

# **Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches Report to General Synod 2013**

September 27, 2012.

Esteemed brothers:

General Synod 2010 mandated the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to maintain the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the following church federations:

- The Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- The Free Church of Scotland
- The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
- The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa
- The Presbyterian Church of Korea
- The Reformed Churches in Indonesia
- The Reformed Churches in Brazil
- The Reformed Churches in New Zealand.

In addition to this, Synod decided:

- to mandate the CRCA to maintain contact with the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia with a view to improving official communications and to gain more insight in the character and direction of the CRCA.
- to continue the contact with the Reformed Churches in Korea with a view to making recommendations regarding ecclesiastical fellowship to Synod 2013.
- to continue the membership of the CANRC in the ICRC.

The responsibility to maintain the relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was given to a subcommittee which worked and reports separately from the CRCA.

The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as adopted by General Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts Lincoln 1992, article 50, page 33) are:

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.

Since Synod Burlington 2010, the CRCA has had eight regular meetings and one extra meeting to meet with delegates from the Reformed Churches of Korea.

Rev. Rob Schouten only attended the first meeting and due to sickness was not able to participate in the CRCA from September 2010. We are thankful that the health of Rev. Schouten has improved and the prospects are good, and we hope that in the near future he will be able again to participate in the CRCA. Rev. A. Souman took over the position as convener from Rev. Schouten.

Also br. J. Vanderstoep had to deal with heart problems and because of that was not able to make a planned visit to the churches in Korea. We are thankful that he did recuperate and was able to continue to function as member of the committee.

Instead of first reporting on the churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship and thereafter on the other contacts we have with churches, we decided to report the contacts grouped per country. If within one country there is a church with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship as well as one or more churches with which we have contact, this situation will have to be discussed with these churches and that will come back in the reports. This is the case in Korea as well as in Indonesia. Therefore we thought it better to group these reports together per country.

For several of the churches we had to limit our report and summarize all the information that we received. There is much more information available in the archives of the CRCA: reports of visits made to the churches as well as speeches by delegates and Acts of synods and correspondence. These files can serve to fill in details not necessarily included in this report. If synod desires more information or has questions about information in this report, the committee will do what is possible to provide this information to synod.

In our report, the following abbreviations will be used:

Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis): GGRC

Canadian Reformed Churches: CANRC

Free Church of Scotland: FCS

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing): FCC

Free Reformed Churches in South Africa: FRCSA

Free Reformed Churches of Australia: FRCA

Independent Reformed Church in Korea: IRCK

Presbyterian Church in Korea: PCK

Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT (Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia) GGRI-NTT

Reformed Churches of Korea : RCK

Reformed Churches in Brazil: RCB

Reformed Churches of New Zealand: RCNZ

## **A. Scotland**

### **1. The Free Church of Scotland**

#### **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the FCS under the adopted rules
2. To provide the CRCA with the following mandate:
  - To give due diligence to the Rules for EF and in the context of these rules to monitor the relationship the FCS has with the Church of Scotland.
  - To encourage the FCS and the FCC to work earnestly at reconciliation and reunion.
  - To send two committee members to the FCS and FCC with a view to encouraging them, also when it comes to the topic of the unity of the church.

#### **Communications and actions**

As directed by Synod 2010, the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship was maintained according to our adopted rules. Decisions of Synod 2010 concerning the FCS were communicated to the Principal Clerk. In turn, the FCS sent copies or indications of the availability of the Principal Acts of the 2010 and 2011 GAs. An invitation was received to send delegates to the 2011 General Assembly. Although it was intended to accept this invitation, at the last minute it was found impossible to fulfill this intention. Instead, a letter of greeting was sent. Subsequently a letter of invitation to send delegates to the 2012 GA was received. In response to this invitation and in accordance with the mandate of Synod, the CRCA delegated the brs. Jake Van Laar and John Vanderstoep. They attended the General Assembly, convened in Edinburgh on May 21-25, 2012. They were warmly received, provided all the documents for the GA and invited to address the Assembly.

#### **Reconciliation and Reunion**

In both the address and in discussions with the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the matter of the reconciliation and reunion of the FCS and the FCC was raised. It is obvious that this matter continues to be a sore point, with continuing differences and even ongoing conflicts between the two federations, particularly on matters of church property. Our offer of assistance was gratefully noted. It is clear that other sister churches have offered the same. However, as outsiders, it is very difficult to know how to assist. Each federation has moved on from the time of separation twelve years ago, and each is developing an ethos of its own. At some local levels, between congregations of the two federations, there was indicated to be less ill feeling, and a suggestion that conflicts are being resolved. The FCS in 2010 adopted the possibility of singing appropriate spiritual material and using musical accompaniment in worship services. While this has not been

universally adopted in every congregation, the fact that it is permissible is a further block to the FCC for reunification. It seems unlikely that reunification will be possible.

### **Discussions with the Church of Scotland (CoS)**

In private discussions, and also in discussions with the Ecumenical Relations Committee, it became clear that already in 2009, the General Assembly debated the wisdom of continuing the talks with the Church of Scotland. These talks had been regularly taking place over a period of five years. “The debate was precipitated by the then ongoing and unconcluded question of whether an allegedly gay minister be inducted to a Church of Scotland charge. The Assembly decided that, in view of the uncertainty over what the outcome might be, they would not take any action which might preclude the outcome. At the same time however, commissioners were assured that the committee would make an “appropriate” response in the event of the outcome being an unscriptural one” (*Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the FCS, to the 2010 General Assembly*). The Committee proposed to the Assembly that: “The General Assembly note with approval the Committee’s decision to suspend discussions with representatives of the Church of Scotland. . . .”. When notified of this decision by the FCS Committee, the Church of Scotland invited the FCS to submit comments on the question of human sexuality to the commission established to study this matter and report to a subsequent GA of the CoS. This was done and the FCS Committee in its 2010 report proposed that the GA record “their hope that the outcome of the (CoS) Commission’s deliberations and report to the 2011 Church of Scotland GA will be faithful to the teaching of scripture and thus glorifying God.” (*2010 Report of the FCS ERC*).

While it is a matter of record that the official discussions between the FCS and the CoS have discontinued, it was noted that the Ecumenical Relations Committee (of the FCS) has been available for consultation should any within the ministry of the Church of Scotland wish to meet with them. Recognizing that it might be perceived as opportunistic as if the Free Church sought to capitalize on the situation facing some of the CoS evangelicals since their Assembly’s decision in relation to same-sex relationships in the ministry, the Committee nevertheless did meet with a number of groups and individuals (*ERC Report to 2012 GA*). At the time of the reporting, no substantial developments had emerged.

### **Conclusion**

From the documents received, from official and private discussions, and from opportunity to attend very limited worship services, it is concluded that the Free Church of Scotland continues to be the faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seeks to abide by the Scriptures and the adopted confessions.

### **Recommendation**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS under the adopted rules;
2. to be available to assist the FCS and FCC in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion, should that be requested;
3. to continue personal contact with the FCS whenever that is possible or feasible, e.g. at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches.

## **2. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)**

### **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. to rescind the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 with respect to the FCC and to reinstate the relationship of EF with the FCC.
2. to provide the CRCA with the following mandate:
  - a. To encourage the FCS and the FCC to work earnestly at reconciliation and reunion.
  - b. To send two committee members to the FCS and FCC with a view to encouraging them, also when it comes to the topic of the unity of the church

### **Communications and actions**

Decisions of Synod 2010 concerning the FCC, particularly that of the reinstatement of EF, were communicated to the Principal Clerk. This development was acknowledged with thankfulness. In turn, the FCC sent a copy or indications of the availability of the Principal Acts of the 2010 GA. An invitation was received to send delegates to the 2011 General Assembly. Although it was intended to accept this invitation, at the last minute this had to be abandoned. Instead, an appropriate letter of greeting was sent. Subsequently a letter of invitation to send delegates to the 2012 GA was received. In response to this invitation and in accordance with the mandate of Synod, the CRCA delegated the brs. Jake Van Laar and John Vanderstoep. They attended the General Assembly, convened in Edinburgh on May 21-24, 2012. They were warmly received, provided all the documents for the GA and invited to address the Assembly. Also, a copy of the Principal Acts, along with minutes of the 2011 GA was received.

### **Reconciliation and Reunion**

In both the address and in discussions with the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the matter of the reconciliation and reunion of the FCS and the FCC was raised. This issue continues to be a sore point, with continuing differences and even ongoing conflicts between the two federations, particularly on matters of church property. Our offer of assistance was gratefully noted. It is clear that other sister churches have offered the same. However, as outsiders, it is very difficult to know how to assist. In his reply to our address, the Moderator commented that he did not think

that reunion was likely or even possible, under present circumstances. Each federation has moved on from the time of separation twelve years ago. At some local levels, between congregations of the two federations, some conflicts are being resolved. The FCS in 2010 adopted the possibility of singing appropriate spiritual material and using musical accompaniment in worship services. While this has not been universally adopted in every congregation, the fact that it is permissible is a further block to reunification with the FCS.

## **Conclusion**

From the documents received, from official and private discussions, and from the opportunity to attend a very limited number of worship services, it is concluded that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) seeks to be the faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seeks to abide by the Scriptures and the adopted confessions.

## **Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCC under the adopted rules;
2. to be available to assist the FCS and FCC in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion, should that be requested;
3. to continue personal contact with the FCC whenever that is possible or feasible, e.g. at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches.

## **B. Australia: The Free Reformed Churches of Australia**

### **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To maintain the existing relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules.
2. To thank the FRCA for its continued and increased support for the Theological College in Hamilton.
3. To mandate the CRCA as follows:
  - a. To maintain close contact with the various deputyships of the FRCA to discuss matters of mutual interest, e.g. mission work in Indonesia, *Book of Praise*, third-party relationships, issues of common interest with regard to sister churches, etc.

- b. To keep the FRCA informed on developments regarding our relationship with the URCNA and in particular developments regarding theological education.
- c. To continue supporting the FRCA as much as possible in its discussions with the RCNZ.
- d. To send a delegate to the next synod of the FRCA in 2012.

### **Communications and actions**

The decisions of Synod Burlington regarding the FRCA (as above) were made known to the FRCA via letter sometime after the conclusion of Synod Burlington and, via this letter, the FRCA were also directed to the on-line version of the *Acts* of Synod Burlington for further information about other decisions. Moreover, it was communicated to the FRCA that their deputyship for the *Book of Praise* could be in direct contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise for the most effective and efficient way to deal with matters of mutual interest there. It became clear through their deputy report on the *Book of Praise* that such communication did take place. Via email, there was some subsequent communication with the FRCA deputyship for the mission work in Indonesia. At one point it was requested of us to have a ‘skyped’ meeting with that deputyship to discuss common approach with respect to the work in Indonesia. However, this did not materialize. An invitation was received from the FRCA to attend the FRCA synod in Armadale in July, 2012. Two fraternal delegates attended Synod Armadale from July 9 through July 13. It was during the time of synod that further aspects of our mandate were taken up.

### **Visit to Synod Armadale, 2012**

Two CRCA members, A. Souman and B. Wielenga, attended the Synod of the Australian sister churches in Armadale from Monday evening, July 9, through the evening of July 13. We were received and seated as fraternal delegates, able to take part in the discussions of synod. Opportunity was given to address synod with fraternal greetings and providing some information about matters of mutual concern. This was an opportunity to undertake various other parts of our mandate. Among the topics touched on in the address were: thanks for the continued (and increased financial) support for the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, *Book of Praise* (and the Australian keen interest in contributing to the final version), our common relationship with the RCN where there are concerns about various developments, our relation with the URCNA and also the developments regarding theological education, and, finally, our relationship with the RCNZ—assuring the FRCA of our continued support in their discussions with the RCNZ.

During our time at synod, we sat in both open and closed sessions of synod, and we also took opportunity to sit in on synod committees as they met to prepare matters for the plenary sessions. Besides this, we met separately with the deputyship for the churches in Indonesia, with the deputyship for the CanRCs, as well as with the deputyship for theological education. During the time in Australia, both A. Souman and B. Wielenga were invited to lead worship services in the sister churches.

## Decisions of Synod Armadale, 2012

Among the decisions of Synod Armadale we quote the following (NOTE: this is from the *provisional version* of the Acts made available online):

### Canadian Reformed Churches:

- I. Decision
  1. To continue the sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
  2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
    - a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
    - b. stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayers;
    - c. encourage the CanRC to support the FRCA as much as possible in our discussions with the RCNZ;
    - d. stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS, and ERQ); and
    - e. send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Carman West during 2013, pending finances.
- II. Grounds
  1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
  2. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters that our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.
  3. Rules for sister relations state that “in cases of substantial changes or additions to the confessions, Church Order, or liturgical forms” our preference is that “as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.”
  4. We value the continuing support of the CanRC in regards to our discussions with the RCNZ.
  5. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the synodical level reinforces our contact with them.

It may be of interest to include the following regarding the “**Liberated Reformed Church Abbotsford**” (LRCA) in Articles 58 and 59 of Synod Armadale:

#### Article 58

- I. Material  
Agenda item 8.e.i – Letter from Liberated Reformed Church Abbotsford.
- II. Admissibility:  
Following some discussion, the matter is declared inadmissible.



Ground:

Rule 7.3 – “The admissibility of an agenda item shall be decided at the time when the item is scheduled for consideration. Submissions not from churches, except those allowed by the Church Order, shall be received for information only and require no acknowledgement.”

## Article 59

### I. Material

Agenda Item 8.a.i – Letter from FRC Kelmscott re request regarding material received from the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

Agenda Item 8.b.i – Letter from the FRC Armadale re request regarding Abbotsford.

Agenda Item 8.c.i – Overture from FRC Mt Nasura re Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

Agenda Item 11.g.iv – Deputies Report for Sister Church Relations: Supplementary Report for Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

### II. Decision

Not to agree to the request of the FRC Armadale, FRC Kelmscott or FRC Mt Nasura to investigate the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford and to accept the deputies grounds.

Grounds:

1. The LCRA have requested deputies to make a judgment as to whether the CanRC are faithful or not. However, the FRCA continues to recognize the CanRC as true and faithful churches.
2. The points of contention raised by the LRCA regarding the CanRC entering sister-church relations with the OPC (and other churches) are appeals against decisions of various General Synods of the CanRC (2001, 2004, 2007, and 2010). The FRCA has not objected to these sister-church relationships.
3. It is not appropriate to delve into a local church matter which belongs within the jurisdiction of the CanRC federation of churches.

With regards to the **Training for the Ministry**, Synod Armadale decided to

1. Request the churches to contribute A\$65 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of Hamilton as from 1 January 2013.
2. Set aside ... funds for the costs of a visit to Australia by a guest lecturer from Hamilton or Kampen .... Also, it is recommended to invite a guest lecturer once every two years, rather than every three years.
3. Set aside ... from General Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of Deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton’s Board of Governors and Convocation between Synod 2012 and Synod 2015.
4. Discharge Deputies and to appoint new deputies with the madate to:
  - a. continue to collect funds for “Hamilton” and forward them to the College;
  - b. continue to correspond with “Hamilton” in order to maintain contact and obtain information ...
  - c. continue to collect funds for theological training;
  - d. continue to oversee the Library Fund;

- e. continue to ensure that relevant information is published concerning the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students;
- f. continue to arrange the support of theological students ...
- g. continue to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from one of the theological seminaries of our sister churches once every two years;
- h. continue to be as closely involved in the work of the Board of Governors of Hamilton as practically possible;
- i. monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program of the Hamilton College within the Australian Churches ...
- j. collect and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines ...
- k. continue to investigate the feasibility of offering the Freshman (i.e. First) Year of theological study to the churches in Australia.

Regarding the **Book of Praise**, Synod Armadale decided as follows:

Decision:

1. To discharge the deputies and thank them for their work.
2. To adopt provisionally the 150 Psalms as revised in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010) for use in the churches.
3. To adopt provisionally the 65 Hymns which we have in the current Book of Praise (2004 edition) with the changes made in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010) for use in the churches.
4. Not to adopt the 19 additional Hymns as provisionally adopted by Synod Burlington 2010.
5. To inform the churches that the 19 additional Hymns may not be used in the worship services.
6. That it is not desirable, nor in line with the Church Order (Article 30) to be tied to the new hymns being adopted or considered by the CanRC, in accordance with the overtures of Byford, Darling Downs, Kelmscott, and West Albany.
7. To endorse ... [the Canadian/SCBP] guidelines ... as a starting point in the evaluation of proposed hymns.
8. To appoint deputies with the mandate to:
  - a. Monitor developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.
  - b. Interact with the Canadian SCBP to ensure that Australian input is taken into consideration.
  - c. Keep the churches informed of developments with the Canadian Book of Praise.
  - d. To submit relevant material already received from the churches to the Canadian SCBP for consideration.
  - e. To study the use of capitalization for personal pronouns referring to God.
  - f. To invite input from the churches regarding the desirability of having an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.
  - g. Recommence investigations regarding copyright, printing costs and feasibility of producing an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise, in the event that a future Synod will decide to go that way ....

Grounds:

1. The Deputies concluded that the revisions to the 150 Psalms and the 65 Hymns in the Provisional Book of Praise are an improvement on the present version in the Book of Praise 2008.
2. The CanRC has not made a final decision regarding the 19 ‘new’ Hymns in the Provisional Book of Praise (2010).
3. Although, in 2009, some churches indicated that they wanted to stay in line with the Canadian Book of Praise, it has not been shown that the actual desire to have more hymns is alive in the churches.
4. The FRCA should only be obliged to consider new hymns if and when these are put forward by the Australian churches.
5. It can be argued that, in practice, Synod 2009 (Article 24) restricted the decision of future Synods to consider an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.
6. Deputies recommend that Synod adopt the “Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church as used by the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) of the Canadian Reformed Churches”, in line with the mandate given to them by Synod 2009 ....
7. Some churches questioned the lack of capitalization of personal pronouns referring to God.
8. It is prudent to invite input from the churches regarding an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.

Besides these matters more directly related to the Canadian Reformed Churches, Synod Armadale 2012 also decided the following, as gleaned from the press release of that Synod:

**Korea (PCK), South Africa (FRCSA), and Indonesia (GGRI and GGRC)**

Synod Armadale decided to continue sister church relations with the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. While continuing sister church relations with the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia (GGRI), it was noted that this federation of churches has become larger due to the union in February 2012 of what was previously three federations (NTT, Papua, Kalimantan). Deputies were mandated to provide a clearer picture of this larger federation, along with the implications of this union. With respect to the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvin (GGRC), Synod Armadale decided to continue contact, while encouraging the GGRC to work towards union with the GGRI and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRCA.

**Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)**

With sadness it was noted that over time the FRCA synods and deputies have needed to express various weighty concerns concerning the faithfulness of the sister churches in the Netherlands, and that deputies had presented evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the Word of God. In line with the rules for sister church relations, Synod decided that the

seriousness of these concerns required an official admonition to the RCN in the form of a statement of weighty objections with respect to the doctrine and practice of the RCN, also taking into account that the RCN had requested the FRCA to direct their concerns directly to their synod. This admonition will pay attention to items that have had the attention of the Australian deputies over recent years, relating especially to hermeneutics, ethics, sacraments, ecclesiology, church government, and liturgy. It will also take into account the responses already received from the RCN. There will be consultation with deputies (committees) from the sister churches in Canada and South Africa. An advisory committee was appointed to formulate the admonition to the RCN; its work is to be completed by March 2013 so that Synod Armadale can reconvene on April 22, 2012 in order to adopt it and decide how to proceed with the relationship with the RCN.

### **Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored) (RCNr)**

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Restored (RCNr) have retracted their offer of sister church relations with the FRCA, making it clear that further meaningful contact will only be possible if the FRCA break the sister church relationship with the RCN. Synod Armadale also acknowledged that the RCNr's relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church Abbotsford may be an impediment to a future sister church relationship with the RCNr.

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

Synod Armadale reconfirmed the decision of a previous synod recognizing the RCNZ to be true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and expressed the continued resolve to work towards the goal of a sister church relation with the RCNZ. While the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCAustralia has changed from a sister church relation (which had been an impediment for the FRCA to have sister church relations with the RCNZ) to a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, the rules for the new relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCAustralia have not yet been finalized by the RCNZ and the practical implications are not yet clear. Synod Armadale decided to charge deputies with the task to “determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA differs from their previous sister church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods” while the deputies are to “encourage the RCNZ to continue to be consequential in their relationship with the CRCA.”

### **Conclusion**

From our communications with the FRCA, including official contact and private discussions, and from our observations at Synod Armadale and our attendance at worship services in a few of the local congregations, it is evident that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia continue as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. They abide by the Word of God as the only rule for faith and life, and adhere to the adopted confessions. The Free Reformed Churches value their relation with the Canadian Reformed Churches, which is evident, among other things, in their

keen interest in the development of the *Book of Praise*, as well as their ongoing dedicated support for the Theological Seminary in Hamilton.

## **Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules;
2. to express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA's ongoing support for and interest in the Theological Seminary, including their generous financial support;
3. to assure the FRCA of our continued attention to the nature and direction of the relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCAustralia;
4. to maintain close contact with the various deputyships of the FRCA in matters of relations with sister churches abroad and informing the FRCA of changes or developments in third party relationships;
5. to invite the various deputyships of the FRCA to seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committees (e.g., our SCBP, sub-committee RCN, our committee in charge of reviewing the liturgical forms, Committee on Bible Translations, and perhaps others) in areas of mutual interest where the CRCA's mandate does not reach;
6. to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCA in 2015.

## **C. Reformed Churches in New Zealand**

### **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To continue the relation of EF with the RCNZ under the adopted rules.
2. To continue to monitor the relation between the RCNZ and the CRC-Australia and encourage the RCNZ to seriously re-evaluate its relationship with the CRC-Australia in light of its continuing practice of ordaining women to the office of deacon.
3. To encourage the RCNZ to keep seeking ways to grow closer towards the FRCA.
4. To invite the RCNZ to become better acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton.

### **Communications and actions**

Although the decision of Synod Burlington does not contain an explicit mandate for the CRCA, the CRCA understanding is that the points of the decision nevertheless form the mandate for the

committee. The decisions of Synod Burlington (as above) were made known to the RCNZ via letter sometime after the conclusion of Synod Burlington and, via the letter, the RCNZ were also directed to the on-line version of the *Acts* of Synod Burlington for further information about other decisions. By this means, the RCNZ was informed of the decisions of Synod Burlington, including our concerns regarding the relation of the RCNZ with the CRCAustralia and inviting the RCNZ to become better acquainted with the Theological Seminary in Hamilton.

The RCNZ held its most recent Synod in Bucklands Beach, 2011. An invitation was received to attend the Synod and a letter of greeting was sent in reply by the CRCA. Unfortunately our letter of greeting did not arrive in time to be received by the RCNZ Synod. In the summer of 2012 reply was received from RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee, informing us of decisions of their Synod 2011; the 2012 RCNZ Yearbook was included in this communication. During the course of our visit to the FRCA and Synod Armadale in July 2012, opportunity was taken to meet with the RCNZ delegate to Synod Armadale, P. Archbald.

### **Synod Bucklands Beach, 2011**

The RCNZ Synod in 2011 decided the following concerning the **Canadian Reformed Churches**:

- To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.
- To express our appreciation for the privilege of cooperating with the CanRC in the mission work in Papua New Guinea.
- To convey our change of relationship with the CRCA explaining that seeking to continue a strained sister-church relationship has not been profitable for either the CRCA or the RCNZ.

It may be of interest to note the following decision regarding the RCNZ updating their **Forms and Confessions**:

Synod decided:

- That the Canadian Reformed Churches translation of the Belgic Confession be adopted by our churches, with the changes recommended by the committee and the advisory committee of Synod.
- That the Canadian Reformed Churches translation of the Canons of Dort be adopted by our churches, with the changes recommended by the committee and the advisory committee of Synod.

Regarding the relationship of the RCNZ with the **Christian Reformed Church Australia**, Synod 2011 decided:

- To establish a new category of interchurch relations in addition to the existing sister-church relationship called “Ecclesiastical Fellowship”.
- To adopt provisionally the proposed “Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship” as the rules for this new relationship.
  - [These “Proposed Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship” read as follows]:
    - Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
    - The eligibility of call of ministers from each other’s churches, subject to

- our established practice of a “colloquium doctum”.
  - Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships.
  - Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
  - A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
  - Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another’s concerns.
- To discontinue the sister-church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- To inform the CRCA of this new relationship with them and seek ratification of this at the next synod of the CRCA.
- To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.

Regarding the RCNZ’s **review of theological education**, the following:

A committee/deputies submitted a report to Synod 2011 entitled, “Review of RCNZ Requirements for Theological Education” (Report 17). The deputies had received the following instruction and mandate from RCNZ Synod 2008:

- to conduct a review of the requirements of the RCNZ for theological education for the future and report back to the next synod with recommendations. This review is to cover:
  - a. The content and type of the theological education (i.e. practical/equipping, or academic/theological, or what combination of both and how that combination should be weighted)
  - b. The delivery of this education (e.g. Through the RTC, MARS, or to be based more in NZ)

The deputies came with eight recommendations to Synod 2011, the last seven of which rested on the first. The first recommendation was to approve the establishment of the RCNZ Institute for Theological Training.

This recommendation sought to introduce a program of theological training which was ‘based more in NZ’, with the intent to have ‘an introductory two year programme of study’ approved by synod (recommendation 5). The first recommendation was defeated. It seems the next seven recommendations (including recommendation 5) fell with the first.

In a subsequent session, Synod 2011 decided to increase each year, for the years 2012 – 2014, the level of support given to Reformed Theological College in Australia.

Among the RCNZ’s **relations with foreign churches** we note that Synod 2011 continued the offer of sister church relations with the FRCA. The RCNZ is also investigating entering into a fraternal relationship with Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia.

### **Meeting with P. Archbald, RCNZ fraternal delegate to Synod Armadale**

During a visit to FRCA Synod Armadale in the summer of 2012, CRCA members A. Souman

and B. Wielenga had opportunity to meet with P. Archbald, the delegate of the RCNZ visiting Synod Armadale.

The Canadian Reformed delegates asked Rev. Archbald to give more clarity regarding the decision of the RCNZ to end the sister church relationship with the CRCAustralia and instead to create a new category called “ecclesiastical fellowship.” It appears that every church federation has its own categories for relationships and that the same name does not necessarily mean the same thing. Rev. Archbald emphasized that the RCNZ decided in their 2011 Synod to end the sister church relationship with the CRCAustralia and that ecclesiastical fellowship must be seen as a downgrading from sister church relations. The RCNZ Synod was under severe time constraints when this decision was made and therefore it was left to the Interchurch Relations Committee to finalize rules for this new category. The next RCNZ synod will make a decision about these rules. The decision to change the relation with the CRCAustralia was made unanimously.

The RCNZ continue to cooperate with the CRCAustralia with regard to the theological education at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, but Rev. Archbald informed us that most of their candidates do not come from this institution, but instead from North American institutions, especially MARS. When he was asked why not from the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, he responded that Hamilton was not very well known yet and by those who do know it Hamilton was seen as having a rather rigorous curriculum, and the entrance requirements were often quite high for students coming from New Zealand. The churches in New Zealand have made use of the seminary in Hamilton for advice in certain matters.

Rev. Archbald indicated that the relationship between the RCNZ and the Canadian Reformed Churches is growing. Also the cooperation in the mission work in Papua New Guinea can be mentioned here. The RCNZ has good contacts with the URCNA and the OPC. The relationship with the CRCAustralia is not so close anymore. About half of the present RCNZ ministers has been trained in Geelong.

## **Conclusion**

From the rather little contact with the RCNZ it is evident that the RCNZ seek to continue as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, abiding by the Word of God and adhering to their adopted confessions. Having been better informed what a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship between the RCNZ and the CRCAustralia means, we can appreciate the direction the RCNZ has taken. Nevertheless, seeing the provisional rules for ecclesiastical fellowship, it seems that it will be important to stay in contact with the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee in this matter, while the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship are being developed and finalized towards their next synod, to see that the change in relations is not, in practical respects, a change in name only. In this respect, it may be prudent to be in consultation with the deputies of the FRCA, since we have assured the FRCA of our continued attention to this matter.

## **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted



- rules;
2. to monitor the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCAustralia and
    - a. try to get a better understanding of the practical changes that the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship has introduced;
    - b. encourage the RCNZ as it develops and finalizes the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship to be consequent in its relation with the CRCAustralia;
  3. to encourage the RCNZ to keep seeking ways to grow closer towards the FRCA;
  4. to invite the RCNZ to become better acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton;
  5. to send a delegation to the next RCNZ synod in 2014.

## **D. South Africa: The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)**

### **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To continue EF with the FRCSA under the adopted rules.
2. To recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued financial assistance, to help them support the needy churches in the federation, and to assist them with their extensive mission work and relief efforts among the disadvantaged and sick in South Africa.
3. To mandate the Board of Governors of our Theological College to encourage and assist when possible the FRCSA in their efforts to set up their Ministerial Training Structure.

### **Communications and actions**

The CRCA informed the deputies of the FRCSA for relations with churches abroad of the decisions of Synod Burlington Ebenezer 2010 regarding the FRCSA.

An invitation was received to attend the Synod of the FRCSA in 2011. The CRCA was not able to send a delegate and a letter of greeting was sent.

A press report of the synod in 2011 were received, as well as a press report of an ad-hoc synod in 2012.

The CRCA delegates at the synod of the FRCA in Armadale (Australia) met with the delegate from the FRCSA, Rev. J. Breytenbach.

The CRCA also contacted the committee from the church at Coaldale for financial assistance to the FRCSA. A report from this committee can be found in appendix 1.

The FRCSA are a small federation facing many challenges. The political situation and the high crime rate do not stimulate economic investment. People are losing jobs, living costs are rising and the FRCSA are directly affected. They are dependent on support from their sister churches abroad for much of their work as federation. They receive 95 % of their income for mission work from sister churches abroad, for which they are thankful. However, they feel that they are not able to justify that any more churches totally dependent on funding from outside are being instituted. An Ad Hoc synod in Pretoria in April 2012 dealt with the issue of the finances. This synod made guidelines for deputies how to come with new proposals that require funding and how to present a proper budget for these proposals. They feel that as part of their stewardship they need to be accountable how and for what purpose they use the financial gifts provided to them. A contribution model was set up and will be phased in, which is based on the ability of the congregations to contribute. The federation hopes to be less dependent on financial support from sister churches abroad.

The theological training also brings its challenges. The Sotho speaking brothers of these churches are being trained at a different institution than the coloured Afrikaans speaking brothers, and the Afrikaans speaking brothers from the older churches are being advised to go to Hamilton. It is the desire of the FRCSA for the future that all the brothers will be trained in Hamilton and the FRCSA are thankful for the invitation to make use of the training in Hamilton. However, because of practical reasons not all the brothers will be able to study in Hamilton all the time. The deputies of the FRCSA ask if it will be feasible to offer the first year of Hamilton's theological training in South Africa, through distance theological training from Hamilton with the use of facilitators in South Africa.

The FRCSA have contact with the Reformed Churches in South Africa. The Reformed Churches in South Africa rejected the plea to install women in the office of elder but they do install women deacons.

The FRCSA value the relationships with sister churches abroad very much and it is important for us to remember that encouragement from our side means much more for them than we often realize.

We have not sent a delegate to a synod of the FRCSA in 2011 or 2008. It deserves serious consideration to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCSA if an invitation is received.

## **Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue EF with the FRCSA under the adopted rules;
2. to recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued financial assistance, to help them support the needy churches in the federation, and to assist them with their extensive mission work and relief efforts among the disadvantaged and sick in South Africa;
3. to mandate the Board of Governors of our Theological College to investigate together with the FRCSA if there are possibilities to set up a form of distance learning for the first year of theological training, with the use of facilitators in South Africa;
4. to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCSA.

## **E. Korea**

### **E.1 The Presbyterian Church of Korea**

#### **Mandate:**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the PCK under the adopted rules.
2. To continue to discuss with the PCK its relationship with the IRCK and the RCK with the goal of seeking further insight into these two federations.
3. To continue to work cooperatively with the RCN and the FRCA in exercising our relationship with the PCK in meaningful ways, such as by regular communication, by visiting the General Assembly of the PCK, and by meeting and interacting with their delegates at the ICRC.

#### **Communication and Actions:**

As mandated by Synod 2010 the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules was maintained with the PCK. There were multiple contacts made with their Fraternal Relations Committee (FRC) through Prof. Yoo. These communications included short reports of their annual General Assemblies.

The CRCA delegated brs. H. Leyenhorst and J. Vanderstoep to visit the churches in Korea and attend the General Assembly in September 2011. Br. Vanderstoep was not able to attend because of sudden illness.. The delegate also met with the FRC, the PCK missionary from China, the delegate from the Southern Presbytery and informally with several other delegates and members. There was also a visit made to one of the churches in Seoul` with the opportunity to join in worship and bible study.

The reports were received from the RCN of their visit in 2009 and from the FRCA of their visit in 2010. These reports are consistent with our observations and have proven a positive way of maintaining regular contact and receiving information. The PCK is appreciative of this arrangement and the regular visits and contact. Special mention was made at the GA of the positive influence of our relationship as we were instrumental through encouragement in their decision to “ ..to keep the Lord’s Table holy and to fence it from abuse”.

The PCK has no official relations with the RCK or the IRCK although there is some contact with the IRCK through their publishing house. The PCK was encouraged to take up contact with these federations and to help us to know and understand them. They have promised to make contact with the RCK and to have discussions with them including items of mutual concern.

The 61<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the PCK formed a committee to seek union with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Hap-shin). (From Prof. Yoo's report about the GA)

### **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea under the adopted rules;
2. to continue to discuss with the PCK their relationship with the RCK and encourage them to meet with them and also support us with information and understanding;
3. to continue to work cooperatively with the RCN and the FRCA in exercising our relationship in meaningful ways and continue to visit the annual GA in turn. To also maintain regular communication with the PCK as well as meet with their delegates at the 2013 ICRC.

## **E.2 The Independent Reformed Church of Korea**

### **Mandate**

Synod 2010 provided no mandate concerning the IRCK except where it was mentioned concerning the PCK (Art. 105 – 4.2) that we discuss their relationship with the IRCK. The IRCK is also mentioned several times in the Acts of Synod (Art. 105 – 2.11, 3.2, and Art. 173 – 2.4.2, 2.5.2, 3.2) as well as the CRCA report to Synod 2010.

### **Communication and actions**

The delegate visited the IRCK churches in September 2010 at the same time that the visit was made to the PCK. The visit included attendance in a worship service, attendance in a lecture at their seminary, visit to their church and publishing house in Soeul, a meeting with delegates from their churches and several discussions with Rev. Heon Soo Kim.

The delegate was informed that the IRCK has withdrawn their request for relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The reasons given were that they already have relations with the OPC and the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands and that their federation is too small for more relations. They already have contact and visits with members of the CanRC and feel these un-official relations are worthwhile and sufficient for now. One example is the visit and lectures in their seminary of Prof. VanDam in 2011 and the publishing of his book *The Elder* in Korean.

They have requested that Synod 2013 correct two errors in the Acts of Synod 2010. It is stated in the CRCA report that they have adopted the three forms of unity even though they have not

adopted the Belgic Confession and Art.173 – 3.2 states “..they do respect the PCK seminary” where their respect is for one of the professors as they have their own seminary.

### **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to make note of the above mentioned errors;
2. to thank the IRCK for their cooperation and discussions and encourage them to continue contact with the CANRC.

## **E.3 The Reformed Churches of Korea**

### **Mandate:**

Synod 2010 decided:

1. Not to accept the offer of the RCK for ecclesiastical fellowship but to wait until more information becomes available.
2. To mandate the CRCA to continue contact with the RCK with a view to making recommendations regarding ecclesiastical fellowship to Synod 2013, keeping in mind especially Considerations 3.1.1 -3.1.4.

### **Communication and actions:**

The CRCA delegate visited the RCK in September 2010. The delegate visited two churches, attended two worship services and partook in two bible study sessions as well as visited and joined in fellowship with several members of the RCK churches. The delegate also met officially with three ministers and four office bearers to discuss contact, relations, communication and to exchange information. There has been limited contact since the visit. Two of the ministers of the RCK visited the CRCA in the summer of 2010.

The RCK has contact and discussions with several Presbyterian churches in the southern area of South Korea. These contacts include regular discussion on Reformed doctrine and polity. The RCK is currently a very small federation but this could change based on discussions with other groups.

They were encouraged to take up official contact with the PCK as they were informed of the commitment made by the PCK that they would have discussions with them. At this time they have not met or had official contact. There is also an outstanding disagreement between one of the ministers of the RCK and the Southern Presbytery of the PCK.

## **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCK until we are satisfied with the results of meetings between the RCK and the PCK. A clear understanding of the current status of the federation as well as future intent for joining with other Presbyterian groups is also necessary.

## **F. Brazil: Reformed Church in Brazil (RCB) (Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil)**

### **Mandate:**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. to express gratitude for the continued faithfulness and growth of the RCB.
2. to mandate the CRCA:
  - a. to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCB under the adopted rules.
  - b. to use every opportunity to have contact with the RCB and to provide encouragement to these churches.

### **Communications and Actions**

The decisions of Synod 2010 were communicated to the RCB via its Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (Comissão de Contatos com Igrejas no Exterior – CCIE). The relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship has been maintained, informed to a large extent by the extensive contact that the Canadian Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Surrey have with the RCB through their missionary activities. While direct federation-to-federation contact was encouraged in the communication sent to the RCB at the time of informing them of Synod's decisions, these direct communications have been slow in developing. We have been informed of Synod (Concilio) decisions primarily by way of the missionaries, but recently the CRCA received the Acts of the 18<sup>th</sup> Concilio, held in Recife in April 2012.

In 2010, the CRCA delegated the brs. Paul Krikke (Hamilton elder and Mission Board member) and John Vanderstoep (Surrey elder, Mission Board member and member of CRCA) to attend the October 2010 Concilio, held in Cabo Frio. The delegates were warmly received, seated at the Concilio table and invited to address the assembly. A report of this visit was published in the year-end 2010 issue of Clarion.

An invitation to attend the 18<sup>th</sup> Concilio, to be convened in Maceio in November 2012 has been received. A letter of greeting is to be sent.

In addition to the work of the missionaries of the Canadian churches, there has been considerable support provided in the past by way of a cooperative effort in the form of the Committee of Three. This organizational structure was discontinued in 2010 and has to date not been replaced. Recently the Brazilian churches, through its CCIE, have drafted a new proposal for the undertaking of cooperative projects. The April 2012 Concilio of the RCB approved this proposal for sharing with their sister churches as a start to discussions how cooperative projects might be undertaken. It is the expectation that the sending churches will consider these proposals and decide how to respond to them. It may be that something will be brought to the attention of the CRCA in the future.

The federation, by God's grace, continues to experience significant growth not only in the number of preaching points that are being established, but also in faithfulness. It is our conclusion that the brotherhood in Brazil, seriously seeks to proclaim the Word of our Heavenly Father. They are committed and work diligently in pasturing the flocks entrusted to them, while at the same trying to keep abreast of the church developments around them and in their sister churches. We pray that the LORD of heaven and earth may continue to sustain and strengthen them!

### **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the IRB under the adopted rules;
2. to use every opportunity to have contact with the RCB and to provide encouragement to these churches.

## **G. Indonesia: Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI(NTT)) and Calvinist Reformed Churches (GGRC)**

### **Background**

In the report of the CRCA to Synod Burlington 2010 the acronyms CRCI and RCI were used for resp. the Calvinist Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches on Indonesia. Because these acronyms are not commonly used in the Canadian Reformed Churches and not by our sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands either, the CRCA decided to revert back to the use of the acronyms GGRC (Calvinist Reformed Churches) and GGRI (Reformed Churches in Indonesia) for these two church federations, to prevent further confusion.

There are three federations in Indonesia which have the name GGRI. In February 2012 these three federations united into one nationwide federation. To distinguish the GGRI in the province NTT, with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship, from the national federation GGRI, we add the name of the province (NTT) to the name GGRI if we speak about this federation.

Synod Burlington 2010 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI(NTT). With regard to the GGRC synod decided at that time not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, but to mandate the CRCA to continue contact with the GGRC with a view to improving official communications and to gain more insight in the character and direction of the GGRC.

The GGRI (NTT) is a federation of reformed churches in the province NTT with 19 instituted churches, 40 “branches” which are not instituted yet but function as a local congregation under the care of a neighbouring consistory, and 20 mission posts, with a total of about 6500 members. These churches are mainly in Sumba, while there are two churches in Sabu and one in Kupang, West Timor. The GGRI(NTT) is working to establish a Theological School in Waingapu. This school started five years ago in Waimarang and moved to Waingapu a couple years ago. The school is not recognized or accredited by the government. The board of governors is working on this but the requirements set by the government for accreditation are quite rigorous. The GGRI(NTT) receives considerable support (financial and spiritual) from the sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands.

The GGRC is a federation of 14 churches and a couple mission posts, with in total about 2500 members. Six of these churches are in Rote, two in Sabu and six in West Timor. Since a reconciliation took place in 2011 between the churches of the GGRC and the churches of the GGRM and the churches decided to use the name GGRC, the number of churches and members mentioned includes those of the churches which previously formed the GGRM. There is some involvement of members of these churches in the mission work done by Smithville through Rev. Edwer Dethan.

The Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton provides financial support through Rev. Yonson Dethan to organize seminars. The organisation Children of Light channels support from donors in the Canadian Reformed Churches to West Timor through Rev. Yonson Dethan, for the Christian schools in West Timor and Rote. The Theological School in Kupang established by the church of Smithville provides theological education also to brothers from the GGRC and some ministers of the GGRC are involved in teaching at this school. The churches themselves however do not receive direct support from either Australia, the Netherlands or Canada.

Through the mission work of Rev. Edwer Dethan as missionary of the church of Smithville, three churches could be instituted, while more are close to institution, and there are several more mission posts. The number of mission posts is increasing constantly because there are many opportunities to start mission work in several villages, and the start of a mission post often depends on someone being available to work there as evangelist. These evangelists are mainly young brothers coming from the Theological School in Kupang, which was established by Smithville in 2006. The members of these churches and mission posts all together are around 700. These churches and mission posts are all in West Timor. There is contact between these churches and the GGRC but because the GGRC are not sister churches of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Smithville did not recommend to these churches yet to join the GGRC.



The Theological School has around 100 students, being trained for either minister of the Word or teacher. Those who intend to become minister come from all over Indonesia. The school is accredited by the government and the diplomas are officially recognized in Indonesia. There is a good contact with government officials and the school is able to fulfill the quite rigorous requirements set by the government.

The GGRI (NTT) has one church in Kupang, which is in close proximity to GGRC churches, and both federations have two churches on the island Sabu. For the rest the churches are not close together. The contact between these church federations is mainly through ministers. Most of the ministers studied together in the past at the theological school which was in Sumba about twenty years ago but later closed.

## **Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided:

1. To not at this time offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the CRCI.
2. To mandate the CRCA to continue contact with the CRCI with a view to improving official communications and to gain more insight in the character and direction of the CRCI.
3. To acknowledge that unity between the CRCI and the RCI should not be a prerequisite for ecclesiastical fellowship with either of these church federations.
4. To accept the invitation of the RCI to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.
5. To maintain the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship under the adopted rules.
6. To mandate the CRCA:
  - a. To monitor the progress of dialogue between the RCI and the CRCI and where possible to continue to promote unity efforts between the CRCI and the RCI.
  - b. To work in consultation with the FRCA, receiving their reports and any other information that would be helpful in assessing the ecclesiastical situation of these churches.
  - c. If necessary, to send Dr.Pol and Rev.Souman to visit the CRCI and to combine this with a visit to a General Synod of the RCI.

Please note that in the decision of Burlington 2010 the acronyms 'RCI' and 'CRCI' were used. As we explained in the 'background', the CRCA decided to go back to the use of GGRI(NTT) instead of RCI and GGRC instead of CRCI.

## **Communications and actions**

### ***The GGRI (NTT)***

A letter was sent to the GGRI (NTT) to inform them of the decision of Synod Burlington 2010. An invitation was received from the GGRI (NTT) to attend their synod in August 2010. The committee was not able to send a delegation but sent a letter. It was agreed that Rev. Pol and

Rev. Souman would visit these churches in 2011, at a time that they could also visit the GGRC. Synod appointed deputies and mandated them to represent the churches during this visit. This visit took place in May 2011. Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman visited most of the churches of the GGRI (NTT) and met with the deputies.

Up until 2011 most of the contacts with the GGRI (NTT) went through only one person (Rev. Pila Njuka) and the GGRI (NTT) were mostly unknown to the Canadian Reformed Churches. This visit served to get to know the GGRI (NTT) better and to explore where there are possibilities to work together as sister churches. The church of Smithville is the only Canadian Reformed Church that is doing mission work in Indonesia. So far there had hardly been any contact between the GGRI (NTT) and the church of Smithville. Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman encouraged the GGRI (NTT) to come to closer cooperation with Smithville, especially in the area of theological education, since the school in Kupang was already fully established and flourishing while the school in Sumba was still fledgling.

Both the federation as a whole as well as local churches requested mainly financial support from the Canadian Reformed Churches. The opportunities for mission work in Sumba are plentiful but the members of these churches live in very poor circumstances and the financial resources of these churches are limited. However, since these churches do receive considerable support from the sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands, it is important that any support given to the GGRI (NTT) be coordinated with the deputies from the Dutch and Australian sister churches. The GGRI (NTT) is still a young federation, although the GGRI(NTT) was established more than 50 years ago. There is still a strong influence from tribal religions, and heathen customs continue among some of the Christians. Also the GGRI(NTT) struggle with this. The GGRI(NTT) for instance has never taken a firm stance on the issue of dowry.

Also several of the young people in the churches do not understand what it means to be reformed and under pressure from outside, from time to time young people join other churches, especially when they have to leave home for many weeks or months to go to high school.

In the spring of 2012 the CRCA was informed by Rev. H. Versteeg, missionary in Papua New Guinea, that he attended the meeting of the first national synod of the GGRI, and by way of his report it became known to the CRCA that the three federations with the name GGRI in Indonesia had decided to unite into one national federation. The CRCA was not informed of this by the GGRI(NTT) and had not received an invitation for this synod. Up until the time of writing of this report, the CRCA has not received a letter from this new federation leave alone an official request to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with this federation.

In July 2012 Rev. Souman, who was on his way back from a visit to the synod of the FRCA, visited Timor and met with delegates from GGRI(NTT) and GGRC. During this visit he urged both church federations to come to closer cooperation and ultimately to ecclesiastical unity. The GGRI(NTT) showed willingness to work on this unity, while the GGRC also expressed willingness but was a bit more reluctant. It was decided by the delegates of both federations to start organizing pulpit exchanges. This can be done without a synod decision because both federations are already sister churches. The intention is to start with that in October 2012. The mission churches established through the mission work of Smithville indicated that they intend to join the new federation once the GGRI(NTT) and GGRC decide to unite. At this meeting it was also agreed between the delegates of the GGRI (NTT) and delegates from the Theological School in Kupang, to draw up and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU)

between the school in Sumba and the school in Kupang. As a result of that, the students at the school in Sumba can go to the school in Kupang for the last year of their studies and graduate from that school. In that way they will have a diploma that is officially recognized in Indonesia. It was also decided that professors from both schools would be invited to teach at the other school.

If the decisions made at this meeting will come to fruition then this may be seen as a big step forward towards cooperation and ultimately unity between the reformed churches in the province NTT.

During this visit Rev. Souman heard from Rev. Mada Biha that he was appointed as chairman of the deputies of the National Synod to maintain contacts with sister churches. Rev. Souman asked for more information about this national synod and was promised that a letter would be sent to the CRCA. So far no letter has been received.

Synod Armadale 2012 of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia decided to accept this new federation as sister churches. However, the FRCA was invited to this national synod and knows the other two federations better than the Canadian Reformed Churches do. The Canadian Reformed Churches have not been informed of this new federation and have not received an official request to continue a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship or enter into such a relationship. The Canadian Reformed Churches have not had official contact with the two other GGRI federations in Indonesia either, before or after they united.

The CRCA does not feel that it can recommend to accept the new federation as sister churches, since hardly anything is known about the other two federations or about the church order and other decisions adopted by the national synod. This puts us as Canadian Reformed Churches in an awkward position regarding the GGRI (NTT). Can we continue ecclesiastical fellowship with them, even though they are now part of a bigger federation? Or should we consider this relationship as terminated, since we only maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with entire federations and not parts of federations?

In this situation it is important to maintain contact with the GGRI (NTT). What should be the name for this form of contact and what are the rules for this form of contact?

The CRCA recommends to synod to suspend the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI(NTT), to continue contact with the GGRI (NTT) and to mandate the CRCA to gain more insight in the situation regarding the GGRI and to inquire if this new federation desires to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

### ***The GGRC***

Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman visited the GGRC in May 2011, in order to gain insight into the situation in these churches. Up until then there was a division in these churches. Some churches did not agree with decisions made by previous synods and used the name GGRM (Pilgrim Reformed Churches). This was the name the churches had used in the past and which they decided to change into GGRC. It was mainly the way in which they went about this change that brought division in the churches. The other churches used the name GGRC. This division within the GGRC was one of the reasons why synod Burlington decided not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the GGRC at that time.

With thankfulness it may be noted that the visit of Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman could be instrumental in bringing these two groups of churches together again. Delegates from both groups of churches came together and signed an agreement of reconciliation during this visit. In

July 2011 a synod was convened where this reconciliation was confirmed. One of the decisions was to use the name GGRC for the federation. Another decision was that the churches which previously were called GGRM would discontinue the practice of ordaining women as deacons. During this visit Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman urged the GGRC to abide by their church order and faithfully apply the articles in the church order to the life of the churches. For several years the church order was not functioning properly in the churches and also the minutes of the synods of 2004 and 2007 have never been officially adopted.

In July 2012 Rev. Souman again visited the churches in West Timor to see how the situation there had developed over 2011 and 2012.

One aspect of church life that had been discussed in 2011 was that ecclesiastical assemblies should again be convened. A result of this was that a synod was convened in July 2011. This synod decided to have the churches meet together in classes, a classis in Rote and a classis in Kupang/Sabu. The first classical meeting in Rote was held at the end of 2011. The churches in Kupang/Sabu still have to have their first classical meeting, which they hope to convene at the end of 2012.

The synod in July 2011 was adjourned and was supposed to convene again in November 2011. However, up until August 2012 this did not happen. It is not clear what the reason for this is. The finances are being mentioned as a reason but there are also tensions between churches regarding how the synod should be held. It became clear during the visit of Rev. Souman in 2012 that the GGRC are still struggling. Not all the decisions made in the agreement of reconciliation have been implemented yet. There have been meetings of ecclesiastical assemblies, but not regularly yet and the synod did not finish its work properly. The churches depend too much on one person, who has a lot of influence in the churches and several of the delegates were extremely hesitant to commit to anything without his approval. The GGRC is moving into the right direction but it is going slowly and they need a lot of help, encouragement and from time to time also admonition from sister churches. At this moment, however, the Canadian Reformed Churches are the churches that are most involved in the situation in the GGRC and have regular contact with the GGRC, but do not have ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRC.

In a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship we commit to take responsibility for each other. The first rule of ecclesiastical fellowship is: *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.*

At this moment the Canadian Reformed Churches do not have a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRC. Nevertheless, the Canadian Reformed Churches have more and closer contact with the GGRC than with the GGRI (NTT). The church of Smithville conducts mission work in West Timor, in close proximity to and contact with several churches of the GGRC. Some of the members of the GGRC are involved in the mission work. The Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Edmonton is involved in organizing seminars and financially supporting the organization of ecclesiastical assemblies within the GGRC. Many members of the Canadian Reformed Churches are either related to Yonson or Edwer Dethan (through their wives) or have visited West Timor and are more or less aware of the churches in Timor, both the mission churches and the churches of the GGRC. Several members of the Canadian Reformed Churches send financial support to West Timor through Children of Light or New Hope Orphanage.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are in a better position to assist the GGRC to maintain, defend and promote the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy and to be

watchful for deviations than any other church federation with which the GGRC has contact. For the GGRC the contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches are very important and the input from our side is well received and much appreciated. The GGRC do show the desire to be reformed churches, but they are struggling and need the help of the Canadian Reformed Churches. For the mission work as done by the church in Smithville and for the mission churches it is important that we help the GGRC where we can to continue to move into the right direction. Therefore the CRCA is convinced that we do have a responsibility towards the GGRC, even if we cannot decide to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with them. There is still too much uncertainty about the direction of the GGRC (see 4.2 of article 108, page 189 of the Acts of Synod Burlington 2010). The CRCA recommends therefore to decide to send someone to Timor on a regular basis to encourage the GGRC to become more reformed and apply the reformed doctrine and church order in their church life.

At the same time, the GGRC and the GGRI (NTT) are in contact with each other again with the intention to come to ecclesiastical unity. As Canadian Reformed Churches we should not make any decision that would cause this process to slow down or come to a stop, and both church federations should be encouraged to continue to seek ecclesiastical unity. We have experienced that often this can be done best by someone from or delegated by the CRCA being present there from time to time to bring them together and facilitate a meeting between delegates from both church federations.

### **Consultation with the FRCA**

The FRCA is supporting the GGRI for mission work in Sumba. The FRCA also have contacts with the GGRC. When after the visit of Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman the GGRC decided to convene their synod in July 2012, the CRCA requested the deputies of the FRCA to send a delegation because it was not possible for the CRCA to send delegates. In preparation of their visit, the CRCA sent the report of Rev. Pol and Rev. Souman to the Australian deputies for information.

The CRCA tried to set up a skype meeting with the Australian deputies in the fall of 2011 to discuss the situation in West Timor but these attempts did not have the desired results. When Rev. Wielenga and Rev. Souman visited the synod of the FRCA, they were able to discuss the situation in Indonesia with the deputies of the FRCA. Although there was not much time to discuss the situation in detail, it was helpful to have face to face contact and the impression is that the deputies of the FRCA and the CRCA agree on most of the issues regarding the relationship between GGRI and GGRC.

After his visit to Timor in July 2012, Rev. Souman shared his report of this visit with the Australian deputies.

One of the decisions of the synod 2012 of the FRCA regarding the GGRI is:

*To encourage the GGRI (via their deputies and the Board of the Theological College) to seek the help of those involved in the establishment of the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang (which is supported by the CANRC in Smithville).*

The CRCA also encouraged the GGRI to come to a form of cooperation with the church of Smithville and the school in Kupang and the CRCA recommends synod to do so as well.

## **Recommendations:**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to suspend the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI(NTT), to maintain contact with the GGRI (NTT) to gain more insight in the situation regarding the GGRI and to inquire if this new federation desires to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches;
2. at this time not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the GGRC;
3. to continue contact with the GGRC, to encourage these churches to be faithful to the reformed doctrine and church order and, when necessary and possible to send someone from or delegated by the CRCA to help and encourage these churches to grow in reformed character;
4. to work in consultation and cooperation with the deputies of the FRCA, with the church of Smithville and the church of Edmonton (Immanuel), and as much as possible and desirable with other organizations involved in the work among the reformed churches in the province NTT;
5. to encourage the GGRI to seek cooperation with the Reformed Theological School in Kupang (established by the church in Smithville) and to encourage the GGRC to make use of this school for the training for the ministry in their churches;
6. to monitor the progress of dialogue between the GGRI(NTT) and the GGRC and as much as possible to continue to promote unity efforts between the GGRC and the GGRI.

## **H. The International Conference of Reformed Churches**

### **Mandate:**

Synod Burlington 2010 decided to:

1. Continue the membership of the CANRC in the ICRC.
2. Instruct the CRCA to send a delegation to the next Conference scheduled to meet in Cardiff, Wales, in 2013.

### **Communications and actions**

The secretary of the ICRC, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, informed us of the online availability of the Proceedings of the 2009 Conference, as well as of the upcoming conference which will be held from August 28 to September 4, 2013.

The Review Committee, formed by the ICRC in 2009, informed the churches of their existence and asked the churches to pass along any suggestions or recommendations for improving the working of the Conference. It was suggested by the CRCA that it would be good to make the

Conference more useful to the churches, for instance, by tackling matters/subjects of interest to the churches and to make it more a consultancy process.

Prof. A.J. de Visser attended the ICRC Missions Representatives meeting in May 2011 on behalf of the CRCA and sent a report to the CRCA.

There has not been a meeting of the ICRC since Synod Burlington 2010. The next meeting will be in 2013. Synod Smithers 207 decided to send two voting delegates and two advisory members to New Zealand in 2009. Synod Burlington 2010 considered that it was prudent of the committee to send a full delegation of its members to the conference in 2009. Synod Burlington decided to instruct the CRCA to send a delegation to the next Conference scheduled to meet in Cardiff, Wales, in 2013. The CRCA assumes that this means that also now two voting delegates and two advisory members will be delegated.

## **Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide:

1. to continue the membership of the CANRC in the ICRC;
2. to send a delegation of two voting members and two advisory members to the next Conference scheduled to meet in Cardiff, Wales, in 2013.

## **I. Miscellaneous**

### **1. Communications with various churches**

A letter was received from Pastor Remegio Lapiz of a Reformed church in the Philippines. His church was seeking to connect to other Reformed groups for advice and fellowship. The committee was able to provide this pastor with some information regarding Reformed churches in the Philippines.

Several churches in our federation forwarded an email from the Free Protestant Church in Argentina. Some investigations were made and from the information received it seems to be very reformed. Because of the language barrier it was hard to have a meaningful communication and the CRCA tried to bring these churches into contact with the Reformed Churches in Brazil, through our missionaries there.

Correspondence was received from the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Several retired ministers and professors from the Canadian Reformed Churches have preached in this church. This church requested input to a document dealing with fraternal relations. In response our rules for ecclesiastical relations were sent. Also an invitation was received for their 30<sup>th</sup>

anniversary on January 28, 2012. A letter was sent in response in which we explained that no delegate would be sent.

The Bethel CANRC of Toronto sent information about the Iglesia Presbyteriana Nacional of Chile. A response was sent to Toronto in which the church in Toronto was encouraged to do some more homework and to come with a proposal to synod if they determine that pursuing contact with this church has value.

A communication was received from the Instituto Teologica Reformado in Venezuela. The CRCA is exploring this relationship and as of yet has no further information about this institute.

## **2. Declarations**

Declarations were requested and issued to several ministers from our federation who went to visit the FRCA. However, the committee questions if it is proper for the committee to issue such declarations. The committee is being asked to declare about ministers that they are ministers in good standing within the Canadian Reformed Churches. The committee is not the right institution to issue such declarations. This should be done by the consistory with the deacons of the church which this minister serves. There can be situations in which a consistory is dealing with a minister and advises its minister not to preach or even does not allow him to preach, of which the CRCA is not informed. Is it prudent then for the CRCA to continue to issue these declarations if it cannot be sure that a minister is indeed in good standing in the Canadian Reformed Churches?

Usually when a minister leaves a Canadian Reformed church to serve in another church within the federation or in a sister church abroad, a declaration is given by the consistory with the deacons of the church as well as by the classis, according to article 5 of the Church Order. Churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a sister-church relationship accept these declarations also. This is the proper way to go.

The CRCA feels that the practice of issuing declarations by the CRCA is not in accordance with the Church Order and should be discontinued. If synod decides not to abandon this practice, then at least the CRCA should receive some guidance about how to deal with these requests. For instance, that a request for such a declaration must come from the consistory and not from the minister himself.

## **Recommendations**

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2013 decide that:

1. the practice of issuing declarations by the CRCA to ministers who will be preaching in sister churches shall be discontinued;
2. ministers who need such a declaration should request one from their own consistory.

Submitted to Synod Carman West 2013 by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad,



H. Leyenhorst  
A. Souman  
J. VanLaar  
J. Vanderstoep  
W. Wielenga

September 2012.

## **Appendix: Report from the Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (Coaldale)**

SUPPORT FOR SOUTH AFRICA

September 2012

It is with much thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, that we as *Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa* can report that in the past year we have again been richly blessed with the support of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches with the funds and prayers to continue the work of assisting our needy brothers and sisters in South Africa.

With thankfulness we can report that for 2012, we could meet the budget for the Needy FRCSA Article 11. As of July 30, 2012, we made three transfers for a total of \$39,617.61(303,008.24 rand). In 2011 we sent a grand total of \$43,457.96(303,739.68 rand).

In their report dated March 12, 2012, the Deputies for the Needy Churches FRCSA Article 11 expressed their extreme gratitude to the supporting Canadian and American Churches. At present, they are receiving approximately 60% of their funds from the sister churches in Australia, Canada, and the United States. The needy churches deputies are working towards reducing the amount of dependency on foreign support, however they realize that the changes they propose will take years to implement. They state in their letter "Basic elements like food, clothing, etc for the minister and his family should be provided by the congregation. But elements like internet, medical support, etc. could be non-basic elements due to the fact that it is not a norm in a poor congregation." Their Synod April 2012 was to deal with this matter; at present we have not received a report from them concerning this issue.

Regarding the Mission Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, after having met the budget for Needy Churches Article 11, as of Sept. 15, 2012 we have collected \$9,367.34, which will be allocated for Mission. In 2011 we sent a grand total of \$34,385.55 (257,552.28 rand) to the Mission Deputies.

The Mission Deputies are very grateful for the support in the past year, and for the funds received for mission work in South Africa. The funds they received from us were used to buy a church centre for the mission point in Akasia, north of Pretoria. They do not have any big projects planned for the next year, because of money constraints. As in the past, these constraints are due at least in part to the fact that they are largely dependent on foreign money, and the exchange rates remain volatile. Another area of concern for the Mission Deputies is that the Netherlands has informed them that they cannot increase their contribution. They state their plea for extra help in a recent letter: "Funds will still be very much needed for the mission work in South Africa and we would again appreciate your support in the coming year so that the word of God can be spread in our country."

We as Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa would like to thank you for your continued support through financial contributions and prayer, and we hope and pray that our Heavenly Father will continue to richly bless our work, so we can continue to provide support to our brothers and sisters in South Africa.

With Christian greetings on behalf of the *Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa*,

George Gritter  
Secretary