

**Reports to  
General Synod Carman 2013**

**Committee for  
Contact with Churches in North America**

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# **The Committee for Contact with Churches in North America**

## **Report to Synod Carman-West 2013**

September 29, 2012

Beloved brothers in the Lord,

With brotherly greetings in the name of Christ, we submit our report to General Synod Carman-West 2013, as mandated by General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010. We do so with thanks to God for His blessing upon the numerous brotherly meetings, discussions, and communications that have occurred during the past three years. We trust that the churches will continue to pray for an increase in the unity of the faith among the churches with whom we enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship or other close relations.

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Committee members**

General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 made the following appointments to the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America: (*Acts 2010*, p. 259):

R.A. Faber (convenor) (2013), P. H. Holtvlüwer (2016), E. Kampen (2016), J. Kuik (2013), C. Poppe (2019), J. Poppe (2019), D. Vandeburgt (2019), H. Van Delden (2019).

As brs. Faber and Kuik will complete their terms in 2013, the committee asks Synod to make two appointments. For the sake of continuity and efficiency, the CCCNA will submit to Synod a separate letter suggesting the names of suitable individuals who have been found willing and able to serve in this capacity.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Dr. R. Faber and br. J. Kuik be discharged from the CCCNA, and thanked for their years of service to the churches as members of the committee;
2. Suitable replacements be appointed to the CCCNA, with consideration given to the geographic distribution of committee members in East (Ontario) and West (Manitoba), and to the candidates suggested by the CCCNA.

#### **1.2 General activity and committee structure**

Plenary meetings of the CCCNA were held on Friday, September 10, 2010, and Friday September 7, 2012. At the prior meeting the committee made the following appointments:

- a. Chairman: Dr. R.A. Faber
- b. General Secretary: Rev. D. Vandeburgt
- c. Treasurer: Br. H. Van Delden

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

Subcommittee East: Contacts with ERQ and OPC,  
Subcommittee West: Contacts with RCUS, RPCNA, and NAPARC.

At least two members of each subcommittee were responsible for attending NAPARC in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Minutes of the subcommittee meetings were exchanged via email to promote good communication and mutual scrutiny.

## **2. General Mandate**

General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 gave the CCCNA this general mandate: (*Acts 2010*, p. 69):

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

For the sake of convenience, here follow the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) that the committee applies in fulfilling its mandate. Synod Lincoln 1992 determined these rules: (*Acts*, p. 33):

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.

**Recommendation:**

That the mandate, as stated by Synod 2010, be continued for CCCNA until 2016.

**3. Subcommittee East****3.1 General activity**

Meetings of subcommittee East were held on June 28, 2010; May 2, 2011; September 19, 2011; February 6, 2012; and June 25, 2012. Dr. R. Faber served as convener, Rev. D. Vandeburgt served as recording secretary, while Rev. E. Kampen served as corresponding secretary.

The subcommittee met with representatives of the ERQ's Committee for Interchurch relations on November 17, 2010, November 16, 2011, and June 15-16, 2012. Delegates from the committee attended Synods of the ERQ on November 19, 2010, June 17-18, 2011, and June 15-16, 2012. The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the ERQ and OPC via telephone and email.

Members of the subcommittee met with the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relationships on November 16, 2010, June 11, 2011, and November 15, 2011. Attendance of the 78<sup>th</sup> General Assembly took place on June 9-11, 2011. A minimum of two delegates attended these committee meetings and the assembly.

**3.2 Reports and recommendations**

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

1. L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

**4. Subcommittee West****4.1 General Activity**

Meetings of Subcommittee West were held on June 22, 2010; January 26, 2011; June 7, 2011; January 23, 2012; June 11, 2012; and July 3, 2012. At these meetings, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer served as chairman; br. J. Kuik as corresponding secretary, and Rev. J. Poppe as recording secretary.

Delegates of the subcommittee met with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee on November 17, 2010 and November 15, 2011. CCCNA sent a delegate to attend the 265<sup>th</sup> Synod, held May 16-19, 2011, and two to the 266<sup>th</sup> Synod, held May 21-24, 2012. The committee also met with delegates from the RPCNA's Inter-Church Relations Committee, on November 16, 2010 and November 16, 2011.

When feasible and in the interests of effective analysis and reporting, two delegates were sent to attend these assemblies. The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the RCUS and RPCNA via telephone, Skype, and email. Rev. Holtvlüwer moved from Carman, MB to Tintern, ON in the summer of 2010 and continues to participate in the committee and sub-committee West (via Skype). The committee finds that the geographical move has not hindered the working of the committee.

## **4.2 Reports and Recommendations**

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

3. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
4. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

## **5. NAPARC**

The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is an organization of confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches. As such both subcommittees of the CCCNA have delegated two members to attend annual meetings of NAPARC, and decisions pertaining to our participation in it are normally determined at plenary meetings. Attendance at NAPARC took place November 16-17, 2010, and November 15-16, 2011.

For the purposes of efficient communication, planning, and operation, subcommittee West has been assigned responsibility.

A report and recommendations are attached for:

5. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

## **6. Expenses**

From the time of Synod Burlington 2010, until September 1, 2012, \$16262.59 has been spent in fulfilling the mandate.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

Subcommittee East:

- R.A. Faber (Elora, ON) (convener)
- E. Kampen (Orangeville, ON)
- C. Poppe (Guelph, ON)
- D. Vandeburgt (Burlington, ON)

Subcommittee West:

- P.H. Holtvlüwer (Tintern, ON)
- J. Kuik (Winnipeg, MB)
- J. Poppe (Winnipeg, MB)
- H. Van Delden (Winnipeg, MB)

## **Appended Reports**

1. L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
3. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
4. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
5. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

## **Report 1. L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)**

The ERQ currently consists of five churches: l'Église chrétienne réformée de Beauce in St-Georges de Beauce, with as pastors Rev. Mario Veilleux and Rev. Paulin Bédard; l'Église réformée St-Marc in Sainte-Foy (Québec City), with pastor Rev. Bernard Westerveld and co-pastor Rev. Patrice Michaud; l'Église réformée St-Jean in Montréal with pastor Rev. Jean Zoellner; l'Église réformée St-Paul in Repentigny with pastor Rev. Winston Bosch; and l'Église réformée de la Rive-Sud in Charny, with as pastor the recently ordained Rev. Satoshi Kawachi.

The membership of the ERQ churches has grown to about 350. It counts a considerable number of converts from Roman Catholicism whereas other new members have a Baptist or Evangelical background. The matter of church life is foremost among the concerns of the ERQ churches and its missionary character predominates. The ERQ churches experience much joy about the growth of a second generation of Québécois believers in their midst. Information about the ERQ can be obtained by visiting the website [www.erq.qc.ca](http://www.erq.qc.ca). More can be learned about the individual churches by visiting their websites: [beauce.erq.qc.ca](http://beauce.erq.qc.ca), [stpaul.erq.qc.ca](http://stpaul.erq.qc.ca), [erq.qc.ca/stjean](http://erq.qc.ca/stjean), [erq.qc.ca/stmarc](http://erq.qc.ca/stmarc) and [rivesud.erq.qc.ca](http://rivesud.erq.qc.ca).

A historical survey of relations of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Can. Ref. Churches) with the ERQ is found on pp. 115-118 in *Reports to General Synod Smithers 2007*, Vol. 1.

### **1. Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the CCCNA the following mandate with respect to the ERQ (*Acts 2010* p. 33):

*4.2.1. To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules.*

*4.2.2. To share information about the nature and development of its dialogue with the ERQ.*

The CCCNA, on behalf of the Can. Ref. Churches, continued ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) with the ERQ by adhering to the rules for EF adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992. It endeavours to accomplish this by assisting, informing and consulting one another and by receiving each other's delegates at major assemblies. The dialogue among and assisting one another occurred by correspondence, at meetings with the Committee for Inter-Church Relations (CICR) and by attending sessions of "synode" (quarterly-held meetings of the ERQ churches).

### **2. Correspondence**

The membership of l'Église réformée de la Rive-Sud in Charny, Québec dwindled and the church was left without office bearers. The CCCNA was then asked by the CICR: "How do Reformed Churches decide to close a local church that is no longer viable? In particular, whose decision is it to close the church – the local congregation, the council or classis?" The reply was that the ability to function as a church depends on the presence of elders elected by the church and that, in the Can. Ref. Churches, classis would advise.

In February 2011, the CCCNA received a request from the chair of CICR to comment on the invitation by the OPC to enter into EF with the ERQ, as per the rules for EF. The CCCNA informed the CICR that it endorsed the ERQ's plan to enter into EF with the OPC.



At the ERQ Synod held March 19-20, 2011, Synod examined Br. Winston Bosch, who studied at l'Institut Farel – Faculté de Théologie Réformée (Farel Reformed Theological Seminary). He sustained the examination and was accepted unanimously to receive a call to teach and shepherd one of the ERQ churches. At the same Synod, the CICR proposed to Synod to establish fraternal relations with the OPC according to “*les Règles d’Association avec d’Autres Églises de l’ERQ* (Rules of Association with other Churches of the ERQ, that were adopted in 1997). Synod accepted this proposal unanimously.

In February 2012, Rev. Bernard Westerveld of l’Église réformée St-Marc in Sainte-Foy (Québec City) sent the CCCNA a request to make members of the Can. Ref. Churches aware of short-term mission opportunities in the summer of 2012 in the Québec City area and asked for help in spreading the gospel via *English for Kids Bible Camps*, *English for Teens Bible Camps* and English Bible studies. The request was passed on to Dr. A. de Visser and an announcement was placed in *Clarion*.

### **3. Meetings with CICR**

At a meeting with the CICR held on the occasion of a North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) meeting in Pompton Plains, NJ on November 17, 2010, the ERQ asked how the Can. Ref. Churches went about establishing relations with other federations. The CCCNA brothers answered that relationships may come about when another federation sends an invitation to the CCCNA or via the initiative of a local church; the CCCNA would then investigate and report to the next Synod. The ERQ brothers asked about the status of the relationship of the Can. Ref. Churches with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). CCCNA members said that progress in furthering the relationship was stalled due to the actions of the most recent URCNA Synod. The brothers enquired if there were any concerns about the ERQ entering into EF with the URCNA. The CCCNA delegates recommended that the ERQ establish EF with the URCNA. The CCCNA asked about procedures for examining pastoral candidates. The reply was that this topic is under study in the ERQ. Later, the CCCNA received a copy of the current working document for information and possible input from Rev. Bernard Westerveld, chair of the CICR. The effort to establish a set procedure is part of a larger effort to formalize aspects of church life in the ERQ. The working document reflects the more recent procedure of examining a candidate for the ministry about one year before finishing his studies allowing him to preach under supervision of the consistory of the congregation where he is placed, and to conduct a second examination of a student who has completed his studies and practical training before he is being declared eligible to receive a call from one of the ERQ congregations. The possibility of pulpit exchanges between the Can. Ref. Churches and ERQ to enhance the relationship was discussed. A major obstacle for Can. Ref. Churches ministers to preach in the ERQ is the inability to preach in French.

The CCCNA delegates present at the Synod of the ERQ on June 15 and 16, 2012 had discussions with the CICR members regarding several topics including the Form for Profession of Faith and Adult Baptism recently adopted by the ERQ and the procedure in the ERQ for supervision of the pulpit. The CICR informed the CCCNA that the liturgical committee’s draft proposal form for the ordination of ministers is in abeyance. Furthermore, there is a *status quo* regarding the

principles and practice of admission to the Lord's Supper and, due in part to differences of opinion, no new proposals are being considered.

#### **4. Attendance at Synods of the ERQ**

On November 19-20, 2010, two members of the CCCNA attended the Synod of the ERQ at Québec City. The state, viability and supervision of the congregation of l'Église de la Rive Sud at Charny was discussed extensively. The CICR reported that the URCNA had decided to receive the ERQ as a sister church. Furthermore, the ERQ informed the secretary general of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) that the ERQ agreed to establish ecclesiastical relations with the PCA. To follow up on earlier discussions with the CICR regarding the training of men for the ministry, the CCCNA delegates gave copies of the Manual for Pastoral Training Program of the Can. Ref. Churches to Rev. J. Zuidema, chair of the Ministry Committee. They also provided the brothers with a copy of the "Classis Regulations: Classis Northern Ontario" Article 7.1 regarding procedures followed when candidates for the ministry undergo the preparatory or peremptory examination, and the Appendix to "Classis Regulations" called "Regulations for Ecclesiastical Examination".

Delegates of the CCCNA attended the ERQ Synod held June 17-18, 2011 in Repentigny. It was agreed that the Charny congregation, presently under the supervision of l'Église réformée St-Jean of Montréal, would be served by a minister from the PCA. The CICR gave a report with respect to NAPARC. The discussions focussed on the ERQ's position on the purpose of NAPARC, in particular the aspect of pursuing organic unity between churches of like faith and practice. Synod received the report for information. Br. Winston Bosch had received and accepted a call to the congregation at Repentigny and Synod approved the call. The CCCNA delegates attended the ordination of Rev. Bosch. As the ERQ churches have no standard form for ordination, the duties of office were explained by means of a selection of passages from Scripture. One of the ERQ ministers asked about the Form for Ordination used in the Can. Ref. Churches. He was referred to the website of the Can. Ref. Churches where the form can be accessed in the section on Liturgical Forms of the Book of Praise.

CCCNA delegates attended the ERQ Synod held June 15-16, 2012 in Québec City. Delegates from each parish presented a report about their congregation highlighting the joys and struggles experienced. Rev. Kawashi (PCA) had been examined and ordained in March 2012 to serve the congregation in Charny. Several proposals regarding regulations that govern the operations of Synod were accepted. The Can. Ref. Churches delegates were asked how their churches elect a "president". They explained that the chairman at synod has that function only for the duration of the session. The delegates expressed their greetings and encouragement on behalf of the Can. Ref. Churches. They highlighted that the ERQ has as first rule for EF that the churches shall mutually assist one another in the work of mission and suggested that the ERQ and the Can. Ref. Churches may wish to cooperate more fully in that regards. Synod adopted a proposal from the Ministry Committee that reads (translated): "Each local council has the liberty, in a punctilious manner, to invite a preacher of its choice assuming the responsibility to ensure the doctrinal and pastoral integrity of the information given". Proposals for amendments defining the preacher such as having been ordained, subscribing to the confessions and/or being ministers from churches with whom the ERQ has EF, were not sustained. Rev. Kanavel (PCA) participates with

the consistory of the ERQ in Montréal in mission at universities and elsewhere, particularly among Muslim immigrants. The ERQ in Québec City meets in a church building of the Anglican Church of Canada and is considering purchasing it since it is for sale. The financial needs of the ERQ churches are high.

## **5. Considerations**

The CCCNA has continued the relationship of EF with the RQ under the adopted rules. The relationship is facilitated by the fact that the ERQ operates with rules for EF that are very similar to those of the Can. Ref. Churches. (An additional rule adopted by the ERQ is “1. The churches shall assist each other in the development and advancement of the mission” [See Rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the ERQ at the website [www.erq.qc.ca](http://www.erq.qc.ca)].)

The ERQ has been informed about major decisions of General Synod Burlington 2010 by means of a report of CICR presented by its chair, Rev. Westerveld, who attended and spoke at Synod Burlington 2010 (See Appendix 9, pp. 329-332 of the *Acts*). The CCCNA delegates provided the ERQ with copies of the *Acts*.

The CCCNA enquired about supervision of the pulpit, an issue emphasized in consideration 3.1 (page 32) of the Acts of General Synod Burlington 2010. It learned that currently the practice in the ERQ is that the local consistory exercises such supervision. As described under heading “3” of the present document, the procedures followed to examine pastoral candidates before admission to the ministry appear to become increasingly standardized. CCCNA delegates provided the ERQ with information regarding the Pastoral Training Program of the Can. Ref. Churches and about procedures followed when candidates for the ministry undergo the preparatory or peremptory examination.

As per the rules of EF, the ERQ consulted the CCCNA regarding the invitations it received to enter into EF with the URCNA and the OPC. The CCCNA recommended the establishment of EF with both the URCNA and the OPC.

The CCCNA notes with gratitude that the ERQ has adopted another liturgical form, namely the Form for Profession of Faith and Adult Baptism that is thoroughly scriptural.

## **6. Recommendations**

The CCCNA recommends that Synod decide:

- 1) To thank the Lord for the faithful Reformed witness provided in and by the ERQ.
- 2) To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules.

## **Report 2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)**

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) currently consists of 275 churches, containing 30,279 members. The federation supports 51 mission works. Its General Assembly meets annually, the most recent one having been held from June 6 to 12, 2012. The next Assembly will be held, the Lord willing, beginning June 5, 2013. Further Information about the OPC may be obtained by visiting its website: [www.opc.org](http://www.opc.org).

Synod Coaldale 1977 of the Can. Ref. Churches recognized the OPC a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ (see *Acts General Synod Coaldale 1977*, pp. 39-43). Synod Neerlandia 2001 of the Can. Ref. Churches established Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the OPC (see *Acts General Synod Neerlandia 2001*, pp. 42-49).

### **1. Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA concerning the OPC (*Acts p. 39*):

- 4.3.1. *To continue the relationship of EF with the OPC under the adopted rules.*
- 4.3.2. *To discuss with the OPC its decision to establish corresponding relations with the IPB.*
- 4.3.3. *To share information about the nature and development of its dialogue with the OPC.*

The CCCNA, on behalf of the Can. Ref. Churches, continued the relationship of EF by adhering to the rules for EF adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992. It endeavours to accomplish this by assisting, informing and consulting one another and by receiving each other's delegates at major assemblies. The dialogue between the Can. Ref. Churches and OPC took place by correspondence, annual meetings with the Committee for Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations (CEIR), and bi-annual attendance of the General Assembly. The reports on these activities are found below. The Can. Ref. Churches also had the privilege of receiving fraternal delegates from the OPC at General Synod Burlington 2010, when Rev. Jack Sawyer gave a fraternal address (see *Acts pp. 86 & 325-328*).

### **2. Correspondence**

As per rule 2 of EF, the CEIR received the *Acts of General Synod Burlington 2010*. Moreover, CEIR receives three copies of each issue of *Clarion*; in turn, the CCCNA receives several copies of each issue of the denominational magazine, *New Horizons*. It also receives the annual *Directory* (or yearbook). Letters of Greeting were sent to both the 77<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (July 7-14, 2010) and the 79<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (June 6-12, 2012).

From the CEIR the committee received invitations to the 77<sup>th</sup>, 78<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies. It also received the minutes of the 77<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies. At the time of writing, the committee is awaiting receipt of the minutes of the 79<sup>th</sup> GA.

### **3. Annual Meetings with the CEIR**

Since the report to Synod Burlington 2010 the CCCNA has met three times with the CEIR.

**3.1** The CCCNA met with the CEIR on November 16, 2010 at the North American and Presbyterian Reformed Council (NAPARC). In this meeting the OPC consulted with the CCCNA regarding the invitation to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with l'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ). CCCNA recommended the ERQ for fellowship, and moreover encouraged the OPC to deal with the ERQ on the federative level, and not merely via its close ties with the one congregation that it supports. In this meeting the OPC also informed the CCCNA that Corresponding Relations are being pursued with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Heritage Reformed Congregations, and the Free Church of Scotland-Continuing. There is a growing relationship with the Independent Reformed Churches of Korea, which is seen as a small but solid group of churches dedicated to the Reformed faith. The CEIR explained that generally it pursues EF with churches with which they have historical ties or with which they envisage a future working relationship.

In this meeting the CCCNA pursued mandate 4.3.2 of General Synod Burlington 2010. The CCCNA informs Synod 2013 that it had communicated with the OPC on its decision to establish corresponding relations with the da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB), although this information was not specifically reported to Synod Burlington 2010. From an internal committee report of a 2008 meeting with the CEIR at NAPARC it quotes the following: "The CanRC has sister church relations with the da Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (IRB), a fruit of their mission work. They are young and struggling, and the relationship with the IPB is a particular point of contention... There's a need to be cautious and discerning... The OPC's connection is primarily in Uruguay, in a mission context, and they have had a good experience with the IPB men they have worked with. The IPB has been soliciting help with the OPC, so this would appear to be a good indication given the orthodoxy the OPC is noted for. Some IPB men have been training in Greenville."

The CCCNA raised this matter once more with the CEIR during its meeting with them at NAPARC 2010. From that meeting the CCCNA reports the following: "It was explained to us that the OPC began contact with the IPB in 2002. At that time the IPB had experienced a change in leadership. The new leadership wished to restore the Reformed character of the IPB, over against Pentecostal and Liberal trends. Around that time the IPB broke contact with the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). The initiative for contact came from the IPB as they sought the help of the OPC... It was noted that the OPC did not enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the IPB but a "corresponding relationship", as was mentioned in our Report to Synod 2010 (*section 4.2* in the report on the OPC). This is a preliminary category. The rules for EF do not require consultation to enter this level of relationship, only full-fledged EF." The CCCNA suggested that the OPC consider taking up more direct contact with the IRB, so that it can learn directly any pertinent information concerning the IPB.

Lastly, at this 2010 meeting the CCCNA updated the CEIR on the developments towards organic unity between the Can. Ref. Churches and the URCNA. A discussion took place on the biblical principles for organic unity, and the CEIR indicated that a study committee of the OPC is currently reviewing this topic.

**3.2** The CCCNA met with the CEIR on June 11, 2011 at Sandy Cove Conference Center, North East Maryland. There the committee's delegates highlighted the work of General Synod Burlington, 2010, in particular the 'grave concerns' expressed about the developments in our sister churches in the Netherlands. These observations generated discussion among all present. The OPC brothers also expressed concern about the growing formal involvement of women in the BBK and consequently in the work of the Dutch Synod.

**3.3** The CCCNA met with the CEIR on November 15, 2011 at NAPARC, Lawrenceville, GA. In this meeting two matters were brought forward for discussion.

a. The CCCNA provided an update on the work of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad's (CRCA) sub-committee for the sister churches in the Netherlands. The OPC brothers expressed a desire to meet with representatives of the CRCA and the CCCNA agreed to pass on that request. (Subsequently contact between the CEIR and CRCA was established.)

b. The CCCNA provided an update on the formation of the Canadian Reformed Missions Association. It encouraged the OPC to offer its assistance to this organization based upon its long experience in operating a denominational organization that is responsible for missions.

In this meeting the CEIR of the OPC also updated the CCCNA on their renewed contact with the Bible Presbyterian Church.

#### **4. Attendance at General Assembly**

Delegates of the CCCNA attended the 78<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the OPC from June 9-11, 2011 held at the Sandy Cove Conference Center, North East, Maryland. The delegates brought fraternal greetings from the Can. Ref. Churches. The 78<sup>th</sup> GA was combined with the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OPC. Reports on our attendance at the 78<sup>th</sup> GA were published via *Clarion* in Volume 60 Numbers 14-17. The Lord willing, delegates from the CCCNA will attend the 80<sup>th</sup> GA to be convened at St. Mary's College, Moraga, California beginning on June 5, 2013.

#### **5. Considerations**

In light of the information found in the sections 2-4 above the CCCNA deems that it has fulfilled the three-fold mandate given to it by Synod Burlington, 2010. In particular the committee trusts that section 3.1, which deals with mandate 4.3.2, sufficiently addresses the concern of Synod Burlington 2010.

#### **6. Recommendations**

The CCCNA recommends that Synod decide:

- 1) To thank the LORD for the way in which the OPC actively provides a faithful Reformed witness to the gospel.
- 2) To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules.

### **Report 3. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)**

The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) currently consists of 46 churches, containing 2940 communicant and 840 baptized members. The church holds a Synod every year, the last one being held from May 21-24, 2012. Further information about the RCUS may be obtained by visiting its website: <http://www.rcus.org/>

Synod Neerlandia 2001 of the Can. Ref. Churches established Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the RCUS (see *Acts General Synod Neerlandia 2001*, pp. 60-64).

#### **1. Mandate**

General Synod Smithers 2010 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA for its dealings with the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS) (*Acts* pp. 28-30):

- 4.2.1 To continue the relationship of EF with the RCUS under the adopted rules.*
- 4.2.2 To endeavour to meet at least once a year to discuss matters of mutual concern and edification.*
- 4.2.3 To share more detailed information with the churches about the nature and the development of its dialogue with the RCUS.*

The CCCNA has had regular contact with the RCUS Inter-Church Relations Committee (IRC) and sent delegates to attend the RCUS synods in 2010 and 2011. This contact has been fruitful, and we have made progress in strengthening the bonds between our respective churches. We report the following matters that may be of particular interest to the churches.

#### **2. Annual Meetings with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee and Attendance at Synods**

Since the report to Synod 2010, the CCCNA has met twice with the IRC of the RCUS: in November 2010, and November 2011. The next planned meeting, the Lord willing, will be with the Inter-Church Committee in November 2012.

##### **2.1 Meeting at NAPARC November 2010**

###### **2.1.1 Church visitation**

CCCNA reported to Synod 2010 an increasing desire in the RCUS to implement a system of church visitation. The 263<sup>rd</sup> Synod of the RCUS mandated a committee to study this matter further and submit a report to the 264<sup>th</sup> Synod (2010). An excellent report providing Biblical reasons and outlining the historical practice of church visitation was presented. This synod made the decision, however, not to pursue the implementation of regular church visitations.

###### **2.1.2 Can. Ref. Churches Synod 2010's decision re: women's voting**

At the meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee at NAPARC 2010, the RCUS brothers inquired regarding our decision on women's voting. The RCUS has a position paper opposing this practice but has not put it in its Constitution. A small number of churches allow women to vote. New churches are not admitted, however, if they have women voting. The RCUS position focuses on the role of the husband as covenant head of the family. It may be noted that RCUS

church polity differs from our own in that congregational votes are integral to their governing process and are binding and authoritative whereas in Can. Ref. Churches polity the consistory always has final say and congregational voting is not strictly mandated.

### **2.1.3 Admitting guests to the Lord's Supper**

At the meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee in November 2010, the CCCNA was requested to provide clarification concerning the Can. Ref. Churches practice of admitting guests at the Lord's Supper. Our practices were explained. The RCUS brothers were encouraged to inform those members visiting one of the Can. Ref. Churches concerning our practices, and encourage them to bring an attestation to testify to their faithfulness in doctrine and conduct.

## **2.2 Meeting at NAPARC November 2011**

### **2.2.1 Federal vision**

At the meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee at NAPARC 2011, the topic of federal vision was brought up by the RCUS brothers. It was reported that Federal Vision was not living in the Canadian Reformed churches nor in the RCUS. A question was asked to the RCUS brothers if they considered the Canadian Reformed churches holding to a federal vision position. A response was given that initially there was a concern by a small minority, but that this concern had been satisfactorily put to rest.

## **3. Attendance at Synod**

The CCCNA sent a delegate to attend the 265<sup>th</sup> Synod, held May 16-19, 2011; Rev. J. Poppe represented the churches there. Rev. Poppe and br. H. van Delden attended the 266<sup>th</sup> Synod, held May 21-24, 2012.

### **3.1 265<sup>th</sup> Synod (2011)**

#### **3.1.1 Special committee report on changing Art.9 of the Belgic Confession**

The 264<sup>th</sup> Synod of the RCUS (2010) appointed a committee to study the Belgic Confession Art. 9 with reference to the wording, "and the Holy Spirit appeared in the shape of a dove." This committee proposed that the wording be changed to reflect the Biblical text of Luke 3:22, so that it would read "and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, as a dove." (This would make the RCUS's version of the Belgic Confession similar to ours.) In the end, after vigorous discussion, this motion did not receive the two-thirds majority needed to change the Confession, and was defeated. Whatever one may think of the proposal itself, it was very encouraging to see among the brothers a deep love for the Reformed Confessions, and a desire to hold them fast!

#### **3.1.2 Relations with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)**

The 265<sup>th</sup> Synod of the RCUS made the following decision regarding the RCN: "Our major concern has to do with the hermeneutics that are being taught at the GKNv seminary and that are being manifested in GKNv churches. Issues such as women and the offices of the church, homosexuality, etc. are symptom of this greater problem. We believe that Belgic Confession Article 7 is in danger of being violated by this hermeneutical approach." Synod directed the Inter-church Relations Committee to communicate immediately their concerns to the BBK.



A letter was sent which addressed the following concerns:

1. The view of Scripture at the Theological University in Kampen, i.e., the interpretation of Scripture (hermeneutics) as set forth in the writings and views of Dr. Paas, Dr. Van Bakkum, Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne, Dr. G. Harinck.
2. The work of the Deputies Men/Women in the Church (Why the role of women in the church is being re-visited and what effect present-day culture plays in the conclusions).
3. Contacts and unity discussions taking place between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC) and who is influencing whom.

### **3.1.3 Fraternal Relations with churches in the Philippines, Kenya, and the Congo**

As part of its foreign mission work, the RCUS has supported the establishment of Reformed churches in the Philippines, Kenya, and the Congo. The 265<sup>th</sup> Synod of the RCUS decided to discontinue fraternal relations with the Evangelical Reformed Confessing Church of the Philippines (ERCC). This is due to great struggles with a few pastors in these churches, who have acted in an unethical manner. Synod adopted proposals that the establishment of fraternal relations with the United Covenant Reformed Church in the Philippines (UCRCP), the Reformed Fellowship Church of Kenya (RFCK), and the United Reformed Church of the Congo (URCC) be referred to the Permanent Inter-church Relations Committee so that the normal procedures in establishing such relationships could be followed (this includes consultation with sister churches).

## **3.2 266<sup>th</sup> Synod (2012)**

### **3.2.1 Enhancing contact between the members of our respective churches**

Already at the meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee in November 2010, the matter of enhancing our relationship, to make it more concrete for the membership, was discussed. In particular, mention was made of holding regional conferences, or publishing articles in the magazines read in the respective federations. This led to various proposals to the RCUS 266<sup>th</sup> Synod (2011).

The following recommendation was adopted:

**Recommendation #1:** That the Editor of the *Reformed Herald* be authorized to discuss and implement, with the editors of the *Clarion*, a periodic exchange of articles between the RCUS and the Can. Ref. Churches.

The following recommendations were “taken note of” (i.e., recommended for implementation):

**Recommendation #2:** That churches in the RCUS consider means to invite Can. Ref. Churches youth to our denominational summer camps.

**Recommendation #3:** That churches in the RCUS consider pulpit exchanges with the Can. Ref. Churches and/or the use of Can. Ref. Churches speakers for conferences.

We can be thankful for this, as it will allow our ecclesiastical fellowship to function in a more practical manner. Since we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS we have the freedom

to welcome RCUS ministers to preach or to speak at various conferences. As CCCNA we would encourage the local churches to do what they can to enhance our contact with the RCUS.

### **3.2.2 Special committee report on “Promoting a biblical sexual morality”**

The 264<sup>th</sup> Synod of the RCUS (2010) appointed a committee to study and prepare a report on “Promoting a biblical sexual morality.” This study had three goals: to teach the biblical support and blessings of godly sexual morality; to set biblical morality over against the abominations of homosexuality, adultery and a man-centered views of sexuality; and to provide Biblical requirements for the use of human sexuality in the midst of and for improvement of culture. Since the work on this study was not complete, the 265<sup>th</sup> Synod renewed the mandate.

This report was presented to the 266<sup>th</sup> synod (2012). The report itself was passed on to the Permanent Publications and Promotions Committee for editing and will be presented to the 267<sup>th</sup> synod. This paper was recommended to the churches as a pastoral guide and starting point for a more biblical understanding of Biblical issues. It presents clear rebuttals to arguments commonly made by homosexuals who try to justify their lifestyle from a Scriptural perspective.

Synod made a series of declarations on Scripture’s teachings about godly sexual morality and opposing society’s perspectives on homosexuality. They are as follows:

1. God created man and woman good and joined them together in a holy state of matrimony. Sexuality was given to the married couple to enjoy in its fullness as creatures under God’s authority.
2. God created only two sexes, male and female. This was taught clearly in Genesis 1 and 2, and repeated by Christ in Matt. 19:4.
3. God himself ordained marriage between one man and one woman. Jesus Christ Himself sanctioned marriage (John 2), and repeated the ordinance of marriage in creation as binding and final upon all men and women (Matthew 19:4-6), including the definition of marriage between a man and a woman.
4. Authority has not been given to people to change God’s ordinance of marriage. To presume to do so is to usurp the place of God. The political state, therefore, exceeds its bounds when it declares to itself the power to redefine marriage as other than one man and one woman.
5. The Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, must respectfully and graciously decline any demands or requests made by anyone to sanction or perform a “marriage” or civil union that is contrary to the ordinance of God.
6. The seventh commandment forbids all sexual uncleanness that violates the created ordinance of marriage. Scripture teaches that corrupt actions spring from corrupt hearts, and this by no means excuses sin. Forbidden as contrary to God’s law are homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, transgender-ism, bisexuality, pornography and any other sexual sins that take the place of or corrupt the union of man and woman in the holy state of matrimony. Not only are the acts themselves forbidden by God, but even the very thoughts themselves are condemned (Matt. 5:27-30).
7. The same God that brings judgment upon sexual sins and calls men to repentance also brings judgment upon those who use private violence against anyone (1 Pet. 3:9-10; Matt. 5:39), and who use railing and contemptuous speech against anyone (Matt. 5:22). The

reality of God's judgment means that we must speak the truth of scripture in love, but not go beyond the scripture itself with abusive speech or violence.

8. Since these sexual sins, including all manner of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, transgender-ism, lesbianism, bestiality, pornography, and other violations of the seventh commandment, are condemned by the Word of God, and since the Church of Jesus Christ is bound to the Word of God in all matters, one who is guilty of such sins is liable to the judicatories of the church. Living unrepentantly in these sins, as in other gross sins, will result in refusal of membership in the churches of the RCUS, termination from employment in the Church, including volunteer work, deposition from office, excommunication from the Table of the Lord and other consequences as determined by the judicatories of the church.
9. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, including those who have committed the sins listed above. There is cleansing and healing from all of the bondage of sin and misery in the blood of Christ, if only we accept such benefit with a believing heart. (See Heidelberg Catechism, Q 60).

### **3.2.3 Theological Education**

The RCUS does not have its own theological seminary. It has a list of approved seminaries, at which students studying for the ministry are expected to study. They are: City Seminary of Sacramento, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Heidelberg Theological Seminary, Mid-American Reformed Seminary, and New Geneva Theological Seminary. Most of these seminaries receive support from the RCUS at a synodical guideline of \$2 per communicant member.

One particular RCUS church in Sacramento, California, has established "City Seminary," which operates under the authority of the local consistory of this church. It attracts seminary students from a wide variety of backgrounds and provides instruction in the Reformed faith.

The Heidelberg Theological Seminary has been set up by ministers and members of the RCUS in the mid-western states, and as such is the closest that the RCUS comes to a denominational seminary. Yet it does not receive any more support from the churches than the other seminaries do. This seminary has undergone a major change in faculty with the resignation of Dr. Robert Grossman (one of two main professors from the RCUS).

### **3.2.4 Fraternal Relations with churches in the Philippines, Kenya, and the Congo**

As part of its foreign mission work, the RCUS has supported the establishment of Reformed churches in the Philippines, Kenya, and the Congo. (See 3.1.3 above) At the 266<sup>th</sup> Synod of the RCUS the following was reported about this:

1. The RCUS invited the UCRCP to enter into fraternal relations with them, but from the response it is not clear that they have accepted this offer yet.
2. The RCUS invited the RFCK to enter into fraternal relations, and they have joyfully accepted this.
3. The RCUS invited the URCC to enter into fraternal relations with them, but to date no response has been received.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The committee recommends that Synod decide:

- 1) To thank the LORD for the way in which the RCUS actively provides a faithful Reformed witness to the gospel.
- 2) To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of EF with the RCUS under the adopted rules, and to endeavour to meet at least once a year to discuss matters of mutual concern and edification.

## **Report 4. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America**

### **1. Mandate**

General Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA for its dealings with the RPCNA: (*Acts*, p. 112)

*4.1 To not enter into EF with the RPCNA at this time.*

*4.2.1 To monitor developments in the RPCNA regarding the ordination of women as deacons.*

*4.2.2 To continue informal contact with the RPCNA via NAPARC.*

*4.2.3 To report to the next General Synod.*

Synod 2010's decision changed the focus of the CCCNA's work from that of "confirming the marks of a true church" and "exploring" potential "hindrances to ecclesiastical fellowship" (as mandated by Synod 2007) to a more passive "monitoring developments" within the RPCNA "regarding the ordination of women as deacons." The Committee understands from Synod 2010's decision that the other issues raised at Synod 2007 have been sufficiently studied, discussed and put to rest, leaving only this one matter to be monitored. Because "monitoring" is different from actively "discussing" an issue with our counter-parts, the Committee passed along Synod 2010's decision to the RPCNA and waited to see what their response would be while interacting with them formally and informally at meetings of NAPARC.

### **2. Correspondence**

CCCNA sent a letter of greeting to the RPCNA Synod of 2010, in which the decision of the Can. Ref. Churches regarding EF with the RPCNA was conveyed. A letter of greeting was also sent to the RPCNA Synod 2012, in reply to an invitation to send an observer. The Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) sent a letter (Appendix 1) with two attachments (Appendices 2-3), addressed to Synod Carman-West 2013, containing an official reply to the decision of Synod 2010 (See point 4 below).

### **3. Annual Meetings**

The committee met with the IRC on November 16, 2010 (at NAPARC), to explain more fully the decision of Synod Burlington 2010, and to discuss the state of the relationship between the churches. The IRC initiated another meeting with the CCCNA, held November 16, 2011 at NAPARC. In this meeting, they expressed warm appreciation for contact with our churches and apologized for not having kept up that contact as closely as they would have liked. They had begun to discuss among themselves the Can. Ref. Churches Synod 2010 decision and raised the question with us as to why the Canadian Reformed Churches would object to having fellowship with the RPCNA on the ground of ordaining women deacons when the Can. Ref. Churches already has ecclesiastical fellowship with the ERQ which (according to the RPCNA) holds to the position of women deacons. As Committee, we note that while the ERQ church order does not rule out women functioning in a diaconal capacity, women have never been ordained as deacons in this church. At our request, the IRC of the RPCNA committed themselves to providing a written interaction with our Synod 2010's decision.

#### **4. Considerations**

Since Synod 2010 mandated our committee to merely monitor developments within the RPCNA concerning women deacons, the CCCNA has not entered into further dialogue with the RPCNA on the contents of their letter to Synod 2013 because there have been no developments within the RPCNA on this point. The letter received is an elaboration of a long-held position in response to our last synod's decision. The mandate did not include an instruction to evaluate further the existing position of the RPCNA. For that reason, the CCCNA passes along the formal correspondence of the RPCNA to Synod Carman 2013 and awaits further instructions.

#### **5. Recommendations**

The CCCNA recommends that Synod:

- 1) Receive and respond to the RPCNA's letter written to Synod 2013 regarding Synod 2010's decision not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA.
- 2) Provide direction for the CCCNA with respect to the RPCNA.

## **Report 5. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)**

### **Introduction**

The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is a fellowship of twelve churches based on subscription and adherence to the Bible as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Its purpose is to facilitate discussion on common issues, to study matters of shared concern, to exercise the promotion of the Reformed faith, and to promote collaboration, where feasible, in works of mission, relief, etc. Any decisions of NAPARC are advisory only, and do not affect the autonomy of member churches. For further information (on constitution and bylaws, meetings, supporting materials, etc.) see the website: [www.naparc.org](http://www.naparc.org). Following the decision of Synod 2007, the Can. Ref. Churches applied for, and was received into membership in NAPARC in 2008.

### **1. Mandate**

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA concerning NAPARC: (*Acts*, p. 55)

*4.2.1 To continue to represent the CanRC at NAPARC.*

*4.2.2 To investigate the status and the implications of the "Golden Rule Comity Agreement" and the "NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations" in order to determine whether or not these agreements interfere with the independence of the CanRC in regard to establishing relationships of EF with other federations.*

### **2. Annual Meetings of NAPARC**

Regarding the mandate to continue representing the Can. Ref. Churches at NAPARC, the committee participated in the meetings held November 2010 and November 2011; it will do so again, D.v., in November 2012. Four delegates (two from sub-committee East and two from sub-committee West) were sent to each meeting, of which main agenda items included reports of each member church on its synod or general assembly, significant decisions, concerns of theological or practical nature, etc. Discussion and prayer followed each federation's report. A 'key-note' address was provided by an invited speaker, which was followed by discussion. Currently, no other federations are applying for membership in NAPARC, which is expected to remain stable for some time. NAPARC has struck a

committee to investigate ways of improving the effectiveness of the annual meetings and to update the constitution and bylaws.

The CCCNA continues to see the benefit of being involved in NAPARC, both to derive insights from and to contribute to the Reformed witness of it. As member churches we live in a North American society that is increasingly secular and hostile. It is good to support one another and maintain a united front on the major challenges we face. Reports from member-churches are often relevant to developments or projects of the Can. Ref. Churches, and it is useful to discuss these out of common interest. It is expected that future meetings will be of even greater relevance to our churches, and that discussion topics will be well focused.

Besides participating in the meeting of NAPARC, the CCCNA has used the occasion to hold meetings with the Inter-church Relations Committees of the ERQ, OPC, RCUS and the RPCNA. We see this efficient and economical arrangement as an additional benefit of membership in NAPARC; moreover, we observe a growing bond among those churches in NAPARC with whom we have EF.

CCCNA has supported the establishment of a Review Committee within NAPARC. This 4-member committee has been mandated, with input from the member churches, to seek ways of improving the functioning of NAPARC. The convener of the CCCNA, Dr. Riemer Faber, serves on this committee.

There is an Interim Committee that prepares the agenda prior to each NAPARC meeting and looks after other organizational matters. Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, chairman of sub-committee West, serves on this committee.

In accordance with a rotating schedule it is expected that Rev. Holtvlüwer will be chairman of NAPARC 2013 and that the Can. Ref. Churches will host the 2014 meeting.

### **3. Status of “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “Agreement on Transfer of Members”**

CCCNA was mandated by Synod Burlington 2010 “to investigate the status and the implications of the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “NAPARC Agreement on Transfers of Members and Congregations” (4.2.2). Synod noted in its considerations leading to this mandate that “these documents appear to have some binding applications to member churches” (*Acts* p. 57).



The committee has again investigated the status and implications of these documents, and reports as follows. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council has as the primary, foundational principle of its constitution that “all actions and decisions taken are **advisory** in character and in no way curtail or restrict the autonomy of the member bodies” (*Constitution IV. Nature and Extent of Authority*; bold added). This principle applies also to these two documents. The “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” was adopted by NAPARC in 1984 following the recommendation of the representatives of the ‘home missions’ (ie., not foreign missions) agencies that member-churches of NAPARC, when planning mission work, be sensitive to the presence of existing congregations and mission-work of other churches. Out of courtesy and for good working relationships, the home missions committees are encouraged to inform each other of their planned activities.

“The Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations” was adopted in 1987 to forestall a consistory or presbytery of a member-church from unintentionally receiving into its membership an ordained officer or member who is under discipline, thus creating tension between the churches. Like the Comity Agreement, it is intended to function as a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ for the sake of maintaining good communications, and so, good relations. It has no binding authority upon any member-church of NAPARC.

We add the following excerpt from the minutes of sub-committee West’s meeting (June 22, 2010) to illustrate our understanding of the implications of these documents: “These agreements are just asking for some sensible contact with neighbouring churches about the establishment of mission posts or the transfer of members. The point is not that we need to “honour” these agreements (in the sense that they are binding upon us), but rather to take them into consideration in contact with NAPARC churches. NAPARC agreements do not supersede our own rules established in the Church Order. It should also be recognized that our participation in NAPARC does not mean that we have recognized all its member churches as being true and faithful; rather we have agreed to meet with them on the basis of an established constitution and bylaws.”

The status and implications of the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations” are governed by the Constitution and they should be interpreted in its context. In sum, the *Constitution* of NAPARC, Point 4 (Nature and Extent of Authority), as cited above, addresses and answers the mandate of Recommendation 4.2.2 Synod 2010. Moreover the language of the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations” is under review by the NAPARC Committee of Review.

#### **4. Recommendation**

The committee recommends that Synod decide:

To mandate the CCCNA to continue to represent the Can. Ref. Churches at NAPARC and to continue its active involvement in it.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 – Letter to General Synod Carman from RPCNA**

To the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, June 20, 2012

Dear Brothers in Christ,

We pray that the Lord would bless your ministry, granting fruitful harvest throughout the nations as your labor in His fields.

We thank you for your careful consideration of our denomination in regards to the possibility of entering into fraternal relations. We regret that we have not been in attendance of your Synod meeting and ask your forgiveness for this oversight. We have received your letter of June 18, 2010 as well as the record of your actions at your Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 that reflect your decision to “not enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA at this time.” Since that time, our Interchurch Committee has had opportunity to discuss this with your Committee for Contact with the Churches of North America during attendance at NAPARC in 2010 and 2011. Please consider this letter something of an answer to some of the concerns you raise as well as an appeal to reopen consideration about entering into fraternal relations with the RPCNA.

We understand that the major stumbling block has been the RPCNA position of ordaining women as deacons. Your CCCNA has summarized our position well so we will touch on only a few points that seem to be misunderstood.

First and foremost, we would affirm that stand taken rests on the exegesis of Scripture and does not reflect a liberalizing agenda. The Synod has entertained robust exegetical consideration of the subject. For your benefit, we’ve appended the adopted report of the Synod of 2001. It addresses the questions of the authority of the office of deacon, that the diaconate is not a ruling or teaching office, exegesis of pertinent passages, among other things. In addition, attached to that report is a paper written by Jeff Stivason regarding the nature of ordination, concluding that ordination does not convey the authority to preach, teach or administer the sacraments. And finally, we’ve appended a paper written by Christian Adjemian on Women Deacons, which provides more in depth exegesis of the pertinent passages. The first is an adopted paper by Synod. The other two, while not official position papers of the denomination, reflect the Scriptural arguments offered in support of the position. We offer these to you to indicate that our stand rests on Scripture.

Second, we would point to the RPCNA decision to break fellowship with the CRC as evidence of our position about the office of elder being reserved for male members only. This took place in 2002. The report of the IRC that year cites the NAPARC action which specifies this issue. The RPCNA voted in favor of the NAPARC resolution (terminating the CRC from NAPARC) and to sever fraternal relations with them. (Minutes 2002 p. 97-102). We also sent Dr. Wayne Spear to the CRC Synod to communicate this message personally and to answer any questions they might have.

Third, much like our stand on exclusive Psalmody, the RPCNA does not require churches in fraternal relations to adopt our confessional stand on women deacons. As the CCCNA has pointed out, the Canadian Reformed Church already holds ecumenical fellowship with another exclusive Psalm singing denomination (Free Church of Scotland) as well as with the Église Réformée du Québec which holds to the position of women deacons. The process of drawing into fellowship will certainly highlight certain confessional differences, but this should not dissuade us from seeking out such fellowship, nor the process of coming to eventual confessional unity.

Finally, as we have not been present in person in order to answer questions that you might have about this, we would offer to send two men to your next Synod to meet with your CCCNA and to be present to answer questions that you might have about this subject.

In all this, we thank God for your brotherly counsel, your witness for the faith, and your zeal for the glory of God.

In Christ,

Bruce Parnell, ch.  
Interchurch Relations Committee of the RPCNA

## Appendix 2

### Adopted Report of Synod 2001 of the RPCNA and Paper By Jeff Stivason

Report of the Committee to Respond to Communication #01-3  
Namely, The Report of the Study Committee of the Great Lakes/Gulf Presbytery of  
the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to Examine the Question of the  
Ordination of Women Deacons

#### INTRODUCTION

Our assignment from the Synod of 2001 is “to report in 2002 on the merits of the proposal” of Communication 01-3. This communication proposes the enactment of basically two changes in our *Testimony* and *Directory for Church Government*:

- 1) the removal of all statements that the office of deacon “is neither a ruling nor a teaching office” and
- 2) the explicit restriction of the office of deacon to male members only.

The paper argues that the burden of proof lies on those who would argue for women deacons. For example, quoting Gordon Clark,

“... a mountainous burden of proof rests on those who advocate ordination of women.”<sup>1</sup>

We note that the burden of proof is something we all are under. Everyone must demonstrate their claims as warranted by the explicit statements of, or good and necessary consequences from, the Scriptures (see *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 1, paragraph 6).

Your committee notes that those who worked through the revision of the *Testimony* that was adopted in 1980 did not take their doctrinal tasks lightly, but carefully weighed the issue of women deacons as well as all the other issues of the *Testimony*.

#### ORDINATION

The paper argues that the office of deacon, being an office, is invested with authority and that, therefore,

- 1) statements in our standards specifying and/or excluding certain kinds of authority must be removed, and
- 2) women may not be ordained to this or any other office in the church.

We wholeheartedly agree that every office is, by definition, invested with authority. We will not, therefore, discuss this major thrust of the paper. We do, however, disagree with both conclusions proposed by the paper and the recommendations that flow from them.

It is our opinion that the paper's implicit claim to be articulating the Reformed view of ordination is debatable.<sup>2</sup>

**THE FIRST PROPOSAL: THE REMOVAL OF STATEMENTS REFERRING TO THE DIACONATE AS "NEITHER A RULING NOR A TEACHING OFFICE"**

The paper itself recognizes that the authority of office has a *particular* and not a general character. The argument includes language such as “in a *specialized* area” (936; line 10; emphasis added); that the gatekeepers had charge over *particular* things (page 936; line 18); “whatever pertains to their *specific* office” (page 937; lines 21,24; emphasis added). We understand this to be the point of the statements the paper objects to. Namely, that the authority of the office of deacon has *particular* reference to *administrative work* rather than ruling, legislation or teaching doctrine. Note that the context of these statements does not only exclude some kinds of authority from the office of deacon, but also *asserts* the particular authority that the office does have.

“The Diaconate . . . is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise . . . and its function *is administrative*.” (*Directory for Church Government*. III. Deacons, page D-23; *emphasis added*)

Deacons are ordained to an *administrative* office with *administrative* authority, not no authority. “The board of deacons has no legislative or judicial powers; its work *is wholly administrative*, subject to the direction of the session and sensitive to the counsel of the congregation.” (*Directory for Church Government*. III. Deacons; C. Privileges; page D-24, *emphasis added*).

Again, deacons are ordained to an office of administrative authority.

“The diaconate is a spiritual office subordinate to the session and is not a teaching or a ruling office. The deacons *have responsibility for* the ministry of mercy, the finances and property of the congregation, and such other tasks as are assigned to them by the session.” (*The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, Chapter 25, paragraph 11, page A-88; *emphasis added*).

Deacons are ordained to an office which involves *specific* authority for the purpose of fulfilling their *particular* responsibilities.

The *authority* conferred through ordination is according to the *work* set aside to. For the Elders, their authority is to rule and teach. For the Deacons, their authority is to administrate; collecting, maintaining and distributing resources to meet the temporal of the congregation, including all relevant spiritual counsel.

We conclude with two quotations from highly respected authors:

"This office of deacons is an office of service, which give not any authority or

power *in the rule* of the church; *but being an office*, it gives authority with respect unto the *special* work of it, under a general notion of authority; that is a right to attend unto it in a *peculiar* manner, and to perform the things *that belong thereunto*." (John Owen, Works, Vol.XVI, p. 147; emphases added)<sup>3</sup>

The OPC majority report includes the following words on ordination from Samuel Miller's *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (1831): "That solemn rite, or act, by which a candidate for any *office* in the Church of Christ, is authoritatively designated to that office" and "They are fully invested with that office, and with all the powers and privileges *which it includes*" (*emphasis added by authors of OPC majority report*).<sup>4</sup>

Each of these quotations supports our thesis that ordination is not general but specific to the office and work ordained to.

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** *that Synod sustain the following statements in our standards as they now appear, not deleting the sections that specify the diaconate as not being a teaching or ruling office, which deletion is proposed by Communication 01-3.*

*"It is neither a ruling nor a teaching office"* (Directory for Church Government, III. Deacons, Page D-23)

*"and is not a teaching or ruling office "* (The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *chapter 25; paragraph 11, Page A-88*)

## **THE SECOND PROPOSAL: THE PROHIBITION OF WOMEN SERVING IN THE DIACONATE WITH THE EXPLICIT RESTRICTION OF THE DIACONATE TO MALE MEMBERS**

The argument of the paper may be summarized as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. The diaconate, being an office, involves ordination to, and the exercise of, authority (see Numbers 27:20f; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22).
2. Women may not exercise authority over men in the church (see 1 Timothy 2:12).
3. Women deacons, by virtue of their ordination to office, exercise authority with their male colleagues over men in the congregation.
4. Therefore, women may not be ordained as deacons.

We agree with the first two premises, but disagree with the third and, therefore, with the conclusion and the recommendations that proceed from it.

### **SURVEY OF RELEVANT PASSAGES**

**1 Timothy 3:11** is the clearest and most decisive text for the question of women deacons. Acts 6 declares that seven men were prescribed by the apostles originally, but

this passage does not necessarily, in itself, prescribe either the number seven in a congregation nor a limitation to men. **Romans 16** is inconclusive on its own as to whether Phoebe was a woman deacon, though the *OPC Minority Report*<sup>6</sup> and *Adjemian*<sup>7</sup> present a good case in favor of Phoebe as an ordained Deacon. The widows of **1 Timothy 5** are having their pressing needs met, not being enlisted to meet the pressing needs of others. The qualifications listed refer to past activity as a condition of present and future temporal provision. Any future work by the widows is incidental to this context of the widows receiving assistance. The nature of the widow's commitment is to the church as to a husband for indefinite and unqualified temporal provision. Violating that commitment is analogous to violating a marriage vow. This explains Paul's strong condemnation (1 Timothy 5:12, see Ecclesiastes 5:5; Deuteronomy 23:21f; Leviticus 27:1f; 5:4f). The history since the early church of widows serving in diaconal roles cannot overrule a simple exegesis of these passages that rules out an identification of the widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 with the women of 1 Timothy 3:11. Exegesis ought to determine historical practice; historical practice must not determine exegesis. The similarities and differences between *Women* and Deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is unique to this passage, but so is the identity and distinction between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders in 1 Timothy 5:17.

### **1 TIMOTHY 3**

And so we come to 1 Timothy 3. Commentators routinely begin and end the discussion of this verse with the observation that the exegetical considerations are quite evenly balanced among various views. Therefore, we will try to represent these views as fairly as possible.

#### THE CONTEXT OF CHAPTERS 2 & 3

The broad context of 1 Timothy 3:11 is Paul's speaking about the church in terms of a household (3:15,5; see 2:1-3:16). This is generally recognized.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Paul often touches on the relationship between men and women (2:8,9f; 3:2,12). The clear point is that the church mirrors the family in its structure and function.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF CHAPTER 3

Parallelism, using "likewise", is a significant structure in chapters 2 and 3. Women adorning themselves with good works are set in parallel to men praying (2:8,9f; "likewise"; see same structure using "likewise" in same theme in Titus 2:2-8). Given the context of analogy with the household, this parallelism seems to have in mind the creational complementation of woman serving as an indispensable help to man in their joint service in carrying out the creation mandate (2:13; Genesis 2:18-25; 1:26f; 1 Corinthians 11 8,9). In chapter 3, this same parallelism, also using "likewise", is employed to associate Elders, Deacons and "Women" (3:1,8,11). Verses 8 and 11 assume



the verb of verse 2, which strengthens the parallelism. Verse twelve provides a new main verb, which suggests a new section though renewing the discussion of deacons. This further strengthens the integrity of verses 2-11 and the parallelism within it. Given that the first two elements in the triad are offices, it seems that "Women" is referring to an official function also<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, it seems that the Women are understood to be officers like Elders and Deacons and that, since Elders and Deacons are ordained to office, these Women should be also. Given that Women parallel Deacons in the same way that Deacons parallel Elders, it seems that their office is distinct in some way from the Deacons.

On the other hand, the association by means of "likewise" may not be with respect to office, but with respect to qualifications for different kinds of service. If Paul truly meant to refer to a third office, it would seem that he would have done so after he finished his section on deacons with a discussion as substantial as his more lengthy passages on Elders and on Deacons. Therefore, "women" could refer to women in the same office as Deacons. But, if Paul truly meant to refer to an office, he could have said, "Women *Deacons* likewise." He even could have said "*Deaconesses* likewise" by coining a feminine form of *diakonoi*. Therefore, "women" could simply refer to the wives of deacons. Some conclude from the dependence of verse 11 on the verb of verse 2 that "women" refers to the wives of Elders as well as the wives of Deacons, though not many commentators support this view.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF VERSES 8-13

The inclusion of the verse about Women (verse 11) within the passage on Deacons (verses 8-13) requires some notion of integration between the two groups. Given the broad context of the analogy with the family and a special focus on the relationship between man and woman, it seems that a relationship analogous to that of husband and wife is in mind. The Women work with the Deacons as a wife works with her husband. These women could include the wives of Deacons, but the passage does not seem to indicate this. The context of home life is by analogy (women), not by identity (wives). The relationship between Deacons and Women is an ecclesiastical one (vows of office), not a domestic one (vows of marriage). If Paul intended us to understand wives here, it seems that he would have made this clear by adding the personal pronoun or the article according to standard grammatical conventions. Also, these women could include widows, but there is no indication in the text that Paul intends this. Therefore it seems that, even if the office of Women is distinct from that of Deacon, their work is within that of the Deacons. Or, the inclusion of v. 11 within vs. 8-13 may mean that the women are in the exact same office as Deacons, reflecting the partnership of male and female in the creation mandate (Genesis 1:26-30). In either case, ordination is indicated.

On the other hand, even though the context is one of analogy, the inclusion may refer

to the literal relationship of husband and wife, reflecting the creation of woman from the side of the man and being a suitable helper to him in general (Genesis 2:18-25). The absence of the article or the possessive pronoun is not decisive against the interpretation of the wives of deacons.

#### THE CHOICE OF THE WORD, “WOMEN” IN 1 TIMOTHY 3:11

Paul's choice of the word “women” seems significant. He could have coined the feminine form of deacon if he intended that these women would simply do the Deacons’ work with them. If this were his purpose, he also would not have set the women in parallel with the other two offices with “likewise” and with dependence on the main verb of v.2. His word choice of “women” in the context of family relationships indicates that he sees their work as “suitable helpers” (Genesis 2:18,20) to the Deacons in analogy to a woman and man in marriage. Given this, nothing more is needed to describe the work of the ordained Women. These Women know full well from the Scriptures, and as they are lived out in the church, what and how a woman helps her husband.<sup>10</sup> Titus 2:1-5 is remarkably parallel to 1 Timothy 3:11 in structure and content, encouraging those in the ordinary leadership of age (rights and duties of firstborn by a natural providence) in the same way as those in the special leadership of office (rights and duties of firstborn by a special providence; namely, ordination). As each man and woman works out the biblical principles in their marriage, the Deacons and Women in each congregation of God's household should do likewise. But, again, Paul’s word choice especially in the midst of the discussion of deacons, could simply refer to female members of the diaconate or to the wives of deacons.

#### THE QUALIFICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH “WOMEN” IN 1 TIMOTHY 3:11

The qualifications listed for the Women are very similar to those of Elders and Deacons and, thus, in this context, seem to indicate qualifications for office.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, these qualifications are very similar to those of the older women in Titus 2:3 where there is no notion of ordained office.<sup>12</sup> These qualifications are quite suitable and necessary to the wives of deacons, especially as a deacon’s work could involve the active assistance of his wife, particularly when serving women in need. There were special qualifications for the wives of priests (Leviticus 21:7,13,14) who were not actively involved in the work of their husbands. These qualifications are also in keeping with a well-ordered home similar to the characteristics required of children, even though the structures of the respective references indicate that the behavior of children is a qualification for Elders and Deacons (4,5; 12) while the behavior of Women is with respect to their own qualification (11).

#### CONCLUSIONS FROM 1 TIMOTHY 3:11

With the vast majority of commentators, we recognize that the exegetical

considerations are balanced among the various views of same office, same work (women deacons), different office, similar work (deaconesses), no office, similar work (unordained helpers or wives helping their deacon husbands) and no office, no work (wives helping husbands in general but not necessarily in their diaconal work). Nevertheless, overall, it seems to us that the balance comes to rest in favor of women participating in the work of the diaconate by ordination. It seems to the committee that there is warrant to commend this argument, conclusion and practice to the church. Therefore, we recommend that our documents not be changed to limit the office of Deacon to men and that we retain the statement in our Testimony (Chapter 25, paragraph 8), that "Women as well as men may hold the office of deacon".

**RECOMMENDATION #2** that Synod sustain the statements in our standards as they now appear (below), not restricting the office of Deacon to men as proposed by Communication 01-3.

“Those eligible to be called as deacons must: 1. Be communicant members in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.” (Directory for Church Government, UJ. Deacons, A. Qualifications, paragraph V Page D-23).

"A judgment of the session that there are qualified persons in the congregation, and an increase in the number of deacons is necessary." (Directory for Church Government, III. Deacons, D. Procedure for Election, paragraph I.a.(2); Page D-25).

“Women as well as men may hold the office of deacon.” (*The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, Chapter 25, paragraph 8; Page A-87)

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** That this committee be dismissed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kit Swartz, Chairman  
Thomas Houston  
Kay Klein, Deacon (consultative member)  
Joseph Lamont  
Jerrold Milroy  
Jeffrey Stivason

Recommended Reading

Your committee highly recommends the following papers to the synod for further study:

Adjemian, Christian, *On Deaconesses*, privately published; latest revision, October 2001. Your committee hopes that this paper will be available to the members of synod at the Cambridge congregation's website by the time you receive this report in the 2002 digest. Look for a reference to this paper at <http://www.reformedprescambridge.com/articles.html>.

Reynolds, Gregory E., Evan Davis, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Robert D. Knudsen, Report of the Committee on Women in Church Office, in *Minutes of the Fifty-fifth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1988, pp. 310-364; available online at: [http://www.opc.org/GA/women\\_in\\_office.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/women_in_office.html) Note that both the Majority and Minority reports are at this same address, with a response to the minority report written by Dr. Gaffin sandwiched in between them.

Strimple, Robert B., Report of the Minority of the Committee on Women in Church Office in *Minutes of the Fifty-fifth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1988, pp. 365-387; available online at: [http://www.opc.org/GA/women\\_in\\_office.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/women_in_office.html). Note that both the Majority and Minority reports are at this same address, with a response to the minority report written by Dr. Gaffin sandwiched in between them.

#### NOTES

1 Communication 01-3, page 933, line 33 from Clark, Gordon, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Appendix A, page 251.

2 Communication 01-3, pp. 933 and following.

3 This quotation from Owen is included in both the O P C majority (page 34) and minority (page 76) reports. These reports were available to your committee online at [http://www.opc.org/GA/women\\_in\\_office.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/women_in_office.html). Both reports and a response by Dr. Gaffin to Dr. Strimple's minority report are found here, being extracted from *The Minutes of the Fifty-fifth General Assembly*, 1988. Page numbers cited in this report are from the online version.

4 These quotations from Miller are also included in both reports; O P C majority (page 21) and minority (page 76).

5 From Communication 01-3, page 940, lines 22-31: "It is in light of this understanding of the Biblical significance and meaning of ordination that such passages as 1 Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1 must be interpreted. We will not enter here into a detailed exegesis of these verses, since many others have clearly demonstrated that there is no reason in the texts themselves that requires us to see the "women" of 1 Timothy 3:11 or Phoebe as ordained deacons. The clear teaching of Scripture regarding the nature of ordination to ecclesiastical office, in fact, requires us

to deny this possibility on the grounds that it would positively contradict what is everywhere affirmed with regard to office and authority. The Apostle Paul, in the very same letter to Timothy, made it patently clear: 'I do not allow a woman to authority over a man.' (1 Timothy 2:12)"

6 see Recommended Reading at the end of this paper for the online address for this paper

7 see Recommended Reading at the end of this paper for the online address for this paper

8 See the OPC minority report, page 375; see *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Crossway Books, 1991); page 233f (Poythress) and page 345f (Knight)

9 Chapters 5 and 6 also have a triad, of honor (5:3,17; 6:1). "Honor" in a family context may be an allusion to the 5th commandment.

10 See 1 Timothy 5:9,10,14, Titus 2:1-5 and Proverbs 31:10f

11 Dignified (11; see 8, dignity; 2, respectable); not gossips (11; see 8, double-tongued); temperate (11; 8, not addicted to much wine; 2, temperate); faithful in all things (11; see 10,2, beyond reproach). The English translation (NASB) is an adequate reflection of the similarities in the Greek.

12 Not malicious gossips (Titus 2:3; see exactly the same in 1 Timothy 3:11); not enslaved to much wine (Titus 2:3; see temperate in 1 Timothy 3:11; see same wording for Deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8 and for Elders in 1 Timothy 3:3). The English translation (NASB) is an adequate reflection of the similarities in the Greek.

### ***Essay on Ordination by Pastor Jeff Stivason***

*Attached to the report of the Committee on Communication 01-3*

The paper (Communication 01-3) argues that ordination is “induction into an authoritative order.”<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that every office is, by definition, invested with authority.<sup>14</sup> However, we are not in agreement with the paper’s interpretation of the doctrine of ordination, which we believe represents Clark, in the main.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the committee believes that Clark’s view is not the Reformed doctrine of ordination.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, we will briefly delineate Clark’s view and then point out disagreement.

For Clark, ordination to the office of elder or deacon does “confer authority to preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Clark, there is no distinction between the offices of elder and deacon either in function or authority.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, one already sees why Clark draws the conclusion he does concerning the ordination of women deacons.

However, even though teaching is not a requirement for the office of deacon in I Timothy 3, Clark finds support for this assertion in Acts 6. He believes that these seven were the first deacons of the NT church. And although, Clark writes, “the activities of the five of the original seven are not described, the other two did in fact preach and baptize.”

Nevertheless, this does not seem to carry the weight Clark would like. There is some question as to whether Acts 6 is the appointment of deacons or elders over the Hellenistic Jews. Significantly, there is no mention of the word "deacon" in the text. Moreover, Acts 6 is a very early time in the formation of the NT church which makes it unlikely that there would be a firm and fast system of government already in place. Therefore, it seems that Clark applies the analogy of faith backwards when interpreting Acts 6 and I Timothy 3.

Therefore, with the assumption that ordination to the office of deacon entails the authority to “preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline” women are necessarily excluded from the office of deacon. Seeing then no distinction within the type of authority from one ordained office to the next Clark adds, “persons chosen to non-authoritative functions are not to be ordained.” Obviously, holding to the above view of ordination, woman must be excluded.

Therefore, when the paper addresses the possibility of woman deacons from I Timothy 3 it states that,

The clear teaching of Scripture regarding the nature of ordination to ecclesiastical office, in fact, requires us to deny this possibility (ordination of woman deacons) on the grounds that it would positively contradict what is everywhere affirmed with regard to office and authority. The apostle Paul, in the very same letter to Timothy, made it patently clear: “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.”

However, the paper has not made its case in the following areas: First, it has not proved that office is without distinction in authority.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, and especially, it has not proved Clark's position that ordination to the diaconate entails the authority to preach, administer the sacraments and exercise discipline.

Second, neither Clark nor Communication 01-3 has demonstrated that its position is "the Reformed position." For instance, Clark admits to a "considerable dependence on George Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming, Against the Ceremonies, and Miscellany Questions*." Yet, clearly, Gillespie does not believe that deacons have the authority to preach or baptize.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, at a critical place in his argumentation Gillespie disagrees with Clark. Consequently, it seems that there are differences of interpretation concerning the nature and authority of ordination in the Reformed position.

Therefore, the committee rejects Clark's position concerning the nature and authority of ordination and instead upholds that offered in the body of the committee's response.

#### NOTES

13 Communication 0-3, p.934.

14 See Report, 2.

15 Communication 0-3 is advocating Clark's position, cf. p.933. This is clearly shown in remarks such as Clark "pinpointed the main issue" in the debate over the ordination of women deacons. And "Clark understood the advocacy of women deacons to strike at the very heart of the reformed doctrine of ordination."

16 Communication 0-3, p.933.

17 Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Appendix B, 277.

18 Clark may in fact see the differences in purpose but does not mention them here.

19 In fact, we think that we have demonstrated that there are distinctions of authority between offices.

20 Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Appendix B, 275. Strikingly, neither does John Owen believe that deacons may preach or administer the sacraments. Moreover, one Gillespie scholar has even found evidence within Gillespie's writings that indicates he believed in the ordination of women deacons (cf. McAy, W.D.J. *An Ecclesiastical Republic: Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie*. Carlisle, UK: Rutherford House Paternoster Press, 1997).

### **Appendix 3**

[See: [www.reformedprescambridge.com/articles/women\\_deacons.pdf](http://www.reformedprescambridge.com/articles/women_deacons.pdf) for the article in its original formatting and pagination]

## **On Women Deacons**

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**Revised  
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The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government published by the Westminster Assembly in 1645 contains this statement about church officers:

The officers which Christ hath appointed for the edification of this church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased. Others ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and other church- governors, and deacons.

In most Presbyterian churches since that time, these offices, or a variation of this list of offices, has been accepted as the full list of biblical offices in the Church of Christ. Differences exist between those churches that consider the pastor-teacher one office and not two. There are also those churches which consider elders (“other church-governors” in the Westminster document) and pastors to be two functions within one office. But whatever the differences internal to this list, it is rare to see an additional office recognized in the churches.

In this paper I will argue that the office of deacon, properly understood, includes the office of deaconess, designed for the service of women. The arguments in support of this position will be Scriptural and exegetical. They will not be historical. In laying out this thesis I am conscious that the issue of women in church office is dividing the evangelical church today. As a consequence I make these arguments humbly, in an



attempt to clarify God's will and not man's.

In reviewing the literature concerning women and the church I have often been struck by how much the interpreter's cultural context can influence his interpretation of gender roles and the Bible's teaching about them. I realize that I too am subject to cultural bias. This is why I have attempted to be exegetically precise in my arguments. I only ask the reader to think with me, as I attempt to receive the instruction of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures

“If any woman who is a believer has *dependent* widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

There is a fourth passage which is prominent in the background of the discussion of the service of women in the church, 1 Timothy 2:12.

1 Timothy 2:12 διδασκειν δε γυναικι ουκ επιτρεπω ουδε αυθεντειν ανδρος, αλλ ειναι εν συχια.

“But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”

Any discussion of women deacons in the church must take at least these New Testament passages into consideration.

## 2.0 Structural Considerations

Exegetical analysis cannot be primarily a concatenation of word studies. The clause, the sentence, and the discourse are all exegetically important levels of analysis. For example, consider the debate on whether the word *διακονος* [diakonos] in Romans 16:1 is to be translated “servant” or “deacon.” Attempting to settle this contention by lexical study is fruitless. The meaning of the word is well known. Although *diakonos* in Koiné Greek was a general term for “servant,” it did also have a more specialized meaning. Moulton & Milligan (1930: 149) point out that the term was used in a technical sense to refer to officials involved in (pagan) religious services, both male and female, together with both male and female priests. References to these inscriptions can also be found in Beyer's article (Kittel 1964:II:81-93). Knowing the usage of this word does not resolve the issue in Romans 16:1. The exegetical difficulty we face concerns the interpretation of the word in its context. To arrive at a satisfactory interpretation we must make an appeal to the analogy of Scripture, relying on other passages that can clarify the intention of the apostle. Word study is only one part of the

exegetical work. The following is a sketch of structural considerations germane to the issue of whether the Lord has given the Church women deacons.

## 2.1 Discourse structure of 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13

The whole of 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13 constitutes a single discourse section of Paul's epistle which addresses the matter of how one ought to conduct oneself in the Church. This is confirmed by the two verses which bring an end to this discourse section, 1 Timothy 3:14-15. In verse 15, Paul explains the motivation for his preceding instructions, confirming the discourse unity of the entire section. He writes:

“...so that you may know how one ought to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

This is the discourse structural background that must guide our interpretation of the whole section.

**2.1.1** The entire discourse unit of 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13 is further divided into two subsections. The practical matters which Paul addresses in the entire unit are issues of behavior and life in the church. The first subsection runs from 2:1 to 2:15. It naturally divides into three units:

Prayer: Παρακαλω ουν πρωτον v.1, “I urge first of all...” How to pray in the church.

Men: Βουλομαι ουν προσευχεσθαι τους ανδρας... v. 8, “Therefore I want the men in every place...”

Women: Ωσαυτως [και] γυναικας ... v. 9, “Likewise, women...”

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<sup>1</sup>The verb “know” ειδης is 2nd person singular, but the infinitival clause ινα ειδης πως δει εν οικω θεου αναστρεφεισθαι, is impersonal, “how one ought to conduct himself...” as NASB, NIV.

The adverb ὡσαυτως, [hōsautōs “likewise,” in verse 9 shows that just as Paul has instructions for men’s behavior in the church, he also has instructions for women. Two groups are thus structurally identified by means of this adverb, and to each group Paul addresses instructions. We will see a similar structural grouping in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 11. The sum of the apostle’s practical instructions in this first subsection of the larger discourse unit is that men are to be men of prayer and of peace, qualities which are not natural to fallen men. Likewise, women are to be godly and not showy, which are qualities not native to fallen women.

**2.1.2** Paul next goes on to discuss conduct for a specific group of the people in the church, church officers:

Church officers: Πιστός ο λόγος. ... “This is a faithful saying...: If a man desires the position of a bishop, ... .

This is the beginning of the second subsection of the larger discourse unit of 1 Timothy 2:1-3:15, which we identified above. We now turn our attention to this second subsection.

## 2.2 Discourse Structure of 1 Timothy 3:1-13

In this subsection, Paul concerns himself with how “one ought to conduct oneself in the household of God.” This “one” is one who would be entrusted to be:

Verses 1-7, Εἰ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρεγεται, “if anyone aspires *to be* overseer”

Verse 8: Διακονοῦς ὡσαυτως σεμνοῦς, ... Deacons likewise reverent... Verse

11: Γυναίκας ὡσαυτως σεμνας,... Women likewise reverent...

Verse 13 ends the section on deacons: οἱ γὰρ καλῶς διακονήσαντες ... “those who have served well/deaconed well...”

In the first subsection of this discourse unit, (2:1-15) Paul addresses matters that concern the church as a whole, while in the second subsection (3:1-13) he addresses matters specific to the officers of the church. Notice that in the first subsection of the discourse, Paul identified two groups of Christians about whom he was giving instruction by means of the adverb ὡσαυτως, *hōsautōs* in 1 Tim 2:9, “men,” then “women.” In the second subsection, Paul identifies three groups of Christians -- *overseers, deacons, women* -- about whom he is giving instructions by means of this same adverb, using ὡσαυτως *hōsautōs* in verses 8 and 11.

### 3.0 Women or wives?

The word I translated as “women,” in 1Tim 3:11, is Γυναίκας *gynaikas* (acc. plur. of γυνή *gynē*). This word “women” is ambiguous in Greek, as in French and in a number of other languages. It can mean “women” or “wives.” The context or various determiners can disambiguate the word. Because of this lexical ambiguity, commentators have differed much on the correct interpretation of Γυναίκας *gynaikas* in 1Tim 3:11, as any perusal of translations will demonstrate.

#### 3.1 Wives.

If Paul intends Γυναίκας *gynaikas* to mean “wives,” the next question we must answer is: *whose wives?* Some translations insert a “their,” linking it with “deacons.” The (N)KJV uses italics to show that the possessive determiner “their” is not present in the Greek original. The NIV cites “their” as if it were part of the text, which it is not. Consider the options for interpretation if we decide to translate Γυναίκας *gynaikas* as “wives.”

**3.1.1 Deacons’ wives.** If Paul means “deacons’ wives,” we are brought to wonder why he would single out deacons’ wives (likewise, [deacons’] wives...) and not mention the wives of elders. Since the wives of elders are the God-given helpers of the overseers in the church, one would think that the apostle would be quite concerned with their character, at least as concerned as he would be with the character of the deacons’ wives. Further, if Paul were singling out deacons’ wives, it would have been more in keeping with his purpose for him to reverse the order of verses 11 and 12, which would give us the more natural reading, as in the hypothetical text below:

**(Hypothetical) 12** “Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. **11** Their wives must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”

In verse 12, no matter what its position in the text, the Greek unambiguously shows that the γυναῖκος *gynaikos* (genitive singular) ‘wife’ is the deacon’s. Similarly, τέκνων *teknōn* ‘children’ and οἰκῶν *oikōn* ‘household’ are unambiguously the deacon’s in verse 12. But verse 11, in the context in which we find it in the NT Greek text, does not in its most natural reading refer to the deacons’ wives. Reversing the order, yielding the hypothetical text [verses 12 + 11] would have created a much clearer statement. The ambiguity of verse 11 would be resolved. Surely this must have been evident to Paul,

native speaker of Greek that he was. Yet, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul gave us the Greek text we have, verses 11 + 12. In this text, *Γυναίκας* *gynaikas* ‘women’ does not naturally refer to deacons’ wives.

**3.1.2 Officers’ wives.** Another possibility is to interpret *Γυναίκας* *gynaikas* in verse 11 with reference to “officers’ wives,” that is, referring to the wives of both overseers and deacons. This is Calvin’s interpretation in his *Commentary* on this passage. But then we must ask why Paul would put this instruction about officers’ wives in the middle of the text about deacons? It would be one of the most confusing passages the Apostle has written. We would be bringing a complication into a text that has an otherwise clear meaning.

**3.1.3 Christian wives.** Another attempt might be to say that *Γυναίκας* *gynaikas* in verse 11 refers to Christian wives in general. But this would make even less sense than the officers’ wives argument. There is no sound rhetorical, discourse, or exegetical reason to read “wives in general” in 1Tim 3:11.

All in all, there is little to commend the interpretation that *Γυναίκας* *gynaikas* means “wives” in 1Tim 3:11. By every exegetical measure, it is a forced interpretation, not one that reads naturally from the text. Let us consider the only alternative.

## **3.2 Women.**

If we interpret *Γυναίκας* *gynaikas* in verse 11 in its most natural contextual reading of “women,” we then need to answer the question: what women? There are three possibilities found in the interpretive literature. (We will exclude a fourth hypothetical interpretation “all Christian women,” for the same reasons as in 3.1.3, above.)

**3.2.1 Women deacons:** this is the view of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. In this view, the women of verse 11 have all the functions and privileges of male deacons. They are discussed in the context of deacons because they are ordained to the same office, have the same responsibilities and place in the Church. These functions and privileges are determined by the Scriptures for women deacons just as they are for men deacons.

**3.2.2 Deaconesses:** this view is slightly different than 3.2.1, in that it says that the “women” constitute a third class of officers, distinct from deacons, and so must be recognized as such. In this view, women, (deaconesses) have special responsibilities of

ministry, perhaps to women and children. They are not entirely identical to male deacons. Yet, they are mentioned in the same passage as deacons because they share with their male counterparts the responsibilities and privileges of serving not only in the church, but in the name of the church. However, the Greek term “deaconesses” did not exist before the end of the third century.

**3.2.3 Widows:** another view sees the “women” in 1Tim 3:11 being the “widows” of 1Tim 5:9-16. This view was recently defended by Brian M. Schwertly (1998). This is a view which is similar to the analysis that John Calvin proposed in his comment on Romans 12:8 in the *Institutes (IV, III, 9)*. There he distinguishes between deacons who distribute alms (“he that gives, let him do it with simplicity”) and deacons who devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick (“he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness”). Calvin goes on:

“Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy [1Tim 5:9-10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor. If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves.

In his commentary on 1 Tim 5, however, Calvin does not refer to the widows as “deacons.”

From the considerations in Section 3.0, I conclude that γυναῖκας *gynaikas* in 1Tim 3:11 refers to women, not wives. What is yet to be determined is what group of women.

#### 4.0 Women deacons, not widows.

There are good biblical and exegetical grounds to show that the Γυναίκας *gynaikas* of 1Tim 3:11 are a group of women in the church who are called to the diaconal office, serving as women deacons alongside their male counterparts.

#### 4.1 Women deacons.

Paul does not call them “women deacons,” but simply “women.” Since he is discussing the office of deacons, he calls them “women” to distinguish male from female deacons. These women are a subgroup of deacons, as indicated by Paul’s separate use of “likewise,” Γυναίκας ὡσαυτῶς *gynaikas hōsautōs*, and by his deliberate use of Γυναίκας *gynaikas* “women” in this passage dealing with deacons, before deacons’ wives are even mentioned. These women form a separate class of official church servants. The term “deaconess” was later coined to refer to them, but the New Testament and early patristic literature does not use this term anywhere.

#### 4.2 Not widows.

The “women” of 1Tim 3:11 cannot be widows. If we compare Paul’s discussion of widows (1Timothy 5:9-16) with the passage on church officers in 1Tim 3, we notice clear differences between the two sets of women.

**4.2.1 Requirements:** First, the requirements for the two groups of women (women deacons and widows) are different. Widows had to be at least 60 years old, and have been married to one man and raised children. Further, widows had to remain single (not remarry) once they were put on the widows list. For women deacons, on the other hand, there is no age requirement, nor is it required that they be or have been married, any more than it is required that elders or deacons be married men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Some interpret 1Timothy 3:2 and 3:12 as imperatives: elders must be husbands of one wife, deacons must be husbands of one wife. But the text does not say that these men must be married at all; it says that the elder or deacon must be the husband of one wife. The phrase *μίας γυναικὸς ἀνδρᾶ*, *mias gynaikos andra* is used in both instances. The phrase uses the numeral *μία*, *mia*, ‘one-feminine.’ Paul does not use the same terms here (“married,” “his own wife” etc.) that he uses in other passages where he discusses married life, e.g., 1Corinthians 7, or Ephesians 5. Nor, conversely, does he use the numeral in these other marriage passages. In 1Tim 3, Paul is saying that church officers, if they are married, must not be polygamists. Notice also the proximity of 1Tim 3:2,12 to 1Tim 2:13-14, where Paul makes direct reference to the Edenic institution of monogamous marriage.

The woman deacon's age and marital status are not relevant. Her spiritual maturity and godly living are the things that matter if a woman is to be a deacon. Clearly, the requirements spelled out by Paul for widows and those for women deacons are quite different.

**4.2.2 Social conditions:** Second, the social conditions of the two groups of women are different. The widows have to have no family available to support them; they are entirely dependent on the church. However, nothing is said about the support of the women deacons.

**4.2.3 Position:** Third, the positions of the two groups within the church are different. Widows are women who depend on the church financially. 1Tim 5:16 shows that widows receive from the church. Women deacons, on the other hand, are women who give to the church, in the same way that deacons give to the church, through their service.

There is no indication in 1Tim 5:9-16 that widows are a class of women set apart for good works within the church, although this is a common assumption among commentators (even Calvin). The good works of widows are in the past, they are women "having a reputation for good works." These works are evidence of a sincere faith. Now, they are unable to work (60 was old in Paul's culture) and they have no one to care for them but the church. The church is willingly to be "burdened" by them (1Tim 5:16), but only because they are helpless Christian women who have made a lifelong credible profession of faith. They are put on a list (1Tim 5:9).

**4.2.4 Widows indeed:** On the basis of these facts, it is highly likely that the widows to which Paul refers in 1Tim 5:9-16 are the same sorts of widows which we find in Acts 6. They are the very kind of women for whose help the first deacons were chosen and ordained. Paul says: *Χηρας τιμα τας οντως χηρας. Xēras tima tas ontōs xēras*, "honor widows who are really widows." In 1Tim 5:16 he adds: "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." These women who were "really widows" were dependent on aid from the church in an age when there were no social insurance programs and no old age pensions. These features of our modern states were developed much later when biblical principles for caring for the poor and needy were integrated into Western democratic systems. In Paul's day, old women were either supported by the family, or they begged. The Church, informed by the Torah and the Synagogue, provided a third way.



**4.2.5. The ministry of mercy:** It is very reasonable to see that the “women” mentioned among the deacons in 1Tim 3:11, were women who shared in the ministry of mercy with their male colleagues. There can be little doubt that the men elected in Jerusalem (Acts 6) would have been aided by women for their ministry to the old widows in Jerusalem. Jewish social structure would have required it. By Timothy’s day, apostolic directions are given to the diaspora church concerning the qualifications of these women, the qualifications of the men, and even the qualifications of the widows who are to receive aid. The widows were dependent, the women deacons help the church to minister to these dependent older sisters. Paul’s instructions show how the Lord is preparing his Church for her post-apostolic mission in the world.

## 5.0 Phoebe.

It is interesting that the Bible does only once name a specific individual as “deacon of the church ...” That someone is Phoebe, mentioned in Romans 16:1-2. Paul writes: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, ουσαν [καί] διακονον της εκκλησιας της εν Κεγχρεαις, *ousan [kai] diakonon tēs ekklēsias tē en Kenxreais*... who is [also] a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. Paul goes on:

“that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a benefactress of many, and of myself as well.”

As is commonly thought, it is very likely that Phoebe is the one who brought Paul’s letter to Rome. She is being specifically introduced to the Roman church. But notice that Phoebe is singled out in the Book of Romans for commendation to the church at Rome for their assistance to her. She is mentioned first, and prominently, in a passage that mentions many other people, among whom she is the one individual singled out as performing a mission. All the others are simply greeted.

Phoebe is one who has “been a benefactress to many” including Paul himself, and she is called a “deacon,” of the church. Some argue that the word διακονον *diakonon* ‘deacon’ - accusative singular, must have the general interpretation “servant” of the church here. But it is, in fact, modified here. It is used in this particular collocation, διακονον της εκκλησιας *diakonon tēs ekklēsias*, “deacon of the church.” Nowhere else in the New Testament is this phrase found. It is much more likely that Paul is using the term διακονος *diakonos* ‘deacon,’ its technical sense, as an ecclesiastical title for Phoebe, to commend her to the church in an official capacity as an emissary from the church at Cenchrea. She is a woman coming to Rome in an official capacity, on a mission, carrying out business for the church. We must not miss that Paul uses his apostolic authority to command the church to receive Phoebe with proper honor and to help her in all her needs in Rome. This is the kind of commendation that Paul usually reserves for his fellow workers (see 1Cor 16:10-11; 15-16; Phil 2:29-30; Col 4:10).

I conclude that in 1Tim 3:11 we are given the qualifications required for women dacons, and in Romans 16:1-2 we are shown an example of such a woman deacon who is sent on a mission by her church. She comes with authority for her mission, and she has the privilege of being assisted by other churches of Christ in carrying out that mission.

## 6.0 Arguments against women deacons.

There are a number of well known arguments against the view defended here that God has ordained women who can serve in the office of deacon.

### 6.1 There is no biblical authority for women to hold special ecclesiastical positions.

One of the most common arguments against the office of women deacons is that women have no authority to serve in any particular office or special function in the church. Women can be church members, wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, but nothing else. This argument is derived via the principle that God alone regulates how his church is to function. Thus, the argument goes, men are called in Acts 6, men are called to be overseers, men are called to be deacons in 1Tim 3:8. Women are not called to these offices. This regulative principle states that the whole will of God “is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6). In other words, unless it can be shown biblically that God has ordained women in special ecclesiastical positions, there cannot be any in the church. However, as I will now argue, a just application of the regulative principle does not yield the conclusion that women have no “official” positions in the church.

The New Testament identifies women in the special positions of prophetesses, deacons, and widows. Consider the following relevant data:

- Philip’s four daughters were prophetesses, Acts 28:8-9.
- Phoebe, is a deacon of the church
- 1Tim 3:11 women likewise are in the diaconal office
- Widows are to be supported by the church, put on an official list

Application of the regulative principle to the place and position of women in the church of the New Testament yields at least these official capacities for women in the church: they can be prophetesses, they can be deacons, they can be widows on an official church list. Obviously, these three positions are “expressly set down in scripture,” even if they are not all three strictly speaking ecclesiastical “office” as the term has come to be understood.

Further, as we would expect for an ecclesiastical position expressly set down in scripture by God, each of these feminine positions is also regulated by apostolic commands. Thus, the New Testament prophetess is regulated by the apostolic

commands found in 1Cor 11:2-16 and 1Cor 14:34, the former of which states that their heads must be covered, and the latter that they may not participate in the judging of prophets in the assembly. Women deacons are regulated by the apostolic commands in 1Tim 3:11 as to their qualifications. Widows are regulated by the apostolic commands in 1Tim 5:3-16. The proper application of the regulative principle, far from disallowing women any official position in the church, requires the church to support needy widows, to admit women as a subgroup among the deacons, and to allow women to prophesy and pray in the church with their heads covered. Having prophetesses, women deacons, and widows is neither “contrary to his word, or beside it.” It is plainly revealed in it.<sup>3</sup>

## 6.2 Women must not be ordained.

A second argument against the office of women deacons is that women must not be ordained by the church. This is based on the view that ordination is a granting of authority and that women cannot exercise authority in the church (1Timothy 2:12). Further, it is pointed out that there is no example of a woman being ordained in the New Testament, while there are examples of men being ordained: the deacons (Acts 6); Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:3); elders (Acts 14:23); Timothy (1Tim 4:14).

In answer to these objections, consider first that ordination is not the granting of authority to exercise authority. Rightly understood, ordination is setting someone apart and granting that person the authority to exercise a particular office. Authority may be a privilege and responsibility of that office, as in the case of the king, or the overseer, but ordination itself only grants authority to exercise the office, nothing beyond that. A deacon, for example, is ordained to exercise the office of deacon. In that office, in Presbyterian churches, he does not exercise authority in the church. He is only authorized to serve in the church, and in the name of the church, representing the ministry of the entire congregation in his work. The deacon’s authority is specific, delegated authority: the authority to serve, not the authority to rule. Elders are ordained to rule, and as a consequence women may not be elders, (1Tim 2:12). But we cannot conclude from this prohibition that the Bible withholds from women the delegated authority to serve in the name of the church as deacons, which is not a ruling office, but an office of service. Phoebe had authority from the church when she traveled to Rome. The apostle Paul presses that fact upon the church by adding his own apostolic authority to back her up in case there were any in the church who doubted it. Surely, in the case

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<sup>3</sup>The argument that the extraordinary charismata have ceased and that there are no longer prophets and prophetesses has no bearing on my argument.

of Phoebe, the only New Testament example of anyone called a *διακονον της εκκλησιας* *diakonos tēs ekklēsias*, “deacon of the church” we see a woman who has been granted authority to serve the church (presumably the church at Cenchrea) and to receive support in that service by another church (at Rome). Taken together with the apostolic regulation of the women of 1Tim 3:11, ordaining a woman such as Phoebe to be a *διακονον της εκκλησιας* “deacon of the church” would simply be an act of recognition that God has set her apart to this ministry of serving the church. And this is the heart of the function of ordination: to set someone apart for ministry in the church. It can be argued that there is no example of such an ordination in the New Testament, but this carries no more weight than the argument that there is no example of an infant being baptized or of a woman taking the Lord’s Supper. Both are rightly understood to be deduced from scripture by good and necessary consequence by sound, Reformed, principles of interpretation.

### 6.3 Women’s roles make it impossible for women to exercise a diaconal ministry.

A third argument against the ordination of women to the office of deacon is derived from the Bible’s purported teaching on the role and service of women. This argument states that women’s roles are restricted to serving other women and children, and that ordination to an ecclesiastical office blurs that distinction. However, this argument is fallacious because of the counter examples to its thesis. The New Testament gives us many examples of women doing far more than serving women and children. Women, in fact, ministered to men in the apostolic age. Women supported and helped Jesus. Luke 8:2-3 records that women traveled with Jesus and the apostles, and notes:

“...certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities -- Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for him from their substance [their means].

Are we to believe from this account only that these women gave monetary gifts to the Lord? Is it not rather reasonable to understand that they accompanied their money with actions, work, service to help the Lord and the apostles in their ministries? Consider also that women wept when Christ was led away to the cross. Women stood by the cross, and were witnesses of Christ’s death, even though it was probably not a modest scene. Women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, and women were God’s chosen messengers to announce the good news to the apostles, Luke 24:10:

Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of

James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.

Notice that these women are exercising a prophetic function here. They are God's mouthpieces, declaring the good news in obedience to the angel who commanded them (Mt. 28:7; Mk 16:7). Later, women continued to help the apostles in their ministries. Note Paul's words in Philippians 4:3:

Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Once again, are we to understand the "struggle" to mean that the women merely struggled in prayer, and doing laundry and cooking, but not in service to and with the apostle? Indeed Phoebe herself ministered to Paul, as he carefully explains in Romans 16:2

"...for she herself has also been a benefactress of many, and of myself as well."

In the next two verses of Romans 16, Paul says of both Prisca and Aquila that they are:

"my fellow workers in Christ, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."

In this verse, Paul does not single out Aquila, but includes both Prisca (mentioned first) and her husband. In verse 6, Mary is honored by the apostle as one "who has worked hard for you." In verse 12, Tryphaena and Tryphosa (both feminine names) are honored as "workers in the Lord."

It is clear from all these many references that women were indeed very active in the ministry of the church in the day of the apostles. These examples do not show that it is necessary to ordain women deacons, but they demonstrate that the service of women in the church is broader than is sometimes taught. Taken together with the arguments for the office of deacon which I presented earlier, these examples show that the nature of the service of a woman deacon can very reasonably be deduced from scripture.

#### 6. 4 Are women's roles and service in the church truly restricted to ministering to women and children?

The examples above show that this is not the case. It is true that older women are to teach younger women how to be godly wives (Titus 2:3-4). It is also true that women

may not teach or have authority over a man (1Tim 2:12). Women may not engage in questioning in the assembly of the church (1Cor 14:29-35). Women may not pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered (1Cor 11:5). But there are no other restrictions on women's ministry in the church outlined anywhere in the New Testament. We have seen a significant number of examples that show that women ministered to men, and helped even the apostles in their work. Thus, it is not a valid argument against the ordination of women deacons to say that having them in the church means that women will overstep the will of Christ, somehow blurring sexual identities.

The very fact that Paul teaches about "women" in the middle of the passage in which he teaches about deacons is itself an indication that the apostle has one office of deacon -- male and female -- in mind. Deacons male and female together share that office. There is no question that women deacons will primarily minister to women and children in need, being the arms and legs of the church to show mercy to them. There are many situations where a woman is more effective, more skilled, and where a woman's service is more appropriate than a man's. But women deacons, alongside their male counterparts, will exercise all the responsibilities of the work of mercy of the church.

The Law of God teaches us right attitudes and approaches to the ministry of mercy. But much has been left up to us in the details of how to carry out this ministry in our time and circumstances. In our times women are educated and trained in many callings that were formerly the sole domain of men. Biblically informed good sense (the "Christian prudence" of the *WCF*) must be what governs the work of the diaconal ministry. Biblically informed good sense governed by the teaching and ruling authority of the elders, as needed. In fact, you may search far and wide for a biblical description of the work of the deacons; you will not find one. The church is left to determine how it is to use its "servants."

**6.5 Won't women deacons eventually be in a situation where they will overstep the woman's restriction against teaching or exercising (diaconal) authority over a man?**

Some fear that women deacons may at times be in a situation where they give biblical counsel to a couple, including a man, therefore teaching a man with "diaconal authority." But the restriction in woman's teaching and authority in 1Tim 2:12 concerns ruling and teaching in an official capacity in the church assembly -- ruling and teaching as an elder. Women are not restricted from teaching men more generally. Certainly, wives can teach their husbands, and must do so at times as they help their husbands. Women can teach men in conversation, in personal admonition, in church classes and in church discussion. To say that women must be silent in all these contexts is to read into

1Cor 14 what is not there. The context for Paul's instruction there is plainly the worship assembly of the church, and the speaking forbidden to women has to do with evaluating and judging the teaching of prophets. Similarly, to say that women may not exercise even the diaconal authority to serve a man is to read into 1Tim 2:12 what is not there. The passage refers to the exercise of the authority of an elder in the church. The several examples of women ministering to Christ and the apostles should be sufficient to make this point.



## 7.0 God's design for church offices

God designed church offices to prevent disorder and to assure that the work of the Gospel is carried out in the world. We must be careful not to let cultural attitudes, conservative or liberal, confuse our understanding of God's Word. It is always demanding to achieve clarity of understanding in the things of God. Issues of sexual roles have so deeply touched contemporary society that Christians cannot escape dealing with them. We must guard biblical truth in these matters with care.

Liberal churches will tend to err by removing all gender distinctions in the church, even those imposed by God. They will move the church to conform to a general democratic ethos derived from the world. They will elect women to serve as elders, and will call them to be pastors, relying on the arguments that the "gifts" are evident and that the church is merely giving the opportunity to exercise them. This is an enthusiast's view of the work of God in the church: gifts are greater than doctrine. The Reformed view is that God both gives gifts and also reveals to us in the Scriptures how these gifts are to be used in the church. Both the office of pastor and of elder are denied by the Bible to women, no matter what their gifts.

In conservative churches, we will tend to err on the side of restraining the service of women out of fear of offending the Lord and violating his word. We must be careful not to do that. We must not "hedge" the law. Our fathers in the past have erred in this way, restricting women from serving beyond the noble callings of mothers and wives. Our generation must do its own exegetical work. We must sanctify our cultural attitudes by means of the word of God.

In God's Word, women have varied callings and responsibilities, depending on their God-given circumstances. There are young mothers who can use help from older women, there are older women who can teach younger women, there are widows who depend on their family and widows who depend on the church. But women are not limited to taking care of their homes and children, (Prov 31:14-20, 24-26) although women are not permitted to neglect this care. And, for that matter, neither are Christian men, be they pastors, elders, deacons, or new converts, permitted to neglect caring for their homes and children. Elders must be men who manage their own households well. In the New Testament, there are prophetesses, there are women serving the church together with their husbands (Apphia, the wife of Philemon; Priscilla the wife of Aquila) and who "risked their own necks (Rom 16:4)" to help Paul, there is a woman deacon sent to Rome, there are women who head their own households (Chloe, 1Cor 1:11; Lydia, in Philippi). There are many women who serve the church in unspecified capacities. Romans 16 mentions several of them: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junias, Rufus'

mother, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Julia, Nereus' sister, Olympas. Some of these are noted by Paul to be "workers in the Lord." Whatever we may take that to mean, we cannot take it to mean less than what it says. These are women who served in the ministry of the church in some capacity. They went beyond being wives and mothers, and were important in the ministry of the church in some direct way.

God's design is for men and women to serve together in the church (Gal 3:28). We must use all the gifts that God has given us, not neglecting the gift of women deacons to serve the body of Christ. Since church office is God's design, we must be careful to respect his design for any office we seek to fill. So we must respect God's requirements for women deacons: "Women, likewise, must be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." But where we have gifted women and the needs for their ministry, let us be wise to follow God's design for the ministry of the church, using all her ordinary offices: pastor-teachers, elders, deacons, both male and female.

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