult issues, each of which may warrant a book-size report or a whole separate study committee in the sister-churches. We, however, are but one Committee charged with overseeing the whole state of affairs in all of the sister-churches. It is the Committee's

opinion that when there are various issues (church/court-proceedings in Scotland, hymns in Holland, along with divorce-remarriage, Sabbath-Sunday) that Synod Smithers wants to consider more carefully in the relations with sister-churches, Synod should not look to the CRCA to study such topics and issues. Some other solution ought to be sought for such in-depth studies.

#### **12.4. Committee makeup and workings**

The Committee needs to alert Synod Smithers to the fact that the Committee has been a man short for about a year, since brother Wayne Pleiter moved to Australia. We are thankful for the work which brother Pleiter contributed on the Committee. We were recently made aware of the decision of Synod 1992 which states (in Article 124, p.86): "Synod decide that the Committees shall have the right, in case a vacancy occurs, to bring the membership up to original strength in order to fulfill their mandate." However, we decided that since we were at the report-writing stage when we learned of this, we would just wait for Synod to appoint a replacement to bring the committee back to full strength.

Since the time that Synod Chatham appointed the Committee, two members have moved from the West to the East of the continent, meaning that meetings have taken place entirely by phone. So far this has worked sufficiently, but it has proven to be far from optimal. The Committee would like Synod Smithers to consider two important aspects in determining appointments to the Committee: 1. a *regional* Committee should be considered the priority, with members living in close proximity to one another; but 2. *continuity* on the Committee is also important. The Committee would like to make suggestions to Synod for appointments to the Committee which would reflect the above two considerations. The Committee will do that in an attached letter for Synod.

#### **12.5. "... respond ... to specific requests ... to attend Assemblies ..."**

The Committee was able to respond to certain requests to attend Assemblies and Synods and meetings, as the Committee saw necessary (see elsewhere in this report). It did become evident that the Committee could take real advantage of those opportunities where many churches (sister churches and churches requesting ecclesiastical fellowship) are gathered in their representatives and delegates in one place. For example, the ICRC in Pretoria as well as the Synod of the GKN proved excellent opportunities to meet with the brotherhood of foreign churches. It is the Committee's opinion that such occasions in particular should be used to the maximum potential.

With regards to actually attending the assemblies of individual federations of sister-churches the Committee weighed what would be possible and feasible along with what was desirable and necessary. In this the Committee is more-or-less left to itself to sort out what to do and what not to do, where to spend money and where not to spend money. For the Committee it is not always so clear what the churches may find the best use of time and the most responsible use of funds. Synod Smithers might consider an approach which we learned from the habits of sister-church federations: that Synod decide ahead of time where the churches would like to have the CRCA visit and attend. The Committee could also make recommendations to Synod in this regard if the Committee saw a specific need. With this method, it is not left up to a few Committee members, but the churches through Synod would direct the Committee where to attend in the next three years.

## **12.6. Budget**

In 1992, at Synod Lincoln, the CRCA was mandated to submit "a financial statement and budget" to Synod 1995. Before this time, the CRCA had not submitted a financial statement and budget to the Synods. Synod 1992 was the first time, and it turns out to be the only time, that the Committee was required to submit finances. Synod 1995 did not repeat this mandate for the CRCA, nor did any subsequent Synod. However, the CRCA, since 1995, has nevertheless submitted a financial statement and budget to each subsequent Synod, even though not mandated to do so. The Synods also dealt with the CRCA finances each time. It should be noted that after 1998 there was a restructuring of the CRCA, with the CCCA being brought into existence. This restructuring would certainly have impacted the financial aspect of the CRCA's work, and, presumably, changed whatever budgetary concerns there were in 1992.

It is the opinion of the Committee that since the present mandate does not require a financial statement and budget, none need to be submitted to Synod Smithers. It should also be noted that no other Synod committee is required to submit such material. Which raises the question: would the matter of the CRCA's finances in particular be an ongoing concern for the churches? There is no evidence of this. Since no subsequent Synod after 1992 specified financial reporting as part of the mandate for the Committee (and the Committee saw a restructuring in 1998), the Committee concludes that the concern must have fallen away.

As far as the Committee's financial requirements are concerned, the only fixed amount is the ICRC fees/dues in the amount of \$5000US.



## 12.7.Recommendations

The Committee recommends that Synod Smithers:

### 12.7.1. Charge the CRCA:

12.7.1.1. To consider requests for ecclesiastical fellowship from churches abroad in direct consultation with, and deferring to the judgment of (in accordance with the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship re third party relationships), a sister-church in the part of the world from which the request originates.

12.7.1.2. To investigate diligently those requests which come from places which are in closer proximity to our churches than to sister-churches abroad.

12.7.1.3. To respond, only if necessary, to specific requests made to attend Assemblies, Synods, or meetings of other churches outside the Americas, besides those visits specifically mandated by General Synod.

12.7.1.4. To serve Synod 2010 with a report with suitable recommendations, to be sent to the churches six months prior to the next General Synod.

12.7.2 Make appointments and reappointments which factor in the necessity for a regional committee and the importance of continuity, and maintain the number of the committee members at six.

Respectfully submitted,  
H.E. Hoogstra  
J. Huijgen  
H. Leyenhorst  
C.J. VanderVelde (convenor)  
W.M. Wielenga

**Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad  
of the Canadian Reformed Churches**

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October 19, 2006

To: General Synod Smithers 2007 of the Canadian Reformed Churches

**Addendum to report to Synod Smithers from the  
Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA)**

Esteemed brothers,

Shortly after the October 1 deadline for sending our report to Premier Printing for printing, we received correspondence from the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Hersteld) [the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored)] offering further explanation of the so-called liberation that took place in 2003. We received a cover letter and three documents: (1) a response to the brochure *Not Beyond What is Written* of the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated)), entitled *Do not take words away from this book of prophecy; Answer to the brochure 'Not beyond what is written'*; (2) a translation of Synod Marienberg's answer to Synod Amersfoort's appeal to the seceded brothers; (3) Synod Marienberg's decisions with respect to repealing certain decisions of Synods Ommen 1993 to Zuidhorn 2002/2003.

The stated purpose of this package of information is to help us "...judge the lawfulness of the recent Liberation" (*Do not take words away...*, p. 23). Furthermore, "We therefore hope that you will accept us as the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and will continue the sister church relations with our churches" (*Do not take words away...*, p. 23). It is somewhat surprising that they continue to appeal for recognition as sister churches without sending us an invitation to their Synod Marienberg and without sending us an agenda informing us of what this Synod would be dealing with. Having read the above-mentioned documents, we conclude that they do not change our assessment as presented in our report.

There is one matter, however, that we would still like to mention. The GKH raises the matter of Scripture criticism within the GKN by referring to a recent book, *Woord op Schrift*, as well as some other writings. On these points we cannot interact with the GKH because we have followed the

conventional approach that committees do not study books, magazines, and newspapers but only official *Acts*. In taking this approach, we have simply continued past practice of the CRCA. However, when substantial criticism is about certain writings, we are perhaps short-changing ourselves and our federation when we exclude such writings from our focus. At the same time, we realize that studying such literature would add a new dimension to the work of the CRCA. Furthermore, it would raise the analogous issue of whether we also ought to be studying the hymns which have been selected by the GKN and about which the GKH raises criticisms as to content. Engaging in the latter exercise would be an impracticable exercise for the CRCA.

In other words, we readily admit that we have not investigated some of the matters which the GKH raises as grounds for their so-called liberation, for the reason that no such specific mandate was given to the CRCA.

Brotherly greetings,

C.J. VanderVelde, convenor  
H.E. Hoogstra  
J. Huijgen  
H. Leyenhorst  
W.M. Wielenga

## APPENDICES

### ADDRESS TO SYNOD AMERSFOORT, MAY 28, 2005

Mr. Chairman,  
 Members of Synod,  
 Fellow Delegates,  
 Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

“Europe is the most secular continent on earth.....An American Baptist missionary website puts things in perspective. “Western Europe”, it states, “is.....one of the world’s most difficult mission fields. Most missiologists compare it to the Muslim-held Middle East when it comes to responsiveness to the gospel.”” These are the words of Timothy Garton Ash in *Guardian Weekly*, May 5, 2005, and showing his true colours, he adds, “*Voltaire* would be proud.”. This commentator makes the following observations worthy of our attention: “Atheists should welcome the election of Pope Benedict XVI. For this aged, scholarly, conservative, uncharismatic Bavarian theologian will surely hasten precisely the de-christianisation of Europe that he aims to reverse. At the end of his papacy, Europe may be as un-christian as it was when St. Benedict, one of the patron saints of Europe, founded his pioneering monastic order, the Benedictines, 15 centuries ago. Christian Europe: from Benedict to Benedict. RIP” (Rest in Peace, oftewel, Rust in Vrede)

One would look in vain for a report or comment on the happenings here at Synod Amersfoort. The developments are not worthy of attention and mention, since they do not affect global issues, they are insignificant in the view of the world. Yet, the very fact that magazines enjoying world-wide readership still pay attention to religious matters has implications for Reformed people. The article quoted above exhibits a bias toward conservative Christianity. Anything which holds back progressivism in a church is suspect. This clearly demonstrates how intolerant are those who claim to preach tolerance. It also characterizes the current spiritual climate of continental Europe, the climate in which your churches exist. Your Canadian and American Reformed brothers and sisters empathize with you. It is our prayer that our gracious God will strengthen and keep you steadfast in your battle for faithfulness.

The travel from Vancouver to Amersfoort takes about 12 hours. It is half way around the world, yet in today’s opinion, that is of little relevance. The global village we live in has an effect on people around the world. This holds true for political and social affairs, but also, the issues and challenges that affect believers are similar for Reformed church-goers in Bedum and Burlington. The philosophy of the age, post-modernism, the temptations and trials, the identity problems, the influence of the modern media, the liberalization of the mores and lifestyle choices, all these are experienced by the citizens of every first-world nation on this earth. As a result, many of the agenda topics which require your attention at Synod Amersfoort, are the same subjects which demand consideration and study in our churches and at major assemblies in

our federation, either at the present or in the future. The close contact between the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt and the Canadian/American Reformed Churches remains strong through intercontinental travel, the exchange of ideas through printed material and internet access. Even the low cost of telephone calls ensures that everyone can be well-informed about matters of mutual interest within a short time.

It causes us great sadness to observe the schism which has rent your churches in 2003. The seeds of dissent, according to one side of the conflict, were sown years ago in some of the synodical decisions which were adopted or recommended. These decisions were used by a number of concerned church members to call for a New Liberation. You have argued not to bind anyone to unscriptural views and interpretations, for you desire to be "*Ecclesia Reformanda*, and be so continually, *semper reformanda*", in the words of your delegates to our Synod Chatham 2004. You are to be commended for your desire to remain Reformed, bound in the unity of faith as expressed in a common scriptural confession. To ensure that Bible-based decisions will be recommended your Synod Zuidhorn gave much of the study into the hands of some 28 committees, "Deputaten" as you call them. These experts have done a lot of work over the last number of years and have served you well with sometimes extensive reports. We appreciate your wish to be faithful and call in this help to determine your vision and direction in the light of God's Word.

Brothers, via your BBK, you have addressed yourselves to us in an unusual manner. The brochure *Not Beyond What Is Written* was forwarded to address many allegations made by the breakaway Vrijgemaakten, and likely in reaction to the articles of the "Group of *Gereformeerde Blijven Eight*". The last few years have been rather difficult in the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt. The unrest, the agitation and the split caused you to call for Verootmoediging (a period of Prayer and Humility). There seems to be no evidence that matters improved since, nor that the positions changed. Synod Chatham 2004 urged the American and Canadian Reformed Churches to make intercession on your behalf before God's throne of grace to work healing and restoration. We may assure you that we continue to plead for the renewal of "the peace in Jerusalem", to allow the brothers of the same House to live harmoniously together.

While inner strife takes its toll, we pray that your attention will remain focussed as well on those that disappear off the radar screen at the other end. These are the members who your delegates referred to as the "twice maybe three times that number who leave our churches to the 'left'". Often the aversion to the Church's teachings, as these are found in the Holy Scriptures and summarized in the Reformed Confessions, are felt to be restricting walls. They desire greater freedom in pursuing a manner and place of worship where fewer constraints are placed against the expression of emotions, personal experiences, individualism, their choice of lifestyle, entertainment, and the like, or even a total denial of God. The booklet *Dankbaar Gereformerd*, prepared by one of the GKNv members, Dr.W. Nieboer, eminently describes the

dangers assailing the faithful today and pleads for equipping the saints by means of thorough Biblical and catechetical instruction. Even our Lord Jesus Christ experienced the departure of those who were not pleased with His message. (John 6:60 ff). May your preaching and teaching remain concentrated on the Will of God, as our Saviour told His followers when He spoke the famous passage on the Vine and the Branches. (John 15:1 – 8)

We have been delegated to bring you the greetings of the Brotherhood on the North-American continent. Synod Chatham has also assigned us the tasks of addressing several matters that you will be dealing with:

(5.4.1) We must convey to you our concern with regard to the proportion of the number of psalms and hymns. We thankfully note that Synod Zuidhorn decided that the Psalms remain the primary source. Since we are aware that the selection process is still ongoing, we urge you to keep in mind the importance of praising God with the inspired words of Scripture, which are profitable for all things.

(5.4.2) We are studying the results of the deputyship Fourth Commandment and Sunday, (now known as *Zondag, een HEERlijke Dag*) and must report to the churches; we will continue to do so, as we follow your deliberations.

(5.4.3) We need to continue the discussion on your New Marriage form, bearing in mind Considerations 4.5 and 4.6 and report to the churches. As a result we have corresponded with your deputies regarding the tasks of husband and wife, and the phrase, “als de Here daarvoor de mogelijkheden geeft”, (“when the Lord provides the possibility thereto”), referring to the gift of children in marriage. Your deputies recently sent us material, to which we will respond in due time.

Additionally, we have also been charged to seek clarity on the Nieuwe Vrijmaking of 2003, to research its legitimacy, monitor further developments, and make recommendations to our upcoming Synod Smithers, 2007. Consequently, we have met with their representatives for discussion, and intend to further investigate the background of the split and the continued unrest that continues to discourage your congregations. (The numbering refers to the Acts of Synod Chatham 2005, p.42/3.)

Brothers, together we face the same struggle, since we all contend for the faith that was once delivered to all the saints. There are several items on your agenda, for which reports have been written and which will affect the way you desire to resolve the issues that are living within your federation as well as in ours. We think of the recommendations for Divorce and Remarriage (especially the ‘new hermeneutics’), Liturgy (particularly the greater freedoms of the local churches in regard to the character of the second service), Church Unity, Government Support for the Theological University, and Preparation General Synod (especially the increased role of the deputies). Some of these matters have been decided, while most of these still need further discussion. It is our prayer that God grant you the wisdom and insight you require to exercise the responsibility with which you have been charged to guide the federation under your care to His Honour and Glory.

We pray that the words of Hebrews 13: 20, 21 may guide you in your deliberations:

“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.”

For the Canadian Reformed Churches,  
Rev. J. Huijgen,  
Br. H.E. Hoogstra.

### **ADDRESS TO SYNOD PRETORIA – FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA, MAY 2005**

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Brothers in the Lord:

It gives me great pleasure to address this Synod on behalf of our Canadian Reformed Churches. Although we had hoped to have an official delegate present (in the person of Br. H. E. Hoogstra), your initial scheduling difficulties have prevented him from doing double duty, attending in Amersfoort and Pretoria simultaneously. He hopes to meet with your BBK representatives in October instead, during the ICRC Conference, the Lord willing.

In Amos 3: 3 we read, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” The prophet here refers to the Covenant which binds Israel to Jahweh. It is the same unity that ties us as federations. Our desire as churches, though continents apart, to live according to the Word of God, the adopted Confessions and the Church Order have led to the mutual recognition of faithfulness and its expression in Ecclesiastical Fellowship. It is this sister church relationship which allows me to be in your midst today to bring both our heartfelt greetings and encourage you to remain obedient in your observance and practice of God’s demands.

Our faithful God guides and blesses his children who desire to keep His commands. The benefits the Lord has bestowed on you have not escaped our attention. There may not be as much direct contact between our federations as we desire, e.g. through travel, publications due to distance and language barriers, we have observed these benefits as related in the Acts of your previous synods. God has given you growth by granting the institution of a new and the inclusion of another church in your federation. The contact with the “verontrustes”, the concerned in other churches has increased, al-

though so far, it has proven difficult to convince them to join with you. Your wish to establish your own Theological Training has come to fruition. Presently its continuity is at a critical stage; this is perhaps partly due to the appointment of your Dr. A. J. DeVisser to our College in Hamilton. Yet, your act of faith has already borne some fruit for your churches, as is evidenced by the graduation of a number of young men, who having been examined, could be declared eligible for call and now serve in various capacities. Your extensive mission work, especially among various indigenous groups, is an example and encouragement for us, especially when we consider your limited membership. It is truly exciting to see your light burning brightly in this nation of your choice and birth. Our previous synod has recognized this, and as a result, decided: to maintain the existing Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the existing rules, to recommend to the churches to support you financially for your work in the mission field and among the concerned, and to invite the Board of Governors at the Theological College in Hamilton to seek ways and means to offer assistance and academic support to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa for their theological training.

Our federation, like yours, desires to be faithful in its service of our God and King. We may briefly recall the blessings our Lord has bestowed on the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. From small beginnings after the immigration waves following World War II, we have grown to 49 congregations spread across Canada and four in the United States of America. These churches are divided into eight Classes, and the total membership at the end of 2004 stood at 15,942. (Yearbook 2005) The churches are served by 43 ministers in active service, most of whom have been educated at our Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario (established in 1969).

Mission work is actively pursued at home and abroad, as evidenced by the work among the Aborigines (Natives) in Smithers, British Columbia, the new Chinese Reformed Church in the Lower Fraser Valley of BC, and the Streetlight Ministries in Hamilton, Ontario. The establishment of the Igreja Reformadas do Brasil, combined with the continuing combined efforts of the Canadian Reformed and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (vrijgemaakt) in that country, as well as the work in Papua New Guinea, and that in Timor, Indonesia under the auspices of the Church of Smithville, Ontario may be mentioned.

While we have no churches in the French-speaking part of Canada, good contact and support is maintained through the efforts of the Church at Owen Sound, Ontario, with the Eglise Reformee du Quebec, a group of churches with whom we hope to establish a stronger bond in the future, the Lord willing. Presently we are pursuing a three-phase federative unity process with the United Reformed Churches of North America, a federation predominantly initiated by concerned members who left the Christian Reformed Church. We have also established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church of the United States and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on our continent, in addition to a number of such relationships with other federations across the world, most of which you maintain as well.



Esteemed delegates, we wish to encourage you with the words of the apostle Peter, as we find them in 1Peter 5:10, "And the God of all grace, Who called you to His eternal glory in Christ,, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen." May our gracious God grant you the wisdom and insight to deal with the matters before you at Synod Pretoria!

The brotherhood in Canada greets you and prays that God's continued blessings may rest upon the Vrije Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika.

Dr. C. Van Dam

## **THE CAPE TOWN MISSIONS**

A dove flies up into the tree, carrying a twig to build a nest. I rub my eyes and wonder, but suddenly it dawns on me that my eyes are not deceiving me. This is South Africa. It is spring; for the dove it is time to build its nest. Being half way around the world during the month of October also brings along the reversal of the seasons. I should have known!

Three hours earlier my plane touched down at the Cape Town airport. It was a long haul, flying via Calgary, waiting for eight long hours in Frankfurt and spending the second night in a row on a plane. Being delegated to represent our church federation at the ICRC in Pretoria should be an experience well worth it. Andre and Gwen van den Berg and family, who have hosted many foreign guests in the past, provide a home away from home while I receive the opportunity to become acquainted with the Mission work on the Cape Flats.

Table Mountain rises up beside us. Most of its renowned level summit is hidden by swirling clouds, which dissipate within the next while. The Indian Ocean stretches out in front of us, and below we can still see the walkway where we watched the waves only half an hour ago. Robben Island, the notorious prison where Nelson Mandela was confined for almost a quarter-century, is barely visible from here. The countless suburbs of the city nestled in the valleys and the promontories against the foothills, stretch as far as the eye can see. The Dutch influence in the country's history is keenly felt while touring the area. Where else do you find names like Oranjezicht and Vredehoek, Voortrekker and Strandfontein Roads or Stellenbosch and Bredasdorp to grace suburbs, highways and towns? The architecture is even more amazing! Many of the wineries, represented by grand white-washed estates, are reminiscent of the building construction you hardly ever see in The Netherlands. A visit to Groot Constantia allows for a close-up experience of the age and size of the structures occupied for one of South Africa's famous export products.

Mrs. Marietjie Breytenbach and her children pick me up for church the next morning. A service in Belhar, led by Mr. Carl van Wijk, a theological student,

is conducted in Afrikaans. The language's Dutch roots are easily recognizable, yet the enunciation requires close concentration to understand what is being said. The liturgy is very much along the line we've grown accustomed to and most tunes used for the psalms are the same and therefore familiar. The sermon is on Acts 26 : 17 and 18, Paul's testimony before King Agrippa regarding his calling to preach the Word to the Gentiles. During the exegesis I cannot help but wonder about God's grace and mercy, the very fact that here, halfway around the world, I am able to listen to the proclamation of God's Word together with people of a totally different race and background. Whatever divides us in colour and language, is bridged by the knowledge of being part of Christ's universal church, members of congregations and federations in ecclesiastical fellowship! The church is served by indigenous elders and deacons, and while it is seemingly independent, Belhar is still under the auspices of the Belleville consistory, which sets the goals and vision for its future.

A few white visitors have joined this exclusively Coloured congregation of 90 members for this morning's worship service. The Afrikaans proves to be a bit of a barrier in communicating with the members in either Dutch or English afterwards. Instead pictures will need to convey the friendliness and experience of brotherhood; finding subjects to pose for these presents no problem at all.

The Church at Leiden is very small: only five members make up this congregation. The pastor, Rev. Hannes Breytenbach is still instructing the congregants when we arrive. The service and instruction takes place in a small shed, behind the home of Sister Jessica Koks. Not only is she happy to offer this space for the proclamation of the Word, she also invites us to view her pride and joy, her home. It is heartening to see how grateful she is with this standard concrete-block building, measuring no more than fifteen by ten feet, serving as living room, kitchen and bedroom for her family. A small corner has been sectioned off to provide the privacy of a bathroom. Never mind that rain will penetrate the walls during a storm and mess up the possessions inside; her family is well provided for with this government-appointed gift.

Rev. Charles Nicholson is greeting the departing members of his mission congregation of Wesbank when we arrive there. Several stop to greet and speak with the Breytenbachs and smile broadly when they are introduced to me and told of my purpose for being there. They proudly show their almost new worship center, erected and maintained through the gifts of several Dutch sister churches. The congregation counts 51 members, predominantly women and children, numbering only five men among its membership. Imagine what that means for filling the church offices of elder and deacon! Wesbank is a somewhat more prosperous suburb of the townships. Many of the church members are employed, in spite of the 90% unemployment rate of the area. Many families can be characterized as single-parent, mostly mother-headed units. Grandmothers often provide the mainstay in such situations; while mothers find employment to earn a living, grandma attends to the needs of her daughters' children. This intergenerational support also demonstrates how little can be expected in financial contributions for the upkeep of the church premises. Yet the sense to take responsibility for this is slowly developing.

The pastor relates his work here as missionary and cites the assistance provided by the three theological students who are serving on the Cape Flats. These are being equipped for their tasks by the three ministers of this area as well as others from inland congregations who fly in on a regular basis to instruct them in the required subject material. This style of educational endeavour was resumed after the short life of the Theological College, established in 1999, had to be dissolved for lack of manpower and resources. A new set-up is contemplated as you may recall from Prof. Dr. VanDam's articles in *Clarion* Vol.54, #17,18 &19 . Synod Pretoria 2005 will reconvene in March 2005 D.V. to make the final decisions.

The only white congregation in the Cape Town area is the Church of Belville, established in 1952. Rev. Eugene Viljoen serves this congregation of 355 members. In spite of the distance that separates this church and its Mission points from the others in the federation, it flourishes under the guidance of its Lord. The Gereformeerde Laerskool of Belville shares the property, and through its educational program supports and completes the triangle of home school and church instruction. The evening worship service is like any other in our Canadian and American Reformed Churches, save for the language and the substitution of different tunes in the Genevan psalter to eliminate some of the more difficult melodies. Towards the end of the service the greetings from our federation are conveyed to the brotherhood. It is simply amazing yet hard to imagine: while we are gathered here for the evening worship, the morning services have commenced in the westernmost provinces and state of our countries. The Lord of His Church is pleased by the devotion exercised in these regions, geographically so far apart, yet one in fellowship and dedication!

It is heartening to see how the effort of this community, with the combined support of a number of the Dutch churches, has resulted in the establishment of the three preaching centers on the Cape Flats. It is also understandable that the recognition of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), the so-called Doppe Kerken as sister-churches at Synod Amersfoort 2005 by the GKNv have filled the members of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa with a degree of apprehension. To date they have refused to extend the offer of Ecclesiastical Fellowship to this denomination on the basis of its contextualized hermeneutics and resultant unscriptural practices of some of its member churches and ministers, as well as the way the GKSA has dealt with these matters. Hopefully this new relationship will not jeopardize the existing support from the Dutch Liberated Churches to finance the flourishing VGKSA missionary activities. Under the Headship of its Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, the winds of different opinions may whip the waves; yet the course of the 1900-member FRCSA (VGKSA) is stayed. His command "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt.28:19) remains the same. To this the FRCSA desires to remain faithful; after all God will provide! Soli Deo Gloria.

H.E. Hoogstra

## **SOUTH AFRICA – Inland Mission**

Speedily the silver-coloured car makes its way up the hill. At the top it comes to a halt before a large speed bump located near a large stop sign, rather than a set of traffic lights. A few street hawkers descend on the vehicle, trying to sell their wares: newspapers, fruit, bottled water, cold pop and the like. They are waved away and the car continues on its way to KwaMhlanga, a planned new government center, until in 1995 changes in policy left both its new stadium and the high rise offices unoccupied. Now the township looks like any other, crude dwellings, some fashioned from corrugated steel drums or other cheap building materials; others the one-room brick government housing, skirted by the wealthier suburbs. Here the Mukhanyo Theological University is located, where predominantly black students receive their training for the ministry. Started by the Free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the institution has expanded to provide in the needs of other denominations too, including those of our sister churches, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

The five occupants leave the car and enter the building. Soon many of the students file into the chapel to praise God in song, both in the North Sotho language and in English. A word of welcome is extended to the guests, especially Prof. Dr. Gert Kwakkel, who will address the students on 1 Sam. 28. When he reads the passage before he starts his lecture, his audience listens with baited breath. The topic of King Saul's visit to the witch at Endor has relevance for them. From experience they know what it means to deal with the spirit world. Although they themselves are rooted in their Christian principles, they still experience the pressures of overcoming ancestral fears by satisfying familial demands. This passage speaks to them: They recognize the temptation to consult with the spirit of the dead, while dependence on God and His grace frees man from these bonds of human enslavement.

Mrs. Joke Parre, who together with her husband volunteers for De Verre Naaste, takes us to the local hospital. Here we pick up a mother and her daughter who suffers from an advanced stage of AIDS and transport them to the "Nakekela Care Center". It is one of the projects started by the university to provide care to the terminally ill as well as to offer other health services. Often space is rented, for example in a school, and health services are started. These points slowly become the places where the gospel is shared with those who come to have their physical ailment attended to. Under the name "Masi-bambisane", meaning "Let us carry each other's burdens", a number of these small, many six-bed units have been established. They provide complete physical and spiritual care for the sufferers. The government shares in the cost of providing the patients with the required medication and healthy foods. Many of the kitchen staff are HIV positive people whose illness is under control.

Mukhanyo also boasts a large garden and greenhouses to teach the students the art of how to use part of one's property to provide for the family. Even the meals shared at the university result from these efforts. We see the carry-over when we drop off student Thabo Matlaela, who with his family

lives in the small house beside the FRCSA in Shoshanguve North. This church, one of the former mission points where Prof. Dr. A. DeVisser laboured, is since two years ago an independent congregation, served by Rev. P. M. Magagula. Started in 1991, the congregation now numbers 350 members and has several outreach programs. Together with many other ICRC delegates I have the privilege to join them on Sunday, Oct. 16, 2005 in their morning service. We thoroughly enjoy the sermon, translated into English by an interpreter, as well as their manner of praise and worship. The opportunity to greet these brothers and sisters on behalf of the Canadian and American brotherhood is extended and used at the end of the service.

A day school is located on the property as well. It is called "Lesedi La Ditshaba", or "Light for the Nations". How stark this institution contrasts to what we are used to! Two classrooms are located in double-wide steel containers. Imagine the conditions; it is early spring and the temperature hovers around 30\* C! A third room is a wooden shed and three classes are held inside the church building, the space being separated from the other by partial dividers. Not the usual accommodation with which our staffs and students are familiar! The school houses some 70 students and is mainly funded by the churches. One good look inside the buildings reveals the abject poverty under which the project is strained. There are no textbooks, only worn carpet and furnishings; teaching tools and basic equipment are absent and wall decorations demonstrate that teachers must design their own charts and maps. Parental contributions are expected but scarce. If you consider the rate of 90% unemployment in the township, this is not surprising. There is a shortage of Reformed teachers, and as a result, the society needs to employ evangelicals to fill these positions and educate their children.

Rev. Pieter Boon, the missionary who has replaced Dr. A. DeVisser, takes us to the FRCSA of Soshanguve South next. We enter the building after one of the children ready to start catechism instruction from the local pastor, Rev. J. Mhlanga, has unlocked the converted house. Started in 1997, the congregation of approximately 80 members has outgrown this facility. An option has been put on a new property down the street, and this building will be sold off after having been restored to its original state. The intention is to possibly build a hospice at this new location also. Rev. Boon explains that, as a new preaching point is started, the women are often the first to attend. Becoming a Christian enhances the situation for a woman. She will realize she is no longer the chattel of her husband, but may live in the light of the new Life, given in Christ. The position of a man seemingly diminishes when he joins. He can no longer treat his wife in a degrading manner, making his demands, beating her when this suits him or even be unfaithful. As a result, it is often the women who join first. The fact that it often takes much longer before men become members creates the difficulty filling the offices of elder and deacon.

Another preaching point has been set up in Soshanguve South-east. Young people from the church have gone into this newly built area to hand out pamphlets and evangelize. A property has been bought and plans for a

church building and a small hospice are being designed. The house already on the property may serve as a residence for another student for the ministry, Br. John Mahlangu and his wife. The planned care center often helps to gain the trust of the government and the community. Opportunities abound in this fast-growing city of one million residents, a place that resembles the sprawling city of Calgary with its built-up hills and valleys. The difference is the size of these homes and the natural setting of the bosveld which juxtaposes with the suburbs, rather than project a mass of these squatting dwellings as far as the eye can see.

The next stop is at the Block XX preaching point. It is housed in a rondavo, a round building with a grass roof. Approximately 40 members meet here every Sunday, and following the service, many of the congregants enter the side wing of the facility to sing to patients in the “Kagisong Hospice”. This “Place of Renewal” has both a section for female and male AIDS patients. Speaking with some of the patients about their lives and sharing the message of the Gospel only reinforces the seriousness of their earthly condition: most of them will no longer be here in a week’s time! The scourge of AIDS, which is projected to reduce the population of South Africa by 25% over the next few decades, has lowered the average life expectancy to age 37! In this secular society many men are unfaithful and their loose living may be a great danger to their believing wives and families. In addition, the prevalence of rape and incest only increases the danger to falling victim to the disease. What is more, grandparents must often step in to fill the void and care for the orphaned grandchildren. A new society by some Pretoria church members has been established to organize another care center, the “Khotsasthong Hospice” or “Place of Rest Home”. For orphans a foster care service is being considered. Four children are already on the waiting list. The grace of God, revealed through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be channeled into some action to be shared with these unsuspecting victims. This is mercy in action!

H.E. Hoogstra

### **ADDRESS TO SYNOD WEST-KELMSCOTT, AUSTRALIA, JULY 2006**

Mr. Chairman,  
Members of Synod West-Kelmscott,  
Fellow-Delegates,  
Brothers and sisters,

Two months ago your Prime Minister, John Howard, visited our country and addressed the Canadian Parliament. He was only the second Australian high official to do so, following in the steps of Mr. John Curtin in 1944. Both Mr. Howard and our conservative Prime Minister Steven Harper are seen to revel in combating political orthodoxy. One of the most important issues on their agenda was finding an alternative to the Kyoto Pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in fighting climate change. Mr. Howard bluntly told his hearers, “This

is an issue where you have people who are very doctrinaire. They think the only path to environmental salvation is the Kyoto path and we don't hold that view..... No developed country is going to sacrifice a significant amount of [its] economic development and jobs mindlessly or carelessly....." (The Vancouver Sun, May 19,2006, p.A5 and May 20, 2006, p. A10)

How insignificant it seems, that two months later two conservative Canadians are visiting your country and address a gathering of sixteen Australian delegates and approximately ten foreign representatives. A number of interested local church members, some fifty people in all, are assembled to tackle a number of issues you deem of great importance. The cameras are not rolling; not even a correspondent of the *Nederlands Dagblad* neither a representative for *Una Sancta* are here to collect information on the proceedings to email these to their offices. No dissidents are holding up their placards outside the church building. Instead, ignorance of the significance of the discussions and decisions of this assembly are lost on the passers-by. No police and security forces are here for crowd control and to stave off any possible attempt to disrupt the proceedings. Perhaps the best way for the evil one is to prevent publicity to this synodical work and thereby to avoid bringing it to the attention of the common Australian. After all, of what importance is a synod representing a church federation of fewer than 4,000 members in a country of just over 20,000,000 inhabitants!

Brothers, you are here to do the Lord's work, to acknowledge the holiness of His Name and to promote the coming of His Kingdom. Several of the terms your Prime Minister used in his speech: orthodoxy, doctrinaire, salvation and sacrifice, are expressions we know well, and are labels which we Reformed people do not mind to have attached to us. This sets us apart from the liberal mainline and Pentecostal denominations, their forward thinking and approaches to all matters religious. Sometimes we even pride ourselves on this designation, feeling that this judgment on our view of issues is a badge of honour. We should realize though, that our stated position must reflect the Biblical norm of expressing its teachings. The derived rules have to govern the style of our daily living and our congregational regulations and interaction. Gratitude must be the theme of our lives; thankfulness for God choosing us to be His people, indebtedness for the redeeming work of His Son, our Saviour, and delight for the work of the Holy Spirit. There is thus no reason for pride in what we feel we stand for; only confidence in the all-surpassing love of God. Therefore, with the apostle Paul we may encourage you with the words of Phil. 2 :12b, 13 (NIV), "...Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure."

We are happy to be in your midst. It has been a long time since delegates from the Canadian/ American Reformed churches have been "down under" to extend their greetings and participate in the discussions at a synod of your Free Reformed Churches. Br. Harold Leyenhorst and I feel privileged to have been appointed by our Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (CRCA)

to bring you the greetings from our federation. Our churches, like yours, started from small beginnings, following the immigration waves after World War II. Presently we consist of 49 congregations spread across much of Canada and four in the northern United States of America. The federation is divided into eight Classes and the total membership hovers around 16,000. There are 44 ministers in active service, most of whom have been educated at our Theological College in Hamilton. Mission work is undertaken at home and abroad. Rev. Frank Dong, well-known to you; after all you sponsored his pastoral training, labours among the Chinese population in the Vancouver area of Canada. We truly appreciate the close working relationship with the Church of Kelmscott in their sponsorship of his varied tasks. Rev. Colin Macleod was recently installed to work with the aboriginal people of Babine, near Smithers, British Columbia. Street Light Ministries continues its activities in Hamilton, Ontario, in spite of the recent disappointing decline of the call which had signaled its next phase. Other missionaries and fields are found in Brazil - Rev. Ken Wieske, Rev. Bram DeGraaf + a vacancy; in Indonesia - Rev. Edwar Dethan; and in Papua New Guinea – Rev. Stephen 't Hart. ( How come many of these names sound so familiar? you may ask.) Support for the Eglise Reformee du Quebec denomination in our French-speaking Canada is channeled through the Church of Owen Sound, Ontario. Federative unity is being pursued with the United Reformed Churches of North America. Numerous elementary and several secondary schools as well as our own Teachers' College, three homes for the mentally-handicapped and a number of homes for the elderly demonstrate the blessings God has entrusted to our federation.

Our relationship to the United Reformed Churches of North America may be of special interest to you. It is a young federation, founded in 1985. Its membership originated for the greater part from the disenchanting members of the Christian Reformed Churches in the United States and Canada. The progressive liberalism in doctrine and church life caused many to leave, so faithfulness to the Scriptures and confessions would not be impeded.

The Canadian and American Reformed Churches have recognized this federation as true and faithful churches of our Lord and agreed to commence a three-step process of achieving ecclesiastical unity. Presently we are working at the Phase II level. Three joint committees are working on matters of great importance:

1. The Joint Church Order Committee's work is fundamental in the development of unity. Its work has progressed very well to date.
2. The Song Book Committee also reports good rapport and progress. Different mandates from the respective synods are a real challenge for the committee. Our synod's mandate calls for the inclusion of the 150 Anglo-Genevan versions of the Psalms, with the allowance for alternate renditions. The URCNA will consider the Genevan tunes for inclusion along with the appropriate Psalm and hymn sections of their Psalter Hymnal. Thus, while there is agreement in principle, much



time and energy is spent on the practical application.

3. The Theological Education Unity Committee has reached an impasse. The URCNA draws candidates for the ministry from various institutions, and places the oversight on the theological training with the local congregations. We desire to maintain a federalional seminary, at which the governance, staffing, funding and oversight is under the auspices of the churches through the General Synod. The members of this committee have not been able to convince each other of a solution that would bridge these different views and present an acceptable solution.

All three committees will soon prepare their progress reports for Synod 2007. It will be interesting to see the exact findings and recommendations when they are published four months from now.

Your federation and ours are sisters of approximately the same age and come from the same background. We have enjoyed the presence of delegates at our synods. As we reciprocate, we wish to express appreciation for the confidence you have often shown in the continuation of this ecclesiastical fellowship. Surely, as the sisters grow to further maturity, they tend to demonstrate distinct characteristics. These often develop on account of the geographical and cultural influences. Yet this may result in scrutinizing the variations of practices, and cause our committees to study such divergences. Your deputies flagged our desire for additional hymns and the progress of our Joint Song Book committee with the URCNA. While they wish to maintain close contact with our Book of Praise committee, the deputies have also recommended to publish your own version. We understand your concern about the hymns and reassure you that it is not our intent to deny the primary place to the use of the Psalms in our worship services. Your desire for greater involvement in the training of your future ministers is commendable, and we express great appreciation for the solid support you have provided to the Theological College in Hamilton over the years. Your earlier concern that candidates for the ministry remained in Canada upon graduation was never seen as a negative in our federation; by now that complaint may no longer be valid!

Synod West Kelmscott has not been instituted for designing an alternative to environmental salvation to replace the Kyoto protocol. Surely, it would be interesting to see what you brothers would recommend if the topic had been placed on your agenda, especially since we as God's people have been charged to maintain and build our Creator's handiwork. Your charge for this august assembly is totally different, however. According to your calendar, you are in the middle of your winter. This season usually signifies a period of rest, dormancy if you like. The activity before us reflects anything but a time of tranquility. Your Agenda reveals an ambitious plan, all to be covered in a matter of two weeks. Perusal of the reports that have been furnished by your deputies demonstrates the extensive amount of work that has already gone into the preparation for this major assembly. In addition, you must deal with

several overtures and appeals; a veritable workload indeed! Your dedication to the task at hand, to be a willing worker in God's vineyard on this continent, is commendable and worthy of the prayerful support of your Free Reformed community.

A close examination of your recommendations and the discussions regarding the requests for Ecclesiastical Fellowship by four churches in your global area is of great interest to us. We have received identical requests, and as a result, are closely monitoring your reasoning and decisions. As for your reports on sister-church relations, we are grateful for your desire to continue your alliance with us. Several discussion points with other churches are similar to concerns that have been expressed in our federation. The occasional exchange of information on a number of matters is something to be stimulated for our mutual benefit. As sisters, yes, sisters – after all we're catholic, aren't we?! we need each other, both in providing mutual approval, and when the need arises, also constructive criticism. Therefore, let me paraphrase the expression of your Prime Minister and alter it somewhat to describe our situation: "No sister church is going to sacrifice a significant amount of ecclesiastical cooperation of this spiritual growth and development and then squander it mindlessly and carelessly to arrive at what others consider to be an acceptable road to salvation." We desire to stand shoulder to shoulder to promote the Kingdom of God!

Brothers, we express our most sincere wish that our gracious God will provide you with the wisdom and insight to carry out the tasks with which your member-churches have charged you. May you receive these to do your work to the honour and glory of our Churches' King! The apostle Paul reminds us of this when he writes in the second letter to the Thessalonians Ch.2: 15 – 17 (NIV):

"So then, brothers, stand firm  
and hold on to the teachings we passed on to you,  
whether by word of mouth or by letter.  
May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father  
Who loved us  
and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,  
encourage your hearts and strengthen you  
in every good deed and word".

Armada, W. A.,

July 17, 2006.

Harold Leyenhorst

Henk Hoogstra