

Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches Report to General Synod 2016

September 26, 2015.

Esteemed brothers:

General Synod 2013 mandated the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to maintain the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the following church federations:

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

In addition to this, Synod decided:

- to mandate the CRCA to discuss our rules for ecclesiastical fellowship with the Committee on Relations of the GGRI and to gather as much information as is needed to come to a good recommendation to General Synod 2016 regarding a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI;
- to mandate the CRCA to maintain contact with the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia in order to encourage these churches to be faithful to the Reformed doctrine and church order.
- to continue the membership of the CANRC in the ICRC.
- that more information was needed concerning meetings between the Reformed Churches in Korea and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

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

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

1. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible in translation).
3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.

4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.

5. The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.

In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.

7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

Since Synod Carman 2013, the CRCA has had seven meetings.

In what follows we will report per country the activities of our committee to fulfill our mandate.

In our report, the following abbreviations will be used:

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

CANRC Canadian Reformed Churches

FCS Free Church of Scotland

FCC Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

FRCSA Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

FRCA Free Reformed Churches of Australia

IRCK Independent Reformed Church in Korea

ICRC International Conference of Reformed Churches

KPCK Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea

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

GGRI-KalBar Reformed Churches in Indonesia – in Kalimantan Barat

GGRI-Papua Reformed Churches in Indonesia – in Papua

GGRI Reformed Churches in Indonesia – national

RCK Reformed Churches of Korea

RCB Reformed Churches in Brazil

RCNZ Reformed Churches of New Zealand

A. Scotland

A.1. The Free Church of Scotland

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the FCS under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To be available to assist the FCS and FCC in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion, should that be requested;
 - 2.2. To continue personal contact with the FCS whenever that is feasible (e.g., at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches) and to leave it in the freedom of the CRCA to send delegates to their assemblies.
 - 2.3. To encourage the congregations to seek out and strengthen ties with local FCS congregations in North America.

Communications and actions:

The decisions of Synod Carman 2013 were sent to the FCS and communication was maintained with the FCS through electronic mail.

The FCS is a federation with over 100 congregations and about 13,000 people attending their Sunday services.

The CRCA has not received any request to assist the FCS and FCC in efforts at reconciliation and reunion.

The CRCA is aware of some congregations in our federation which do or did have contact with local FCS congregations in North America. There was an FCS church in Toronto, which just recently decided to join the RPCNA. The reception of this congregation into the RPCNA was scheduled for October 14, 2015. There is a congregation in Livonia (Detroit), MI, and there are six congregations in PEI, which together with Livonia form the North American Synod of the Free Church of Scotland. The church in Toronto was also part of this synod.

With the departure of the church in Toronto from the Free Church of Scotland, the church in Livonia is the only church left which is in reasonably close proximity to Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

As far as the CRCA can judge, the FCS is a church federation, which desires to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Recommendations:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the FCS under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To continue personal contact with the FCS whenever that is feasible (e.g., at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches) and to leave it in the freedom of the CRCA to send delegates to their assemblies.
 - 2.2. To encourage the congregations to seek out and strengthen ties with local FCS congregations in North America.

A.2. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. To continue the Relationship of EF with the FCC under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To be available to assist the FCC and FCS in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion, should that be requested;
 - 2.2. To continue personal contact with the FCC whenever that is feasible (e.g. at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches) and to leave it in the freedom of the CRCA to send delegates to their assemblies;
 - 2.3. To encourage the congregations to seek out and strengthen ties with local FCC congregations in North America.

Communications and Actions:

The decisions of Synod Carman 2013 were sent to the FCC and communication was maintained with the FCC through electronic mail.

The CRCA has not received any request to assist the FCS and FCC in efforts at reconciliation and reunion.

The FCC has a number of churches in the US, in Metropolitan Washington, in South Carolina, North Carolina, two in Missouri and one in Georgia. The church in Ottawa also has some contact with a very small FCC church in Smiths Falls, ON.

As far as the CRCA can judge, the FCC is a church federation, which desires to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Recommendations:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the FCC under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To continue personal contact with the FCC whenever that is feasible (e.g., at meetings of the ICRC, mutual presence at assemblies of sister churches) and to leave it in the freedom of the CRCA to send delegates to their assemblies.
 - 2.2. To encourage the congregations to seek out and strengthen ties with local FCC congregations in North America.

B. Australia: The Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Mandate

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

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

Communications and actions

The decisions of Synod Burlington regarding the FRCA (as above) were made known to the FRCA via letter sometime after the conclusion of Synod Carman and, via this letter, the FRCA were also directed to the on-line version of the *Acts* of Synod Carman for further information about other decisions. Moreover, it was communicated to the FRCA that the various deputyships of the FRCA should seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committees (e.g., our SCBP, sub-committee RCN, our committee in charge of reviewing the liturgical forms, Committee on Bible Translations, and perhaps others) in areas of mutual interest where the CRCA's mandate does not apply. An invitation was received from the FRCA to attend the FRCA synod in Baldivis in June 2015. Two fraternal delegates attended the synod from June 22 through July 1. It was during the time of synod that further aspects of our mandate were taken up.

Visit to Synod Baldivis, 2015

Two brothers, O. Bouwman and J. vanLaar, attended the Synod of the Australian sister churches from Monday evening, June 22, through the evening of July 1. They were received and seated as fraternal delegates, able to take part in the discussions of synod. Opportunity was given to address synod with fraternal greetings and providing some information about matters of mutual concern. This was an opportunity to undertake various other parts of our mandate. Among the topics touched on in the address were: thanks for the continued (and increased financial) support for the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, *Book of Praise* (and the Australian keen interest in producing a modified "Book of Praise", our common relationship with the RCN where there are concerns about various developments, our relation with the URCNA and also the developments regarding theological education, and, finally, our relationship with the RCNZ.

During their time at synod, the delegates sat in open sessions of synod. Besides this, they met separately with the deputysip for the churches in Indonesia.

Decisions of Synod Baldivis 2015

Among the decisions of Synod Baldivis we paraphrase the following (NOTE: this is from the *provisional version* of the Acts made available online at <http://synod.frca.org.au/2015/acts/>):

Canadian Reformed Churches:

1. Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. Stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayer Forms;
 - c. Stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ);
 - d. Send two (2) delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Dunnville, Ontario during 2016, pending finances;
 - e. To liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN.

With regards to the *Training for the Ministry*, Synod Baldivis 2015 decided to:

1. To request the churches to contribute an increased amount of AU\$82 per communicant member for the maintenance of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary as from 1 January 2016.
2. To set aside funds from General Synod for the visits to Australia by guest lecturers from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary once every three years (rather than every two years).
3. To set aside funds from General Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of Deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors and the Convocation between Synod 2015 and Synod 2018.
4. Discharge deputies and appoint new deputies with the additional mandate to investigate the feasibility of establishing a FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:
 - The desire of the churches for such a seminary;
 - The potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary;
 - The impact the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS; and
 - The resources required for such a seminary, and the availability of such resources.
5. To cease to investigate the feasibility of offering the freshman (i.e. first) year of theological studies to the churches in Australia and to cease to investigate possible distance education of theological studies to the churches in Australia.

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

1. To encourage the churches to use the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise for the interim.
2. To appoint new deputies and mandate them to:
 - a. To develop an Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise and present it to the next Synod that:
 - i. contains the Psalms and Hymns of the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise that are approved for use in the FRCA and not to include any unapproved hymns;
 - ii. incorporates changes to the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order;
 - iii. to prepare two versions, one using the NKJV for all Scripture quotations and capitalising all pronouns referring to God, the other retaining the ESV without capitalisation;
 - iv. contains a list of all hymns with the corresponding numbers of the hymns in the Canadian Book of Praise.
 - b. To work through all legal as well as practical matters including but not limited to:
 - i. arranging that copyright permissions be granted to an appropriate legal entity within our churches;
 - ii. proposed size(s), covers and bindings;
 - iii. working with one or more printers to set scope and priority if any, as to alternate edition/formats, e.g. printed with a Bible, large text etc, or digital editions;
 - iv. determining the need and/or usefulness in appointing an Australian standing committee for the Book of Praise.

- c. To solicit feedback from the churches and propose suggested names for an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise.
- d. To maintain good contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, alerting the churches of any proposed changes.

Besides these matters more directly related to the Canadian Reformed Churches, Synod Baldivis 2015 also decided the following:

First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

Synod Baldivis decided to extend an offer of sister-church relationship to the FERC. The FERC is one congregation in the city-state of Singapore with about 320 members. They hold to the Three Forms of Unity and govern their church by the principles of the Church Order of Dort.

Reformed Church of Brazil (IRB)

Synod Baldivis decided not to appoint new deputies for contact with the IRB and not to pursue a sister-church relationship with them. Among other reasons it had been previously decided that the FRCA should, as a rule, only establish sister-church relations with churches who are geographically close.

Korea, South Africa and Indonesia

Synod Baldivis decided to continue sister church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

Currently the FRCA have a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI)). This federation is the result of a union in February 2012 of three regional Synods, the GGRI Papua, the GGRI Kalimantan Barat and the GGRI NTT. Synod Armadale 2012 had already expressed great thankfulness that this union could take place. Synod Baldivis decided that the deputies should provide more information about this union to the churches, confirming their Reformed character. Deputies will prepare that report and send it to the churches in due time. The GGRI have established a Theological Seminary in Waingapu, Sumba. Our deputies were able to make recommendations to improve several aspects of the running of the Seminary.

Furthermore, the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville is involved in mission work in Kupang in Timor, through its missionary, Rev. Edwer Dethan. Smithville also supports the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang. There is another federation of Reformed churches in Indonesia, the Calvinist Reformed Churches (Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC)) with whom the FRCA do not have a sister church relationship. That is why Synod also decided “to consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the CanRC to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and to work together with all the parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles” in order to make progress towards federal unity between the GGRI and the GGRC.

United Reformed Churches of North America

Synod decided to mandate deputies for relations with churches abroad to provide the URCNA with information about the FRCA in response to their letter to the FRCA, to take up contact with them, and to report to the next Synod.” The grounds that support this request mention that the CanRC are in a close relationship with these churches and are pursuing unity with them.

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Synod has decided to suspend the relationship with the RCN. That means that attestations from brothers and sisters coming from the RCN will not be accepted without question. It also means that ministers from the RCN are no longer allowed to preach in the FRCA. To keep the lines of communication open, the FRCA will still welcome two delegates to their next Synod. This suspension of the relationship is a big step because Synod also declared “that the FRCA’s sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the synod of Ede 2014.” This suspension does not preclude yet another attempt to change the direction of the RCN, because Synod also decided “to interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice with respect to the role of men and women in the church, and present the clear biblical teaching on this matter.” It is safe to say that this decision to suspend the relationship may very well be the last attempt to convince the RCN to turn around from the direction they are going, back to faithfulness to God’s Word and the Reformed confessions.

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored)

Synod’s decision to suspend the sister church relation with the RCN has consequences for the decisions regarding the DGK and the GKN. The DGK is the new name for the churches formerly known as the RCN(restored). GKN is the name of the churches formerly known as “Voorlopig Kerkverband” (Temporary church bond). Both these churches were established when they withdrew from the RCN. The DGK have visited FRCA Synods since 2006. Synod decided to “maintain contact with the DGK and the GKN and be receptive to contact with others who withdrew from the RCN and to report to next Synod on further developments in this regard.” As one of the grounds Synod considered that “there are members, ministers and churches within the RCN that continue to express objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them who still need time in considering how to respond.” Synod also mandated deputies to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith. It should be noted too, that the relationship of the DGK with the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford is still considered an obstacle.

The decision is recorded in the Acts in this way:

1. “Not to act on the proposals of FRC Byford and FRC Mundijong at this time and await further developments.
2. To maintain contact with both the DGK and GKN and to be receptive to future contact with those who have already, or who do withdraw from the RCN and report on further developments in this regard.
3. To await recommendations from among the churches on how to proceed with these contacts.
4. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a) to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and GKN, to work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments;
 - b) to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith;

- c) to maintain contact, and
- d) to report back to the next Synod.”

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Synod Baldivis accepted the request from the RCNZ to accept them as a sister-church. This culminated years of discussion and relationship building, and was made possible by the recent decision of the RCNZ to change their relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia to one of Ecumenical Fellowship which took away the concerns of negative influence of the CRCA on the RCNZ. This relationship was made active with the opening of the pulpit in Rockingham to a minister of the RCNZ the Sunday after Synod had made this decision.

Conclusion

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

Recommendations:

The CRCA recommends that Synod Dunnville 2016 decide:

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

C. Reformed Churches in New Zealand

Mandate

Synod Carman 2013 (Article 192) decided:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the RCNZ under the adopted rules;
2. To try to get a better understanding of the practical changes entailed by the relationship of EF that was begun in 2007 and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequent in their relationship with the CRCAustralia as they develop and finalize the rules for EF;
3. To encourage the RCNZ to keep seeking ways to grow closer towards the FRCA;
4. To invite the RCNZ to become better acquainted with CRTS in Hamilton;
5. To send a delegation to the next RCNZ synod in 2014, if feasible.

Communications and Action:

The CRCA continued the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCNZ by communicating to them the decisions of Synod Carman and by sending a delegate, Rev. Arend Witten, to the RCNZ Synod Bishopdale in 2014.

Relationship with CRCAustralia

Synod Bishopdale adopted rules for a new category of relationship with other churches called Ecumenical Fellowship. The CRCAus is the only church in this new category of relationship. The new rules of relationship with the CRCAus are (Article 84 of Synod Bishopdale)

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. If feasible, the Inter-church relations committees should meet at least once in the inter-synodical period.
2. The eligibility of *call of ministers* from each other's churches, subject to our current practice of holding a preliminary evaluation before a call is issued and a Colloquium Doctum. (see church order Article 10)
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships, subject to Session examination; longer-term pulpit supply should be subject to Presbytery evaluation.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns

Please note: Church Order Articles 61-62, regarding oversight of the Lord's Table and the admitting of new members, do apply to Churches in Ecumenical Fellowship. (This Church Order is available at www.rcnz.org.nz)

This change in relationship is more than cosmetic and entails practical changes with their relationship with the CRCAus. They are no longer sister churches. It places safe guards on pulpit exchanges (both short and long term), receiving attestations, attendance of guests at the Lord's

Supper table and the calling of ministers. It continues to require communication on major issues. It was clear anecdotally at their assembly that the personal connections between the RCNZ the CRCAus are still close. Approximately half their ministers were trained in Geelong, Australia. Many members have family on both sides of the Tasman Sea. So it is a relationship that cannot easily be cast aside. Yet the RCNZ have been pastoral and consequent in their relationship.

Relationship with RCNZ and FRCA

Developing a relationship has been a priority for both the RCNZ and FRCA. The FRCA had two delegates at Synod Bishopdale and had also met with RCNZ delegates in the intersynodical period. While addressing Synod Bishopdale as a sister church of both federations our delegate encouraged continued effort and patience with this process. (Since then the FRCA have entered into a sister church relationship with the RCNZ, at Synod Baldivis in June 2015).

Training for the ministry

The Deputies for the training of the ministry of the RCNZ were informed of Synod Carman's offer that they become acquainted with CRTS and its possible use by RCNZ students. The RCNZ Synod 2011 rejected a proposal to establish a theological training institute in New Zealand, so they continue to make use of other seminaries. In 2014 one student was studying at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Geelong (RTS) and 2 at Mid America Reformed Seminary. In the recent past churches have also supported their young men at Greenville Seminary in the U.S. The RCNZ deputies endeavour to supervise the training of the ministry by visiting the students at these seminaries where possible and keeping in contact with the faculty. So to add another seminary such as CRTS to their list at this time would spread their resources thinner. So it may not be in their interests to encourage further diversification by the use of CRTS in Hamilton. They also have closer ties to the URCNA than they do to us (with two former URC/OCRC ministers in their ranks) and close ties to conservative American Presbyterians (Revs. G. I. Williamson and J. Sawyer having served in RCNZ.) This makes these American institutions a more natural choice for RCNZ students than CRTS at this time.

However when looking for prospective candidates for the ministry, Synod decided to (Article 70) "to instruct the deputies to make contact first with the principals and then with students of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary to determine if there are men currently in training who would be both suited to and interested in serving in the RCNZ. After careful investigation such men would then be placed in a 12-month vicariate in our churches with a view to them being made available for call in our churches."

Other decisions of note

The RCNZ continue to appreciate the cooperation with the CanRC in the work of mission in Papua New Guinea in the person of missionary Rev. Alan Douma.

Synod Bishopdale decided to discontinue sister-church relationship with the CGKN (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland) in view of the limited contact they have had with them and a similar desire on the part of the CGKN. They would maintain contact through the ICRC.

The RCNZ expressed deep concern about the developments in the RCN. Synod (Article 32) expressed concern that "the RCN synod has not clearly rejected the hermeneutical foundations of the conclusion and recommendations of the "Men/Women in the Church" report." Synod instructed the Inter church Relations Committee to "seek clarification from the Committee on

Relations with the Churches Abroad of the RCN regarding these decisions, since unless they constitute a clear withdrawal from this hermeneutical direction (see precious point) our sister-church relationship may be affected negatively.”

They have had increased contact with another small church federation in eastern Australia; the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia and Synod Bishopdale decided that “the Inter-church Relations Committee work towards recommending that they establish a sister-church relationship with the PRCA at our next synod.”

Conclusion:

From our contact and visit to the RCNZ it is evident that the RCNZ seeks to continue as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, abiding by the Word of God and adhering to their adopted confessions. They are active in the work of mission and there is a strong commitment to work together to grow Christ’s church in that country. They have been careful and consequent in their relationship with the CRCAus. The responsibility to educate men for ministry is taken seriously. At this time however it does not seem to be in their best interests to send students to CRTS. There is a real commitment to developing a relationship with the FRCA which has borne fruit and under the blessing of the Lord may continue to do so.

Recommendations:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:

1. To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCNZ under the adopted rules.
2. To express appreciation for ongoing cooperation with the RCNZ in the mission work in PNG.
3. To send a delegation to the next RCNZ Synod in 2017.

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

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

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

Communications and actions

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa were informed of the decisions made by Synod Carman 2013.

The CRCA maintained contact with the committee appointed by the church in Coaldale, which collected funds in the Canadian Reformed Churches to support the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. It appears that the churches are giving generously. In 2015 the church of Coaldale informed the CRCA that this committee had accumulated sufficient funds to offer support to the FRCSA for three full years. Therefore the committee approached the supporting churches with a request to stop collecting for this cause for the time being and until further notice.

Rev. T. Lodder and Dr. A.J. DeVisser were delegated to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in 2014.

This Synod decided to continue sister church relationships with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

This Synod also decided to continue contacts with the Reformed Churches of South Africa. The purpose of the relationship is to support each other in the pursuit of Reformed teaching and life. Focus points of discussion will be hermeneutics (the explanation of the meaning of Scriptures), the Cloete psalm versification and the RCSA decision to allow female deacons to office.

Synod also decided to continue contacts with the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. This bond of churches continued to exist in 1994, when most of their congregations joined the United Reformed Church in Southern Africa. The Synod instructed the deputies to use these contacts to get to know each other better and to support each other in maintaining the true faith.

The sister church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (RCN) required a more extensive discussion. Synod decided to send a letter directed at the Synod of the RCN. Its purpose is to encourage them to remain faithful to the reformed teaching.

Synod decided not to establish sister church relationships with The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands restored (De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, DGKN). Apart from the fact that the FRCSA currently have a responsibility towards the RCN, they are also unable to meet the requirement that the FRCSA end their sister church relationship with the CanRC.

Deputies liturgical music submitted to congregations a list of 11 hymns as well as the new hymns directly based on scripture as used within the RCSA. Congregations were asked to submit feedback to deputies before the end of 2015 so that deputies will be able to finalise the selection for submission to the next synod.

Synod decided to set clear admission requirements for new theological students. Theological students will be required to follow one of the following trajectories:

1. Three years BA studies (Hebrew III, Greek III) at an accredited tertiary education institution (university), followed by a four year MDiv course at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton Canada.
2. A Foundation course, followed by a BA (Hebrew III, Greek III) at an accredited tertiary education institution, followed by a four year MDiv at the CRTS;
3. A Foundation course, followed by a BTh at an accredited tertiary education institution (currently Mukhanyo Theological College or George Whitfield Theological College), followed by at least two years of language studies (Hebrew II and Greek II) and at least one year at CRTS.

Mission and sustainability also received a fair bit of discussion. The FRCSA is a small federation and the challenges on both fronts are significant. The mission church plants depend heavily on the established churches. Almost all of the financial support for mission comes from the Netherlands. There are also a few needy churches in the FRCSA, which depend heavily on foreign support. The FRCSA is doing everything possible to reduce its dependence on foreign support. In 2010 67% of the funds for needy churches came from abroad. The hope is that by 2017 only 45% will be collected from abroad. The FRCSA has asked the churches in Canada and Australia to scale back their contributions in an effort to become more independently sustainable.

In August 2015 the CRCA received two letters from the deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (RCA). In one letter the deputies address the matter of hermeneutics as it came up in discussions between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and several of their sister churches. The deputies propose that the debate on reformed hermeneutics be continued within and between our church federations. It is their desire to come to a clear and mutual Statement on Reformed Hermeneutics and how this should be practiced in our churches and be taught at reformed theological universities and seminaries. If we could formulate such a mutual Statement on Reformed Hermeneutics, and if this would be accepted by our respective Synods, this would certainly support our churches in staying on the reformed track.

In consultation with the subcommittee for the Netherlands the CRCA responded to this letter, indicating that the matter of hermeneutics has been discussed by our subcommittee with the deputies of the Dutch sister churches but they have not shown much willingness to discuss this matter any longer. If there would be any forum to discuss hermeneutics, then the ICRC would be the better place.

The second letter addresses the matter of retirement of ministers. The FRCSA called several of their ministers as experienced ministers from sister churches. The FRCSA does not have a fund for superannuation. This situation puts a heavy financial burden on the last church that a minister serves as active minister. The suggestion they make is that if a minister comes over from a sister church federation to the FRCSA, that a proportional part of his retirement funding is transferred or reserved for his future retirement.

The CRCA responded to this, after having consulted with the chairman of the board of the Foundation for Superannuation, that in the past attempts have been made to come to agreements with sister churches but these attempts have failed for several reasons. The sister churches in South Africa were encouraged to take up contact with the Foundation for Superannuation if a specific situation develops where there is a need for assistance, instead of trying to come to a general agreement.

Conclusion

The FRCSA show that they want to remain truly Reformed churches and take their responsibility towards sister churches and contact churches seriously. The relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches is appreciated and valuable to them.

Recommendation:

That Synod decide:

1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa;
2. To mandate the CRCA to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCSA if possible.

E. Korea

E.1 The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the KPCK under the adopted rules.
2. To continue to discuss with the KPCK its relationship with the IRCK and the RCK, with the goal of seeking further insight into these two federations.
3. To continue to work cooperatively with the RCN and the FRCA in exercising our relationship with the 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 the 2013 ICRC.

Communications and Actions:

As mandated by Synod 2013, the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules was maintained with the KPCK. The decisions of Synod 2013 concerning the KPCK were sent to them. There were multiple contacts made with the Fraternal Relations Committee (FRC), primarily through its contact person, Prof. Haemoo Yoo. These communications included short reports by Prof. Yoo of their annual General Assemblies.

The CRCA delegated the brs. Souman and Vanderstoep to visit the churches in Korea in September 2014 and to attend the 2014 General Assembly of the KPCK. While in Korea, the delegates had the opportunity to visit one of the congregations in Seoul. Rev. Souman delivered the morning sermon in this church. The delegates were also able to join in a bible study following the service and to discuss various matters, especially relating to the government of the church, with members of the congregation.

The prayer service for opening of General Assembly was attended and the following day Rev. Souman was given the opportunity to address the GA, which was responded to by Prof. Yoo. A fruitful meeting was held with the FRC. Some matters of mutual concern about common churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship could be addressed. Other delegates were met informally and an informative visit was made to the PCK Mission Training Institute in Daejon City. Here requests were made for possible assistance from members of our federation in (English instructors and Books for Bible schools).

The reports by the Dutch Deputies (RCN) of their visit in 2012 and by Australian Deputies (FRCA) of their visit to Korea in 2013 were received. These reports are consistent with the observations of the CRCA and have proven a positive way of maintaining regular contact and receiving information. There were very limited opportunities to interact with delegates of the KPCK at the 2013 meeting of the ICRC.

The KPCK has no official relations with the RCK nor with the IRCK, although there are some personal contacts with the IRCK. The matter of the discussion between members of the RCK and

the KPCK concerning outstanding mutual concerns was broached, but little resolution seems likely.

The recent visit to Korea by Pope Francis has caused many Christians to convert to the Catholic church. While the Kosin church has been less influenced by this trend, it is still facing decline in membership numbers. The church is designing countermeasures. Most of all they are trying to focus on teaching the history of the Reformed and Kosin Church as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms. The 2013 GA specifically commissioned the writing of an exposition on the Confession of Faith and the Catechism. Although the 2014 GA was to discuss this exposition and decide upon its publication (taken from Prof. Yoo's response to our address), it is unknown what actually was the outcome. The 2014 GA did decide to not participate in the Faith and Order Conference for Unity in which the Roman Catholic Church and the Korean National Council of Churches were to participate. It was also decided to form a committee to consider the future of the Kosin University, including the relocation of the seminary to Busan.

Conclusion

From what could be observed and discussed with the brothers, the CRCA would certainly recommend that we maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the KPCK and continue to exercise the mutual relationship embodied in such a relationship.

Recommendations:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:

1. to continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea under the adopted rules;
2. to continue to encourage the KPCK to further their relationship with the RCK and support us with information and understanding;
3. to continue to work cooperatively with the RCN and the FRCA in exercising our relationship in meaningful ways and continue to visit the annual GA in turn; to also maintain regular communication with the KPCK as well as meet with their delegates at the 2017 ICRC.

E.2 The Independent Reformed Church of Korea

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

to mandate the CRCA to thank the IRCK for their cooperation and discussions and to encourage them to seek contact with the KPCK and the RCK.

Communications and Actions:

The decisions by Synod 2013 concerning the IRCK were shared with them. Our contact with the IRCK has been sporadic, although delegates to the ICRC in Wales in 2013 did meet with delegates of the IRCK. Also, the brothers Souman and Vanderstoep, visited with several

ministers of the ICRK when they were in Korea to attend the KPCK GA in September 2014. During this visit they were able to exchange information about our respective federations and about topics of common interest. They also had an opportunity to see the facilities of the SungYak press, operated by the Holy Covenant Church, on behalf of the IRCK. The IRCK have published an impressive list of books, a number of which have been translated from the English language, including some by CanRC authors.

Recommendation:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:

That whenever possible (e.g. at ICRC meetings) contact with the IRCK be maintained. It will assist us in our understanding of the reformed church situation in Korea and hopefully better enable us to fulfill the intent of the Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which we have with the KPCK.

E.3 The Reformed Churches of Korea

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 did not mandate the CRCA concerning the RCK, but implied that more information was needed concerning meetings between the RCK and the KPCK. “A clearer understanding of the current status of the federation, as well as future intent for joining with other churches, is needed.”

Communications and Actions:

The contact between the RCK and the CRCA has been twofold. The first was an opportunity for three of the Canadian delegates to meet with Rev. DongSup Song at the ICRC in Wales in 2013. The second was meeting a between four ministers of the RCK (plus Dr. S.G. Hur) and the brs. Souman and Vanderstoep during their attendance at the GA of the KPCK. Furthermore, a meeting with Rev. Song and his congregation in Jeonju took place. Subsequent to the two meetings in Korea, the CRCA received from Rev. Song a fairly lengthy information package concerning the RCK.

In meetings, both in Wales and in Korea, delegates spoke about the need for the RCK and the KPCK to meet and to resolve the issues between them (as had been discussed with them by the CRCA delegate in 2011). At the end of the meeting in Korea, the delegates were assured that this would be done. No further information about the progress on this matter has been received.

During the meetings, general information about the federation was received (this has been received several times before). There are currently 4 congregations with about 200 members in total. Each congregation has a minister, 2 elders and 2 deacons. The federation prides itself on being reformed, having adopted the reformed creeds and the three forms of unity. There was an indication that over the last year or so, two other congregations have “disappeared”, presumably because of issues with the ministers. It was not possible to get further clarity on this development. There was also a suggestion that there are several other churches looking to join the RCK, but again no particulars were shared. As in the past, there were attempts to explain why

they exist as the RCK. They feel that there is not another federation in Korea that is truly reformed. And that it is not possible to exist within any of these federations.

During the delegates' stay in Jeonju they attended a study session with the congregation, at which church history was being studied. They do this every Tuesday and Wednesday evening, although because of the presence of the delegates they moved this particular session to Thursday. There were approximately 20 adults present plus a number of children. The meeting was opened with scripture reading, praying and singing. Some children sang as well. They did so heartily and from memory. The discussion was a chapter out of the booklet "Outlines in Church History" authored by Mr. G. Slings. The discussion seemed good and included exchanges with the delegates about life in the CanRC. In spite of the rather negative conclusion after the official meeting earlier in the day, both delegates felt that the kind of enthusiasm that was experienced that evening warrants that the CanRC do not abandon them outright. There was definitely real hospitality and dedication amongst the members.

Just prior to completing our report, the Committee was informed by the RCK Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad that one of the churches (congregations) was suspended by the Classis from the federation. This will have considerable impact on the federation. It behooves the CRCA to continue contact with this federation to determine what our relationship might be and to get a better picture overall of the reformed church situation in Korea.

Recommendation:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:
to mandate the CRCA to continue contact with the RCK, seeking to determine how the talks between them and the KPCK are progressing and to get a clearer picture of the state of the federation.

F. Brazil: Reformed Church in Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil, IRB)

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. To continue EF with the IRB under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA to use every opportunity to have contact with the IRB and to provide encouragement to these churches.

Observation and Request:

The CRCA observes that in the 2013 Acts of General Synod the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil were referred to by an acronym of an English rendition of their name (Reformed Churches of Brazil – RCB). Our committee respectfully requests that we again identify these sister churches with the standard acronym (IRB), thus preventing possible confusion.

Communications and Actions:

As mandated by Synod 2013, the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules was maintained with the IRB. The decisions of Synod 2013 concerning the IRB were sent to them. Primarily through the work of the Aldergrove and Hamilton Mission Boards, multiple contacts have been made and sustained during the past few years.

In terms of representation at recent Brazilian Concílios, we note:

1. Brs Casey DeHaas and Kevin van Delden attended the first Concílio in 2014, held in Maragogi, AL. They were delegated by both the Aldergrove Mission Board as well as by our committee.
2. Br Otto Bouwman attended the second Concílio in 2014, held in Esperança, PA. He was delegated by both the Aldergrove Mission Board as well as our committee.

Additionally, Brs Mark Krikke, Paul Krikke, and John Ludwig, representing the Hamilton Mission Board, attended the first Concílio in 2015, held in Recife, PE.

Each of these visits was very encouraging; the brothers were warmly received and invited to speak and participate.

Various other channels of communication connecting our federations have continued and intensified as well, including other visits to Brazil, ongoing contacts through our missionaries and mission aid workers, as well as limited informal discussions at the ICRC gathering in Cardiff. Further, we note the attendance of a Brazilian school principal (Br Elias Barbosa da Silva) at Canadian Reformed Principals' Conferences in 2013 and 2015, and the attendance of a Brazilian seminarian (Br Iraldo Luna) at a two-week CRTS course in 2015.

The CRCA is aware of efforts involving both the IRB and the participating Canadian mission boards to more clearly define cooperation protocols. Though one of the observations of Synod Carman was that this topic “may be something that will have the attention of the CRCA in the future,” to date this has not had our attention. The normal protocol has been that individual churches in our federation connect with the IRB via a mission board of our sending (Aldergrove

and Hamilton) churches. Our committee also received a request from the IRB for financial assistance for a particular project in Brazil; we advised the IRB to connect with our mission boards rather than our committee.

Decisions of Concílios:

Biannually, the IRB gather in Concílio, the sole broader assembly in this federation of seven instituted churches. Several specific decisions of significance to note include:

1. Matters related to the ongoing evolution of the John Calvin Institute – the federation’s seminary established in 2011 – have the close attention of churches. By now the first three students have completed their regular course of study there, have passed Concílio examinations, and are involved in internship programs.
2. The IRB communicates distress about developments in the RCN, which is one of their sister-churches.
3. There is a large federation of Presbyterian Churches in Brazil (Igreja Presbyteriana do Brasil – IPB). After observing concerns and trends in this federation, Concílio decided: “to encourage pastors and churches of our federation to enter into and continue informal contacts with the IPB at the local level.” Concílio also encouraged further study of Westminster Standards and other IPB documents “so that we can understand the challenges and strengths of IPB and prepare for possible future relationships.”

Conclusion:

By God’s grace, the federation continues to grow and mature. The number of ministers in the federation is increasing, as does the number of instituted churches. It becomes evident that the federation takes more and more responsibility for the ongoing development of the federation’s theological education program. These are all developments we rejoice in. We are thankful for the faithful proclamation of the Word and for the evident commitment to grow in faithfulness and understanding for his will, and to do these things in cooperation, where possible, with other faithful brothers and sisters in Brazil. It is our prayer that our Father continues to sustain and strengthen them.

Recommendation:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:

1. To express gratitude for the continued growth evident in the IRB;
2. To continue ecclesiastical fellowship with the IRB under the adopted rules;
3. To mandate the CRCA to use every opportunity to have contact with the IRB and to provide encouragement to these churches.

G. Indonesia:

G.1 Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI-NTT)

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. To accept the apologies of the GGRI for not having invited us to their first National Synod;
2. To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI-NTT under the adopted rules;
3. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 3.1. To discuss our rules for ecclesiastical fellowship with the Committee on Relations of the GGRI and to gather as much information as is needed to come to a good recommendation to General Synod 2016 regarding a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI;
 - 3.2. To gather and evaluate information regarding the GGRI-KalBar and the GGRI-Papua in order to prepare a proposal as to how to deal with the GGRI as a national federation instead of dealing exclusively with the GGRI-NTT, which has become part of this larger federation of churches;
 - 3.3. To request input from the FRCA and the RCN;
 - 3.4. To try to ensure that a delegation of two brothers is sent to Indonesia to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at a synod of the GGRI-NTT;
 - 3.5. To work in consultation and cooperation with the deputies of the FRCA, with the church of Smithville and the church of Edmonton- Immanuel and as much as possible and desirable with other organizations involved in the work among the GGRI, to encourage and support these churches in their efforts to grow in the Reformed doctrine and Church Polity;
 - 3.6. To encourage the GGRI-NTT to seek cooperation with the Reformed Theological School in Kupang (established by the church in Smithville);
 - 3.7. To encourage the GGRI-NTT to seek closer contact and cooperation with the GGRC and to monitor the progress of the dialogue between the GGRI-NTT and the GGRC.

Communications and actions:

The decisions of Synod Carman including the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship were passed on to the deputies of the GGRI and the GGRI-NTT. There has not been much contact with the deputies of the GGRI (national federation). Email or telephone contact is difficult. Internet in Indonesia is not always as readily available in every area as it is in North America. There has not been a national synod of the GGRI either, so a meeting in person between deputies and CRCA delegates did not take place yet. A synod is scheduled for February 2016 and hopefully more communication can take place there. However, there are some suggestions to postpone this synod, which is to be held in Sumba, until July 2016, when the GGRI-NTT will have their own synod as well. It is not known to the CRCA yet what has been decided about this.

In July 2013, the CRCA delegated Dr. A.J. Pol and Rev. E. Dethan to attend the synod of the GGRI-NTT and represent the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In July 2015 Rev. A. Souman visited the GGRI-NTT together with Rev. E. Dethan and met with the deputies of the GGRI-NTT on Thursday, July 9. During this meeting several matters were discussed.

1. The cooperation between the GGRI-NTT and STAKRI (The Theological School in Kupang, supported by the Canadian Reformed Church in Smithville). STAKRI has official government accreditation, while the seminary in Sumba does not. In 2012 an agreement was made that the seminary of the GGRI-NTT and STAKRI would exchange professors and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would be drawn up so that students at the seminary in Sumba could take their last year in Kupang at STAKRI and get an official diploma. Nothing of this has happened in the three years that have passed. At the moment the GGRI-NTT has such an MOU with Salem, which is a theological seminary in Malang, but there are concerns about this seminary. It is connected to a church which accepts women in all offices and this seminary has no problems preparing women for the office of minister of the Word. The deputies were strongly encouraged to pursue cooperation with STAKRI instead of Salem. However, it became clear that a proper cooperation that fulfills all the requirements of the federal government is complicated and may need time. It did also become clear that it will be very hard for the GGRI-NTT to get accreditation for their seminary on their own.
2. The Dutch sister churches are drastically decreasing the financial support for the GGRI-NTT, the seminary and for mission aid work. The plan is to phase out all financial assistance by 2020, while the support for the seminary will end already before that. The Australian churches have promised to increase their support but it is uncertain in how far they can replace the support that came from the Dutch sister churches. The Indonesian deputies are wondering if there are ways in which they can receive support from the Canadian Reformed Churches.
3. There is no progress in the process of closer unity with the GGRC. An agreement was made in 2012 to come to pulpit exchanges and closer cooperation but these did not take place. One of the reasons mentioned for this is the tension between GGRC and GGRI-NTT which arose after an evangelist who was disciplined by the church in Kupang (of the GGRI-NTT) left the GGRI-NTT with his mission post and joined the GGRC, which received him without any problem. The deputies of the GGRI-NTT are still committed to the process of unity and were encouraged to restart the process. They promised to become more active in reaching out to the GGRC.
4. The situation in the churches in Kalimantan Barat and Papua was discussed. There is some conflicting information about the membership of those churches. According to the most detailed and up to date information, the GGRI-Papua probably have 50 churches, 40 mission posts, 16,412 members, 15 active ministers and 65 evangelists. The GGRI-Kalimantan have 35 churches, 5878 members and a total of 35 active ministers and evangelists. The GGRI-NTT has a total of 75 churches and mission posts (of which 20 are instituted churches), and around 7,000 members. There is some contact between the churches in these three provinces. Recently a minister from Sumba was called to Papua. The GGRI-NTT has concerns about the system of church government in Papua, where they don't have deputies but a permanent executive of classes and synods. Is this going into

the direction of hierarchy? This will be discussed at the next national synod.

There are also concerns about the GGRI-Kalimantan, which have become part of PGI, which is the Indonesian version of the World Council of Churches. It is the association of churches in Indonesia. The PGI is a very liberal organization. Any church can join this. This will also be discussed at the next national synod. These two matters should be monitored closely by the CRCA.

5. There are some concerns in the GGRI-NTT about the situation in the classis Kupang-Sabu. One church of the GGRI-NTT has ceased to exist and is now a mission post. With that the number of churches in this classis decreased to two and this classis decided to disband itself. However, the Synod in 2013 did not agree with this. Deputies are trying to find a solution for this. In this process the suggestion was made that the GGRC churches in Kupang could join this classis. This situation is an extra encouragement to become serious about the process of church unity.

While visiting Sumba, Rev. Souman and Rev. Dethan also visited some of the churches. It was noticed that almost all the churches have only one worship service on Sunday and that the catechism preaching is becoming rare. Confirmation was received from Rev. P. Njuka that there is only one church on the island of Sumba, which still has two worship services. The general feeling is that these churches are struggling to remain reformed and need encouragement and support. Closer cooperation with STAKRI and the mission churches in West Timor can be a great help and support for these churches.

During this trip also a visit was made to the Bebas churches (Free Churches). These churches were the result of the mission work of our Dutch sister churches until the split in our sister churches in the Netherlands in 1967. This split also had consequences for the churches in Sumba and the Bebas churches are now in a relationship with the Dutch Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken). There are contacts between the Bebas Churches and the GGRI-NTT, but for several reasons the Bebas churches are reluctant to come closer to the GGRI-NTT. The Bebas churches did show serious interest in sending their students for the ministry to STAKRI. These churches seem to be genuinely reformed and desire to be Christian churches in a hostile society.

Throughout the past years there has been incidental contact with the deputies of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia (FRCA). Both the CRCA and the deputies of the FRCA, as mandated by their respective synods, encouraged the GGRI-NTT and the GGRC to work together and seek ecclesiastical unity as well as cooperation with STAKRI and the mission churches established by the mission work of the church in Smithville. The synod of the FRCA held in Baldivis, 2015, reconfirmed this approach and the CRCA requests synod Dunnville to do so as well.

It appears to be difficult to get more detailed information about the churches in Papua and Kalimantan. Much of the information gathered so far is very general. There are certain rumours about these churches which are being contradicted by others. It is important not to base any decisions about these churches on rumours but to rely only on concrete information. The Australian deputies did not have much information either, which led to the decision of Synod Baldivis in June 2015 to mandate the Australian deputies *'To as yet report to the churches with a clearer picture of the GGRI Papua and the GGRI Kalimantan Barat that have united and formed*

one federation with the GGRI NTT in February 2012, confirming their Reformed character and the implications of this union.'

The GGRI-NTT shared with the CRCA some concerns that they have about the GGRI-Papua and the GGRI-Kalimantan and which will be discussed at the upcoming national synod.

Based on this the CRCA is not ready yet to recommend to General Synod to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI. We should at least wait until after the national synod. It may also be helpful to wait for the information that the Australian deputies are going to provide, hopefully in the near future.

Recommendations:

The recommendation of the CRCA to General Synod Dunnville is mainly a continuation of the mandate given to the committee by General Synod Carman 2013.

The CRCA recommends that Synod decide:

1. To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI-NTT under the adopted rules;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To discuss our rules for ecclesiastical fellowship with the Committee on Relations of the GGRI and to gather as much information as is needed to come to a good recommendation to General Synod 2019 regarding a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI;
 - 2.2. To gather and evaluate information regarding the GGRI-KalBar and the GGRI-Papua in order to prepare a proposal as to how to deal with the GGRI as a national federation instead of dealing exclusively with the GGRI-NTT, which has become part of this larger federation of churches;
 - 2.3. To try to ensure that a delegation of two brothers is sent to Indonesia to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at a synod of the GGRI;
 - 2.4. To work in consultation and cooperation with the deputies of the FRCA to encourage and support the churches of the GGRI in their efforts to grow in the Reformed doctrine and Church Polity;
 - 2.5. To encourage the GGRI to seek cooperation with the Reformed Theological School in Kupang (established by the church in Smithville);
 - 2.6. To encourage the GGRI to seek closer contact and cooperation with the GGRC and to monitor the progress of the dialogue between the GGRI and the GGRC.

G.2 Calvinist Reformed Churches (GGRC)

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

1. At this time not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the GGRC, but to work toward that goal;
2. To note with gratitude to the Lord that the work of the Canadian Reformed Churches has borne fruit, also in the reconciliation that could take place between the GGRC and the GGRM;
- 3 To mandate the CRCA:

- 3.1. To continue contact with the GGRC to encourage these churches to be faithful to the Reformed doctrine and church order;
- 3.2. When possible to send someone from or delegated by the CRCA to help and encourage these churches to grow in Reformed character, giving priority to finding out what obstacles the GGRC are experiencing in understanding and implementing the articles of the Reformed Church Order and how to help the GGRC to remedy the situation;
- 3.3. To work in consultation and cooperation with the deputies of the FRCA, with the church of Smithville and the church of Edmonton- Immanuel, and, as much as possible and desirable, with other organizations involved in the work among the Reformed churches in the province of NTT;
- 3.4 To encourage the GGRC to make use of the Reformed Theological School in Kupang (established by the church in Smithville) for the training for the ministry in their churches.

Communications and actions

The decisions of General Synod Carman were passed on to the deputies of the GGRC. Over the past three years there has been continued email contact in which the CRCA was kept up to date regarding the situation within the GGRC.

In July 2015, Rev. A. Souman visited the GGRC and met twice with the deputies of the GGRC. The Acts of their synods and classis meetings were received.

During the first meeting, which took place on July 7, Rev. Souman and Rev. Edwer Dethan (missionary of Smithville) met with deputies Rev. Yonson Dethan and Rev. Yawan Bunda. Some updates on the situation in the GGRC were provided. The GGRC now consists of 14 churches and 3 mission posts. One mission post on Rote Island ceased to exist, and one church on the same island joined the federation. In Timor one mission post joined the federation (which came from the GGRI-NTT, see also the report on the GGRI-NTT). The total membership is estimated at around 1700. The Galilea church, which was previously GGRM before the reconciliation between GGRM and GGRC took place in 2011, decided to withdraw from the federation and continued on their own.

A second meeting between Rev. Souman and the deputies of the GGRC took place on July 19. This visit was not very encouraging and it seems like some positive developments are being offset by several major concerns that arose during this visit.

Throughout the past years there has been regular contact with the church in Smithville about the situation in Indonesia. The church in Smithville has no contact with the GGRI-NTT, but does have contact with the GGRC. For the mission churches mainly the contacts with the GGRC are relevant. With regard to STAKRI, neither the GGRI-NTT nor the GGRC have shown much interest in cooperating with this theological school, supported by the church in Smithville. There has been incidental contact with the Immanuel church in Edmonton about their support for the GGRC. This church decided to channel their support for seminars in the GGRC through the Australian deputies, and are no longer actively involved in the work in the GGRC.

The present state of the GGRC leads the CRCA to the question how long we should continue pursuing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRC. The GGRC came with this request to the Canadian Reformed Churches in 2001. Initially the Canadian Reformed Churches

didn't know the GGRC well enough and were not ready to accept this offer. Over time, however, the Canadian Reformed Churches got to know the GGRC quite well, but in the meantime several difficulties and divisions within the GGRC made the Canadian Reformed Churches reluctant to enter into such a relationship. This situation continues and over the past three years the CRCA has not seen much positive change in this situation.

Synod Carman mandated the CRCA *'to help and encourage these churches to grow in Reformed character, giving priority to finding out what obstacles the GGRC are experiencing in understanding and implementing the articles of the Reformed Church Order and how to help the GGRC to remedy the situation.'*

A lot of discussion between the CRCA and the GGRC has taken place, with the financial support of the Immanuel church in Edmonton and the help of the Australian deputies several seminars have taken place and at STAKRI the teaching of Reformed church polity has an important place.

There are some positive developments, but these seem to be offset by negative developments. Classis meetings are being held in Rote Island on a regular, annual basis and minutes of these meetings were received by the CRCA. However, meetings in Classis Kupang-Sabu were held irregularly and not in an orderly way, which leads to growing tensions in the federation.

A general synod was supposed to be convened in July 2015, but was postponed until probably July 2016.

Ministers are being ordained within the GGRC who did not come from STAKRI but from other seminaries in Indonesia. The way in which they were called and ordained is not in agreement with the intention of the Church Order. The GGRC do not send their students for the ministry to STAKRI, as they had committed to during their synod in 2011 and 2012. Also the unity with the GGRI-NTT is something that seems to disappear into the background more and more.

Conclusion

The CRCA is not convinced that the situation in the GGRC is the result of a lack of knowledge. Most of their ministers have had a thorough training in Reformed church polity at the Theological School in Sumba in the beginning of the nineties, and Rev. Yonson Dethan received his training at our own seminary in Hamilton. The knowledge is there. The question is if the willingness is there to wholeheartedly implement the Reformed Church Order that the GGRC officially has adopted.

Recommendations:

1. At this time not to accept the offer of the GGRC to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, but to work towards that goal;
2. To mandate the CRCA:
 - 2.1. To continue contact with the GGRC to encourage these churches to be faithful to the Reformed doctrine and church order;
 - 2.2. To work in consultation and cooperation with the church of Smithville and the deputies of the FRCA;
 - 2.3. To encourage the GGRC to make use of the Reformed Theological School in Kupang (established by the church in Smithville) for the training for the ministry in their churches.

H. The International Conference of Reformed Churches

Mandate:

Synod Carman 2013 decided:

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

Communications and Actions:

While the ICRC functions and has usefulness to member churches even in the time between the quadrennial meeting of the Conference, more notice is taken of the Conference around and immediately after the meetings. Since the last discussion about the ICRC by Synod Carman in 2013, the ICRC met in Cardiff Wales from August 29 to September 4, 2013. Leading up to this meeting, the Interim Committee and the host organizing team made many preparations. Also since its appointment by the 2009 meeting, a Review Committee had been working on preparing recommended changes to the Constitution and the Regulations.

As decided by Synod Carman, the CRCA delegated the Rev. A Souman and Dr. J. Vanderstoep, as voting delegates, and br. H. Leyenhorst and Dr. J. Visscher, as advisory members, to the Cardiff meeting. Also attending from the CanRC were Rev. C. van Spronsen, as the retiring Corresponding Secretary, and br. H. Berends, as the retiring Treasurer.

The meeting in Cardiff was another excellent opportunity to interact with and have meetings with delegates of a number of the churches with which we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship and also with delegates of churches with which we do not. The formal presentation of papers and the discussions flowing from them were opportunities to learn and to share experiences. If nothing else, this ability to meet and share makes the continued membership in the ICRC and the attendance at its meetings very worthwhile.

The Meeting also dealt with the report of the Review Committee, whose striking had been proposed by the CanRC in 2009. The Review Committee recommended some revisions to the Constitution. The revised Constitution needs to be adopted by the member churches and their general assemblies and synods before going into effect. The appended document indicates the proposed changes. In summary, Article IV was expanded to indicate the origin of the Conference, to clarify the eligibility criteria for membership and to articulate more clearly, the process for suspension or termination of membership. Article V was expanded to clarify the nature and extent of the Conference's authority. Finally, Article VI was expanded to clarify the procedure by which the Constitution may be amended. The CRCA recommends to Synod 2016 that the amended Constitution be approved.

Substantial revisions to the Regulations were proposed and adopted by the meeting in Wales. These included changes to the structure of the Conference in order to encourage more regional interaction between the member churches and to give a higher priority to their theological education and diaconal ministries. To facilitate this a Coordinating Committee, a Theological Education Committee, a Diaconal Committee, and a Regional Conferences Committee have been

appointed in addition to the already existing Missions Committee. Finally, in order to give greater visibility to the ICRC and to improve communication among the member churches and make information about the various ministries of the member churches more easily accessible, a Website Committee was appointed.

In an effort to make the Conference more meaningful to the churches, the ICRC has continued to promote an increase in the number of regional conferences. In September 2014, the fifth meeting of the European Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Wales. The theme of the conference was “Reformed Piety”. In October 2015, an Asian-Pacific Conference will be held in Anyang, South Korea, with the theme of “Baptism and Lord’s Supper”. A North American Conference, with the theme “Women in the Teaching Offices”, will be convened in Orlando, Florida in February 2016. The CRCA has delegated the brothers A. Witten (CRCA) and P. Holtvlüwer (CCCNA) to attend this latter event.

The ICRC maintains an active website (www.icrconline.com), where information about activities can be found. It also has the revised Constitution as well as the approved Regulations

As the next meeting of the Conference will be in our own backyard and since there are a number of member churches from North America for which the CCCNA has responsibility, it would be prudent to have the CanRC delegation consist, in part, of members of the CCCNA. A delegation of four is recommended.

Recommendations:

The CRCA recommends that Synod 2016 decide:

1. to continue the membership of the CanRC in the ICRC;
2. to approve the revised Constitution of the ICRC, as recommended;
3. to mandate the CRCA to delegate participants to relevant ICRC Regional Conferences
4. to send a delegation of two voting members and two advisory members to the next Conference, scheduled to meet in southern Ontario, in 2017.

Attachment:

The current Constitution of the ICRC:

Article I - Name

The name shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Article II - Basis

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

Article III - Purpose

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfilment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Article IV - Membership

1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which:

- a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
- b. have been sponsored by at least two member Churches;
- c. furnish
 - i. their confessional standards,
 - ii. their declaratory acts (if applicable),
 - iii. their form of subscription,
 - iv. their form of government;
- d. are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis;
- e. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, every member Church having one vote.

2. Termination of membership shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches whenever the Conference is of the opinion that the member Church in its doctrine and/or practice is no longer in agreement with the Basis.

Article V - Authority

The conclusions of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member Churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation.

Article VI - Amendments to the Constitution

The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches. The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary two years before the meeting of the Conference. He shall send it to the member churches immediately.

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION of the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

I. NAME

The name of the Conference shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches (“ICRC”).

II. BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;
3. to facilitate and promote cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference’s documents.

2. Churches eligible for membership are those which:

- a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
- b. have complied with the applicable *Regulations* regarding applications for membership;
- c. are not members of any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis.

3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.

4. Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that the Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, *cf.*, *Belgic Confession*, Article 30), is no longer in agreement with the Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Conference but shall not vote.

5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that the Conference is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Conference, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Conference (*Constitution*, IV), are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church.

VI. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

This *Constitution* may be amended by two-thirds majority vote of the major assemblies of the Member Churches eligible to vote, such amendment having been proposed to the Member Churches by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote. An amendment, as proposed to the Member Churches, is not amendable.

A proposal to amend the *Constitution* may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference.

I. Miscellaneous

1. Communications with various churches

During the past three years the CRCA has had some communication with churches within our federation about churches abroad. One was about the Free Evangelical Church in Singapore and another was about reformed churches in Chile. In both situations the CRCA provided information to these churches but it is not in the mandate of the CRCA to establish contact with these churches. In order to establish contact with these churches, the matter should be brought to Synod by local churches in an ecclesiastical manner as described in article 30 of the Church Order.

The CRCA also communicated with the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) to provide or receive information in situations in which the CCCNA was dealing with questions or information from sister churches in North America about churches outside North America and the ICRC.

2. Requests for financial support

The CRCA wants to draw the attention of the Synod as well as the churches within our federation to the fact that it is not in our mandate to arrange financial support for sister churches. Until now, when financial support was needed, one of the local churches took it upon itself to raise funds in the federation, as is the case with the church of Coaldale for our sister churches in South Africa, or sister churches were directed to a mission board, as is the case with our sister churches in Brazil.

Submitted to Synod Dunnville 2016 by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad,

O. Bouwman
T. Lodder
A. Souman
J. VanLaar
J. Vanderstoep
A. Witten

September 2015.