

REPORT OF THE COORDINATORS FOR THE COMMITTEE FOR CHURCH UNITY (CCU)

To: General Synod Carman 2013

Mandate

1. Synod Burlington 2010 did not give the CCU a specific and well-defined mandate (Art. 63). We assumed that our task was to carry on in the vein of the previous Coordinators.

Activities

1. On June 7, 2010 the newly appointed coordinators for the CCU met with the former coordinators – Rev. D.G.J. Agema and Rev P.G. Feenstra – for the benefit of transitioning into the work of the committee. On Oct 4, 2010 the coordinators met to discuss the decisions of Synod London 2010 of the URCNA. On Feb 24, 2011 the coordinators met again to strategize about how best to promote the cause of unity.

2. Rev. W. den Hollander attended and spoke at Synod London 2010 as a fraternal delegate. See the appended speech. Rev. P.G. Feenstra accompanied him as fraternal delegate instead of Rev. C.J. VanderVelde, who was out-of-province at the time. At the request of the coordinators for the CCU, Dr. J. VanVliet and Dr. G.H. Visscher attended Synod London to answer questions from delegates at Synod in a public session.

3. As coordinators, we met with part or whole of the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) on several occasions. On June 28, 2010 we met with part of CERCU to discuss matters that would be on the agenda of the upcoming Synod London 2010. Dr. J. VanVliet and Dr. G.H. Visscher were also present since they would be answering questions posed by delegates of Synod London. On Nov 4, 2010 we met with part of CERCU to discuss the decisions of Synod London 2010 and the letter from Synod London to the CanRC. Our focus was on how to proceed after the decisions of Synod London. On Apr 27, 2011 we met again with part of CERCU to discuss concrete ways of promoting unity. On Nov 14, 2011 and Nov 16, 2011 we met with the whole CERCU in Lawrenceville, Georgia at the occasion of the annual NAPARC meeting. The Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) was also present at the Nov 14, 2011 meeting. Our topics of discussion were about getting to know one another better, trusting one another, and the ecumenical imperative. See the appended Press Release of the meetings in Lawrenceville, GA.

4. On September 18, 2010 Rev. C.J. VanderVelde was at the American Reformed Church in Grand Rapids at the invitation of that congregation to discuss how Synod London 2010's decisions would impact their relationship with local United Reformed Churches. He went with Dr. G.H. Visscher, who had been invited to deliver a speech about our relationship with the URCNA in light of Synod London's decisions.

5. Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde attended Synod Nyack, NY 2012 as fraternal delegates, where Rev. VanderVelde addressed the assembly. See the appended speech. Your delegates stayed almost the entire duration of synod in order to take in almost all the plenary sessions, sit in on several committee discussions, and get a good feel for the atmosphere at synod. At several points during the plenary sessions our input was specifically requested regarding various topics. We were well-received as delegates and enjoyed the good atmosphere at synod.

6. Rev. C.J. VanderVelde attended the Classis Southern Ontario September 28, 2011 held in Sheffield, ON and brought fraternal greetings. Rev. W. den Hollander attended the first gathering of the new Classis Ontario-East held on September 26, 2012 in Oro-Medonte, ON and brought fraternal greetings.

7. Upon the invitation of the churches in Classis Southwest of the URCNA, Rev. W. den Hollander went to California from September 14-19, 2012 in order to meet with URCNA ministers at two separate occasions (Ontario, CA and San Diego, CA), meet with the Spanish-speaking missionary, attend their Classis where he brought fraternal greetings, and preach in two churches on the Sunday. The discussion with the ministers focused on the Proposed Joint Church Order and seminary training; these topics had been chosen by the URC organizers of this visit. Rev. den Hollander also addressed concerns, challenges, and fears that live among the URCNA regarding merger with the CanRC. For example, suspicions that the ideas expressed in the Federal Vision movement are present in the CanRC and that there is support for the ideas of Prof. Norman Shepherd.

Correspondence

1. The letter from Winnipeg –Redeemer addressed to General Synod Burlington 2010 and forwarded by that Synod to the CCU was not dealt with specifically in our contact with CERCU. However, the matters raised in the letter were touched on in our contact with representatives of the URCNA in various contexts.

Synod London 2010

Merger Efforts

1. Synod London decided that the Theological Education Committee's mandate had been fulfilled and was at an end (Art. 53).

2. Synod London decided to conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook with the CanRC for use in a united federation (Art. 135). Synod did decide that the Songbook Committee be in dialogue with the CanRC and one of the grounds was that this would allow for the possibility of a common songbook in a united federation.

3. Synod London decided to continue the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee and mandated the committee to continue working with the sub-committee of the CanRC to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address some unfinished matters (Art. 41). Furthermore, synod accepted for continued study the Proposed Joint Church Order 2010 as the church order for a united federation.
4. Synod London encouraged the churches to continue to give feedback to The Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee in its ongoing work (Art. 40). No mention was made of continued consultation with the CanRC sub-committee, but neither was the decision of Synod Schererville 2007 regarding consultation with the CanRC sub-committee reversed.
5. Synod London wrote a letter to the CanRC in response to Synod Burlington 2010's letter which was addressed to the URCNA and to Synod London 2010. Among other things, this letter states that before federative unity can take place "...we need to do more foundational work, especially at the local level." It goes on to state: "We ask that you be patient with us, recognizing that moving more slowly toward federative unity, [sic] may be the best way of ensuring that our actions result in lasting unity that will truly glorify God and advance the gospel of peace in the world."

Evaluation regarding Merger Efforts

Although the CanRC experienced disappointment on several significant counts because of the decisions of Synod London 2010, there is also reason for hope on several counts. Dialogue between the URCNA's Songbook Committee and the CanRC sub-committee as the URCNA produces an updated *Psalter Hymnal* is with a view to allowing the possibility of a common songbook in a united federation. The Proposed Joint Church Order 2010 was accepted for continued study as the church order for a united federation. Regarding the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee, the letter from Synod London to the CanRC states: "The rejection of the overture to dismiss the committee is a telling indication of our continuing commitment to eventual church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches, even though our progress toward that goal has been impeded by several obstacles." In other words, these decisions indicate that eventual merger is still on the radar screen for the URCNA. The letter from Synod London also states: "We are not merely good friends; we are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined together in the bond of the Spirit, evidenced by a common confession of the faith and with you, committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways." In this regard, we can also be grateful that Synod London adopted the following recommendation: "That Synod encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built" (Art. 47). We can also be heartened by the positive context within which Synod London made its decisions regarding the relationship with the CanRC because synod adopted without dissent the following recommendation: "That Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow-workers in the kingdom" (Art.

47). No doubt the decisions of Synod London 2010 have slowed down the process leading to merger, but the goal of merger is still in view.

As CanRC, we must recognize and respect that in any relationship both parties must be ready to move forward to the next stage and that it would be counter-productive for one party to be too insistent on moving ahead. Our two federations have made wonderful progress in their relationship over the past twenty years. Forcing the issue now would run the risk of ruining what we have achieved so far by the LORD's grace. As CanRC, we would have liked to take the step of merging with the URCNA sooner rather than later. However, as CanRC we must respect that Synod London came to the decisions that it made. It is important for us to remember that Synod London adopted a recommendation "That Synod recognize that challenges and concerns remain among both the committees and congregations of the URCNA with regard to our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches" (Art. 47). Furthermore, the introduction of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) report to Synod Nyack 2012 speaks of "concerns and fears" among the URCNA regarding the pursuit of the ecumenical calling (*Synod Nyack Agenda*, p. 108). The brothers of the URCNA know their federation better than we do, and we must respect that. Achieving federative unity requires time and, above all, we must never forget that in our human efforts as the LORD's instruments we are dependent on the LORD's timing and blessing.

At the same time it must be said that, besides pulpit exchanges where our respective churches are in close proximity, between the time of Synod London 2010 and Synod Nyack 2012 we as Coordinators for the CCU heard of and saw little other activity from the URCNA with a view to facilitating further opportunities for interaction as recommended by Synod London 2010.

The Fifteen Points

Synod London affirmed the following teachings of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity (Art. 113).

1. In God's unchangeable purpose, He elects His chosen ones to salvation and effectively draws them into fellowship with Christ through His Word and Spirit, granting them true faith in Christ, justifying, sanctifying and preserving them in Christ's fellowship until He glorifies them (Canons of Dort, 1.7).
2. The election of God is of one kind only, and is to everlasting life, and not to a mutable relationship dependent on the good work of man, which can be forfeited (Canons of Dort, 1.8). Those who finally fall away have not forfeited their election, but demonstrate they never were elect, though members of the covenant community (Canons of Dort, 5.7).
3. Some members of the church or covenant community "are not of the Church, though externally in it" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).
4. Those who are truly "of the Church" may be known by the "marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).
5. Adam was obligated to obey "the commandment of life" in order to live in fellowship with God and enjoy His favor eternally (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3).

6. All human beings have fallen in Adam, are subject to condemnation and death, and are wholly incapable of finding favor with God on the basis of obedience to the law of God (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3 and 24).

7. The work of Christ as Mediator of the covenant of grace fully accords with God's truth and justice, satisfies all the demands of God's holy law, and thereby properly "merits" the believer's righteousness and eternal life (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 5-7, 15, 23-24; Belgic Confession, Article 22; Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors 2:3).

8. The entire obedience of Christ "under the law," both active and passive, constitutes the righteousness that is granted and imputed to believers for their justification (Belgic Confession, Article 22; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23).

9. Faith is the sole instrument of the believer's justification, so that believers may be said to be justified "even before [they] do good works" (Belgic Confession, Article 24).

10. The good works of believers, though necessary fruits of thankfulness, contribute nothing to their justification before God since they proceed from true faith, are themselves the fruits of the renewing work of Christ's Spirit, are imperfect and corrupted by sin, and are performed out of gratitude for God's grace in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24, 32, 33; Belgic Confession, Article 24).

11. The justification of true believers is a definitive and irrevocable blessing of Christ's saving work, and therefore cannot be increased by the good works that proceed from true faith or be lost through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:9; Rejection of Errors 1:2, 2:8, 5:7; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 20 and 21)

12. The sacrament of Baptism does not affect [sic] the believer's union with Christ *or* justification but is a confirmation and assurance of the benefits of Christ's saving work to those who respond to the sacrament in the way of faith (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25 and 27).

13. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a means to strengthen and nourish the believer in Christ when it is received by the "mouth of faith" and therefore the children of believing parents shall make public profession of faith before receiving the sacrament (Belgic Confession, Article 35; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 28-30).

14. The assurance of salvation springs from true faith, which looks primarily to the gospel promise and the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the basis for confidence before God. Although good works confirm the genuineness of faith, they are not the primary basis for such assurance of salvation (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, 23, 32; Belgic Confession, Article 22-23; Canons of Dort, 5:8-13).

15. According to God's electing purpose and grace revealed in the gospel, true believers may be confident that God will preserve them in the way of salvation and keep them from losing their salvation through apostasy (Canons of Dort, 1:12, 5:8-10)

These points were adopted by Synod London 2010 with respect to the Federal Vision, a movement with particular views on covenant and baptism. Point 12 is of most interest to us. Contrary to the Federal Vision movement, we too believe that baptism does not bring about the believer's union with Christ or justification. One is united to Christ through faith, and one is justified through faith. It is good that we state this explicitly, since we are sometimes seen by some as being part of the Federal Vision movement.

Neither should we feel threatened by Point 6 of the Nine Points adopted by Synod Schererville 2007, which received much attention among us. In Point 6, Synod Schererville 2007 rejected the error of those "...who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between

those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29)” (Acts Synod Schererville 2007, Art. 72). As Canadian Reformed Churches, we too believe that while all covenant children receive the promise of salvation, not all will receive the promised salvation. This is what Point 6 of Synod Schererville is trying to get across.

In answer to the question of Synod Burlington 2010 whether Point 6 of Synod Schererville 2007 was directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches, the letter from Synod London 2010 states: “No, it was not directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches or their view of the covenant. Synod Schererville addressed an error associated with Federal Vision which contends that in baptism a person is granted every spiritual gift, including a true and saving faith, the grace of conversion and justification. The Nine Points were made to uphold the doctrine that a man is justified *through faith alone*, and that God will never reverse His gracious declaration of justification concerning the believing sinner. Point 6 of the Nine Points of Schererville does not deny that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace. What Point 6 denies is that all baptized persons are in the covenant in *precisely* the same way *such that* no distinction is made between those who have the promises by covenant and those who receive by faith what is promised. It should be read in the context of Point 5 which rejects the error *that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness* (underline added).”

The Fifteen Points of Synod London 2010 can be seen as an expansion of and fine-tuning of the Nine Points of Synod Schererville 2007.

Other Specifics

1. Synod London 2010 decided that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase Two) with the Reformed Churches in New Zealand (Art. 126).
2. Synod London 2010 adopted the recommendation of its Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKNv) rather than moving to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase Two) (Art. 126). The CECCA reasoned that it would wait and see what the upcoming Synod Harderwijk 2011 of the GKNv would decide about the role of women in the church.
3. Synod London 2010 decided that the next synod would be held in June 2012 (Art. 138). This would be one year earlier than the three-year interval which had been customary for the URCNA.

Synod Nyack 2012

At the time of writing, the official *Acts* of Synod Nyack 2012 are not yet available. We pass on the following information based on our stay at Synod Nyack.

1. Synod Nyack 2012 followed the recommendation of the CERCU committee and reiterated what Synod London 2010 said about the local URCNA churches creating opportunities for interaction with the CanRC in order to get to know one another better.
2. Synod Nyack 2012 decided to continue its Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) committee and gave it the mandate to work out synodical regulations for a merged federation and to wrap up some other matters. Synod also decided to receive the PJCO for a united federation of URCNA and CanRC churches for continued study by the churches.
3. Synod Nyack decided to take up the offer from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) to work together on a new Psalter Hymnal. The grounds with this decision refer to this being practical and discernible evidence of ecumenicity, a wonderful opportunity to be a blessing to a wide range of confessional Presbyterian and Reformed churches, an aid in obtaining copyright permissions and licencing, and a way to significantly lessen the financial burden of producing and publishing the book.

No doubt it hurts for us as CanRC to note this decision since we were involved with the URCNA in producing a combined songbook. However, given the decision of Synod London 2010 to disband the Songbook Committee which worked with the CanRC committee, Synod Nyack's decision should not surprise us. It is even understandable. Synod London's decision was partly the result of fear and concern among the URCNA about merger, while there is no fear of a merger associated with Synod Nyack's decision to work with the OPC on a songbook since there is no talk of merger with the OPC.

4. Synod Nyack decided to enter into Phase 2 relations with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) according to the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The fact that the RPCNA has ordained women deacons in some of their churches led to much debate on the floor of Synod. By a slim majority, Synod Nyack decided to enter into Phase 2 on the grounds that this practice is not the product of a liberal and destructive hermeneutic, that deacons are not part of the ruling body of the church in the RPCNA, and that their practice is much like that of women deacons in the Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ) with whom the URCNA has Phase 2 relations.

5. The next URCNA Synod will be held in 2014, after an interval of two years.

Considerations

1. The fact that Synod Burlington 2010 did not give us a specific and well-defined mandate left us wondering what exactly belonged to our task as Coordinators for the CCU.

2. Given the fact that Synod Nyack 2012 reappointed its Church Order Committee to finish up some matters, it would be good if Synod Carman 2013 reappointed the CanRC Church Order Committee so that the URC brothers have counterparts with whom they can discuss matters.
3. Recognizing that the road to eventual unity will be much slower than the CanRC had initially hoped speaks in favour of reappointing Coordinators for Church Unity. If there are no longer Coordinators, whatever momentum toward unity still exists will decrease even more. Subsuming the URCNA portfolio under the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America would decrease the momentum and would also send the wrong signal to the URCNA because it suggests that achieving unity is no longer a priority for the CanRC.
4. The fact that the CCU was invited to send a representative to Classis Southwest of the URCNA in September 2012 indicates that the CCU still serves a useful purpose in making the CanRC more well-known among the URCNA. Moreover, the CCU also anticipates more invitations to other URCNA Classes as a result of contacts made at Synod Nyack. This speaks in favour of reappointing Coordinators for Church Unity.
5. For the sake of continuity and consistency in our contacts with the URCNA, both of the undersigned are willing to continue serving as Coordinators for the CCU.
6. The analysis offered in this report about the Fifteen Points adopted by Synod London 2010 should be sufficient to allay fears regarding the content of these Points.

Recommendations

We recommend:

1. That Synod Carman reappoint Coordinators for Church Unity.
2. That Synod Carman give the Coordinators for the CCU a specific and well-defined mandate.
3. That Synod Carman reappoint a CanRC Church Order Committee.
4. That Synod Carman decide that the discussion concerning the Nine Points of Synod Schererville 2007 and the Fifteen Points of Synod London 2010 has been completed.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. William den Hollander
Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde
Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity (CCU)

Appendix #1

Address at Synod 2010 URCNA – London, ON

By Rev. William den Hollander

Esteemed brothers in the Lord, delegates at this General Synod of the URCNA

When I bring to you formal greetings in the Lord, it is in deep gratitude that I do so for the fact that by our unity in the true faith we share in his work of atonement and in his resurrection from the dead through which He obtained his Holy Spirit for us that we may live in newness of life with our Triune God. He is our common Saviour, our Risen Lord, and Exalted King! He is the Head of his Catholic Church and it is in his church-gathering work that we have the privilege of serving Him. He gave us the means of grace and the precious promise that his Holy Spirit would lead us in all the truth. Our common bond of faith, love, and unity in the truth, therefore, incites us to seek you, greet you, and appeal to you that we may continue to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace! Yes, we pray with our only High Priest, that we may continue to grow together in the Lord, in the truth, and in the manifestation of the unity of the Triune God as He has revealed Himself in truth in his Word!

It is a real privilege and honour for me, personally, to be here and represent our Canadian Reformed Churches. When I express the prayer and desire that we may continue to grow together, I do this gratefully observing that we *have* grown together in the Lord a lot since the mid-1990s. Among the highlights in my life definitely have been the twelve years I served our churches in the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity from 1992-2004. I was blessed richly as I attended your alliance meetings at first and later on your synods in Lynwood, St. Catherines, Hudsonville, and Escondido. I attended meetings of Classis Ontario. While closer to home I've seen the bonds grow and deepen with your ministers in the GTA. Most special, however, were the occasions at which I was privileged to fill the pulpit of one of your URCs! Looking back over this process, therefore, I am very encouraged by the grace of God and the power of his Holy Spirit as we increasingly see Christ's prayer come to fulfilment and reality as He has been bringing our churches together more and more closely towards true church unity!

At the same time, brothers, I realize and am aware that much has changed in the course of those years. Even in the way of an increase in numbers, I have seen your federation grow from some thirty congregations at first to more than 100 today! You have become spread out geographically and the balance between congregations in Canada and the United States has changed as well. At the beginning of this development our Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity worked closely and intensely together with your CERCU brothers and the results were very encouraging: we moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2, laying the basis for the next move with the establishment of Statements of Agreement, which were *received* by your General Synod and ours in 2001. I believe that we owe it to each other that we do not only observe and *receive* these

Statements of Agreement but also *uphold* and *honour* them as part of our unity in the truth. Yes, for those churches that joined in the course of the years it should be an incentive to assess the situation at their time of merger, taking ownership of the (brief) history of the federation of churches they desire to join. They may be expected to take note and interact and work with these Statements. The onus is on all other churches as well, though, to remember what was stated and to be committed to taking this course of action!

During this time of growth and development, you have dealt with various issues and matters that came your way, which indicated that there were ongoing dynamics of unification going on among you. As Canadian Reformed Churches we have observed these developments and dynamics and we rejoice with you in the continued unity you enjoyed in spite of difficulties and challenges that arose, in spite even of diversity of practices and of theological perspectives among you. Wherever applicable and appropriate we became part of the discussion, yes even subject to scrutiny and/or suspicion ourselves! Yet, we saw it as the normal and natural process of churches living together in a federation of churches that deal with all matters according to the same standards: God's Word and the Reformed confessions. The history of the church of Christ in general, and the history of the churches of the Reformation particularly, show us that there will always be questions, concerns, and critical issues that the churches need to deal with. As the leaders of the first Secession expressed it, "Unity in necessities, freedom in what's not of necessity, and love in all!" It's one of the blessings and purposes of a federation of churches to deal with them. Hence, if and when there are matters that give rise to discussions and even disagreements, these should not *be* or *become* obstacles in the way to ecclesiastical unity! On the contrary, as we have witnessed over the past year, it should be encouraging when we deal with those questions in the proper scriptural and spiritual way. It testifies to the fact that we are one, not only in word, or not just in name as Reformed churches with the same confessional standards, but also in deed! This is how we may and should live and work together in a federation of united Reformed churches!

Dear brothers, your churches are precious to us and the aspiration and anticipation of church unity in one federation of united Reformed churches is high among our ecclesiastical priorities and pursuits. Of course, we are realistic enough to note, as your representative at General Synod Burlington put it, that "we are at something of a delicate time with regard to the unity process. We are at the point where we see many practical difficulties, where there is fatigue, frustration, and sometimes disillusionment." Therefore, indeed, with tenderness, patience, wisdom, and with firm resolve, fortitude, and commitment we must walk on in obedience to our Saviour, walk on *together* that is! We are not of those who shrink back but of those who believe and are saved! Therefore I would like to urge you to move ahead without hesitation or reluctance! I would plead with you to take the letter of appeal seriously, which General Synod Burlington 2010 wrote to you. I do not now need to repeat the sentiments and concerns expressed in that formal letter. Yet, I do want to ask you urgently and sincerely: heed our appeal for continuity!

As one of the two Coordinators in the Committee for Church Unity, I also wish to affirm and appeal that you accept the requests that are contained in General Synod's letter pertaining to the four sub-committees. Some made progress, relatively speaking, while others became frustrated due to the lack of it, considering how much they had to do in coming together "on the same page:" living together under one Church Order, singing together from the same song book, and training together our future ministers in their theological education. May you indeed come to the resolution to re-appoint the Joint Church Order Committee to finalize its work! May you also go back to the close cooperation between the two song book committees as it was enjoyed before the 2007 General Synod, so that we may as yet achieve what we expressed in our Statements of Agreement and "produce a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan psalter..., while including hymns that also meet the standards of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions." And as far as the theological education of our future ministers is concerned, I would like to re-iterate our Agreement in 2001, as our General Synod Burlington did as well, that we should retain at least one federational theological school; thus preserving what has been such a tremendous blessing to our churches. It's, as our General Synod letter expresses, a principle that our churches hold dear! Accepting a federational seminary may not be a matter of scriptural *command*, as you have observed, yet it certainly is a *principle* rooted and grounded in its essence and existence in God's Word (2 Tim 2:2), the Confessions (HC, LD 38) and the Church Order of Dort (our Article 19). With such underpinnings, we should certainly treat it as demanding the highest possible priority and the strongest spiritual preference!

Beloved brothers, as Coordinator in the Committee for Church Unity and representative of the Canadian Reformed Churches, I wish to assure you of our continued commitment to the process toward full ecclesiastical and federational unity. I also want to offer our services and make them available to your churches and classes. We wish to further the process of acquaintance and serve the progress in acceptance, in whatever way we can, be that by attending your meetings and assemblies in the United States or Canada, by organizing conferences and theological debates, or by answering questions in one setting or another. At the same time I appeal to you that we *keep* our focus and vision on the calling from the Lord and on the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in spirit and truth. Allow me to quote once more what we expressed in our Statements of Agreement, namely, "Churches of various backgrounds but one confession have the duty to pursue the highest forms of ecclesiastical fellowship possible in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in the federation of churches."

May you receive the blessing and commitment from the Lord to continue in this spirit and resolve! May our heavenly God and Father bless your deliberations and decisions, for the well-being of his churches and for the greater glory of his Name! Thank you!

Appendix #2

The Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
meeting in London, Ontario, Canada
July 27 - 30, A.D. 2010

October 18, 2010

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, Second Clerk
227 1st Avenue SE
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

To the Canadian and American Reformed Churches,

Esteemed Brothers,

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the king of the church, and pray that He will continue to fulfill His promise to “build my church” in your midst.

Synod London, 2010, received “with appreciation” the two letters of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Burlington, Ontario in May of this year. Because our synod met only for four days, it was not possible to draft an appropriate and acceptable response in the space of that time and so it assigned the officers of the synod to draft a response to both letters, subject to the approval of the consistory of the calling church for our next synod. This is our response to both of your letters.

Our synod devoted much attention to our relationship with you as sister churches and to the matter of achieving a fuller expression of the spiritual unity we have in Christ.

On our first full day, we devoted a good part of the evening to hearing from Dr. Gerhard Visscher and Dr. Jason Van Vliet, who answered questions that had been submitted in advance by our churches. They also answered questions from the floor. We were impressed with their humility and patience and greatly appreciated the clarity with which they allayed the concerns of the questioners. The chairman of our synod responded to their work with words of gratitude and with a reference to the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and our need to give visible expression to our spiritual unity.

Regarding the work of the unity committees we jointly established in 2001, our synod took note of the fact that the Theological Education Committee has reached an impasse, and that the Songbook Committee had made little progress toward a united song book. In light of this, our synod terminated our involvement in both unity committees, although we continue to have a Songbook Committee for the development of a new songbook for our own federation. Although no longer working on a joint song book, the committee was reminded of the need to communicate with your churches according to the provisions of our current relationship of Phase 2, Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The churches were also alerted that proposed solutions to the impasse regarding the education of ministers may still be proposed by way of overture to future synods.

Although we have terminated our involvement in two of the unity committees, we have mandated the Joint Church Order Committee to continue to perfect their work for use by a united federation. We did this, in part, as an answer to an overture asking the synod to dismiss the committee. The rejection of the overture to dismiss the committee is a telling indication of our continuing commitment to eventual church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches, even though our progress toward that goal has been impeded by several obstacles.

As a federation of churches, we remain committed to working toward reconciliation in obedience to the ecumenical imperatives of Scripture, such as Ephesians 4:3, “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and Philippians 1:27ff, “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith.” In that spirit, we approved a recommendation “That Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow workers in the kingdom” (Article #47). We are not merely good friends; we are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined together in the bond of the Spirit, evidenced by a common confession of the faith and with you, committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways.

However, our situation is different than yours. While the vast majority of your churches know us well, through neighboring congregational relationships in Canada, nearly two thirds of our churches – those in the United States – do not have Canadian (American) Reformed congregations as near neighbors. This means that most of our churches are not intimately aware of how the faith lives among you. Such lack of information is, sadly, fertile ground for the seeds of both indifference and suspicion. Our situation is also different in that there is not among us the same degree of uniformity as is found among Canadian Reformed Churches. Unity committee reports regarding seminaries, songs and regional synods, for example, have sometimes raised concerns that our current freedoms would be curtailed in a way that would drive some of our own members to separate from us if a union were implemented in the near future.

Because of these differences, it has become evident that before we can move forward in building a single edifice in which we all can live together; we need to do more foundational work, especially at the local level. To that end our synod passed a resolution to “encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built” (Article #47).

We ask that you be patient with us, recognizing that moving more slowly toward federative unity, may be the best way of ensuring that our actions result in a lasting unity that will truly glorify God and advance the gospel of peace in the world.

Regarding your second letter, of June 7, 2010, concerning the status of the Nine Points adopted by Synod Schererville and the significance of “pastoral advice,” we can state that some clarity was achieved, although the matter was also referred to our Synodical Rules Committee for further clarification. The Nine Points were also challenged by way of an appeal, directed not at their content, but at the procedure by which they were adopted. The appeal was not sustained, so the pastoral advice remains.

You ask if such pastoral advice is confessionally binding. Although the matter of defining the nature of synodical pastoral advice was referred to a synodical committee for further work, by implication, it appears that such statements by our synod are not confessionally binding. We make that observation on the basis of the grounds attached to theological statements made by this year's synod. A study committee report submitted to Synod London asked the synod to affirm a list of theological statements, some of which were quotations from our confessions and some of which were not confessional quotations but statements summarizing the exegetical findings of the committee. Rather than affirming the entire list of theological statements, the synod responded by separating the confessional quotations from the committee's own summary statements and made the following distinction: "clearly distinguishing direct quotations from the Confessions from the formulations of the 15 points [the committee's summary statements] respects the binding status of our confessions as our doctrinal standards" (Article #113). Thus, the 15 summary statements affirmed by the synod were distinguished from the confessions which are binding.

You also ask if Point 6 of the Nine Points of Schererville was directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches and the view of the covenant upheld by the Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands. No, it was not directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches or their view of the covenant. Synod Schererville addressed an error associated with Federal Vision which contends that in baptism a person is granted every spiritual gift, including a true and saving faith, the grace of conversion and justification. The Nine Points were made to uphold the doctrine that a man is justified *through faith alone*, and that God will never reverse His gracious declaration of justification concerning the believing sinner. Point 6 of the Nine Points of Schererville does not deny that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace. What Point 6 denies is that all baptized persons are in the covenant in *precisely* the same way *such that* no distinction is made between those who have the promises by covenant and those who receive by faith what is promised. It should be read in the context of Point 5 which rejects the error *that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness* (underline added). We gratefully take note of the fact that when addressing our synod on behalf of your churches, Dr. G. H. Visscher expressed agreement with this understanding of Point 6 and our concern.

We join with you in praying that the Lord will bless our efforts for unity and give us the wisdom to know how to proceed and the courage to do what His Word commands. May God give us all grace to persevere in obedience to the command to "make every effort" (Ephesians 4:3), having as our goal the prayer of Jesus, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (John 17:23).

On behalf of Synod London 2010,

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer
(Second Clerk)

Appendix #3

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Co-ordinators for Church Unity (CCU) and the United Reformed Sub-committee of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU), Nov 4, 2010

The combined meeting was held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario on November 4, 2010. From the CanRC, the Revs. William den Hollander and Clarence J. VanderVelde attended. From the URCNA, the Revs. John Bouwers, Peter Vellenga, and Harry Zekveld attended.

The greater part of the meeting focused on the letter written by Synod London 2010 of the URCNA to the CanRC. Our guiding thought was: Where do we go from here after Synod London 2010? As committees we recognize that discontinuing the joint Songbook and Theological Education committees removes to some extent the pressure of working toward eventual merger. While this may be viewed as taking a step backwards in our ecclesiastical fellowship, our hope is that it will open the way to renewed and increased efforts among our churches toward building mutual appreciation. While a merger is not on the horizon in the near future, we discussed the implications of Synod London's statement to the CanRC that "We are not merely good friends; we are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined together in the bond of the Spirit, evidenced by a common confession of the faith and with you, committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways." We discussed together how the process of seeking unity has been a blessing to both federations in spite of the difficulties, and therefore committed ourselves to the need of maintaining the vision and sense of calling with respect to eventual merger. Ways and means will need to be explored and encouraged in order that the suggestions in the letter from Synod London for more local interaction and exposure can come to fruition.

The next combined meeting is scheduled for March 23, 2011 at the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario.

Appendix #4

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Co-ordinators for Church Unity (CCU) and the United Reformed Sub-committee of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU), April 27, 2011

The combined meeting was held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario on April 27, 2011. From the CanRC, the Revs. William den Hollander and Clarence J. VanderVelde attended. From the URCNA, the Revs. John Bouwers, Peter Vellenga, and Harry Zekveld attended.

The main purpose of our meeting was to continue working with the statement in the letter of the URCNA Synod London that we are "*committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways.*" The URCNA brothers spoke of the desire of their ecumenical relations committee to pursue the possibility of regional conferences among URC classes where the focus would be first of all internal, with a view to the challenges and responsibility to pursue ecumenical relations generally, and then, secondly, a focus on relations with the Canadian Reformed with a view to growing in familiarity and alleviating outstanding concerns. The Canadian Reformed brethren have expressed their willingness to make representatives available

for such dialogue – particularly among the United Reformed Churches in the United States that are less familiar with them.

In another attempt to work with the challenge of the lack of familiarity with Canadian Reformed Churches among American URCs, the CanRC brothers expressed their desire to meet with the whole URC CERCU committee (with representatives from each URC classis). The URC men agreed to pursue the possibility of such a meeting in conjunction with the meetings of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) in Atlanta this coming fall. Among NAPARC churches themselves there is presently some discussion about the viability of pursuing a broader, umbrella form of unity among varying federations of churches. Both the URC and the CanRC delegates expressed the concern that such would be short of the ideal of organic unity but suggested that the idea should not be completely discounted, especially if it might possibly be seen as a stepping-stone to more complete unity in the years to come, so long as the goal is kept before the churches.

The brothers reminded each other that in spite of the challenges of moving forward ecumenically, we should be mindful of the progress that has been attained to date. There is much for which to be thankful.

Appendix #5

Press Release of meeting between CanRC and URCNA, November 14 and 16, 2011

The 2011 meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) in Lawrenceville Ga. provided opportunity for personal and extended engagement between representatives from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

All or most of the representatives from the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) and the Canadian Reformed Churches' Committee for Church Unity (CCU) and Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) met on two separate occasions (on November 14 and 16). Those present from the CanRC were Rev. Willem Den Hollander, Rev. Clarence Vander Velde (from the CCU), Rev. Peter Holtvluwer, Rev. Eric Kampen, and Elder Henry van Delden (from the CCCNA). From the URCNA Rev. Greg Bero, Rev. Bill Boekestein, Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Todd De Rooy, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Ralph Pontier, Elder Al Vermeer, and Rev. Harry Zekveld were present.

The purpose of the meetings was to discuss goals, expectations, frustrations and commitments regarding the relationship between the two federations. The meetings also presented opportunity for the representatives to develop personal relationships with and grow in appreciation for one another. A number of potential objections to the proposed merger between the URCNA and CanRC were discussed along with ways to constructively respond to them.

1. Getting to know one another.

It was observed that congregations do not affiliate in a federation on the basis of knowing every other congregation but rather on the basis of confessional agreement; something which does exist between the URCNA and the CanRC. Still, the representatives felt the practical importance of facilitating ways for ministers and congregations from the respective federations to get to know each other. In particular, congregations are encouraged

to open their pulpits to ministers from their sister church. Classes are encouraged to extend invitations to fraternal delegates for the purpose of developing closer ties; classes in the USA are encouraged to receive members of the Canadian Reformed Coordinators for Church Unity as fraternal delegates to their meetings. Where feasible, classes are also encouraged to consider holding joint CanRC/URCNA classis meetings (business meetings would be conducted separately; devotions, meals, and other times of interaction could be enjoyed jointly. Such an arrangement is being planned for Spring 2012 between Classis East of the URCNA and Presbytery New Jersey of the OPC). As a step toward getting to know each other Rev. Willem den Hollander has given a brief presentation on CanRC/URCNA history and relations which can be viewed at Youtube.com. Lack of knowledge of one another may also contribute to the concern that our two denominations are simply too different from each other. In response, the CanRC delegates pointed out that diversity in the URC can be a strength provided that those who disagree on non-confessional matters make no attempt to bind the consciences of another.

2. Getting to trust one another.

There are some in the URC who mistakenly lump the CanRC with the Federal Vision (FV) stream of thought. Given the positions taken against FV by the URCNA and other NAPARC denominations, such a view naturally breeds distrust. Dr. Wes Bredenhof has written a series of articles to help dispel this misunderstanding by distinguishing the CanRC and FV (The first installment of which can be read at <http://www.reformedfellowship.net/articles/federal-vision-bredenhof-jul-aug11v61-n4.htm>). On the other hand there are some in the CanRC who are hurt to hear that they are not trusted. Such feelings have had a cooling effect among some in the CanRC regarding the merger.

It was also acknowledged that there has existed in the CanRCs an element of exclusivism which could also create disinterest among URCs to join with them. The old thinking that existed among some in the CanRC was that there could be only one visible manifestation of the true church so that every church, other than one's own, must be a false church. As Dr. Godfrey mentioned in his address to NAPARC the recognition of denominations entails acknowledgement that there are other Christian bodies that are faithful manifestations of the true church. The CanRC representatives humbly acknowledged personal and denominational development with regard to this view.

There is also a fear among some URCs that the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) is hierarchical. It was observed that part of that perception could come from a functional congregationalism that may exist in some URCNA churches. It was pointed out that until greater trust develops there will remain an unwillingness on the part of some to embrace delegated assemblies.

3. Appreciating the ecumenical imperative.

The representatives would encourage preaching on John 17:21 and other texts which highlight the moral imperative of unity. The general consensus amongst the brothers was that while formal, organic unity cannot exist in any beneficial or meaningful way where there is no spiritual unity, both are essential. Formal, organic unity is the structure and shape of spiritual unity.

In summary, CERCU encourages each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA. The Canadian Reformed brothers expressed their eagerness and willingness to come to any classis to address any concerns to enable us to come to know and trust one another more fully. Those who have been involved in this process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process relationships have been formed and misconceptions addressed. It seems that most or all of those present have experienced progress in terms of our understanding of the unity of the church. We have also experienced how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity (Psalm 133:1).

Appendix #6

Address at Synod 2012 URCNA – Nyack, NY

By Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

It is my privilege to bring you fraternal greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). As the two Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU), Rev. William den Hollander and I are happy to be here for the duration of your synod. We wish you the LORD's blessing in all your deliberations and pray that your decisions may be to the honour of his Name and for the well-being of Christ's church.

Much has happened since Rev. den Hollander spoke at Synod London 2010. Synod London made important and far-reaching decisions pertaining to the relationship

with the CanRC and the efforts toward an eventual merger between the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the CanRC. As representatives of the CanRC, we cannot hide the fact that Synod London's decisions with respect to the merger efforts met with much disappointment among many in the CanRC. We were disappointed to hear of the decision that your Theological Education Committee's mandate had been fulfilled and was at an end (Art. 53). We would have liked to see further efforts to surmount the impasse regarding how best to train men for the ministry in a united federation. Likewise, we were disappointed with the decision to conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook for use in a united federation (Art. 135).

At the same time, we still found reason for hope with respect to an eventual merger in that Synod London decided that the Songbook Committee be in dialogue with the CanRC and that one of the grounds was that this would allow for the possibility of a common songbook in a united federation. Furthermore, we noted that the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee was continued and was mandated to continue working with the sub-committee of the CanRC to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address some unfinished matters (Art. 41). Even more importantly, we happily noted that Synod London accepted for continued study the Proposed Joint Church Order 2010 as the church order for a united federation. Therefore, although the CanRC experienced disappointment on several significant counts because of the decisions of Synod London 2010, we also found reason for hope on several counts.

Brothers, we want to impress upon you the deep desire of the CanRC for eventual merger with the URCNA. We were greatly heartened by the positive context within which your decisions were made, namely, that Synod London 2010 adopted without dissent the following recommendation: "That Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow-workers in the kingdom" (Art. 47). Moreover, we were grateful that Synod London also adopted the following recommendation: "That Synod encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built" (Art. 47).

We realize that achieving federative unity requires time. We also realize that we are dependent on the LORD's timing and blessing. As CanRC, we must recognize and respect that in any relationship both parties must be ready to move forward to the next stage and that it would be counter-productive for one party to be too insistent on moving ahead. Our two federations have made wonderful progress in their relationship over the past twenty years. The CanRC cherish all the things we can already do together in our present relationship with the URCNA. As CanRC, we would have liked to take the step of merging with the URCNA sooner rather than later. However, as CanRC we must respect that Synod London came to the decisions that it made. We also noted that Synod London adopted a recommendation "That Synod recognize that challenges and concerns

remain among both the committees and congregations of the URCNA with regard to our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches” (Art. 47). You know your federation better than we do, and we must respect that. We note that the introduction of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) report to Synod Nyack 2012 speaks of “concerns and fears” among the URCNA regarding the pursuit of the ecumenical calling (*Synod Nyack Agenda*, p. 108). Therefore, we are happy that we also read: “What we are recommending is a careful and gentle pressing on in the good work that has been begun in our ecumenical pursuits with all of our ecumenical counterparts, and particularly in connection with the Canadian Reformed” (*Synod Nyack Agenda*, p. 107).

Meetings between our CCU and your CERCU have focused on how best to cultivate continued and deepening contact between churches of our federations, as also articulated by Synod London 2010. May our churches strive to be creative in finding ways to foster greater awareness of one another. And let us use the means available to us in the hope that one day we will all be ready for merger. Brothers, in keeping with the gist of the CERCU report to Synod Nyack 2012, please reiterate what Synod London 2010 said and encourage your churches to implement the essential work of creating occasions at which bonds with the CanRC can be forged and misconceptions removed. Besides pulpit exchanges where our respective churches are in close proximity, as Coordinators for the CCU we have heard of and seen little other activity from your churches since Synod London with a view to facilitating further opportunities for interaction. Because challenges and concerns remain among the congregations of the URCNA with regard to the relationship with the CanRC, please urge your churches to present those challenges and concerns to us as Coordinators so that we can work on them and if possible remove them. As Coordinators for the CCU, we are eager and willing to come to any classis to address any questions or concerns in order to increase knowledge about the CanRC and to build trust.

Let us never forget what was stated in a joint press release after meetings between our two committees held at the time of NAPARC 2011 (where the theme was church unity): “Formal, organic unity is the structure and shape of spiritual unity” (*Christian Renewal*, Feb 29, 2012). We have that spiritual unity. May we one day also have that organic unity. Thank you.

Appendix #7

Report of the URCNA Synod Nyack 2012

On Monday, June 11th, 2012, on the campus of Nyack College, the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church [RBC], welcomed delegates and guests to the Prayer Service at the eve of the opening and constitution of Synod Nyack 2012. “Nyack College is situated on the picturesque banks of the Hudson River in Nyack, New York, just 23 miles north of New York City,” the organizing committee informed delegates to this synod in its general welcome bulletin. “Founded in 1882 as a missionary training

institute, Nyack College is the oldest college continuing in Christian education in the United States.” Although the buildings on this campus were from the mid 20th century and the accommodations somewhat ‘spartan’ in the experience of many a delegate, the meetings that were held in the *Olson Auditorium* at Pardington Hall, from the opening Prayer Service to the closing session of General Synod 2012, were uplifting and upbuilding and conducted in the most spiritual and fraternal fashion! The walks to and from the Boon Centre, where meals and coffee were served, were great opportunities for personal conversations and deeply spiritual discussions; and all this against the backdrop of “a spectacular view of the Hudson Valley and palisades.”

Upon the welcome and opening devotions by the Rev. Richard J. Kuiken, pastor of the Pompton Plains RBC, including a meditation on the words of Psalm 122, the gathering set out on one of the highlights of the entire experience at GS Nyack 2012: the singing! Throughout the Prayer Service and at every moment at which the meetings of synod were adjourned or resumed throughout the week, the singing was majestic and glorifying in honour to God, heart-warming and edifying for the devotional participant! The Prayer Service *per se*, however, was just that: not a service with a sermon as its centre piece but manifold prayers sent up for every aspect of the work of the upcoming general synod, conducted by a selection of delegates to Synod Nyack 2012.

When the chairman of the convening church, Rev. Kuiken, called the meeting to order on Tuesday, June 12th at 8:00 am, the delegates were welcomed not only most heartily, but also supplied with a well-prepared binder displaying an efficiently organized synod that was attended by some 200 delegates from over 100 churches, together with fraternal delegates from a variety of church federations (among whom the writers of this report, delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches). After the convening church had taken care of the constituting exercises, Synod Nyack 2012 could be constituted with the following moderamen: Rev. Ronald Scheuers, of Chino, CA, as chairman, Rev. John Bowers, of Jordan ON, as vice-chairman, Rev. Douglas Barnes, of Hills, MN, as 1st clerk, and Rev. Greg Lubbers, of Byron Center, MI, as 2nd clerk. The Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, of Sioux Center, IA, joined the podium as well, being the Stated Clerk of the federation of the URCNA. The delegates rose to indicate their assent to the Form of Subscription, and after some further initiating actions of synod the 12 advisory committees could be sent to their respective rooms at campus to work on their assigned agenda items for the preparation of proposals to be discussed by synod. By this time as well the fraternal delegates and observers had been recognized and welcomed and been given the privilege of the floor. We may add that your fraternal delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches received a special place at a convenient location in the auditorium.

We would be going beyond the scope and format of this report if we would be writing about each and every item on the agenda. Before mentioning anything in particular, however, we would like to highlight the very warm and cordial welcome and reception we experienced throughout these days of GS Nyack 2012. In the meetings of the advisory committees we attended (at first the committee discussing the report of CERCUC, i.e. the committee for church unity, and further the committee dealing with the report on doctrinal commitment), we received ample opportunity to contribute to the

discussions. The address, also, by one of our delegates, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde (as accompanying this report), was well received and appreciated for its positive and productive approach, continuing as it does to hold out much hope for progress in the process toward church unity. In the course of the proceedings and during many a point of discussion, the opinion and input of your Canadian Reformed delegates was asked frequently and was received with appreciation. The latter became evident, for instance, when in the midst of an interesting discussion about theological education and the required courses to be decided by synod for candidates-to-be, your fraternal delegates could observe with gratitude that the discussion made the need for a federational seminary apparent!

Among other matters of interest to our Canadian Reformed Churches, we may report with thankfulness the interest that was expressed to involve our (dormant) synodical committee with the Liturgical Forms Committee. Synod Nyack decided to have the revised and updated forms distributed among the churches of the URCNA to review these forms and correspond with the committee regarding their findings. In discussions with members of this committee the involvement of our committee was recommended and requested! With regard to the work of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee, Synod thanked its members. No churches, however, had responded to Synod 2010's reminder that suggested changes to the PJCO 2010 should be directed to Synod by way of overture through Classis. Rather than receiving the work for information, therefore, Synod decided to continue its PJCO committee and to receive the Church Order for a united federation of the URCNA and the Canadian Reformed Churches for continued study, feedback, and possible overtures. The URCNA committee that's working on a common Psalter Hymnal, on the other hand, did *not* turn back to our Common Songbook Committee from its cooperation with the OPC committee that's working on a new Psalter Hymnal as well. Rather, given its long history with the OPC going back to the days of the CRC, Synod approved of this cooperation and recommended it. Another matter of common interest was Synod's discussion and decision concerning the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America [RPCNA]. Although the request and recommendation was to enter with the RPCNA into Phase 2 according to the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the fact that the RPCNA has ordained women deacons in some of their churches required much debate in the advisory committee as well as in the deliberations on the floor of Synod. In the end Synod adopted by a slim majority a proposal to enter upon this Phase 2, stating among the grounds that this practice is not the product of a liberal and destructive hermeneutic, that deacons are not part of the ruling body of the church, and that their practice is much like that of women deacons in the ERQ with whom the URCNA has Phase 2 relations.

During the days we spent at Synod Nyack your Canadian Reformed Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity [CCU] had the privilege of interacting and communicating with many of the delegates at Synod. One of the main objectives of the conversations and discussions was to pursue some networking with the classical appointees as members of the CERCU, as well as with the Stated Clerks of the various classes in the federation of the URCNA (particularly those located in the US!). As a result we may report that several representatives expressed interest in the attendance of

one of our coordinators at their Fall Classis or at next year's Spring Classis! The suggestion was made that such visits at respective classes could be combined as well with preaching engagements in one or more of the classis churches, as well as with presentations in one or more local congregations. We may conclude this report therefore with thankful mention of Synod's decision regarding the pursuit of merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches, adopting the following recommendation:

“That Synod encourage each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill our pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection.”

Respectfully submitted by the

Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity,

Rev. C.J. VanderVelde, speaker,

Rev. W. den Hollander, reporter.