

Press Release of Synod Carman West of the Canadian Reformed Churches, May 7- May 21, 2013. “Significant Snapshots of Synod.”

Opening

On Monday, May 6, 2013, 24 brothers from various congregations across the country, arrived in the prairie town of Carman, Manitoba for the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. These brothers, who were to serve as delegates, along with the congregation of Carman West and many other guests came together for a prayer service in the evening. Rev. R. Aasman, who had been chairman of the General Synod 2010 in Burlington, Ontario, led this service. Preaching from the text of James 1:17-18, he delivered an encouraging message.

The following morning, May 7, Dr. A.J Pol, on behalf of the convening church of Carman West, called the meeting to order. He requested those present to sing from Psalm 133 and then read from Romans 12. He gave a brief meditation on this passage. In this meditation he also noted that this Synod was not the first to be held in the town of Carman. The General Synods 1954 and 1958 of the Canadian Reformed Churches were also convened in Carman. After leading in prayer, Dr. Pol welcomed all the delegates to Synod as well those delegates representing churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches have ecclesiastical fellowship or contact.

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. All the primary delegates as chosen by Regional Synods East and West were present and signed the attendance list.

By means of election the following brothers were chosen to serve as executive for Synod: Rev. C. Bouwman, chairman; Rev. J.D. Louwerse, vice-chairman; Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, 1st clerk; and Rev. R.A Schouten, 2nd clerk.

On behalf of the convening church of Carman West, Dr. A.J Pol, declared synod constituted and the elected officers took their places. Rev. C. Bouwman thanked the assembly for the confidence placed in the officers of Synod. He also expressed appreciation for all the work done by the Church

of Carman West in preparation for General Synod 2013. The meeting was adjourned for the rest of the morning, while the executive prepared proposals with respect to the proceedings of Synod and the division of tasks among the various advisory committees of Synod. Five advisory committees were established and each committee was given various agenda items to discuss and then prepare as proposals for deliberation and decision in the plenary session of Synod. The details of each decision were placed in the Acts of Synod. These acts were made available on the website of the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches (www.canrc.org). Once they have been edited they will be made available to the Churches in printed form. Before proceeding to its work, Synod adopted the agenda after a few late submissions were either declared admissible or inadmissible.

Here follows the major decisions of Synod Carman West 2013:

The Theological Seminary in Hamilton

On the evening of the first full day, Synod adopted the proposal to establish the position of a fifth professor at the Seminary in Hamilton. This proposal came to Synod, after the Board of Governors had completed an external evaluation of the curriculum of the Seminary and the workload of the current faculty. Thus the Board had fulfilled the directives provided by Synods 2007 and 2010. The Board of Governors satisfactorily demonstrated that the department of Ecclesiology ideally requires its own professor, as the current professor of Ecclesiology is over-burdened in having to teach two departments, and that the overall program of the Seminary can be significantly enhanced by the addition of a fifth full-time professor.

The same evening, Synod accepted the recommendation of the Board of Governors to give the Board leave to appoint Rev. T.G. Van Raalte, pastor and teacher of the Church of Surrey-Maranatha, as professor of Ecclesiology. For the fourth time in its history, the Church of Surrey provides its minister in the service of the Theological Seminary in Hamilton. The chairman of Synod noted with thankfulness to the Lord how our seminary continues to be blessed with faithful, capable brothers to teach a new generation of men to serve the churches as ministers of the gospel.

The following week, on Wednesday evening, the chairman of Synod welcomed and introduced Dr. T.G. VanRaalte who was able to be present at Synod via Skype (the internet). The chairman noted that the day before Rev. VanRaalte had successfully defended his doctoral dissertation and received his degree of “Doctor of Philosophy”(Ph.D.). The chairman congratulated Dr. Van Raalte on this accomplishment and gave thanks to our heavenly Father. Dr. VanRaalte then addressed the Synod, expressing his deep thankfulness for and his acceptance of his appointment. The chairman responded with fitting remarks and Synod joined in the singing of Psalm 115:1, after which the chairman led in thanksgiving prayer.

Synod noted with thankfulness that the mandate given by Synod Smithers 2007 and renewed by Synod Burlington 2010 regarding a full external review is now complete. Synod observed with deep gratitude the considerable work done by the Board of Governors, the Faculty and the Staff of the Theological Seminary with respect to this review. Further, Synod approved all other decisions and actions of the Board for the years 2010-12.

The previous Synod of Burlington 2010 appointed the Church of Grassie, ON as the church responsible for the administration of the Needy Students Fund. This Church appointed a committee to launch the operation of this Fund. In its report to Synod 2013, the committee provided support guidelines which it had developed. A considerable number of churches responded to this report indicating that a loan program as suggested is not the best way to achieve our goal of promoting stewardship among students in need. Synod 2013 decided among other things to mandate this church to review and modify the current guideline and procedures in light of the input from the churches.

Fraternal greetings

Throughout the duration of Synod, delegates from various foreign Churches came and went. They gave Synod updates on developments from their respective churches and passed on their greetings. The following churches passed on their greetings via letter: Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI-NTT), the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK), Free Church of Scotland (FCS), and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN – Rev. Hoogendoorn), and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

The following men addressed General Synod on behalf of their churches:

Br. Wayne Pleiter – Free Reformed Churches of Australia.
Rev. Bernard Westerveld - Église réformée du Québec.
Rev. Dirk Boersema – Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.
Rev. Daniel Kok – United Reformed Churches of North America.
Dr. Peter Wallace – Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
Rev. Maynard Koerner – Reformed Church in the United States.
Rev. John M. Batteau – Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

Rev. Dong Sup Song briefly addressed Synod, as an observer from the Reformed Churches in Korea. Rev. Matthew Kingswood addressed Synod as an observer delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Relations with Churches Abroad

With thankfulness to the Lord, Synod Carman decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with all churches with whom such a relationship was established at an earlier time. It is worth noting that our fellowship with the Reformed Churches of Brazil (RCB) has been maintained to a large extent by the extensive contact that the Canadian Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Surrey have with the RCB through their missionary activities. The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) was mandated by Synod to use every opportunity to have contact with the Reformed Churches in Brazil and to provide encouragement to them.

With respect to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), Synod once again decided to recommend these churches as worthy of continued financial assistance, to both help them support the needy churches in their federation and to assist them with their extensive mission work and relief efforts among the disadvantaged and sick in South Africa. Synod also mandated the Board of Governors of our Seminary to investigate together with the FRCSA if there are possibilities to set up a form of distance learning for the first year of theological training, with the use of facilitators.

Synod decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Thanks and appreciation was expressed to our sister churches “Down Under” for their ongoing support for and interest in

the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, including their generous financial support.

Ecclesiastical fellowship with both the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) will continue and Synod gave the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad the revised mandate to be available to assist both of these Churches in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion should that be requested.

The Canadian Reformed Churches continue to seek to have a meaningful relationship with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK). Synod recommended among other things that the CRCA continue to work cooperatively with our Dutch and Australian sister churches in exercising our relationship with the KPCK in meaningful ways, such as by regular communication, by visiting the General Assembly of the KPCK and by meeting and interacting with their delegates at 2013 ICRC.

Synod noted that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have established a new category of inter-church relationship called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship," (EF) in addition to the existing sister-church relationship. They also provisionally adopted new rules for this new relationship. Then they downgraded the relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia from a sister church relationship to ecclesiastical fellowship. The CRCA was mandated to try to get a better understanding of the practical changes which come with the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. The CRCA was also to encourage the RCNZ to be consequent in its relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia as it develops and finalizes its own rules for EF.

It was decided not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK) until the Canadian Reformed Churches are satisfied with results of meetings between Reformed Churches in Korea and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea. A clearer understanding of the current status of this small federation, as well as future intent for joining with other churches is necessary.

Synod decided to continue in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches of Indonesia referred to in their own language as the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI) in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). This federation of churches has recently united with two

other federations of Reformed Churches in Indonesia in the provinces of Kalimantan Barat and Papua. The CRCA was mandated to gather and evaluate information on these other churches who are result of the mission work undertaken in the past by our Dutch sister churches and the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. Further, CRCA was mandated to encourage the Reformed Churches of Indonesia with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship to seek closer contact and cooperation with the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis, yet another federation of Reformed Churches in Indonesia with whom we have contact but have decided at this time not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Synod acknowledged that the ICRC appears to be serving a useful function and it also provides a good opportunity to meet with other churches. The next International Conference of Reformed Churches will take place in Cardiff, Wales, 2013. A delegation of two voting members and two advisory members will be sent.

Relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Relations with our sister churches in the Netherlands had the special attention of our General Synod. Synod received a very extensive report from a subcommittee appointed by the previous Synod. Synod Carman decided to address the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) directly by letter. Our Synod would express to their next Synod, our brotherly concerns in a letter of admonition as per the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (1&6) about the tolerance of deviations from Scriptures and confession that we see in our sister churches at this time. This letter will express our love for the RCN as church of our Lord and our sincere prayers for our sister churches in the extremely secular European situation. But it will also describe our disquiet about the following matters:

1. The views coming from or tolerated at the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) which show marks of Scripture criticism and which deviate from Reformed hermeneutical principles as indicated by Articles 5 and 7 of the Belgic Confession.
2. The work of the deputies Men/Women in the Church appointed by Synod Amersfoort-West 2005 and Zwolle 2008, especially regarding how Scripture was treated in their reports.
3. The growing relationship with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), without resolution of crucial differences such as women in office and subscription to the confessions.

4. A growing sense of estrangement as a consequence of the concerns mentioned above, which we hope and pray will not lead to a parting of ways in the future.

This letter was drafted at Synod and approved. It was translated into Dutch before it was to be sent. If it is possible our subcommittee is to be present when this letter is dealt with at their General Synod.

The Synod reappointed the subcommittee consisting of brothers C. Van Dam, J. Moesker, J. DeGelder, and G.J Nordeman. This committee was mandated to among other things:

- To maintain contact with the BBK of the RCN (their committee for contact with foreign churches).
- To continue to observe developments at the Theological University in Kampen.
- To monitor the work of the Deputies concerning the Role of Women in the Church and assess its report as well as the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding that report.
- To monitor the ongoing unity discussions between the RCN and NRC.
- To review the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding unity with NRC, to review the results of the revision of the RCN church order, to monitor the results of the RCNs involvement with the National Synod,
- To monitor the developments regarding the application of Article 67 of the RCN Church Order.
- To work in consultation with the deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With respect to those who left our sister churches in the Netherlands, Synod Carman decided to have the subcommittee monitor developments in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in temporary federation (RCNvv) and the Reformed Churches Restored (RCR). The subcommittee is to inform the Reformed Churches Restored that as long as they maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with the “Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford” closer contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches Restored will be impossible. Our sub-committee is to do their work in consultation with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Relations with Churches in North America.

With respect to Churches in North America, Synod decided to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Église réformée du Québec, and the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules giving attention to particular issues of concern or difference.

General Synod Carman 2013 received a letter from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. In this letter they elaborated on their position regarding women deacons, clarifying their stance on exclusive Psalmody, and requesting a re-opening of discussions with the Canadian Reformed Churches with a view to having fraternal relations. Their Interchurch Relations Committee provided a position paper, adopted by the RPCNA Synod of 2001, outlining their view of women deacons and their view of ordination. For example with respect to the former, it states, "The Diaconate.. is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise... and function is administrative." Synod Carman 2013 decided to mandate the committee for Relations with Churches in North America:

- To respond to this letter sent from the RPCNA.
- To investigate and evaluate the way in which the RPCNA understand ordination, the nature and root of the office of deacon, and the authority of such an office in light of Scriptures and the Reformed confessions.
- To investigate the nature and status of the Testimony,
- To continue dialogue with the RPCNA at meetings of NAPARC.

A number of Canadian Reformed Churches expressed concerns with respect to our membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the implications of such membership. Synod Burlington 2010 had appointed the Committee for Contact with Churches of North America (CCCNA) to investigate the status and 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 Canadian Reformed Churches in regard to establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations. The committee provided the churches with an explanation of the "Golden Rule Comity Agreement" and the "NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and

Congregations.” Synod considered that the CCCNA’s conclusion with respect to the advisory character of NAPARC should be underlined: “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.” It is important that local congregations understand that these agreements do not put us into ecclesiastical fellowship with every NAPARC church. The self-testimony required by NAPARC member churches is not sufficient basis for us to recognize them as true churches, but it is sufficient basis for us to dialogue together with them at NAPARC as a discussion partner. Like the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) NAPARC is a discussion forum for churches who share the same Reformed confession. Synod Carman renewed the CCCNA mandate to represent our churches at NAPARC.

United Reformed Churches of North America

In light of the decisions of Synod 2013, the road forward to eventual merger with the United Reformed Churches of North America remains open. Synod did express regret that the CCU subcommittees dealing with liturgical forms and confessions, with theological education, with the songbook had nothing substantial to report because their counterparts from the URCNA lacked the mandate to interact with them. Thankfully, the committee dealing with the Proposed Joint Church Order was able to prepare a final edition for Synod 2013. The coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity were very active in promoting the unity with the URCNA. It was noted by Synod that in many locals in Canada there has been excellent cooperation and fellowship among the CanRC and URCNA (e.g. pulpit exchanges, joint church services, combined council meetings, Bible studies, ministerial, support of Christian schooling, joint church news).

The coordinators for the committee for Church Unity (CCU) were reappointed to their task. They were given the mandate:

- To discuss with CERCU the areas of concern or fear in the URCNA that seem to be hindering progress toward merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches to seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local level, as well as visiting churches and classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States.
- To discuss with CERCU how to make preparations for Phase 3a, such as through the reappointment of the subcommittees for

theological education, liturgical forms and confessions, and a common songbook.

- To seek clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods.
- To encourage the URCNA to refrain from making further statements of this nature.

With thankfulness to the Lord, Synod decided to continue in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the United Reformed Churches and to reappoint the various subcommittees. Synod received the Proposed Joint Church Order 2012 for further modification and the Forms for Discipline for further refinement. The subcommittee dealing with the Proposed Joint Church Order was given the mandate to continue to work with the church order committee of URCNA and make further changes to the Church Order and the Forms for Discipline in light of the letters received from the churches.

The Book of Praise

The work of revising the *Book of Praise* was brought to completion by General Synod 2013. Minor changes were made to the wording of both forms of subscriptions, to the forms for celebration of the Lord's Supper and the form for the solemnization of marriage, as well as to the confessions. With input from the churches, a final revision of the wording of the psalms and hymns was accepted. Many churches addressed Synod concerning the deletion of rests and breath marks in a number of hymns. A number of rests were placed back into the hymns. The decision was also made to revert back to the 1984 melodies of Hymn 18, 31, 37, and 48. Synod expressed thanks to the SCBP for its efforts over the years in reviewing, evaluating, and suggesting new hymns to the churches. A hymn index which enables one to see at a glance the scripture passages upon which various hymns are based was adopted. Further, Synod mandated the SCBP to change the NIV quotations in the confessions and prose section of the *Book of Praise* to the ESV before publishing the final version. The decision of Synod Burlington 2010 to instruct the SCBP to refrain from capitalizing referent pronouns for God in the *Book of Praise* was upheld.

Synod thanked the SCBP for its dedication and effort in publishing the APV in book form and on the website. It also authorized the SCBP to publish 2013 edition of the *Book of Praise* as the Authorized Version for

use by the churches and to make it available on the website in hyperlinked, indexed format.

The mandate of the SCBP was clarified. It was decided that all requests concerning factual errors, grammatical, typographical, or other minor stylistic matters throughout the *Book of Praise* may be addressed by individuals or churches to the SCBP for their consideration and possible suggestion for change to a future synod. All requests concerning other changes to the contents of the *Book of Praise* (e.g. translation of confessions, rewording and rhyming of psalms and hymns, changes to liturgical forms) need to arise out of the churches in the ecclesiastical way, namely from consistory to classis, then to regional synod and finally general synod.

Looking to the future, Synod decided not to renew the mandate given in Article 142 of Synod Burlington 2010 but to direct the churches which desire the addition of new hymns to take their proposals through the ecclesiastical route.

Bible Translations

In its report to Synod 2013, the Committee for Bible Translations provided an evaluation of the 2011 NIV. It drew attention to five texts that they felt could eventually impact the churches' view of women in office. General Synod decided to refrain at this time from recommending the NIV 2011 for use or testing in the churches. Instead Synod recommended to the churches the use of the ESV, and leaves it to the freedom of the churches to use the NKJV, NASB, or the NIV84.

The Committee for Bible Translation received a new mandate which includes, among other things, the following:

- To provide a thorough study of the ESV with special attention to its readability and to what degree the concerns expressed by previous iterations of the CBT about the RSV remain a concern in relation to the ESV.
- To submit, receive, and evaluate comments from the churches on the ESV.
- To submit worthy translation changes to the ESV editorial committee and monitor the response.

- To send the committee's critical remarks and suggestions for improvement on the five texts pertaining to women in office to the CBTNIV and monitor the response.
- To serve the next general synod with a report sent to the churches at least six months prior to the next general synod.

Women's Voting

The previous Synod of Burlington 2010 decided that any arrangements for the election of office bearers that goes beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Article 3 CO is a matter of local regulations, adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons. This decision to leave women's voting in the domain of the local church, led 14 churches to appeal this decision to Synod Carman 2013. The delegates wrestled extensively with these appeals in committee and plenary session. Eventually the following decision was adopted with respect to women's voting. 1. That Synod Burlington erred on church political grounds in its decision to leave the matter of women's voting in the freedom of the churches. 2. That Synod Burlington erred in stating that exegetical sections brought forward in both the majority and minority reports "are hardly relevant or decisive for the matter of women's voting." 3. That the churches should return to the voting practice as it officially was before 2010, namely male communicant members only voting.

Format of Synod Acts and Synod Guidelines

An overture came from Regional Synod West concerning the format of the Acts of General Synod. It was asked of General Synod to choose the format of "material(s) – decision – ground(s) for its decisions and acts. Synod decided to not accede to this overture and continue with the long held format of "observations – considerations – recommendations.

In Article 62 of Synod Burlington 2010 it was decided to add the following new guideline to the Guidelines for Synod: *For all matters of the churches in common, individual churches may address proposals or significant submissions directly to general synod with the requirement that all such submissions are sent also to each church in the federation no later than six months prior to general synod.* (Article 62, recommendation 4.2, now General Synod Guidelines I.E.)

Four churches asserted that this new guideline contravenes Article 30 of the Church Order, since the guidelines allows churches to place matters for the church in common on the agenda of general synod without having the minor assemblies (classis and regional synod) filtering these matters first. Synod Carman decided that Synod Burlington erred in its decision to implement Guideline 1.E and that Guideline 1.E. be removed from the *Guidelines for Synod*.

Conclusion of Synod

Finally, in the evening of Tuesday May 21, Synod was able to complete the work set out in the adopted agenda. The work was completed in a spirit of peace and good order and censure according to article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary. The vice-chairman took the opportunity to thank Rev. C. Bouwman for the fine way he served as chairman. Rev. Bouwman showed himself to be well organized, and fair and judicious in his work.

In his closing remarks, the chairman noted that Synod dealt with some 275 items of correspondence. He briefly reflected on the fact that the items on the agenda of Synod Carman 2013 were very similar to the items on the agenda of Synods Homewood-Carman 1954 and 1958. This similarity speaks of continuity, and especially of God's continued faithfulness. The chairman concluded that the decisions of Synod 2013 will now be judged by the churches and by God Himself in the light of His Word.

He also expressed thanks to all the brothers who served at Synod, as well as to the church of Carman-West for its exceptional hospitality. The ladies in charge of the meals were thanked and given a gift for their church kitchen. In closing, the chairman read from Ephesians 6:10-20 and gave a brief meditation on this passage. The members of Synod and those who had joined them for the evening sang from Psalm 124. The chairman led in prayer and General Synod 2013 was closed.