

REPORTS TO GENERAL SYNOD DUNNVILLE 2016

VOLUME I

- COMMITTEE FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION (CBT)
- COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA (CCCNA)
- COMMITTEE FOR CHURCH UNITY (CCU)
- COMMITTEE FOR NEEDY STUDENTS FUND (CNSF)



**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

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**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

Committee for Bible Translation

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inclusive philosophy” of the NIV2011 is concerned with the translation of the Bible’s inclusive-masculine¹ language for males and females. The position of the NIV translators is that the inclusive masculine is increasingly not read as “inclusive” by modern readers. To preserve the inclusive aspect of the Bible’s inclusive-masculine, the translators have made the following choices:

1. Generic “he” was often, though not exclusively, replaced with generic “they”² (e.g., Mark 4:25)
2. The words “man” and “mankind” were occasionally used to describe human beings collectively (e.g., Mark 2:27). However, on other occasions, “people” and “humans” were used to translate Greek and Hebrew masculine forms referring to both men and women
3. “Ancestors” was preferred over “forefathers” (e.g., Judges 2:1)
4. “Brothers and sisters” was frequently used to translate the Greek *adelphoi* in the New Testament, when it was clear that both genders were in view (e.g., Romans 8:29)

Gender-Related Translation Philosophy in the ESV

By contrast with the NIV2011, the Translation Philosophy of the ESV translators was: “in the area of gender language... to render literally what is in the original.” According to the Preface of the ESV, this led the translators to the following translation choices:

1. “Anyone” replaces “any man” where there is no word corresponding to “man” in the original language
2. “People” rather than “men” is regularly used where the original languages refer to both men and women
3. The word “man” is retained when the original language contrasts human beings with God
4. “Brothers” is retained as the translation for the Greek *adelphoi*
5. “Sons” is retained for the Greek *huioi*
6. The generic “he” has been regularly retained because this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages

A comparison of various texts in the NIV2011, ESV, and NRSV can be found in the section of this report entitled “On the CBT’s 1992 Evaluation of the NRSV”.

Evaluation – Suitability of the Two Translation Philosophies

The choice of the CBTNIV to make a gender-inclusive translation is consistent with their overall philosophy of translation, which was described in the 1995 CanRC CBT report as “modified-literal” or “idiomatic.”³ For instance, when the intent of the original author was to include the “sisters” in his address to the “brothers,” the translation “brothers and sisters” accurately reflects that intent. This intent can be inferred from the context. Since modern readers are less likely to understand that the term “brothers” includes the “sisters,” the CBTNIV believes that the gender-inclusive translation is a more effective communication of the true meaning of the origi-

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We make the following observations:

1. The inclusive-masculine is consistent with the Biblical view of male headship and a complementarian⁶ view of gender roles. However, there are no convincing arguments that the inclusive-masculine or generic “he” are *necessary* for the establishing and maintaining of a biblical and complementarian view of gender roles.
2. The shift to gender-inclusive language is consistent with a feminist agenda to promote an egalitarian⁷ view of male and female roles. However, there is no proof that gender-inclusive terminology *necessarily* leads to a feminist egalitarian view of gender roles.
3. The Biblical model of male headship in family, church and society is known independently of the inclusive-masculine language of the Scriptural text. This model is explicitly taught in such passages as Genesis 1-2, Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.
4. The modern climate of egalitarianism requires a strong determination to hold onto the Biblical teachings about men and women. As noted above, we do not believe that a translation of *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters,” for example, is necessarily a contradiction of the biblical view of men and women. The question then becomes whether such translations shape our thinking more subtly. The committee is left with the difficulty of how we would measure the effect of gender-inclusive language on the thinking of the people who read it. What, if anything, is lost of a Biblical view of men and women when an inclusive-masculine term like “mankind” is instead translated as “humans” or “people”? We do not know how to measure whether this language structure carries as much meaning as is sometimes alleged. We recognize that there can be a variety of reasons behind the move to change language structures and usage, of which some reasons are certainly related to the promotion of a feminist ideology. But given that the Bible teaches clearly and explicitly about the roles of men and women, there is no need to rely on language structure alone to convey that men are entrusted with headship and authority.
5. The inclusive-masculine language that has traditionally characterized English translations of the Bible requires explanation of its meaning, especially in our current culture. On the other hand, the gender-inclusive language of some recent translations also requires an explanation as to how this language relates to the original Hebrew or Greek text. Neither philosophy of translation produces a translation that has no need for further explanation. The CBT does not believe that the NIV2011’s philosophy of gender-inclusive language is sufficient to make this translation untrustworthy or inaccurate; rather, as pointed out in the CBT Interim Report (2011), the difficulty resides in the application of this philosophy in some instances. We are also confident that the ESV approach does justice to the original text and renders it accurately readable to the modern audience.

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4. On the CBT's 1992 Evaluation of the NRSV

Another aspect of our mandate was to consider the gender inclusive translation philosophy in the NIV2011 and in the ESV, doing so through a comparison with past findings on this subject by the CBT (see 4.4.1). By way of background, the CBT report to General Synod 1992 dealt with this matter in particular through its analysis of the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). The underlying question was whether the previous findings of the CBT would be of assistance in helping us to make a further determination on the legitimacy of gender inclusive language.

To set the context of the 1992 report, we should note that the NRSV was of interest to our churches because it was an updated version of the RSV, which was widely used in the federation at the time. After carrying out their investigation, the committee recommended—and Synod 1992 agreed—rejecting the NRSV, a decision that was based primarily on the policy of inclusive language that its translators had adopted. The 1992 report detailed numerous examples where “precision of translation is sacrificed for the policy of inclusive language.”⁸

Examples of Texts in the NRSV, Compared to NIV2011 and ESV

An initial exercise that may assist our evaluation of gender inclusive language in the NIV2011 and in the ESV is to compare a selection of texts that were originally flagged in the 1992 report on the NRSV as being unjustified translations of the original Hebrew or Greek, and to see how the more recent translations have rendered these texts.

Text	NRSV	NIV2011	ESV
Matt 23:8 (<i>sic</i> ; should be Matt 25:40)	“members of my family”	“brothers and sisters of mine”	“my brothers”
Luke 17:3	“another disciple”	“brother and sister”	“brother”
Acts 7:37	“people”	“people”	“brothers”
Rom 12:1 (and elsewhere in the NT epistles)	“brothers and sisters”	“brothers and sisters” (with a recurring note that the Greek <i>adelphoi</i> refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family)	“brothers” (with a recurring note to indicate that the term “brothers” [<i>adelphoi</i>] was often used in Greek to refer to both men and women)
Acts 3:17	“friends”	“fellow Israelites”	“brothers”
Gal 4:28	“friends”	“brothers and sisters”	“brothers”
2 Cor 11:9	“friends”	“brothers”	“brothers”
3 John 10	“friends”	“believers”	“brothers”
Gal 2:4	“false believers”	“false believers”	“false brothers”
Gal 1:2	“members of God’s family”	“brothers and sisters”	“brothers”

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Eph 6:23	“the whole community”	“brothers and sisters”	“brothers”
1 Pet 2:17 (x 2)	“everyone” “family of believers”	“everyone” “family of believers”	“everyone” “brotherhood”
Rom 8:14,16-17 (x 3)	“children of God”	“children of God”	“sons of God” “children of God”
Gal 4:5	“adoption as children”	“adoption to sonship”	“adoption as sons”
Dan 7:13	“one like a human being”	“one like a son of man”	“one like a son of man”

In its 1992 report, the CBT gave further attention to a few texts in the NRSV that pertained to gender-inclusive language as this language relates to ecclesiastical office; namely, Philippians 1:14, 1 Timothy 3:11, and Romans 16:1.

With respect to Philippians 1:14, it was observed that “most of the brothers” in the RSV had become “most of the brothers and sisters” in the NRSV. This verse was taken by the CBT to imply that both men and women were involved in the official proclamation of the Word. This verse was also discussed by the most recent CBT in their Interim Report (2011) in connection with NIV2011, where in Philippians 1:4 *adelphoi* has been translated as “brothers and sisters.” The CBT noted this as a misleading translation, as it does not do justice to the text’s terminology of proclamation, and it undermines the proper understanding of who is eligible to serve as minister in the church. In the ESV, the term in question in Philippians 1:14 is translated as “the brothers.”

With respect to 1 Timothy 3:11 in the NRSV, the CBT suggested that this text demonstrated the NRSV’s bias in favour of women in office. The NRSV translation begins, “Women likewise...” while the text note says, “Or ‘their wives’ or ‘women deacons.’” In the CBT Interim Report (2011), the NIV2011’s translation of 1 Timothy 3:11 (“the women”) was deemed to be an acceptable rendering of the original Greek *gune*. Additionally, the NIV2011 footnote to this text (“Possibly deacons’ wives or women who are deacons”) was considered by the CBT to be an improvement on the NIV1984, which had suggested “deaconesses” as an alternative translation for “their wives.” In the ESV, 1 Timothy 3:11 is translated similarly to the NIV1984: “their wives.” The ESV also includes a footnote that does not suggest any connection of the women to the aforementioned deacons, “Wives, likewise, must, or ‘Women, likewise, must’”.

With respect to Romans 16:1 in the NRSV, rendered “Phoebe, a deacon...”, the CBT drew attention to the text note which says, “or minister.” Also in the NIV2011, Phoebe is described as a “deacon,” and there are two footnotes attached to this word. The first reads, “Or ‘servant’.” The second reads, “The word ‘deacon’ here refers to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways; similarly in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8,12.” Again, the previous CBT in its Interim Report (2011) evaluated the NIV2011 translation of this text, and the two footnotes. The CBT maintained that “servant” is the preferable translation of the Greek

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6. Readability of the ESV

Objectively Evaluating Readability

In light of our mandate to provide a thorough study of the ESV with special attention to its readability (4.4.2), we discussed at some length how to evaluate the readability of a Bible translation. To some extent this is a subjective matter. Among other things, it depends on the education level of the one evaluating the translation, how much regular reading the evaluator does, and what kind of reading. What might be challenging for one reader might be relatively easy for another.

Our committee did some research into whether or not there are any useful objective standards for readability. It turns out that there are at least seven widely-used readability formulas:

1. The Flesch Reading Ease Formula
2. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula
3. The Fog Scale (Gunning Fog Formula)
4. The SMOG Index
5. The Coleman Liau Index
6. Automated Readability Index
7. Linsear Write Formula

These can be used to determine the grade, difficulty, and age level of English prose texts. There is a website where one can input a text and an algorithm determines the consensus of these seven formulas. The website is www.readabilityformulas.com. Our committee used this website to compare the ESV and 2011NIV on several texts. We chose 14 random prose texts from the Old Testament and New Testament from a variety of genres. It is important to note that these are only **prose** texts. The readability formulas cannot be used to analyze poetry. Besides the random texts, we also analyzed Ephesians 1:3-14, a passage with notoriously difficult grammar. The results of our study are below:

1. Genesis 22:1-8

ESV – Grade level 5, easy to read, 8-9 years old
 NIV – Grade level 5, easy to read, 8-9 years old

2. Leviticus 14:1-9

ESV – Grade level 8, easy to read, 12-14 years old
 NIV – Grade level 9, fairly easy to read, 13-15 years old

3. Joshua 4:1-7

ESV – Grade level 8, fairly easy to read, 12-14 years old
 NIV – Grade level 9, fairly easy to read, 13-15 years old

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14. Hebrews 8:1-7

ESV – Grade level 11, standard/average, 15-17 years old
 NIV – Grade level 11, standard/average, 15-17 years old

15. Revelation 10:1-7

ESV – Grade level 10, fairly easy to read, 14-15 years old
 NIV – Grade level 7, easy to read, 11-13 years old

Summary and Conclusion on Survey

- ESV average grade level – 8.67
- NIV average grade level – 8.33

We note that the ESV and NIV scored equally on four passages. NIV scored a higher reading level than ESV on six passages. ESV scored a higher reading level than NIV on five passages.

If we take Ephesians 1:3-14 out of the results, the two translations are actually equal in terms of grade level:

- ESV average grade level – 8.00
- NIV average grade level – 8.00

We were initially surprised by this result. The impression many seem to have is that the ESV is significantly less readable than the NIV. However, our research above does not bear this out. Furthermore, we discovered a chart published by Zondervan (the publisher of the NIV) which confirmed our findings.¹⁷ According to Zondervan, the NIV is at a grade 7.8 reading level, while the ESV is at 7.4. They are close, but the ESV is marginally easier.

It has been noted before that the ESV is essentially a light overhaul of the RSV. In 1995 when a previous CBT recommended the 1984 NIV to the churches, it was noted that “the NIV is in many respects very close to the RSV.”¹⁸ The same report quoted Robert G. Bratcher, “The NIV is closer in style and form to the RSV than to any other English version....The principles that guided it in textual, exegetical, linguistic and stylistic matters are hardly distinguishable from those which guided the RSV.”¹⁹ Our research shows that, in terms of readability, what was true of the RSV vis-à-vis the NIV, remains true of the ESV.

Some Specific Passages with Readability Issues

While the overall picture of the readability of the ESV is good, some scholars have identified particular problem areas. There are specific passages where the ESV has room for improvement in terms of readability. In this section we will identify some of those passages and provide proposals for how these might be improved. Some of these passages have been identified as being problematic by Mark Strauss in an article entitled “Why the English Standard Version Should Become the Standard English Version.”²⁰ Other passages were noted by Allan Chapple in a 2003 article in *Reformed Theo-*

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logical Review, “The English Standard Version: A Review Article.”²¹ Other passages come from our own reading and study of the ESV.

We should state at the outset that a degree of subjectivity cannot be avoided here either, especially when the passages under consideration are poetic in nature. Poetry is an elevated form of writing and poets often use words and phrases that might not otherwise be used in normal discourse. We see this even in the latest edition of our *Book of Praise* and its psalms and hymns. Moreover, there are other places in Scripture where an elevated form of writing found in the original would be expected to be reflected in a translation. We think, for example, of the polished Greek used by Luke in parts of his gospel and Acts. To ask (as Strauss does) whether a contemporary English speaker would use this or that phrase is to miss the distinct literary character of much of the Bible. With these caveats in mind, we cannot expect all readers of this report to agree with our evaluation of every passage identified as being problematic, and likely other readers would want more passages added.

Unclear Passages or Potential for Misunderstanding

Joshua 6:26

Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, “Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.”

The Hebrew means to impose a curse. “To lay an oath” on someone is not clear in English.

We propose: “Joshua pronounced a curse at that time...”

Proverbs 30:25,26

*...the ants are a people not strong,
yet they provide their food in summer
The rock badgers are a people not mighty,
yet they make their homes in the cliffs;*

The problem here should be self-evident. It is odd to describe ants and badgers as “people.”

We propose: “species” in the place of “people” in these verses.

2 Kings 7:3

*Now there were four men who were lepers at the entrance to the gate.
And they said to one another, “Why are we sitting here until we die?”*

Were they only lepers at the entrance to the gate? This could be clearer. We propose: “Now there were four leprous men at the entrance to the gate...”

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1 Chronicles 28:19

“All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan.”

Newer editions of the ESV have added quotation marks with this verse to indicate that someone is saying this, but it is still not immediately clear who is saying it. While this translation is faithful to the Hebrew text, we propose that readers would be served by adding at the verse’s beginning, “David said.”

Romans 14:22

***The faith that you have**, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.*

Are Christians to keep their faith to themselves and not share it? The Greek word translated as “faith” has a broader range of meaning that includes “conviction.” We propose: “The conviction that you have...”

Galatians 6:12

*It is those who want to make a **good showing in the flesh** who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.*

The expression in bold here is not clear. The idea here is that that the Judaizers are all about impressing others with outward appearances. We propose: “It is those who want to make an external show...”

Psalms 94:9

***He who planted the ear**, does he not hear?
He who formed the eye, does he not see?*

This is an overly literal translation of the Hebrew. This word can also be used metaphorically to describe the creation of something. We propose: “He who shaped the ear...”

Idiom Problems

Joshua 10:6

*And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, “**Do not relax your hand from** your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us.”*

What the men of Gibeon mean is “do not abandon us.” Our English translation should reflect the meaning of this idiom. We propose: “Do not abandon your servants...”

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Judges 15:8

*And he struck them **hip and thigh** with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

Compare NIV, “He attacked them viciously...” and even NASB, “And he struck them ruthlessly...” It is true that the idiom used here is not entirely clear. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* states, “To ‘smite hip and thigh’ is a particularly vigorous form of attack...” (500). Commentator Daniel I. Block (*The New American Commentary*) notes that it is “a wrestling idiom for total victory.” We propose: “And he struck them viciously...”

Psalms 22:7

*All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;*

In English, we make faces at people. The Hebrew idiom is close, but our translation should be clearer. The idea is that of a contemptuous gesture with the mouth. We propose: “they sneer at me...”

Psalms 10:4

***In the pride of his face** the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”*

While the meaning might be worked out with some thought, it is not immediately obvious. We propose: “In his pride the wicked does not seek him...” With this verse we note that the ESV offers an alternative translation of the word “face” in the footnotes. It is true that this word can be translated as “anger.” We therefore also propose an alternative reading for the footnotes: “In his angry pride the wicked does not seek him...”

*Lexical Issues*Matthew 2:23

*And he went and lived in **a city called Nazareth**, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*

The Greek word translated as “city” here can also be translated as “town” or “village.” At the time of Jesus’ birth, Nazareth was certainly not what we commonly think of as a city. We propose: “And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth...”

NOTES*Word Order Issues*Luke 22:29

...and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,...

The word order in this translation follows the original Greek closely. However, the English word order could definitely use some improvement. The ESV could take a hint here not only from translations like the NIV, but also the KJV and NASB. We propose: "And I assign to you a kingdom, just as my Father assigned one to me..."

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is clear that that the ESV still needs improvement in some areas related to readability. In keeping with 4.4.3 of our mandate, we have forwarded the results of this study to the ESV Translation Oversight Committee. Since the committee has stated that it is open to receiving critical feedback, we hope that it will take our comments to heart and incorporate our proposed changes in a future revision of the ESV.

7. Feedback from the Churches

Our committee was mandated to solicit, receive and evaluate comments from the churches on the ESV, to submit worthy translation changes to the ESV editorial committee and to monitor the response (see 4.4.3). In early 2015 we wrote a letter to all the churches inviting feedback on the use of the ESV. The committee has received correspondence from two churches. Both churches complained about the readability of the ESV while advocating for the use of the NIV2011. Regarding the readability of the ESV these churches were referred to the contents of this report. The churches were also informed that further consideration of the NIV2011 is beyond our current mandate.

8. Interaction with the CBTNIV

Synod directed our committee to correspond with the CBTNIV (see 4.4.4). We were to send the critical remarks and suggestions for improvement on the five texts that pertained to women in office, as these texts were discussed in our Interim report (December 2011). Anticipating this aspect of the mandate, our committee sent the Interim Report in its entirety to the CBTNIV in April of 2012. To date, no interaction from the CBTNIV has been received.

**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

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

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

Subcommittee East: Contacts with ERQ and OPC,

Subcommittee West: Contacts with RCUS, RPCNA, and NAPARC

At least two members of each subcommittee were responsible for attending NAPARC in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Minutes of the subcommittee meetings were exchanged via email to promote good communication and mutual scrutiny.

2. General Mandate

General Synod Carman-West 2013 (*Acts 2013*, p.46) continued the mandate that General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 gave the CCCNA: (*Acts 2010*, p. 69):

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

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

1. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.

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

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

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

Recommendation:

That the mandate, as stated by Synod 2010, be continued for the CCCNA until 2019.

3. Subcommittee East**3.1 General activity**

Meetings of subcommittee East were held on July 3, 2013; December 2, 2013; October 7, 2014; December 12, 2014; June 8, 2015. Rev. E. Kampen served as convener; Rev. D. Vandeburgt served as recording and corresponding secretary.

The subcommittee met with representatives of the ERQ's Committee for Interchurch relations on November 20, 2013, November 12, 2014 and November 10-12, 2015. A delegate or delegates from the committee attended Synods of the ERQ on November 2, 2013, May 10, 2014 and May 9, 2015.

One of the CCCNA members attended and spoke a few words of congratulation at the anniversary retreat to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Inauguration of the ERQ, held at Asbestos, Québec on October 11-13, 2013 (See Bos G, Bos A. ERQ Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Retreat. Clarion 2014; 63:42).

Members of the subcommittee met with the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relationships on November 20, 2013, November 11, 2014, and November 10-12, 2015. Two members also attended the 80th General Assembly of the OPC from June 5-7, 2014.

The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the ERQ and OPC via telephone and email.

3.2 Reports and recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

Report 1 - L'Église Reformée du Québec (ERQ)

Report 2 - The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

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4. Subcommittee West

4.1 General Activity

Meetings of Subcommittee West were held on June 18, 2013; January 22, 2014; June 7, 2014; February 11, 2015; and June 11, 2015. At these meetings, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer served as chairman; br. H. VanDelden as corresponding secretary, Rev. J. Poppe as recording secretary and br. L. Vanderveen as vice-all.

Delegates of the subcommittee met with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee on November 19, 2013, November 11, 2014 and November... 2015. Delegates were sent to the 268th Synod of the RCUS, May 19-23, 2014 and the 269th Synod of the RCUS, May 18-21, 2015.

Delegates of the subcommittee met with the RPCNA IRC on Nov 12, 2014.

The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the RCUS and RPCNA via telephone, Skype, and email.

4.2 Reports and Recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

Report 3 - The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

Report 4 - Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

5. Concerns of the Committee as a Whole

As deputies of synod, acting on behalf of the federation of churches, the CCCNA strives to serve the churches in fulfilling the mandate given to it by the General Synod. As mentioned in the reports of contacts made to our sister churches, a sensitive issue has arisen because the mandate given to this committee by General Synod 2013 requires it to discuss again particular issues from the past with each church. The mandate to discuss a particular issue or a specific matter with another church body is not the issue. *“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”* (Proverbs 27:17) We are the servants of the churches and discuss these differences with our brothers in the faith in the context of Romans 14.

However, we do struggle with the lack of consistency by the decision of General Synod 2013 mandating that once again special attention be given to outstanding issues compared with the decisions of General Synods of 2007 and General Synod 2010 wherein these outstanding matters were to be discussed when appropriate. We fear that this threatens our progress in the EF relationships we have or desire to build.

We have paraphrased Considerations 3.5, 3.6, and Recommendation 4.3 of Art. 131 of General Synod Smithers 2007:

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7. Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin)

As per the third point of our mandate (*To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in the Americas*), Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer responded to a request to attend the 30th General Assembly of Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin). In addition the delegates attending NAPARC 2015 responded to a request to meet with two delegates of the KPCA on November 12, 2015.

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

A report is attached for:

Report 6 - The Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA)

8. Expenses

From the time of Synod Carman 2013, until September 11, 2015, \$16378.72 has been spent in fulfilling the mandate.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

Subcommittee East:

- E. Kampen (Orangeville, ON)
- C. Poppe (Guelph, ON)
- D. Vandeburgt (Langley, BC)
- G. Bos (Guelph, ON)

Subcommittee West:

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

Appended Reports

1. L'Église Reformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
3. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
4. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
5. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)
6. The Korean Presbyterian Church in America - Kosin (KPCA)
7. Appendices re: RPCNA, NAPARC and KPCA

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1. Mandate

Synod Carman 2013 gave the CCCNA the following mandate with respect to the ERQ (Acts 2013, p. 27):

- a) To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of EF with the ERQ under the adopted rules, giving particular attention to the matters of supervision of the pulpit, admissions to the Lord's table and women deacons (in particular, the ordination of) and to provide an account of its dialogue with the ERQ.

2. Correspondence

As per rule 2 of EF, the CICR received the *Acts of General Synod Carman-West 2013*. The CCCNA sent a letter of fraternal greeting to a Synod held February 8, 2014. The CCCNA received from the ERQ minutes of their Synods held since Synod Carman 2013 up until the date of this report.

3. Meetings with the Committee for Inter-Church Relations (CICR)

3.1 November 14, 2012

Present for this meeting were Rev. J. Zuidema and Rev. B. Westerveld for the ERQ and Rev. P. Holtvluwer, J. Kuik, C. Poppe and Rev. D. Vandeburgt for the CCCNA. The following matters were discussed:

3.1.1 Women Deacons

The ERQ brothers were asked about the occurrence of women deacons in the ERQ, if they are ordained and if they exercise authority in the churches. Rev. Zuidema answered that there are indeed women deacons in the ERQ who are ordained. He further noted that this practice to ordain women as deacons is the same as that operating in the RPCNA, that the women deacons are under the supervision of the elders, and that they neither exercise an authoritative role nor are part of the local council. He defended the practice with the same reasoning as found in the article "On Women Deacons" authored by Christian Adjemian (attached as Appendix 3 by the CCCNA to its report to Synod Carman-West 2013).

One of the CCCNA delegates asked if the statement by the RPCNA that the CanRC "already holds ecumenical fellowship with another exclusive Psalm singing denomination (Free Church of Scotland) as well as with *the Église Réformée du Québec which hold to the office of women deacons* (italicized by the CCCNA) (see Appendix 1 of the report of the CCCNA to Synod Carman-West 2013) is correct. Rev. Westerveld confirmed the same and reiterated the phrase from the Church Order of the ERQ that "The parish can call to the office of deacon all members who show evidence of their competence according to the Biblical criteria mentioned in Acts 6:3; Rom 16:1,2; 1 Tim. 3:8-13" (See art. 2.4.3 of the "Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline of the ERQ). Upon inquiry he noted that l'Église réformée St-Marc at Sainte-Foy and l'Église chrétienne

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3.3 November 12, 2014

Present for this meeting for the ERQ were Rev. B. Westerveld and V. Collet and for the CanRC G. Bos, Rev. P. Holtvüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, C. Poppe, H. van Delden and L. Vanderveen. The following matters were discussed:

3.3.2 Update on Genesis 1&2 and Creation in the ERQ

A proposal by the St-Marc ERQ to outline and affirm the teachings of the Scriptures and the Confessions regarding creation and the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 had been referred to the Ministerial Committee of the ERQ churches for review.

3.3.3 Marriage vows

At the ERQ synod held on May 10, 2014 the Church at St-Marc presented a modification to the “Marriage Vows adopted by the St-Marc church”. The vows are similar to those found in the Book of Praise of the CanRC published in 2013 (see page 630). The vows contain additional clauses such as (for the bridegroom) “I promise to love and honour you *as Jesus Christ has loved the Church and gave his life for her*”, and for the bride “I promise to love and respect you *as the Church loves and submits to Jesus Christ*”. The CCCNA delegates asked if the vows would be incorporated into a Form for the Solemnization of Marriage and noted that the CanRC have a very biblical form for that purpose.

4. Attendance at Synods of the ERQ

4.1. Synod of November 2, 2013

Br. C. Poppe attended this Synod convened at l’Église St-Marc at Québec City. We highlight the following from his report:

4.1.1 Songs for Children

L’Église réformée de la Rive-Sud has established a committee of musicians (members of the church), who under the supervision and guidance of the church, plan to compose Christian songs suitable for children that would help them to memorise the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The program is called “gamal musique ministère”. The proposal was discussed at some length to assure adherence of the texts to the Scriptures, supervision by the church at Rive-Sud, and to ensure that it would be beneficial to all churches. All churches supported the program.

4.1.2 Creation

There were two presentations on the topic of creation, one on “The days of creation: a second look at Scriptures” by Rev. Zoellner, and the other on “Literary framework or six 24-hour days” by Rev. Bédard. These presentations were meant to provide a context for further discussions at subsequent synods.

4.2 Synod of May 10, 2014

Brs. G. Bos and C. Poppe attended this Synod convened at l'Église réformée de la Rive-Sud. We highlight the following from their report:

4.2.1 The Administration of the Lord's Supper

The St-Marc ERQ presented a submission called "Réflexions sur l'administration de la sainte Cène dans l'Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec" ("Reflections on the administration of the Holy Supper in the ERQ of St-Marc, Québec"), asking for comments from the other ERQ churches in the hope to promote unity among the ERQ churches.

The submission reads, in part, that "Our reflections about the Lord's Supper concern mainly two subjects: namely, its administration to visitors and its frequency". Concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper to visitors, St-Marc writes that it has "already been an issue of lively discussion among the ministers and elders of the ERQ but that thus far, regrettably, no common practice has been adopted". It writes that "We wish to underline the common convictions that we have regarding the administration of the Lord's Supper. We recognize that each person is responsible to examine oneself before communion". "The members of our churches are admitted to the table of the Lord by the elders since they professed publicly their faith in Jesus Christ (See the form for the confession of faith). Our children by marriage are not received at the table of the Lord before having professed their faith before the congregation. The sensitive question is clearly the reception of visitors, be they occasional visitors or regularly attending our assemblies". "Recognizing the dynamics between personal responsibility of each person who comes to the Lord's table and the requirement of the elders to protect its sanctity, we require him who officiates to read an invitation and a warning before the distribution of the elements, that essentially reads as follows: "The Lord has prepared this Table for all those who take hold with joy of its promises and who respond with humility at its call. If you have received the promises of God with a believing and repentant heart, and if you have already confessed that faith in a Church that faithfully teaches the doctrine of grace, the Lord Jesus invites you to participate in this supper with joy. However, if you do not quite understand the significance of this supper, or if you have not been baptized, or if you have never professed your faith in a Church, or if there is a sin in your life for which you are not yet ready to ask for forgiveness, you must not participate, so as to prevent, as the Lord says, to eat and drink to your judgment. You are invited to observe the administration of the Lord's Supper to learn what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for his people and to pray that God would accord you such faith and such repentance that you could profess it before God and his Church".

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

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3.1 We met on November 19, 2013 at the North American and Presbyterian Reformed Council (NAPARC). In this meeting we pursued mandate 4.3 of General Synod Carman 2013. The CEIR members were all able to affirm that the 2001 agreement is functioning well. Furthermore, they did express their surprise and disappointment that the agreement was part of the mandate and wondered if it was occasioned by any particular offense on their part. The CCCNA was able to make very clear that no particular offense occasioned this mandate but that it arises from the concerns raised by a small number of churches within the CanRC. Further to the mandate of Synod Carman 2013 we can report that it is the shared desire of our committees to be mandated to work together on new items rather than belaboring the issues of the past. For more on this matter we refer to point 5 of the General Report of the CCCNA to General Synod Dunnville 2016.

3.2 We met on June 6, 2014 as the CEIR had organized a colloquium with the fraternal delegates and observers during the 81st GA. Discussion took place on how to help one another fulfill our task as churches, especially in bringing the gospel to the world. The ensuing discussion brought out how ecclesiastical relations are beneficial for the life of the respective churches in enabling the sharing of resources and studies in dealing with all kinds of issues.

3.3 We met on November 15, 2014 at NAPARC, Grassie, ON. In this meeting the brothers of the CEIR reported on the following:

3.3.1 Relations with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil

The CEIR of the OPC informed us of a developing ecclesiastical relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. The PCB approached them after the PCB had broken off contact with the PCUSA. This church sees the OPC as its “mother church” and thus sought fellowship with it. They have invited the OPC into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Since the PCB General Assembly meets every four years they have some time to respond to this request.

Members of CEIR attended a recent General Assembly of the PCB. The Presbyterian Church of Brazil is a church comprising about a million members. When their assembly met, more than 1100 men were present as delegates. In evaluating the request for fellowship the OPC, the CEIR gave attention to a major item on the docket of the General Assembly. While the PCB is, in principle, against the ordination of women to the offices, one of the Presbyteries has asked: is it permissible for women to preach under the oversight of session?

The CEIR addressed the assembly on the fact that this matter was a concern for them, and will review this matter when it is concluded at another session of the assembly. The GA was adjourned and is to be reconvened at a later date to come to a decision on this matter.

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It was noted that some of the theological students of the PCB are studying at Greenville Theological Seminary, giving another point of contact between the Presbyterian Church of Brazil and the OPC. While in Brazil, the members of CEIR met informally with CanRC missionary Rev. Julius Van Spronsen and mission worker Chris Boersema.

3.3.2 *Report on study committee for the republication of the covenant of works*

One of the Presbyteries of the OPC has faced significant struggles on the issue of the republication of the covenant of works. As a result the General Assembly has appointed a study committee on this issue.

An explanation was given on what this issue is about. Some believe that the Mosaic covenant is a republication of the covenant of works. The idea is that Israel had to do works in order to remain in the land, but that they needed God's grace to be received into heaven. This is applied today in such a way that members need to obey the commandments to retain membership of the church, but need God's grace in Christ to receive eternal salvation. Somehow, this view is tied to the two kingdom viewpoint.

A deep rift has developed in one of the Presbyteries and the conflict has become quite personal. As a result, the General Assembly appointed a study committee and also made a visitation committee available should its help be requested by the Presbytery. Such a request did come forth in September 2014, and this matter is being dealt with.

3.3.3 *Review of questions according to the OPC rules for ecclesiastical fellowship*

One of the significant questions that the OPC asks churches in ecclesiastical fellowship is: *Are there specific occasions where you believe we have failed to live up to our commitments to you or have caused you grief?* (For all the questions see 3.3.6 below.) We could respond by stating that the OPC has not caused us any grief; on the contrary, we find great joy in our fellowship together.

At the same time the brothers of the CCCNA were able to report on the following to the CEIR:

3.3.4 *Answer to OPC's prior query on the CanRC's favourable vote to admit the CRC Australia to membership in the ICRC.*

The OPC had expressed perplexity that the Canadian Reformed Churches voted in favour of the CRC of Australia's application to be members of the ICRC. Their perplexity arises from the fact that the OPC are concerned that the CRC of Australia is having a negative influence on the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

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We responded by passing on a letter from the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. They explained that they supported the CRC of Australia's application to join the ICRC because of the reforming direction being taken by this church. They are moving away from non-reformed ecumenical bodies, and want to see the ICRC as their spiritual home.

3.3.5 Request for clarification on the OPC entering into entering into EF with the Independent Reformed Church of Korea.

The OPC has entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the IRCK. This church is a consciously confessional church. This relationship arises out of a mission situation. One of the OPC missionaries in China developed contact with this church. The OPC also has an indigenous candidate moving into a church planting situation.

3.3.6 Report on CanRC's relationship with Reformed Churches of the Netherlands

The last Synod of the CanRC appointed a sub-committee to the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad to deal with the struggles we are facing in our ecclesiastical relationship with the RCN. This committee recently issued an interim report, and a copy of this report and a website link to it was passed on.

In conclusion to this section we would like to highlight for Synod that the questions the OPC uses for discussion with other inter-church relations committees are very helpful to the functioning of our relationship with the OPC. We share them with Synod as to give some context for how our relationship with the OPC is approached from their side.

The agenda of items to be discussed by delegates of both churches during such a meeting will include: Are there specific occasions where you believe we have failed to live up to our commitments to you or have caused you grief? Speaking the truth in love, where do you perceive our testimony or practice to be weak? What, if any, significant changes in policy, doctrine, or practice are pending in your church(es)? What are the significant issues presently under study in the various assemblies of your church(es)? Are there ministries in which we can more closely cooperate? What are the impediments, real or perceived, to the two churches achieving organic unity?

4. Attendance at General Assembly

Delegates of the CCCNA attended the 81st General Assembly of the OPC from June 5-7, 2014 held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids. We brought fraternal greetings from our churches. As a result of our time at the 81st GA we report the following:

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

Introduction:

The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) currently consists of 51 churches or church plants with a total membership of 3,674 members at the end of 2013. The churches are scattered among fourteen states: Arkansas [1], California [14], Colorado [3], Iowa [1], Minnesota [3], Missouri [1], Nebraska [4], N. Dakota [4], Ohio [1], Pennsylvania [1], S. Dakota [14], Texas [1], Wisconsin [1], and Wyoming [2].

The churches are divided into four classes: Classis Covenant East [927 members], Classis North Prairies [498 members], Classis South Central [1,393 members], and Classis West [856 members].

About 50 ministers, 118 elders and 108 deacons serve the churches. Seven (7) ministerial students are under their care, attending various seminaries that have been approved and are supported by the church.

The RCUS supports foreign mission works in the Congo, Kenya, and the Philippines and also supports Reformed Faith & Life. In the USA, the RCUS supports mission works through its churches in Casper (WY), Omaha (NE), Eden Prairie (MN), Rogers (AR), Dickenson (ND), Los Angeles (CA) as well as a Hispanic outreach in Shafter, CA.

The RCUS holds an annual general synod with the most recent synod held from May 18 – 21, 2015 in Menno, SD and attended by about 47 ministers and 32 elders. The next synod (their 270th) is scheduled for May 16-19, 2016 in Bakersfield, CA.

Further Information about the RCUS may be obtained by visiting its website: www.rcus.org.

General Synod Neerlandia 2001 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) established Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the RCUS (*Acts General Synod Neerlandia 2001, Arti. 59*).

1. Mandate:

General Synod Carman 2013 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA concerning the RCUS (*Article 93*):

4.2.2. To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of EF with the RCUS under the adopted rules and to endeavour to meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern and edification, giving attention to the matters of Lord's Day observance and admission to the Lord's table.

The CCCNA, on behalf of the CanRC, continued the relationship of EF by adhering to the rules for EF adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992 (Article 50). The dialogue between the CanRC and RCUS took place via the annual meetings at NAPARC with their Inter-church Relations Committee (IRC) and by attending their annual general synods in 2014 and 2015. Dr. Maynard Koerner attended and addressed our General Synod Carman 2013 as a fraternal delegate. (see the address in the *Acts General Synod Carman 2013, Appendix 11* beginning on page

326) and our delegates made use of the invitations received to address their General Synods in 2014 and 2015.

2. Correspondence:

As per rule 2 of EF the IRC received the *Acts of General Synod Carman 2013*. Moreover, the IRC receives two subscriptions to *Clarion* and a third subscription is given to the editor of the *Reformed Herald*.

From the IRC the CCCNA receives invitations to every general synod and receives a copy of the Abstracts of these synods. These abstracts are also available through their website.

3. Annual Meetings with the IRC:

Since the report to General Synod Carman 2013 the CCCNA has met with the IRC at each of the annual NAPARC meetings in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

Matters discussed during the November 18, 2013 at NAPARC included:

3.1.1. Blue Bell, PA congregation (formerly of the CanRC): The RCUS reported on the labours of two RCUS pastors helping at Blue Bell, PA. The Blue Bell congregation had decreased in size to the extent that it would no longer function as a congregation. Its members have since joined a local RCUS congregation.

3.1.2 The RCUS requested a discussion about the CanRC position in regards to the place of children within the covenant to ensure a correct understanding in light of their interaction with the men at Blue Bell. The Heidelberg Catechism (LD 26, 27), the Canons of Dort (chapter 1, Article 17) and sections from page 340 of the Acts of General Synod 2013 related to the Federal Vision were mentioned in the discussion. Both churches hold to the same confessions so the result of the discussion was a common conclusion. A copy of the booklet, "*The Privilege of Parenting*" written by Rev. Clarence Bouwman explaining the CanRC Form of Baptism for Infants was provided to the RCUS delegates.

3.1.3 Developing Relationships between the RCUS and CanRC: The Redeemer CanRC in Winnipeg hosted a conference on Oct 18 & 19, 2013 on "Promoting a Biblical Sexual Morality" with Rev. S Powell being the conference speaker. Rev. Powell was the main author of a report on this subject accepted by the RCUS synod in 2012. (More information of this report can be found in the CCCNA report to CanRC General Synod Carman, 2013 and in the Abstract of the 266th synod of the RCUS.) Rev. Powell accepted the invitation to proclaim the Word for both services on October, 20, 2013 and to administer the sacrament of baptism during one of those services.

3.1.4 The *Clarion* reprinted an article originally printed in the *Reformed Herald*.

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3.2.2 The rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship were also discussed in light of the RCUS entering into an ecclesiastical fellowship with the United Covenant Reformed Church in the Philippines (UCRP). The rules of the CanRC state, "The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties" while the rules of the RCUS state, "Will inform one another regarding new relationships with third parties and membership in ecumenical organizations." Since each church body follows its own set of rules the words "consult" and "inform" may function differently for each body. According to our rules the RCUS should have consulted us prior to the decision, but according to their rules, the RCUS has only to inform us of new relationships. The RCUS did inform the CanRC Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) after it had made the decision to enter into EF with the UCRC in the Philippines and now informed this committee that it had received an initial contact from the Heritage Reformed Congregations. The RCUS has also established ecclesiastical relations with the Reformed Fellowship Church in Kenya. The CCCNA will forward this information to the CRCA.

4. Attendance at General Synods:

CCCNA delegates attended the annual general synods of the RCUS in 2014 and 2015.

4.1. 268th General Synod of the RCUS (Sutton, NE): Two delegates of the CCCNA attended this synod of the RCUS from its opening on May 19 to almost its closing on May 22, 2014. During that time the delegates had opportunity to meet with various synod members and to actively participate in several synod committees. A delegate was also invited to bring fraternal greetings from our churches. Comments received from a number of synod members indicated great appreciation for the timely input in some discussions and for the CanRC delegates' attendance for almost the whole of synod.

4.2 269th General Synod of the RCUS (Menno, SD): This synod met from May 18 – 21, 2015. For the fourth time Rev. J. Poppe and Br. H. van Delden were able to attend a RCUS synod. Having the same delegates attend synods has the benefit of developing deeper and personal relationships with many RCUS delegates. During the synod the delegates brought fraternal greetings and had the opportunity to fully and actively participate in the synod's inter-church relations committee. The RCUS synod expressed its appreciation for the diligence shown by the Canadian Reformed Churches in exercising their ecclesiastic fellowship responsibilities by attending synod and classis meetings, usually for the attendance for almost the whole of synod. The bond we have with the RCUS continues to grow.

Report 4. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

1. Introduction

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) was established in 1798 and currently consists of 6 presbyteries comprised of 88 congregations and 6,786 members. The denomination supports approximately 18 mission works within North America and is very active in at least six mission fields overseas. The RPCNA is a member both of the ICRC and NAPARC. It has formal “fraternal relations” (= our ecclesiastical fellowship) with a number of churches, including these sister churches of the CanRC: Free Church of Scotland (Synod of North America); Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Reformed Church in the United States and the United Reformed Churches in North America. Its Synod meets annually, the most recent one having been held from June 8-12, 2015. Further information about the RPCNA may be obtained by visiting its website: www.reformed-presbyterianchurch.org.

Much information and analysis has been presented to our churches over the years, which need not be repeated here. However, we urge the churches and delegates to Synod Dunnville to study these earlier reports in order to better understand the thrust of this present report and its recommendations. The first report giving a detailed overview of the RCPNA was received by Synod Smithers 2007 (*Report*, Vol.1, p.196-239; see the corresponding decision in the *Acts* of that synod, Art. 163). Synod Burlington 2010 received an investigative report on the Testimony, exclusive psalmody and women deacons (*Report*, Vol. 1, p.188-222; see the corresponding decision in the *Acts*, Art. 77) and a recommendation to offer ecclesiastical fellowship to the RPCNA. Synod Carman 2013 received a much briefer report (*Report*, Vol. 1, p.193-194; see the corresponding decision in the *Acts*, Art. 76). Presently, the CanRC is not in ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA but this report will recommend that General Synod Dunnville proceed to extend that offer.

Later in the appendices you will find the following relevant documents:

- Appendix 1 – CCCNA-West letter to IRC of the RPCNA (Jan 28, 2014)
- Appendix 2 – RPCNA letter of response (March, 2015)
- Appendix 3 – CCCNA-West follow-up letter (May, 2015)
- Appendix 4 – RPCNA follow-up letter of response (May 29, 2015)
- Appendix 5 – Is the Testimony a Reformed Confession? An Investigative Report

2. Mandate

General Synod Carman 2013 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA for its dealings with the RPCNA (*Acts*, p. 60):

4.1 *To respond to the letter from the RPCNA*

4.2 *To investigate and evaluate the way in which the RPCNA understands ordination, the nature and root of the office of deacon and the authority of such an office in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions;*

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4.3 To investigate further the nature and status of the Testimony;

4.4 To continue dialogue with the RPCNA at meetings of NAPARC.

3. Correspondence

As per mandate 4.1, in early 2014 CCCNA-West sent a detailed letter of response (Appendix 1) to the IRC of the RPCNA in which it also made specific inquiries of the RPCNA regarding the points mentioned in 4.2 of the mandate. In the spring of 2015, a letter of response was received from the IRC (Appendix 2). A follow-up exchange of letters occurred in order to seek additional clarification (Appendices 3 & 4). An evaluation of their overall understanding of the issues raised in mandate 4.2 is given below in section 5.

Meanwhile, CCCNA-West also continued to investigate further the nature and status of the Testimony (as per mandate 4.3) and prepared a detailed summary and evaluation of the Testimony (see further below and Appendix 5). In the summer of 2014, this summary and evaluation was sent to the IRC to ensure accuracy of understanding and to give opportunity for any comment, if desired. To date, no response to this document has been received. CCCNA has also received copies of the minutes of the annual RPCNA Synod for the years 2013 and 2014 with the minutes of 2015 being anticipated.

4. Meetings

Representatives of the CCCNA met with the IRC at NAPARC 2014 with the expectation of another meeting at NAPARC 2015. In the 2014 meeting, having earlier received our letter continuing the dialogue regarding women deacons, the RPCNA brothers elaborated orally on some points and promised to send a written response to our letter by March, 2015. The brothers indicated receipt of the investigative report on the Testimony but had not yet dealt with it internally. The atmosphere and interchange was brotherly, respectful and appreciated by all in attendance.

5. Evaluation of RPCNA position on Women Deacons

As per mandate 4.3, the CCCNA is called upon to evaluate how the RPCNA understands “*ordination, the nature and root of the office of deacon and the authority of such an office in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions.*” To assist our churches in arriving at a clear understanding of the entire matter, we draw from the recent correspondence (see Appendices) and official documents of the RPCNA to offer the following salient points:

1. *Different Concepts of Deacon* – It is critical to understand at the outset that the office of deacon in the RPCNA is *considered* differently and in fact *functions* differently than in the CanRC. When we as CanRC hear the RPCNA speak of deacons then our natural (default) understanding is to think they are speaking of the office of deacon as we know it in the CanRC. But this is incorrect. The two churches hold different ideas about the very office of deacon.

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as “teaching elders”) is conceived of as having ruling or governing authority with charge over the entire congregation, including the deacons. According to their letter of May 29, 2015 (Appendix 4), the text of 1 Timothy 2:12, which clearly forbids women to have authority over men within the church, is speaking directly to the office of elder and not to the office of deacon. Only once Paul finishes speaking of the office of elder does he then go on in 1 Timothy 3:8ff to speak of the office of deacon. The office of deacon is conceived of as a “serving” office, having no share in the ruling/governing of the church, with only a lesser “administrative” authority.

Once more, this is different from what we have within the CanRC. According to our confessions and church polity, the office of deacon is invested with a measure of governing or ruling authority. As CanRC we do not distinguish between “ruling/governing” authority and “administrative” authority. The concept of “office” within our churches inherently carries with it authority and our deacons exercise their particular authority (in accordance with their scriptural mandate to have charge of the ministry of mercy) over the whole congregation, men included. Because of that understanding and practice, and because 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women to have authority over men within the church, we as CanRC are clear that we may not ordain women to serve in the office of deacon.

- 5. *An Exegetical Position* – It is abundantly clear and quite important to see that the RPCNA’s position on women deacons rests on their exegesis of Scripture and not on external factors such as pressure from the surrounding culture or the ideology of feminism. The RPCNA sincerely wishes to guide itself by the Word of God and has honestly sought to understand and put into practice the office of deacon from out of the Scriptures.

As CanRC, we may be frank that we do not find their exegesis convincing. We believe Acts 6:1-4 shows the root and origin of the office and that 1 Timothy 3:11 speaks of the wives of deacons and not of women deacons. We also question the unproven assertion of their March, 2015 letter that the “clear teaching of the New Testament” is “that order in the visible body of Christ (the church) underwent progress in its development.” What is to prevent us from finding the office of deacon in the early days of the NT church as described in Acts 6 and to see there its direct link to the office of Apostle with its inherent authority over the church? Further, we do not find the context surrounding 1 Timothy 2:12 to be speaking in a limited way to the office of elder, nor are we convinced that v.12 itself distinguishes between one sort of authority and another (i.e. speaking only of “ruling” authority and not of “administrative” authority). However – and this is the point we wish to make here – whatever we as CanRC might think of the RPCNA understanding of women and the office of deacon, they are genuinely aiming to follow the Word of God in a Reformed manner.

- 6. *No “New” Hermeneutic* – There is no evidence of a liberal or “new” hermeneutic (i.e. method of interpreting Scripture) at work here by which

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as the Westminster Standards, asking that it, as yet, be thoroughly studied and evaluated for its Reformed character.

Consideration 3.4 states, “The nature and status of the Testimony within the RPCNA still needs to be clarified (see Acts of Synod Burlington 2010, Art.77, Consideration 3.6).”

It is important to also note that Consideration 3.6 of the Acts of Synod Burlington 2010, Art.77 states,

It would seem that some of the churches are mistaken in speaking of the *Testimony* as an “extra-confessional” document. In reality, this document has the status of a confession on par with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. More study would be necessary to determine whether this document is a faithful Reformed confession.

From this we conclude that our task with respect to our mandate from Synod Carman 2013 is twofold:

- 1) To investigate further the nature and status of the Testimony;
- 2) To determine whether the Testimony is a faithful Reformed Confession.

6.2 The nature and status of the Testimony

6.2.1 Background information

The CCCNA provided extensive material regarding the nature and status of the Testimony to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 (see Report to Synod 2010, pp.190-196). It may be helpful to repeat here some of the basic information about the Testimony:

The RPCNA, like many Presbyterian bodies, holds to the Westminster Standards of 1648. However, they also hold to a confessional document called *The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, a document unique to them. It originates in the early 19th century in the American context. After various modifications and augmentations over the years, General Synod 1980 declared the revised Testimony to be the law and order of the church.” (see *Report*, pp.190-191).

This is confirmed by the fact that the RPCNA includes in its Constitution the following standards as being subordinate to the Word of God: The [Westminster] Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Testimony, the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory of Public Worship (see *The Constitution of the RPCNA, 2010*, available at www.reformedpresbyterian.com).

The Constitution presents the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) and the Testimony (2010) in parallel columns. This helps to explain the purpose of the Testimony. The CCCNA reported to Synod 2010,

Purpose of the Testimony

The stated objective of the Testimony is to support and enhance the teaching of the Westminster Standards by enforcing them and applying them to the issues of the day. This is clear from the Introduction to the Testimony as follows: The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the historic creeds of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The

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In two cases – the duty of the civil magistrate (23:18 [cf. also 31:2]) and prohibition of marriage to a deceased wife's sister, etc. (24:21,22) - the Testimony rejects the position of the WCF. This would not close the door to confessional unity with other Reformed bodies that adhere to the WCF since other Presbyterian bodies have removed these sections from the WCF. To maintain historical integrity, we have not removed them, but have indicated our disagreement.

The CCCNA commented,

While to our ears it may sound strange that the RPCNA takes pains to distance itself from certain statements within its own official Confession, yet within the history of Presbyterian churches this is more often done with the WCF and also on these same matters. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has gone further than the RPCNA by actually making changes to the WCF to correct the same points regarding the magistrate (WCF 23:3 and 31:2) and consanguinity (WCF 24:4). More importantly, the actual changes made by the RPCNA to these doctrines through its Testimony are fully justified as they are in complete harmony with Scripture. Indeed, we would have a great deal of difficulty with any denomination that would uphold those points of the original Westminster Confession of Faith (*Report*, p.191-192).

6.2.2 Evaluation regarding the nature and status of the Testimony

1) The testimony is not an extra-confessional document

Synod Burlington 2010 summarized the concerns of 21 different churches with respect to the CCCNA report. Article 77 of the *Acts of Synod Burlington 2010* lists various concerns about the Testimony in its observations section. One concern was: "Churches should not be bound by extra-confessional documents" (Observation 2.9.14).

Synod dealt with this concern in its considerations. It noted, "It would seem that some of the churches are mistaken in speaking of the Testimony as an "extra-confessional" document. In reality this document has the status on par with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms..." (Consideration 3.6).

The CCCNA would agree with that perspective!

2) The Testimony is in fact one of the RPCNA's confessional standards

There has been some uncertainty as to whether the Testimony is merely an authoritative interpretive lens through which the Westminster Confession is read, or whether it is in fact one of the RPCNA's confessional standards. In their report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010, the CCCNA concluded the following about the status and function of the Testimony: "From this it is clear that the Testimony is a confessional document and is even the controlling

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Yet it is more than that. Synod Burlington 2010 recognized this in Article 77, Consideration 3.6. It concluded, "In reality, this document has the status of a confession on par with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms."

This is clear from the vows taken by those entering into communicant membership of the church. One of the questions they are asked at their profession of faith is: "Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America?...*" (RPCNA Constitution 2010, p.253). The fact that the Testimony is part of the Constitution of the RPCNA, and that those desiring to enter into communicant membership are asked to give their assent to it shows that it functions as one of the doctrinal standards of the RPCNA.

The same applies to those entering into the offices of the church. One of the queries for ordination, installation, and licensure is: "Do you believe in and accept the system of doctrine and the manner of worship set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures?" (RPCNA *Constitution 2010*, p.254). The fact that office-bearers and those desiring to speak an edifying word are required to agree that the Testimony is agreeable to and founded upon the Scripture shows that the Testimony is part of the RPCNA's doctrinal standards.

Thus, in conclusion we can report the following about the status and function of the Testimony. It is part of the Constitution of the RPCNA, one of the confessional documents of the church. Members subscribe to it through their profession of faith, and office-bearers believe in and accept the system of doctrine and manner of worship set forth in it as being agreeable to and founded upon the Scriptures. The Testimony has the status of a confession of the church.

6.2.3 Is the Testimony a faithful Reformed Confession?

Introduction

As noted above, the purpose of the Testimony is to provide clarifying comments on the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). For this reason, it is printed in the RPCNA's Constitution in parallel columns alongside the WCF. As committee, we have systematically investigated the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Testimony to determine whether the Testimony is a faithful Reformed Confession. In doing so we have provided a detailed summary of how the Testimony adds to, explains, and applies the WCF for the church today (see Appendix 5). At this point in our report we simply wish to highlight some of the major characteristics of the Testimony and then present the conclusion of our study.

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6.3 Concluding Evaluation

To determine whether the Testimony is a faithful Reformed Confession, we can note that most of the chapters of the Testimony provide an explanation of Scriptural doctrines in harmony with the revealed Word of God. There is disagreement on some issues where we are of the opinion that Scripture does not support their exegesis. We may, however, applaud their intent on some of those issues. The points on which we would disagree with the Testimony (with the exception of the office of deacon as dealt with elsewhere in this report) do not contradict any doctrine summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. As CanRC, we have agreed in Article 50 of the Church Order that “on minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.” As Committee, we are of the opinion that the issues of ecclesiastical practice on which we would express disagreement or reservation are, in fact, minor. Further, these disputed points of doctrine within the Testimony take nothing away from the marks of the true church which are clearly found in the RPCNA.

On the whole, we may conclude that although there may be disagreement the Testimony is a faithful Reformed Confession, our points of concern notwithstanding. For the purposes of entering into ecclesiastical fellowship, we suggest the way forward would be for our federation of churches to consider the Testimony a faithful confession while registering our conscientious objections/reservations to particular points as raised in this report.

7. Considerations

1. After significant preliminary study, the CCCNA first reported in detail to Synod 2007 that the RPCNA exhibits the marks of the true church. After further study into particular areas of concern highlighted by Synod 2007, the CCCNA was able to confirm in its report to Synod 2010 that the RPCNA indeed exhibits the marks of the true church.
2. Based on the presence of these marks, the CCCNA recommended to Synod 2010 that an offer of ecclesiastical fellowship be extended to the RPCNA. That recommendation was deemed premature by Synod 2010 as some particular matters of concern needed to be cleared away first. Following Synod 2013, only two issues of concern remained to be further examined: women deacons and the Testimony.
3. Having more thoroughly investigated the matter of women deacons, it is clear that the RPCNA concept and practice of the office of deacon is different than in the CanRC churches. This difference arises from a different exegesis of Scripture. They also work with a different church polity where deacons form no part of the ruling/governing body of the church. While the CanRC is not in agreement with the exegesis, yet as the RPCNA understands and practices the office of deacon and opens it to women, it is not in disobedience to Scriptural teaching. As such, it does not form an obstacle to ecclesiastical fellowship.

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

1. Introduction

The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is a fellowship of thirteen churches based on subscription and adherence to the Bible as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Its purpose is to facilitate discussion on common issues, to study matters of shared concern, to exercise the promotion of the Reformed faith, and to promote collaboration, where feasible, in works of mission, relief, etc. Any decisions of NAPARC are advisory only, and do not affect the autonomy of member churches. The CanRC has been a member of NAPARC since 2008. For further information see the website: www.naparc.org.

Later in the appendices you will find the following documents:

- Appendix 6 – CCCNA letter to Committee of Review re: Revised Constitution and Bylaws
- Appendix 7 – Committee of Review letter of response
- Appendix 8 – NAPARC’s Revised Constitution (2014)
- Appendix 9 – NAPARC’s Revised Bylaws (2013)

2. Mandate

Synod Carman 2013 (Article 77, p. 66) mandated the CCCNA with respect to NAPARC as follows:

4.2 To mandate the CCCNA to continue to represent the CanRC at NAPARC and to continue its active involvement in it.

4.3 To mandate the CCCNA to raise in discussion at NAPARC what may be perceived as a tension between Article 4 of the NAPARC constitution on “The Nature and Extent of Authority,” and the last sentence of 5.2 on “Membership,” namely, “Those churches shall be eligible for membership...[which] maintain the marks of the true church (pure preaching of the gospel, the Scriptural administration of the sacraments, the faithful exercise of discipline.”

Mandate 4.2 is reported on below under Section 3 while mandate 4.3 is reported on under Section 4.1 (see also Appendices 6&7).

3. Annual Meetings of NAPARC

Regarding mandate 4.2, the committee participated in the NAPARC meetings held each November in 2013, 2014 and hopes to do so again, DV, in 2015. Four delegates (two from sub-committee East and two from sub-committee West) were sent to each meeting. The main agenda items included reports of each member church on its synod or general assembly, significant decisions, concerns of a theological or practical nature, mission works and the like. Discussion and prayer followed each church’s report. On a designated evening, a “key-note” address was provided by an invited speaker, which was followed by discussion. One new church has applied

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4. New Constitution and Bylaws

In 2009, NAPARC established a Committee of Review (CoR) to review its Constitution and Bylaws. Dr. Riemer Faber of the CanRC served on this committee. At NAPARC 2012, the CoR presented its final report wherein certain changes to both the Constitution and Bylaws were proposed. Each member church was then requested to review the proposal and provide input to the CoR in anticipation of voting on the proposal at NAPARC 2013. The CCCNA reviewed the proposal, providing input and suggesting some changes (see Appendix 6). Many of the proposed revisions to the Constitution and Bylaws were cosmetic, consisting of word changes and sentence structure. The net effect was an improvement in clarity but also in the intentionality of NAPARC to put into practice the tenets of its own Constitution. Some highlights of the more significant changes are provided in what follows.

4.1 Revised Constitution

Regarding the revised Constitution, the CoR summarized its proposed changes as follows:

1. a more logical division of the original two articles, “Basis” and “Purpose and Function,” into three (the second sentence of the original Basis article being more in the nature of a purpose statement);
2. the addition of a function explicitly to encourage the Member Churches to pursue closer ecclesiastical relations;
3. the addition of a function to operate a website;
4. the addition of activities for young people to the list of areas in which cooperation is promoted;
5. the fleshing out of the nature and extent of NAPARC’s authority;
6. the fleshing out of the membership application process, with the addition of a requirement of being sponsored by at least two Member Churches.

As Canadian Reformed Churches, the 5th point has been a concern raised at recent synods. In response to Synod Carman’s mandate 4.3 (see above), the CCCNA addressed this matter directly to the CoR and received a very illuminating and helpful response (see Appendices 6 and 7). The CoR made it abundantly clear that the Constitution seeks to limit the authority of NAPARC with respect to member churches to making decisions regarding entry into NAPARC itself, and nothing beyond that. Member churches remain free in their own affairs, also in determining whether other churches (even NAPARC member churches) are indeed true churches. Their letter explains the crucial point as follows:

With regard to your particular inquiry, perhaps a way forward is to say that, while a decision of the Council regarding whether a particular federation “profess[es] and maintain[s] the basis for fellowship (*Constitution II*)” and “maintain[s] the marks of the true church” (*Constitution VI.2*) is determinative *solely* for the purpose of adjudicating whether a particular federation is eligible for the status of membership in the Council, it cannot bind the

6. Report on Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA)

1. Introduction

The Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA (Kosin)) is a daughter church of the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) with whom the Canadian Reformed Churches have had ecclesiastical fellowship since 1992. To this day, there remains a very tight bond between the mother and daughter church. The Kosin Korean immigrant community in the United States started the KPCA (Kosin) in 1984.

Beginning with less than 10 pastors, the KPCA (Kosin) has grown to include 135 churches with 185 ordained pastors, 126 ruling elders and approximately 10,300 members in 8 presbyteries. They have 6 chaplains and have sent 24 missionaries to 13 countries.³ Their General Assembly meets annually in the fall, with the next one planned for October 27-30, 2015 in Seattle, WA. The KPCA (Kosin) was admitted to membership in NAPARC in 2013 also with the support of the Canadian Reformed Churches via Synod Carman 2013 (see *Acts of Synod Carman*, p.68). At present, the only fraternal relationship they have is with their mother church in Korea. To our knowledge, they have no English website for their denomination.

Contact between the CanRC and the KPCA (Kosin) was attempted by the CCCA (under synod mandate) in the early 2000s but, due largely to the language barrier, bore little fruit and formal attempts were discontinued by Synod Smithers 2007 (see Art. 152). After that time, some informal acquaintance with the KPCA (Kosin) began to emerge at NAPARC meetings as mentioned by the CCCNA in its report to Synod Burlington 2010 (see *Report*, Vol. 1, p.226). When the KPCA (Kosin) took the initiative to join NAPARC, the CCCNA reported in considerably more detail on this church in its *Supplementary Report to Synod Carman 2013* (see the corresponding decision in the *Acts of Synod Carman*, Art. 78). This supplementary report is printed as Appendix 15 of the *Acts of Synod Carman*. All *Acts* and *Reports* can be found in electronic form at www.canrc.org (under the tab, "Assemblies").

Later in the appendices you will find the following documents:

- Appendix 10 – A Brief History of the KPCA
- Appendix 11 - Report on Visit to the 30th General Assembly of KPCA (Kosin)
- Appendix 12 – Report on Meeting with the IRC of the KPCA (Kosin) at NAPARC 2014

2. Mandate

Part of the CCCNA's general mandate is, "To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in North America;" and, "to report on its findings with suitable recommendations to the next general synod..." (*Acts of Synod Carman*, Art. 55, 4.1.3 and 4.1.4). In late August 2014, Rev. Holtvlüwer received a written request directly from a representative of the KPCA (Kosin) to attend their upcoming 30th General Assembly in Chicago, IL. He was invited in his (then) dual capacity as chairman of NAPARC as well as a representative of the Canadian Reformed Churches. This marked the first

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time such a formal invitation from this church was received by the CanRC. It was found feasible to attend and his report is found in Appendix 11.

3. Interaction

After the contact made at their 30th General Assembly, a meeting of representatives of their IRC and our CCCNA was held at NAPARC 2014 (see report in Appendix 12). This meeting was helpful to become acquainted with each other's respective churches. A history of each was presented, some questions were exchanged and, over-all, a positive, upbuilding meeting was held. It was agreed to hold another such meeting at NAPARC 2015, the Lord willing.

4. Considerations

1. The KPCA (Kosin) is the daughter church of the Kosin PCK, a church with which the CanRC already has ecclesiastical fellowship. The daughter church has the very same confessional basis as the mother church. Given that this daughter church exists much closer to the CanRC in North America (including some parts of Canada), it makes sense to develop a relationship with the KPCA (Kosin).
2. As has been noted in past and current reports (see Appendices 11-13), the dominant language of the KPCA (Kosin) remains Korean at this time. Official assemblies and worship services are held entirely in Korean. Younger leaders and members are transitioning to English on a personal level but this is not expected to occur broadly on a denominational level in the near term. The language barrier is an impediment to meaningful ties and practical interaction with one another on both the federational and local levels and suggests the wisdom of taking a long-term approach toward formal ecclesiastical fellowship.
3. Although the KPCA (Kosin) is confessionally Reformed and leaders express the desire it remain so and even deepen its Reformed character, certain practices observed within the KPCA (Kosin) suggest a strong undercurrent of non-Reformed influences (see Appendix 11). This too is reason for caution in how and at what rate we develop a relationship as federations. It would be good to learn more about these influences and find ways to assist the Kosin churches in their desire to remain Reformed in the North American context.

5. Recommendations

The Committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To express gratitude to the Lord for the establishment of contact with the KPCA (Kosin),
2. To mandate the CCCNA to continue dialogue with the KPCA (Kosin) where feasible, with a view to getting to know the KPCA (Kosin) better over time.

Appendices

- RPCNA – Appendices 1-5
- NAPARC – Appendices 6-9
- KPCA – Appendices 10-12

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For instance, in Belgic Confession Article 30 concerning the government of the church we confess,

There should be ministers of pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; there should also be elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church... By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are chosen in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy.⁴ [*emphasis added*]

This confessional position is reflected in our Church Order. While on the one hand the elders and ministers are said to form the “consistory” of the church as the main governing body (Article 38)⁵, on the other hand the “consistory with the deacons” clearly make numerous decisions together in various church government matters. A few examples where the deacons are required to be involved are: the calling to office and election of office bearers (Art. 3), the honourable discharge of a minister (Art. 5, 9), dismissal of a minister (Art. 10), and even suspension and deposition of office bearers (Arts. 26, 71, 72). In practice, the deacons are often involved in many other practical matters of church government (such as financial matters and decisions about church assets). In our churches, the office of deacon is clearly understood as one of authority which shares to an extent in the general government of the church.

For this reason too, the office of deacon has been restricted to male communicant members in our federation of churches. We state this clearly in Article 3 of our Church Order.

Only male members who have made profession of faith and may be considered to meet the conditions as set forth in Holy Scripture (e.g. in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1) shall be eligible for office.

Our Historical Struggle

Before going on to discuss the RPCNA position, we desire to be open and transparent about our own historical struggle with this issue. We wish to relate this as much for our benefit as for yours, so that through this process we as Canadian Reformed Churches may come to rightly understand this matter and determine how best to approach it. Though it may not be as pronounced or well-known as other struggles in our past, the fact is that churches and assemblies early in our Dutch Reformed history did discuss and even in certain cases implemented the ordination of women to the office of deacon. In doing so, they took their point of departure in the writings of our common father in the faith, John Calvin.

Calvin on the Two Kinds of Deacons... and Women

We fully admit that Calvin saw the office of deacon in a way different from how we see it today. He spoke of two kinds of deacons and openly taught that in New Testament times certain women (older widows) were appointed to one of those offices of deacon which he describes as a “public office... to devote themselves to the care of the poor.” Calvin’s line of thinking is made clear in the larger context of this quotation:

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The Root of the Office of Deacon

Our Synod Carman charged us to inquire specifically about how the RPCNA views “the root of the office of deacon and the authority of such an office in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions.” May we ask: how does the RPCNA view the origin of the office of deacon? Where in Scripture would you find its root and beginnings? And what do those origins teach us about the office of deacon? This seems to be missing in the documentation provided.

It is common among the Continental Reformed to refer to Acts 6:1-6 as the root or origin of the office of deacon. While the noun δῆακον (deacon) is not found there, the verbal form of it is found in v.2. Many Reformers, including Calvin, believed this passage describes the beginning of the office of deacon. Acts 6:1-4 is footnoted in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession. Acts 6 is also referenced in our Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons:

For the sake of this service of love, Christ has given deacons to His church (Phil 1:1). When the apostles realized that they would have to give up preaching the Word of God if they had to devote their full attention to the daily support of the needy, they assigned this duty to seven brothers chosen by the congregation (Acts 6:1-7). It is therefore the responsibility of the deacons to see to the good progress of this service of charity in the church. They shall acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties, and exhort the members of Christ’s body to show mercy. They shall gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ’s Name, according to need. They are called to encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ’s love. They shall promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord.²²

We note that concentration on, and an explanation of, this passage appears to be missing from your appended exegetical work. Christian Adjemian mentions Acts 6 four times in passing but does not expound it. The Adopted Report of Synod 2001 briefly mentions it also in passing. Even the essay by Jeff Stivason touches on it briefly and only then to describe it as a text of uncertain contribution to the discussion of the office of deacon more generally:

There is some question as to whether Acts 6 is the appointment of deacons or elders over the Hellenistic Jews. Significantly, there is no mention of the word “deacon” in the text. Moreover, Acts 6 is a very early time in the formation of the NT church which makes it unlikely that there would be a firm and fast system of government already in place.²³

We would ask: if Acts 6 does not describe the origin of the office of deacon, then from where do we know what the nature and purpose of this office is? What (if anything) does this text reveal about this office? Where else does Scripture make known that the office of deacon is a ministry of mercy to

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the poor and needy? 1 Timothy 3 certainly describes the *qualifications* for those eligible to serve in the office of deacon but it says nothing about what deacons are to *do* in that office. Our conclusion is that Acts 6:1-6 plays a primary role in understanding the origin, nature and purpose of the office of deacon.

Apostles and the Diaconate

If you would agree that Acts 6 does describe the origin of the office of the deacon, we would ask you to think further with us about the implications of this with respect to female deacons, ordination and authority. With respect to the question of female deacons, we are struck by the fact that though the need in Acts 6 clearly involves the care of *widows*, a task seemingly best-suited for women, yet the congregation chose and the Apostles set into office not seven *women* but seven *men*. If it was the Lord's will to include sisters to serve in this office, why would the Apostles have hesitated to do so at this juncture?

Christian Adjemian indicates that the situation in Acts 6 was ripe for female involvement when he writes:

It is very reasonable to see that the "women" mentioned among the deacons in 1Tim 3:11, were women who shared in the ministry of mercy with their male colleagues. There can be little doubt that the men elected in Jerusalem (Acts 6) would have been aided by women for their ministry to the old widows in Jerusalem. Jewish social structure would have required it. By Timothy's day, apostolic directions are given to the diaspora church concerning the qualifications of these women, the qualifications of the men, and even the qualifications of the widows who are to receive aid. The widows were dependent; the women deacons help the church to minister to these dependent older sisters. Paul's instructions show how the Lord is preparing his Church for her post-apostolic mission in the world.²⁴

Dr. Adjemian postulates that there was a development in the matter of deacons (male at first, later female too) from Acts 6 to "Timothy's day" but does not appear to prove that such a development took place. Nor does he offer an explanation as to why the Twelve Apostles did not appoint sisters to the office of deacon (or, if you prefer, it's prototype) in Acts 6 when such would seem to have been opportune, but a few decades later the Apostle Paul apparently had no such hesitation in writing to Timothy.

If we understand the Bible correctly in Acts 6, that would mean that the office of deacon has its roots in the office of Apostle. The work that the seven were appointed to do was work formerly done by the Twelve Apostles. They only gave up this work because it was taking them away from their other (and more primary) task of "the ministry of the Word of God" (Acts 6:2). It is acknowledged by all Reformed and Presbyterian confessors that the office of elder, both the ruling elder and the teaching elder, derives from that of the Apostle. The elder is one of the permanent offices that carry on the primary Apostolic function of the ministry of the Word of God alongside

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Appendix 2 – RPCNA Letter of Response re: Women Deacons

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
Interchurch Committee
c/o Bruce Parnell, committee chairman

March 2015

Canadian Reformed Churches
Committee for Contact with North America – Subcommittee West
c/o Henry van Delden (corresponding clerk)

Dear Brothers,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It was good to have a conversation with you during the meeting of NAPARC Interchurch Committees in Grimsby, ON this past November. We are encouraged by our common commitment to the reformation principles of salvation and church polity; notwithstanding the distinction between the federation of churches maintained by Dutch Reformed folk and the confessional bonds of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian folk. It is with respect to the grace filled questions and pursuant conversation concerning women in the office of deacon that we offer this study with the prayer that God will be honored by it as we proceed into formal ecclesiastical fellowship.

Questions You Raised

Your committee’s letter of response dated January 28, 2014 asks two questions primarily. First, you asked: *Would you be able to enlighten us on the historical origin of female deacons within the RPCNA?* This question essentially comes from your Synod Carman’s charge *“to inquire specifically about how the RPCNA views ‘the root of the office of deacon and the authority of such an office in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions’.*”

Second, you asked, with respect to a statement in the Adopted Report of Synod 2001 which cites 1 Timothy 3:11 as the “clearest and most decisive text for the question of women deacons”: *Is this not over-stated?*

Origin of Deacons

You recognized that the RPCNA does not agree with Calvin’s understanding of 1 Timothy 5:9-10 “that Paul was referring to a special order of widows who would function as a second office of deacons.”²⁶ Furthermore, you are correct in noting that we do not describe categorically that the origin of the office of deacon is primarily to be found in Acts 6. Perhaps Dr. Spear’s recently published, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion*, sheds some light on this matter. The section on *Deacons* in the chapter, “The Church and Its Officers,” indicates there was debate as to just how Acts 6 informs the reader concerning deacons. There were two minority points of view expressed in the Westminster Assembly. Some understood “while Acts 6 spoke of church officers called deacons . . . the situation at the time was extraordinary, and deacons were not ordinary officers of the church.”²⁸

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The second minority view maintained “the seven men. . . did not serve as officers . . . but were essentially assistants to the apostles.”²⁹ Due to the debate over the minority’s points, a committee formulated two statements reported on December 19, 1643:

1. The office of a deacon is perpetual in the church. I Tim. iii. 8, Rom. xii. 8. 2. It hath been debated in the committee whether it pertain to the office of deacon to assist the minister in preaching of the word, and administration of the sacraments; but it was not determined upon, but referred to the judgment of the Assembly.³⁰

Because in the years the Westminster Assembly met, it was the responsibility of the civil magistrate to care for the poor, some delegates viewed the diaconal work mentioned in Acts 6 as only temporary until the magistrate took seriously their responsibility for the poor. This position was rejected, perhaps because of the Scottish delegate, George Gillespie, who is recorded as arguing, “The magistrates lookes to them [the poor] not as the distressed members of Christ. Human charity and christian charity [are] very different.”³¹ Therefore, Acts 6:1-4 was added to the list of verses offered as biblical warrant for the permanence of the deacon’s office.

That the essential work of the deacon was debated indicates the presence of Anglican delegates who understood the office of deacon as a stepping stone to the priesthood. Gillespie, borrowing from Peter Lombard, maintained in a passing remark in his *Assertion*, “that there are two sacred offices that are perpetual in the church, deacons and elders. He contrasted the two orders: ‘the administration of deacons is exercised about things bodily; the administration of elders about things spiritual. The former about goods; the latter about the government of the church’.”³² Gillespie’s *two office* position is the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA).³³ Here is the statement adopted by the Westminster Divines:

The scripture doth hold out deacons as distinct officers in the church. Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8. Whose office is perpetual. Acts 6:1-4 To whose office it belongs not to preach the word, or administer the sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor.³⁴

You already noted in your most recent communication to us that the Assembly voted by one in favor of having women deacons. Of course, it is unclear exactly what that vote meant, nevertheless, it demonstrates the lack of clarity with respect to just what the Bible teaches on the matter of women serving as deacons. Spear’s discussion of this indicates the vote concerned the question of the special office of deaconess as developed by Calvin.³⁵

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America adopted the position of the Westminster Assembly as set forth in the *Form of Church Government* concerning deacons; i.e. the office is perpetual, given to mercy matters, and for men only. It was not until 1887 that a congregation within the RPCNA called a woman to serve as a deacon alongside men.³⁶ The author of the first article written given to the discussion of the congregation’s

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to time, as they were found necessary to the comfort and edification of her members."⁴⁴ Clearly the commission of the apostles and the requisite gifts were all provided, but only as they were required. The word was preached to the world, both Jews and Gentiles, and congregations were organized with elders (teaching and ruling) and deacons were added to oversee the temporal affairs of the house of God. The yoke of the ceremonial law was removed in due time. "The apostles seem to have followed the guidance of providence, as well as of the Spirit, in giving the church a full organization."⁴⁵ This was true of the Old Testament laws and provisions as well. One example is the synagogue which developed because it became more and more difficult "to wait on the temple service . . . yet it was sanctioned by priests, prophets, and by our Lord himself."⁴⁶ Apparently synagogues had deacons who "had charge of the property, opened the doors and conducted strangers to seats, and attended generally to the comfort of the assembly, as well as being almoners and managers of the funds. And the sexes sat apart, separated by a partition of some height, female officers were required for one side of the house, to attend to the comfort of the worshippers and preserve order."⁴⁷ It may be in light of this strict separation of the sexes that led Paul to admonish the women to keep silent in church and ask questions outside of the worship service. As for the committee's understanding of Acts 6:1-4, we read

Nor is the supposition by some of our best writers at all unreasonable, that even before the choice of the seven (Acts 6), one side of the great multitude of believers then in Jerusalem (the Hebrew), had, after the example of the synagogue, parties already acting as deacons in taking care of their poor; while the Hellenists, being comparative strangers, had none, and therefore their poor were neglected. And favoring this idea is the fact that all the seven have been taken from the party that had complained. And this, putting them on equal footing with the Hebrews, perfect harmony was restored. The church as yet, however, was in a very inchoate state, and we cannot, at that early period, expect to find about her institutions all the completeness afterwards sustained. Certain it is, however, that the deacon's office came ultimately to be recognized as a divine and permanent institution in all the churches, and therefore, Paul addresses the church at Philippi as consisting of saints, bishops and deacons.⁴⁸

The second point which must be kept in mind: "That the offices in the New Testament church *are indicated both by official names given to the office-bearers, and also by terms descriptive of their work.*"⁴⁹ New Testament words are used in two senses – the ordinary and the appropriated.

"The terms overseer or bishop, elder, pastor and deacon, are now mostly used as official names for office-bearers in the church; and in which sense, primary or appropriated, any one of these terms is employed in the original of the New Testament, can only be determined by a careful study of the context. In its primary and ordinary signification the term rendered deacon simply means one who renders a service to another, and both it, and verb formed from it, are often used in this sense. But in time it has

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come to be chiefly used as a designation of a church office-bearer, and though as a substantive it is not used of the *seven* (Acts 6), yet as a verb it is employed to express the nature of their work, 'to serve tables' (*diakonein trapezais*).⁵⁰ We find this to be the case when we come across the word pastor, elder or deacon in an epistle, though no one is named specifically, we understand such persons exist in the congregations addressed. Hebrews 13:17 is such an example. Romans 12:6-8 presents us with "the several office-bearers in the church are wholly designated by their work . . . Among these, 'ministry' (*diakonia*), the deacon's work and office, is in its operations doubly described as 'giving with liberality,' and 'showing mercy with cheerfulness.' Therefore, when either the term deacon is used *in connection with the church and her work*, or when the work *proper to the deacon's office* is clearly referred to, it is reasonably certain that a church officer is intended."⁵¹

The third point: "That how far any ordinance or institution is to be enjoyed or exercised by members of the church, *can only be learned by subsequent facts, not from the account of its first institution.*"⁵² It is understood that all members in the church enjoy all the rights and privileges unless otherwise excluded. For instance, women were not circumcised in the Old Testament, therefore, one would expect that women would be excluded from baptism. Throughout the ministry of John and Jesus there is no record of a woman being baptized, one is therefore tempted to think women are not to be baptized. At Jesus' ascension, with the call "to repent and be baptized," no women are recorded as being baptized. It is not until twenty years later that we have the case of the baptism of Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15). When Paul institutes the Lord's Supper he enjoins, "Let a man examine himself . . ." which could be interpreted as prohibiting women from the Table. From Acts 1:14, "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers," we infer that women were included in Acts 2:42, "And they [men and women] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayer." Therefore, women surely enjoyed the Lord's Supper. Further, we understand there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

The small committee demonstrates how these principles apply to the issue of women deacons. Acts 6 shows that the seven deacons were all males, nevertheless this "does not necessarily exclude females from the office, inasmuch as the institutions of the New Testament were, to some extent, adapted to circumstances as they arose."⁵³ When this is coupled with the second principle, i.e. "if we find both the name and the work, and the qualifications proper to the deacon's office predicated of women, and *that clearly in church relations*, they must be admissible to that office."⁵⁴ Finally, because "the privilege of holding and exercising the deacon's office, *not being in the case of women one of the things excepted*, their right thereto is as plain, and even plainer, than to many other things which we freely accord them."⁵⁵

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Keeping these points/principles in mind we consider Romans 16:1-3 with respect to Phoebe. Clearly she is a member of the church at Cenchrea and she is preparing to visit Rome. Paul commends Phoebe “to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7) “a servant (δῆακονοβ = deacon/servant) of the church at Cenchrea” (Rom. 16:1). She is not a deaconess because the word in the Greek is the common gender, it does not distinguish gender. The word “deacon” as used in this verse may apply to either men or women. “Now, we hold, that the word deacon is here used of Phoebe, not in its primary or ordinary sense, but in its appropriated sense of a church officer, because *she is spoken of in church relation*. Had it been ‘a servant of God,’ or ‘a servant of the Lord,’ it would have proved nothing as to her holding office, because these expressions are applicable to all who are of the household of faith. But we are not aware that ‘*servant of the church,*’ or any similar expression, is ever used of persons except in official positions.”⁵⁶ This certainly is the case with prophets and teachers at Antioch, and with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers in Ephesus. Moses was a servant in his house, no doubt referring to his official position in Israel, the Old Testament expression of the church.

Paul assures Timothy that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, therefore, for Phoebe to be a deacon of the church of Cenchrea, it follows she was an office-bearer, i.e. the office of deacon. Paul writes of Phoebe, “she has been a patron of many and of me also” (Rom. 16:2). The term translated “patron” (προστάτις) is used of those who go before or over others in any work. “Its (προστάτις) force can be seen in the fact that it is twice used by Paul in describing the qualifications of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:3-4), as ‘one that *ruleth* well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity,’ as every father and head of family should.”⁵⁷ It was not uncommon for Paul to send “messengers of the church” (2 Cor. 8:16-24) to raise money or distribute money. In commending Phoebe as a deacon in a sister church, Paul is not simply speaking of any “servant” of the Lord or himself; she is an official deacon of the church.

Next our attention is turned toward a passage where the qualifications are found for women deacons. Paul writes to Timothy instructions as to how to behave in the house of God:

Paul first instructs him as to how bishops should be qualified, then, in five particulars, the necessary qualifications which deacons should possess, (1 Tim. 3:-10,) and then (v.11) adds, as in the authorized version, “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” This would, at first sight, appear as an additional qualification which the deacon should possess, but though usually interpreted, there are no grounds for understanding the passage in that sense, because, first, the character of a man’s wife is never given as a qualification for his holding office in the New Testament church. If it had been so, it would be of special importance in the case of a bishop, and yet in his case nothing of the kind is ever hinted.⁵⁸

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Secondly, it is pointed out that the word “their” is not in the Greek text, which means the word translated “wives” (γυναίκας) is more commonly translated “women” because it ought not to be understood as related to the male deacons whose qualifications are also given. Thirdly, grammatically the whole passage forbids the idea of “wives”. Bishops, deacons and women are linked together by the use of ὡσαύτως “likewise” in verses eight and eleven of First Timothy chapter three.

As Alford remarks, “γυναίκας here, marked off by *hosautos*, must be an ecclesiastical class, and can hardly be other than deaconesses, *ministrae*, as Pliny calls them in his letter to Trajan, such as Phoebe was at Cenchræa.”⁵⁹

Another reason why γυναίκας is not “wives” is seen in the fact that domestic duties are not listed as qualifications in verse 11 for females, as they are in verse 12 for males – the husband of one wife and managing their children and household well. Furthermore, in verses 8-10 qualifications for deacons are cited, then in verse 11 qualifications for females are cited and in verse 12 for males who are married are cited. It is worth noting that the four qualifications listed for females – *dignified, not slanderers, sober-minded, faithful in all things* – parallel those listed in verses 8-10 – *dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, hold fast the mystery of the faith*.

It only follows that such women who are qualified to be called as deacons in the church of God, they would be ordained just as those men who are qualified to be called as deacons in the church of God. Once a person, male or female, is duly elected and found qualified to the office of deacon in the church, their ordination merely sets those persons apart and officially declares them an office-bearer in the church. “To a deacon elect, duly qualified and approved, belongs the right of ordination. But a woman may be a deacon elect, duly qualified and approved. Therefore, to a woman duly elected to deacon’s office, and qualified and approved, belongs the right of ordination.”⁶⁰

While there may be many practical advantages which may be cited for having women deacons, pragmatics is not the basis of the argument, it is a derivative of the propriety of having female deacons. Hence, the sum of the argument is stated in the following quote:

The principle is plain. To a woman belong all corporate rights in the church *unless specifically excepted*, as is the case as regards the ministry and eldership, whilst it cannot be shown that the deaconship is excepted but the contrary is established. In fact her rights here are fuller and plainer than her right to the Lorde’s table.⁶¹

1 Timothy 3:8-12 the “clearest and most decisive text for the question of women deacons”: *Is this not over-stated?*

You muse at the statement offered that 1 Timothy 3:8-12 is “the clearest and most decisive text for the question of women deacons,” therefore we must answer that query “Is this not over-stated?” which you raise. Presumably, the fact that Acts 6:1-4 calls attention only to “seven men, full of the

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Appendix 3 – Follow-up Letter to the RPCNA re: Women Deacons

Canadian Reformed Churches
Committee for Contact with North America – Subcommittee West
c/o Henry van Delden (corresponding clerk)

May 9, 2015

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
Interchurch Relations Committee
c/o Bruce Parnell, committee chairman

Dear Brothers,

Our subcommittee is beginning to work through your Interchurch Relations Committee’s response (dated March, 2015) to our letter (dated January 28, 2014) so that we can “evaluate the way in which the RPCNA understands ordination, the root of the office of deacon and the authority of such an office in light of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions”. It will take our committee some time to work through your reply so we are grateful that you did not request a timeline to reply.

We have noticed, with gratitude, that your letter addressed two of our main questions. At the same time we observe that one other main topic about which we posed some questions went unanswered, namely the subject of the authority of the office of deacon (see our original letter, p.7,8). We realize that we put a tight timeline on our request for a reply but our only reason for doing so was because our synod only meets every three years. Because this topic was specifically mentioned in our synod-given mandate we would appreciate a reply, as yet, to these questions if at all possible. If it is not possible, would you send us a brief note to indicate this?

Our committee will make an evaluation on the response received to date, and possibly forthcoming, and prepare a report for our upcoming General Synod next spring. We appreciate this dialogue with the goal that there be ecclesiastical fellowship between the RPCNA and the CanRef federation of churches. At this time we also wish your upcoming General Synod much wisdom as it serves our Lord and His Church.

With brotherly regards
Henry van Delden, corresponding clerk

Appendix 4 – RPCNA Response to Follow-up Letter

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[Received May 29, 2015]

Dear Brothers in the Canadian Reformed Churches,

You ask in your letter of May 9, 2015 about your earlier question regarding 1 Timothy 2:12. (March 2014 p. 7-8) We recognize that you are preparing for your Synod meeting so offer this brief response in clarification.

While our response didn't single out 1 Timothy 2:12, it does address the passage on the bottom of page 8.

It is in the qualifications for the eldership that we find the outworking of Paul's words in 2:12 prohibiting women (not wives) from exercising authority over men or teaching in the church. Paul then turns to the qualifications for deacons (servers).

By way of clarification and in answer to your second question ("...does Paul speak only here of a ruling or teaching authority? If so, how is that indicated?") - In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul links "authority" and "teaching" in the church as a male only responsibility. It is the office of elder which bears the weight of "authority" and "teaching" and carries the qualifications of "male only". The office of deacon is the office of "service". In an earlier communication/paper, we sought to show the deaconate is not an office of "authority" as the office of elder is. When one "serves" one generally is not exercising "authority" as an elder would. Certainly when a deacon directs a congregant to the Word of God in order to help with a material matter when giving a "cup of cold water" (showing mercy), the Word of God is the "authority". If the congregant does not heed the direction offered by the deacon, it is the elder who enters the situation with "authority" and "teaching".

The provides the basis, then, to answer to your first question, "Instead, the RPCNA is clear that women may exercise a certain form of authority over men in the church, namely administrative authority. Have we understood this correctly and, if so, is there a way to clear up this inconsistency?" – Yes. Women may exercise administrative/serving authority. See the paragraph above regarding 1 Timothy 2:12 referring to the teaching/ruling authority.

We hope this serves to further our dialogue and mutual edification.

In Christ,

Bruce Parnell, ch.
Interchurch Committee

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Appendix 5 – Is the Testimony a Reformed Confession? An Investigative Report

Note: In this following report, CCCNA-West has systematically worked through the WCF and the Testimony. We provide some notes on how the Testimony adds to, explains, and applies the WCF for the church today. Our goal is to determine whether the Testimony is a faithful Reformed Confession.

Introduction (of the Testimony)

While the WCF begins by dealing with Scripture, the Testimony adds an extensive introduction to the document. It is focused on the covenant. The RPCNA is very much a covenantal church. The introduction to the Testimony states, “The covenant concept lies at the heart of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.” (Testimony, *Introduction*, 1). The introduction goes on to explain how the covenant relation began with Adam, how he broke the covenant, and how “the remainder of Scripture is the gradual unfolding of the Covenant of Grace through a series of covenants...” (Testimony, *Introduction*, 4). It explains how Christ came to serve as Mediator of the covenant, and how all men are called to repentance and obedience.

In the *Introduction*, section 9, the Testimony states:

The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the historic creeds of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America believes that this Confession is based on, and subordinate to, Scripture. The truth it presents is of inestimable value for contemporary society.”

Section 10 describes the relationship between the WCF and the Testimony:

However, changes in the application of truth are needed because of changing situations in each generation. Some current topics of vital importance for the Christian Church were unknown in the 17th century. Therefore, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America presents its Testimony applying Scripture truth to the contemporary situation. This Testimony is placed in a column parallel to that which contains the Confession.

Section 12 explains the authority of the RPCNA’s confessions:

All of these documents, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, are of equal authority in the church; except that where noted, earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones.

This point is noteworthy. There are points where the Testimony disagrees with the WCF. In such cases, the Testimony, being written later, should be used to interpret the WCF.

Conclusion: The *Introduction* to the Testimony is useful as it shows that the RPCNA has a covenantal view on Scripture. It also helps to explain that the confessions are subordinate to Scripture, and that earlier confessions are to be interpreted by later ones. All that is presented here is faithful to Scripture.

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The sin against the Holy Spirit which will not be forgiven, commonly called the unpardonable sin, is the final— secret or open—rejection of His testimony concerning Jesus Christ. It is a sin unto death, because it is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and because, by its very nature, it is the willful and persistent rejection of the only hope of forgiveness through the Savior. On the other hand, the fear of having committed this sin, together with an earnest desire for fellowship with God in Christ, give evidence that this sin has not been committed (chp.2.11).

The Testimony states, “We reject the teaching that particular charismatic gifts such as those of tongues and of healing are normal or necessary signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit” (chp.2.15).

Conclusion: The Testimony provides a sound explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity and further elucidates the person and work of the Holy Spirit in a scriptural manner.

Ch.3 Of God's Eternal Decree

The comments that the Testimony makes regarding God's eternal decrees clarify some rather obscure language in the WCF.

Conclusion: The Testimony is in accord with the revealed word of God.

Ch.4 Of Creation

The WCF specifies that God created the world in the space of six days. The Testimony states that “The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is history, not mythology.” (Ch.4.1). The Testimony opposes the theory of evolution in ch.4.3: “The theory of evolution which assumes that chance happenings are an explanation of the origin and development of matter and living things is unscriptural.” It adds in the next section, “We deny that man evolved from any lower form of life.”

The Testimony upholds the need for man to be a good steward of God's creation. It says, “Man is steward of the creation and should treat his resources of material wealth, environment, health, energy and talents as gifts of God, for which he must give account” (Ch.4.8). The Testimony has a section titled “Economics” which teaches that everything belongs to God, and that men are to seek God's glory in the use of their goods. It states:

The Scriptures require the Christian to exercise stewardship over his possessions. In view of that requirement, he should contribute gladly to the Lord's work and give generously to the poor and needy. Under the old covenant the Lord required the practice of tithing. Recognizing the greater blessings under the new covenant and the fact that Christ endorsed tithing, the Christian should respond out of love by giving at least as great a proportion of his income to the Lord's work through the Church” (Ch.4.15).

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Conclusion: The Testimony faithfully summarizes Scripture in taking a strong position against evolution and providing godly principles for Christian stewardship.

Ch.5 Of Providence

The Testimony applies the Confession’s teaching on God’s providence by explaining how it “should lead the believer to be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity, resting confidently on the Lord” (Ch.5.1). It details how gambling is a sin and warns against a wide variety of different forms of gambling (Ch.5.4). It explains how, “Satan has power in this world which includes predictions of the future, signs and wonders that deceive, and possession of persons.” It warns that “Christians are to flee the workings of Satan in such things as fortune telling, horoscopes, astrology, palmistry, witchcraft, conjurings, séances, drug experiences, and Satan worship” (Ch.5.5).

Conclusion: The Testimony faithfully elucidates God’s providence by warning against gambling and the occult.

Ch.6 Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof

The Testimony clarifies the WCF’s position by further explaining that the corruption of man’s nature is called “total depravity.”

Conclusion: The Testimony is in harmony with the revealed word of God.

Ch.7 Of God’s Covenant with Man

The WCF makes a distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. In connection with this, the Testimony explains that,

The Covenant of Works has not been revoked. All men remain under its requirement of perfect obedience and will have to give account according to it at the last judgment. In the Covenant of Grace Jesus Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the Covenant of Works for His people...” (Ch.7.3).

The WCF explains that the shadows of the old covenant were fulfilled when the gospel came. In connection with this, the Testimony states, “We reject the teaching that God will reinstate the temple and its rites and ceremonies” (Ch.7.6).

Conclusion: The Testimony faithfully represents Scripture’s teaching about God’s covenant with man.

Ch.8 Of Christ the Mediator

The Testimony clarifies that while Christ’s atoning work was sufficient to save the whole world, it is only applied to the elect (the doctrine of limited atonement) (Ch.8.7). The Testimony also makes it clear that because of their connection with God’s elect, the reprobate are partakers of some benefits which flow forth from Christ’s death. These include the fact that some divine judgments are sometimes averted for the sake of the saints, and that benevolence and temperance are promoted by the Church’s teaching and influence (Ch.8.8).

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Conclusion: The Testimony provides some further clarification on the atoning work of Christ our Mediator and the benefits that flow forth from him.

Ch.9 Of Free Will

The Testimony states, "We reject the teaching that the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is dependent upon the exercise of man's free will."

Conclusion: The Testimony provides some further clarification in harmony with Scripture.

Ch.10 Of Effectual Calling

The Testimony makes it clear that "There is no inconsistency between the biblical doctrine of particular redemption and the command to offer the Gospel to all men" (Chp.10.2). It goes on to outline the Church's task in evangelism and mission.

Conclusion: The Testimony provides a faithful summary of Scripture's teaching on limited atonement and the calling to spread the gospel indiscriminately.

Ch.11 Of Justification

The Testimony provides a clear definition of justification, explaining that it "is a legal declaration that the sinner is acquitted from the guilt of sin, and is considered righteous before God" (Ch.11.1). It states that, "Faith in Christ is the only means of justification," (Ch.11.2) and declares, "We reject the teaching that man's works have a part in his justification" (Ch.11.3). It explains that "The justification of the believer does not diminish his obligation to obey divine law" (Ch.11.4).

Conclusion: The Testimony provides a faithful summary of Scripture's doctrine of justification.

Ch.12 Of Adoption

The Testimony states that justification and adoption are both performed once, and not repeated (Ch.12.2). The Testimony clears up possible misunderstandings about the universal fatherhood of God, stating that "to the redeemed alone belongs the right to be called sons of God" (Ch.12.4).

Conclusion: The Testimony provides a faithful summary of Scripture's teaching of adoption.

Ch.13 Of Sanctification

Conclusion: The Testimony makes a clear and helpful distinction between justification and sanctification which is faithful to Scripture.

Ch.14 Of Saving Faith

Conclusion: The Testimony provides a beautiful and biblically faithful summary of what we believe about saving faith.

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Yet it is important to note what our Church Order says in Article 50 about Churches Abroad. It notes, "On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice, churches abroad shall not be rejected." The Free Church of Scotland also practices exclusive psalmody and forbid the accompaniment of musical instruments in worship but this has not prevented the CanRC from entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with them. As Committee, our conclusion is that such matters are indeed minor, take nothing away from the marks of the true church which are evident in the RPCNA, and present no obstacle from entering into ecclesiastical fellowship.

Ch.22 Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

In explaining how lawful oaths and vows are to be made, the Testimony introduces the idea of "covenanting." It indicates that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the uses in Scripture of the words "vow" and "covenant." It defines a covenant we make with God as "a corporate act of pledging obedience to what God has commanded in His covenant." (Ch.22.6). The Testimony says:

God's covenants require obedience of all men whether they acknowledge their obligation or not. God's people, individually and corporately, respond to His covenants by solemnly promising to be the Lord's and to keep His commandments... [T]he sacraments of the New Testament are ordinances for entrance into and renewal of covenant union with God" (Ch.22.8).

It continues:

Covenanting in the New Testament takes the form of confessing Christ and His Lordship. In view of the continued emphasis of the covenantal relationship of God to men in the New Testament, it is appropriate for churches and nations to covenant to be the Lord's and to serve Him. The statements or documents produced in these acts of covenant response are dependent upon the Covenant of Grace. They are statements of responsibility arising from the application of the Word of God to the times in which they are made. Such covenants have continuing validity in so far as they give true expression to the Word of God for the times and situations in which believers live." (Ch.22.9).

Conclusion: We struggle with the idea of the New Testament church corporately "covenanting" with God as church. What does this mean? We question whether it is right for a nation "to covenant to be the Lord's and to serve him." The nations of this world are made up of believers and unbelievers. How can a nation make a covenant to serve the Lord when many of its citizens don't know him or serve him? The proof texts for this idea of "covenanting" do not appear to support the concept being promoted in the Testimony. At the same time, this teaching does not contradict anything in the Three Forms of Unity and appears to be a doctrine derived from scriptural exegesis, however unconvincing we may find it to be. As such, it does not detract from the marks of the true church which are evident in the RPCNA. As committee, we would recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches note their difficulty with chapter 22 of the Testimony.

NOTES**Ch.23 Of the Civil Magistrate**

Chapter 23 of the Testimony speaks to the RPCNA's practice of "covenanting." They believe that it is the responsibility of every nation "to enter into covenant with Christ and serve to advance His Kingdom on earth" (Ch.23.4). As committee, we question the biblical basis for this. In the old covenant God established a relationship with Israel, his covenant people. In the new covenant, God's establishes a covenant with believers and their children. We don't see biblical warrant for nations (made up of believers and unbelievers) to covenant with God.

The Testimony goes on to say, "We reject the view that nations have no corporate responsibility for acknowledging and obeying Christ" (Ch.23.5). We question the Biblical basis for stating that a nation has a corporate responsibility for acknowledging and obeying Christ.

The Testimony makes it clear that the RPCNA does not subscribe to what the WCF teaches about the civil government's involvement in spiritual matters in the church (Ch.23.18). The Testimony distinguishes between the differing spheres of authority between church and state. It says,

Both the government of the nation and the government of the visible church are established by God. Though distinct and independent of each other, they both owe supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ. The governments of church and state differ in sphere of authority in that due submission to the government of the visible church is the obligation of members thereof, while due submission to civil government is the obligation of all men. The governments of church and state also have different functions and prerogatives in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The means of enforcement of the civil government are physical, while those of church government are not. Neither government has the right to invade or assume the authority of the other. They should cooperate to the honor and glory of God, while maintaining their separate jurisdictions (Ch.23.19).

The Testimony states, "Both the Christian and the Church have a responsibility for witnessing against national sins and for promoting justice" (Ch.23, 22). We agree that this is the Christian's task, but do not see Scriptural warrant for making this the church's responsibility.

The Testimony goes on to say, "It is the duty of the Christian Church to testify to the authority of Christ over the nations, against all anti-Christian, atheistic, and secular principles of civil government, and against all sinful oaths of allegiance to civil governments..." (Ch.23.28). We question the delineation of responsibility between a Christian, and the Christian church. The Church's task is a spiritual one. The Testimony itself makes this point beautifully in Ch.25, section 2. It states,

It is the mission of the Church to preserve, maintain and proclaim to the whole world the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the whole counsel of God; to gather into her fellowship those of every race and people who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and promise obedience to Him; to build them up in their most holy faith, and train them to be faithful wit-

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nesses for Christ in all his offices; to maintain the ordinances of divine worship in their purity; witness against all evil; and in every way to seek the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We would say that while individual Christians have a mandate to be involved in society and in politics, we do not see scriptural warrant for the church's task in politics. The Testimony states,

When participating in political elections, the Christian should support and vote only for such men as are publicly committed to scriptural principles of civil government. Should the Christian seek civil office by political election, he must openly inform those whose support he seeks of his adherence to Christian principles of civil government" (Ch.23.29).

This can make it impossible for a Christian to vote in a political election, especially if no fellow Christian is running for office.

Conclusion: The practice of "covenanting" is problematic, especially in the civil realm. There is no clear delineation between the task of a Christian and that of the church in politics. The scriptural warrant for these matters is not convincing. At the same time, this teaching does not contradict anything in the Three Forms of Unity and appears to be a doctrine derived from scriptural exegesis, however unconvincing we may find it to be. As such, it does not detract from the marks of the true church which are evident in the RPCNA. As committee, we would recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches note their difficulty with chapter 23 of the Testimony

Ch.24 Of Marriage and Divorce

The Testimony gives much useful instruction about marriage and family life. It supports the Scriptural teaching that a husband is to be head of his wife and that the wife is to be the helper of her husband, and outlines each of their responsibilities in marriage. The Testimony teaches, "Unborn children are living creatures in the image of God" (Ch.24.19). It opposes deliberately induced abortions, except possibly to save the mother's life. The Testimony opposes part of the WCF's teaching about consanguinity (Ch.24.21). It makes it clear that Scripture permits marriage to a deceased wife's sister or a deceased husband's brother (Ch.24.22).

Regarding divorce, the Testimony states:

Before seeking divorce, it is the responsibility of the innocent party to attempt reconciliation with the guilty party in the same manner as in any case of sin, first by his or her own appeal, and then, if need be, by calling on the elders of the church" (Ch.24.23).

While we may consider this to be wise counsel, the question needs to be asked whether the innocent party must seek reconciliation. This seems contrary to the WCF's statement that, "In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce; and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead." The WCF's position on whether the innocent party may divorce his or her partner in the case of adultery is clearly supported from Scripture. Additionally, the Testimony says, "In any marriage threatened with dissolution, or even if

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The Testimony speaks against denominationalism. It states, Divisions that separate believers into denominations mar the unity of the Church and are due to error and sin. It is the duty of all denominations which are true churches of Christ to seek reconciliation and union. Such organizational unity, however, should be sought only on the basis of truth and of scriptural order. It is the duty of every believer to unite with the branch of the visible church which adheres most closely to the Scriptures" (Ch.25.14).

The Testimony also speaks about how the Christian should avoid involvement in oath-bound societies. It says,

Christians should walk in the light. Their beliefs, purposes, manner of life, and their rules of action and conduct should be based on the Word of God and should not be concealed. Oath-bound societies usually involve an improper requirement of secrecy, aims which are immoral, intimate fellowship with unbelievers or participation in unbiblical worship. Membership in such organizations is inconsistent with a Christian profession, however good their announced purposes may be." (Ch.25.19).

Conclusion: While we would agree with many of the points raised, we have concerns about the ordination of women to the office of deacon. Our issue is not with the idea of women serving the edification of the church as (un-ordained) deaconesses, but with the fact that in the RPCNA the sisters are ordained as deacons and thus have an office in the church. This matter is dealt with more extensively elsewhere in this report.

Ch.26 Of the Communion of Saints

We agree with the Testimony's first three sections which deal with the communion of saints. Sections 4-7 deal with some moral matters, and we do not see a clear connection to the topic "Of the Communion of Saints."

In section 4, the Testimony states,

For preservation of life and because of respect for our bodies as God's creation, we are to be careful in the use of drugs. Christians should avoid enslavement to alcohol, tobacco or any habit-forming drug. The Scripture strongly condemns drunkenness as a sin" (Ch.26.4).

We would agree.

In section 5 the Testimony says,

Because drunkenness is so common, and because the intemperate use of alcohol is constantly being promoted by advertising, business practices, and social pressure, Christians must be careful not to conform to the attitudes and the practices of the world with regard to alcoholic beverages. To prevent damage to our neighbor, to provide mutual help in godly living, and to strengthen each other in living a disciplined life it is altogether wise and proper that Christians refrain from the use, sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages." (Ch.26.5).

Here the Testimony fails to distinguish between a scripturally warranted use of alcohol, and an abuse of alcohol. Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High served Abram bread and wine (Gen.14:18). Part of God's blessing

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itself is the means to achieve organic union and as if the intention is for all member churches to be discussing organic union as a collective of churches.

4. *Re: Bylaws IV.* Items for consideration by the Council point 3 XVI Reports on consultations f. Youth Ministries. If point 1 of our concerns mentioned above is upheld, point f. Youth Ministries would need to be dropped from the regular docket of the Council.
5. *Re: Bylaws VI.* Interim Committee 4n: This bylaw speaks about what to do when an officer of the Council is incapacitated, and suggests the appointment of a presbyter of a member church to perform the functions of that office on an interim basis. Our difficulty is with the word "presbyter." Some of NAPARC's member churches have lifelong eldership, but some also practice term eldership. Not all those serving on our Inter-church relations committees are presbyters or elders. Thus we would suggest adding to "presbyters" the words "or member of the Inter-church Relations Committee" in this bylaw.
6. *Re: Perceived Tension Between Constitution Articles 4 and 5.2:* Our recent General Synod (held in Carman, MB, May, 2013) also mandated our Committee to raise a point of discussion at NAPARC concerning some of the wording in the Constitution. Because your committee is dealing directly with the possibility of altering the Constitution, we feel it may be best to include that concern in this letter in the hopes that it can be addressed in an appropriate fashion. Allow us to quote the particular mandate we have received:

To mandate the CCCNA to raise in discussion at NAPARC what may be perceived as a tension between Article 4 of the NAPARC Constitution on "The Nature and Extent of Authority," and the last sentence of 5.2 on "Membership," namely, "Those churches shall be eligible for membership ... [which] maintain the marks of the true church (pure preaching of the gospel, the Scriptural administration of the sacraments, the faithful exercise of discipline)." (*Acts of Synod Carman 2013*, Article 77, Recommendation 4.3)

As we understand our Synod's concern, there appears to be a tension between the *actions and decisions* of NAPARC being *advisory* in nature (as per Article 4 of the Constitution) and, on the other hand, that the *constitution itself* is not advisory but rather *binding and authoritative* on all member churches. This seems to be the very nature of a constitution.

The concern centers specifically on what is stated in the Article 5.2 of the Constitution concerning membership being eligible only to those churches which "maintain the marks of the true church." Such a way of stating the entry qualification appears to make *binding* upon all member churches, by the *decision* of NAPARC to admit them, the acceptance of all other member churches as true and faithful. Synod Carman, in its deliberations concerning NAPARC, did not believe that this

NOTES**Appendix 7 – Committee of Review Letter of Response**

Note: The following response was received from NAPARC's Committee of Review along with a request for permission to share both our original letter plus the CoR's response with the rest of the NAPARC churches to benefit their understanding of some of the proposed changes to the Constitution. Permission was granted and these two documents were distributed to all NAPARC churches in the docket package for NAPARC 2013. The explanation (below) of the CoR was not challenged on any point.

**NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED
COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF REVIEW
607 N. Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19046**

The Rev. H. van Delden [sic], Corresponding Secretary
Committee for Contact With Churches In North America
Of the Canadian Reformed Churches
536 Rosseau Avenue West Winnipeg, MB R2C 1X8

Dear Brothers,

July 29, 2013

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Thank you for your kind words in your July 12, 2013, letter regarding our report and for sharing your concerns with us about several items in the amendments to the *Constitution* and *Bylaws* that we are proposing to the next meeting of NAPARC.

We understand that we might still end up with differing thoughts regarding the items you raise, but we thought it might be helpful to see if we might be able to address at least some of them. We'll take them up in the order in which you present them (our references will be to the final form of the proposed amendments to the *Constitution* and *Bylaws*; a copy of our full Report Portfolio, dated May 1, 2013, is attached).

1. Activities for Young People (Constitution IV.5). The idea behind this addition to the functions of NAPARC was voiced by Delegates during the discussion time at the 35th (2009) Meeting of NAPARC (cf. APPENDIX 6 to our *Report of the NAPARC of Review to 38th (2012) Meeting of NAPARC*, page 44 [items 6 and 8] and page 45 [item 5]), particularly the plea of a brother, ministering in a more isolated circumstance in North America, regarding the difficulty his covenant young people had in finding suitable spouses within the local Reformed community. With regard to the practicalities of promoting such, the Committee, in suggesting the addition of this clause, had in mind the kinds of things enumerated in (proposed) *Informational Document 11: Suggestions for*

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n. in the event an Officer of the Council becomes incapacitated or is otherwise unable or unwilling to continue to serve, appoint a minister or elder ~~presbyter~~ (or a member of the interchurch relations committee who has been previously ordained as an elder) of a Member Church to perform the functions of that office on an interim basis (until such time as the Interim Committee determines the Officer is able to resume his duties).

6. Perceived Tension Between *Constitution* Articles V and VI.2. We appreciate the tension you identify. Because your letter refers to the current numbering of the articles of the *Constitution* (i.e., Articles IV and V.2), rather than the renumbering of the articles being proposed in the amendments, we wonder whether the amendment we are proposing might already address your concern:

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that the Council is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Council, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Council (*Constitution*, VI.4), ~~taken~~ are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, ~~or~~ 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. The autonomy of the member bodies.

The Council possesses no ecclesiastical jurisdiction or authority of its own to exercise; it can only determine eligibility for its own membership according to constitutionally specified criteria. We hope our proposed amendment makes it clear that the *only* matters which the Council itself is competent to adjudicate with respect to the Member Churches are those pertaining to a federation's membership status *vis-à-vis* the Council. Only the Council (following its own constitutional process) can admit, suspend, restore, or terminate the membership of a federation in the Council. One federation cannot unilaterally vote itself into the Council, nor can any Member Church unilaterally suspend, restore, or terminate the membership of another Member Church in the Council: such actions addressing the membership status of a federation in the Council require an action of the Council itself. But apart from such membership status issues, *no* action of the Council can bind a Member Church.

With regard to your particular inquiry, perhaps a way forward is to say that, while a decision of the Council regarding whether a particular federation "profess[es] and maintain[s] the basis for fellowship (*Constitution* II)" and "maintain[s] the marks of the true church" (*Constitution* VI.2) is determinative *solely* for the purpose of adjudicating whether a particular federation is eligible for the status of membership in the Council, it cannot bind the Member Churches in their bilateral relations among themselves. In proposing our amendment to this article, we desired to

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Appendix 8 – Revised Constitution of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council

CONSTITUTION

[As amended by the 3rd (1977), 22nd (1996) and 40th (2014) Meetings of the Council]

I. NAME

The name of the Council (“the Council”) shall be The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (“NAPARC”).

II. BASIS

Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

III. PURPOSE

We regard this basis of fellowship as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.

IV. PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

1. Facilitate discussion, consultation, and the sharing of insights among Member Churches on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common.
2. Encourage the Member Churches to pursue closer ecclesiastical relations, as appropriate, among the regional and major assemblies.
3. Promote the appointment of committees to study matters of common interest and concern and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the Council with respect to them.
4. Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
5. Promote local, regional, and general assembly/synodical-wide cooperation wherever possible and feasible in such areas as missions, relief efforts, training of men for the ministry, Christian schools, activities for young people, and church education and publications.
6. Operate a website to facilitate the exchange of information and to foster increased cooperation and fellowship among the Member Churches.

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Appendix 9 – Bylaws of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council

BYLAWS

[As amended by the 4th (1978), 5th (1979), 7th (1981), 8th (1982), 15th (1989), 22nd (1996), 32nd (2006), 36th (2010), and 39th (2013) Meetings of the Council]

I. MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

1. The Council shall ordinarily meet annually on the second Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of November, convening at 1:30 p.m. on the Tuesday and adjourning no later than noon on the Thursday. On the Tuesday evening, there will ordinarily be a public devotional service (which includes the reading and preaching of Scripture by a minister of the host Member Church, prayer, singing, and, if the session/consistory conducting the service so chooses, an offering for a beneficiary of its choosing) conducted by a session/consistory of one of the nearby congregations of the host Member Church, to which members of nearby congregations of Member Churches will be invited; and on the Wednesday evening, there will ordinarily be a banquet and program arranged by the host Member Church.
2. The host Member Church will ordinarily be chosen (alphabetically) from the *List of NAPARC Member Churches (Bylaws, IX.1)*; if a Member Church is not able to host the next meeting, the next listed (alphabetically) Member Church(es) will be asked until a host Member Church is secured. Before adjournment the Council shall determine the host, the date, and the place for the next meeting.
3. All meetings shall be open, except when the Council decides to meet in Executive Session.

II. DELEGATES AND VOTING

1. Each Member Church shall appoint no more than four Delegates to each meeting of the Council and, except as otherwise provided, shall bear the cost of its Delegates' travel, housing, and meal expenses in attending the meeting.
2. Each Delegate of the Member Church shall be entitled to vote on items before the Council. Voting on major decisions (as determined by the Council) shall be by unit vote of the Member Churches' Delegates.
3. Except as otherwise provided herein, a (simple) majority vote in the affirmative adopts any motion.

III. OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. Each meeting of the Council shall elect its own Officers, as follows: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Vice-Chairman of the previous annual meeting shall normally succeed to the office of Chairman and shall be declared elected by acclamation, unless

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- (12) respond to requests for "NAPARC's position" on a matter with a list of the relevant adopted statements of the Member Churches, if any, including their grounds
 - (13) serve *ex officio* as a member of the Website Committee and provide counsel to the Webmaster as appropriate
 - (14) maintain updated copies of the Council's *Constitution*, *Bylaws*, and *Informational Documents (Bylaws, IX)*, as they may be amended from time to time
 - (15) maintain the archives of the Council's documents, including the *Minutes* and papers from all of its prior meetings, and arrange for their safe storage in a climate-controlled facility
 - (16) maintain a cumulative list of the topics of ongoing and completed studies by the major assemblies of the Member Churches, compiled from the annual Reports from the Member Churches (and other sources available to him), for distribution to the Member Churches with the *Minutes* of the meetings.
- d. Treasurer
- (1) keep full and accurate accounts of receipts into and disbursements from the Council's Treasury in books belonging to the Council
 - (2) receive and disburse the funds of the Council in accordance with the directions of the Council (or the Interim Committee, pursuant to *Bylaws*, VI.4.e)
 - (3) deposit all funds of the Council in the name and to the credit of the Council in federally insured or other accounts as may be designated by the Council
 - (4) execute documents as required or authorized by the Council (or the Interim Committee)
 - (5) monitor the funds of the Council and alert the Interim Committee to significant deteriorations in the Council's financial condition that might undermine the Council's ability to meet its financial obligations
 - (6) submit periodic reports to the Council, as he deems appropriate or is requested by the Interim Committee
 - (7) submit an annual financial report to the Council (which shall be audited each year by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman prior to the meeting of the Council, with a report given to the Council) summarizing: all receipts and disbursements; deposits and withdrawals from the Council's accounts; and the Council's assets (including bank accounts and investments, and interest/dividends earned thereupon).
3. Terms of office:
- a. The Chairman shall serve for a one-year term, such term beginning with his election at the annual meeting at which he presides

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XII. Reports and Appointment of Operating Committees

a. Website Committee

XIII. Old Business

XIV. Reports of Study Committees (if any)

XV. Reports of Conferences (if any)

XVI. Reports on Consultations (and, where appropriate, appointment of host and convener for the next Consultation)

a. Home Missions

b. World Missions

c. Christian/Church Education

d. Relief/Diaconal Ministries

e. Theological Training

f. Youth Ministries

XVII. Arrangements for Next Meeting (host, place, date, and invitees)

XVIII. Any Remaining Items from the Report of the Interim Committee (including approval of the proposed budget)

XIX. New Business**

XX. Adjournment

* This is a time when the Delegates assemble to share reports from their churches, to talk about important issues raised, and to pray with and for each other (see *Suggested Form for Member Church Reports—Bylaws*, IX.2).

** Matters to be taken up under New Business shall be determined not later than the Adoption of the Docket.

V. COMMITTEES, CONFERENCES, AND CONSULTATIONS

The Council may establish and appoint both Operating Committees and Study Committees as it deems appropriate. These Committees shall continue until the matters assigned to them have been completed, and report annually to the Council. It may also call Conferences on subjects of mutual concern and arrange for Consultations among the agencies of the Member Churches. The mandates of the respective Committees and Special Conferences shall be included in the Council's *Informational Documents*. In the discharge of their respective mandates, Committees, Conferences, and Consultations shall take care not to infringe or intrude upon the prerogatives of the Member Churches for the conduct of their own ministries.

1. NAPARC Operating Committees

Operating Committees are established, normally with three to five members (together with an alternate), to oversee a particular part of the Council's operations (e.g., the Website). Members of an Operating Committee shall be appointed each year and may be reappointed to serve at the pleasure of the Council. The Council will designate a chairman for the Operating Committee from among the appointees, and the Operating Committee shall elect from among its members a

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secretary, who will keep minutes of the meetings and send copies to the Council's Secretary. The expenses of an Operating Committee shall be borne by the Treasury.

2. NAPARC Study Committees

Study Committees are established to study matters of mutual concern to the Member Churches and, when appropriate, to make recommendations to the Council with respect to such matters (bearing in mind the nature and extent of the Council's authority, *Constitution*, V). If it is desired that each of the Member Churches be represented in a Study Committee, the option of participating and the manner of selecting its representative(s) shall be left to each Member Church; otherwise, the (normally five to seven) members (together with one or two alternates) of the Study Committee shall be elected by the Council with a view to their particular competency and experience in the subject matter, and with a view to the diversity of perspectives among the Member Churches. The Council shall designate one of the Member Churches to convene the Study Committee. The Study Committee shall elect from among its members a chairman and a secretary, who will keep minutes of the meetings and send copies to the Council's Secretary. All reports (other than interim reports) of Study Committees should be submitted to the Council's Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than four months before the meeting at which such reports are to be considered. In discharging its mandate, the Study Committee shall solicit the input of the Member Churches (through their appropriate agencies). The expenses of a Study Committee shall ordinarily be borne by the Treasury.

3. NAPARC Conferences

The Council may call Conferences on subjects of mutual concern to which all Member Churches are urged to send representatives. The Council shall designate one of the Member Churches to convene the Conference and to appoint a chairman and a secretary, who will keep minutes of the Conference and send copies to the Council's Secretary. All reports (other than interim reports) of Conferences should be submitted to the Council's Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than four months before the meeting at which such reports are to be considered. Unless the Council determines otherwise (and authorizes a special appropriation), the expenses of operating the Conference (e.g., meeting hall rental, speakers' honoraria, promotional materials, etc.) shall be borne by the Treasury, but the travel, housing, and meal expenses of the Member Churches' representatives in attending the Conference shall be borne by their sending church.

4. NAPARC Consultations

Representatives of the appropriate corresponding agencies of the Member Churches (e.g., home missions, world missions, Christian/

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

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Churches, with a view to his serving as Chairman of the next year’s meeting), Secretary, and Treasurer

- j. propose to the Chairman nominations for the members (and chairman) of each Operating Committee
- k. regarding the establishment of a Study Committee, propose to the Council:
 - (1) a mandate for such Study Committee;
 - (2) whether such Study Committee should be composed of a member from each of the Member Churches or by election by the Council, and if the latter, propose to the Council nominations for the members of such Study Committee; and
 - (3) a nomination for the convening Member Church
- l. propose to the Council a budget for the following year, including such honoraria as it deems appropriate
- m. extend invitations to non-Member Churches that adopt the basis of the fellowship of NAPARC (*Constitution*, II) to send (at their own expense) Official Observers (*Bylaws*, VII.1) to the next meeting
- n. extend invitations to other non-Member Churches to send (at their own expense) observers (as “Other Guests,” *Bylaws*, VII.2) to the next meeting
- o. in the event an Officer of the Council becomes incapacitated or is otherwise unable or unwilling to continue to serve, appoint a minister or elder (or a member of the interchurch relations committee who has previously been ordained as an elder) of a Member Church to perform the functions of that office on an interim basis (until such time as the Interim Committee determines the Officer is able to resume his duties).

5. When it becomes necessary for the Interim Committee to act at a time other than that of its usual time of meeting (*Bylaws*, VI.2), the Interim Committee is authorized: (i) to meet by conference call, at the call of the Chairman and/or the Secretary, to take the necessary action(s); or (ii) if the matter is primarily of an administrative nature (including the approval of a Press Release), to take the necessary action by an informal exchange of email initiated by the Chairman and/or the Secretary—but only if there is no objection either to the proposed action itself or to the making of the decision by such procedure. All such actions, whether by conference call or by email exchange, shall be reported to the next meeting of the Council.

VII. OFFICIAL OBSERVERS AND OTHER GUESTS

1. Official Observers are duly appointed representatives of non-Member Churches that adopt the basis of fellowship of NAPARC (*Constitution*, II) and are invited to attend the meeting (at their own expense) by the

Appendix 11 Report on Visit to the 30th General Assembly of KPCA (Kosin)

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Note: The General Assembly was held in Chicago, IL, on October 27-31, 2014.

Hospitable Spirit

In response to an invitation received from Rev. Young J. Woo, chairman of the Inter-church Relations Committee of the KPCA (Kosin), I (together with my wife) set out to attend and observe their 30th General Assembly in Chicago. The invitation came to me in my capacity as both NAPARC chairman (at this time) and member of the CCCNA. Arriving by car on the evening before the GA was to begin (Oct 27), we were instantly welcomed at the hotel by several of their leaders who were fully expecting us. Though the language spoken everywhere by all delegates was Korean, Rev. Woo quickly placed himself by our side as translator and guide throughout our stay. From the beginning to the end, the Korean brethren showed us the warmest hospitality, regularly ensuring we were looked after for accommodations, meals and whatever else. It was clear to us that they placed a high value on our visit.

Korean Praise and Worship

On Monday evening (Oct 27), we were treated to a series of various performances designed to mark, with thankfulness to God, the 30th Anniversary of their General Assembly. In a rented church facility, we, along with a crowd of delegates plus local people from the broader Korean community (which is large in Chicago, over 200,000), observed a traditional Korean women's dance followed by male and female choral groups, soloists and full choirs. All of it was directed as praise to the Lord and some of the tunes were recognizable to us (including Handel's *Messiah* in part Korean, part English). The most clear and powerful praise came in the closing song, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* – one sung most heartily in Korean (and the same in English by two Canadians!).

On the following evening, in conjunction with the official start of the GA, a prayer service was held in the nearby KPCA (Kosin) church building. The pews were mostly full, a gathering composed of delegates as well as local congregants, a sum total of 200-250 people. The service presented a mixture of elements, some quite new to us. As an introduction to the prayer service, a group of young people led the congregation in singing contemporary western choruses (in Korean) in the "praise and worship" genre. Making use of an over-head projector (to show lyrics) and guitar, drums, and other instruments, the enthusiastic and charismatic young Korean leader soon had everyone singing along. It was noticeable that the older and younger members sang these choruses with the same zeal.

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Preaching and Prayer

Following this 20-25 minute introduction, the outgoing moderator of the GA (it's typically an annual appointment) began the service proper with prayer soon followed by a sermon based on Acts 20 (v.32 in particular, I believe; only one verse was read). Rev. Woo kindly translated the main message of the sermon. What struck me about this portion of the service is how little Scripture was actually read. There was no second Scripture reading (as we are accustomed to) nor was there a reading of the context. The sermon was about 35 minutes long. From what I could gather, the minister explained the context of Paul's statement in his whole ministry (there were a number of references to earlier in Acts) and then went directly into the situation of the KPCA (Kosin). It is difficult to judge in translation, but what I missed was a redemptive-historical approach that places Christ in the center. It seemed more exemplaristic to me.

The remainder of the service had familiar elements: singing of traditional hymns (apparently they sing very few psalms, though they have a hymn book full of traditional western hymns translated into Korean), a thank-offering, intercessory prayer and a concluding blessing. Of particular note is the manner in which the prayer following the sermon was conducted. I must admit this left my wife and I bewildered at first as we were instantly surrounded by what seemed to us to be a cacophony of noisy chatter. As Rev. Woo later explained it, the minister announced to the congregation a prayer subject (in this case, several very sick members of the GA and other leaders in the denomination) and asked the congregation to pray for them. They did – simultaneously, aloud, each one saying his own personal prayer, including the minister over the speakers. They were all noticeably animated and much louder than regular conversational volume. At the time, it seemed disorderly to us, but to the congregation it seemed normal.

Apparently this kind of “free prayer” does not happen during a Lord's Day worship service but is reserved for separate “prayer meetings” or services such as this one. When I commented to Dr. Sung Dae Kang (another minister who could speak English and who is personally familiar with the Canadian Reformed Churches) that it first appeared to us as a sort of charismatic event, he indicated that while that was not the intention, yet he also felt that such tendencies needed to be countered by strong Reformed teaching and practice so that the KPCA (Kosin) does not get taken by charismatic practices.

The General Assembly

On Wednesday morning (Oct 29), the GA began its official business and its first order was to invite myself to address the assembly. I was followed by the moderator of the General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church (Kosin), their mother church. The very fact that I was first in line was an indicator to me of the high priority the KPCA (Kosin) is placing on developing relations with Reformed churches within North America. I was introduced in my capacity as NAPARC chairman (that seemed to be the

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path. In part by connecting with faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches, they hope this tide can be averted or turned.

When I asked about their rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, they explained they did not have any. The only church they have fellowship with is their mother church and this grew up naturally (there are no formal rules there either). I took a few minutes to explain how we (and other Reformed churches) conduct EF, i.e. that we make use of some rules which guide how we interact with one another. They were interested in learning more about those rules. When I asked if their denomination would be willing to send delegates to our next General Synod (if invited), they responded favourably.

Conclusion

After taking our leave the next day, my wife and I could look back with much appreciation for the warm, Christian hospitality we experienced during our stay. There seems to be a growing desire on the part of the KPCA (Kosin) to reach out to NAPARC churches including also the Canadian Reformed Churches and I hope we can mutually influence each other to be and become Reformed churches which are always reforming.

Evaluation and Recommendations

1. The KPCA (Kosin) is clearly Reformed in confession and the official desire is to keep to the Reformed path, yet there are some practices which show signs of evangelical influence. While that may make us wary of developing ties, we may also see it as an opportunity to assist our brethren in holding to the Reformed path.
2. The two federations can learn from one another. The Kosin believers show great zeal, grace and humility in their interaction amongst themselves and toward visitors, a good example for us. The CanRC have a rich heritage in psalm-singing, transmitting the doctrine from generation to generation in home-teaching (devotions), catechism and Christian schools, something we could model for them.
3. Since we already have EF with their mother church, it seems only natural and right to work toward the same with their daughter church. I suggest we seek opportunities to interact with the Kosin brothers both at NAPARC, their GA (if invited) and our own next General Synod Dunville, 2016 (we should extend an invitation to them).

Respectfully submitted to the CCCNA,

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Appendix 12 Report on Meeting with the IRC of the KPCA (Kosin) at NAPARC 2014

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Note: This meeting was held on Wednesday, November 12, 2014 in Grassie, Ontario.

Present were:

Representing KPCA (Kosin):

Rev. James Alderman, and Rev. Young J. Woo

Representing CanRC:

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, Rev. Eric Kampen, Mr. Les Vanderveen, Mr. Cornelius (Case) Poppe, Mr. Henry Vandelden, and Mr. Gerrit Bos.

1. Peter Holtvlüwer opened the meeting with prayer
2. Introduction of each denomination:
 - a. Young Woo and James Alderman gave a brief description of the history of the Korean Presbyterian Church of America (Kosin), and the location of their churches in North America.
 - b. Eric Kampen gave a brief description of the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the location of their churches in North America.
3. Each church discussed their current relationship with significant denominations in their countries of origin, the Kosin PCK in Korea and the RCN (Liberated) in the Netherlands.
 - a. The CanRC shared a 2014 Yearbook, and a copy of the *Acts of General Synod Carman 2013* which includes a copy of the adopted rules for ecclesiastical fellowship.
4. It was agreed that this meeting was mutually beneficial, and tentative plans were made to meet again at next year's NAPARC meeting. KPCA (Kosin) expressed interest in discussing the education of youth, the history of the transition from an "immigrant language" church to a "culture language" church.
5. There was a question regarding the relationship of the CanRC to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). It was answered that this was our "mother church," and there is still ecclesiastical fellowship between the two denominations, but strong concern regarding hermeneutics. We are independent sister churches. This is similar to the relationship of the KPCA (Kosin) church to the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. It was pointed out that a recent report regarding the relations with the RCN (Liberated) is available at the CanRC website at: <http://canrc.org/> by clicking on: Deputies > Committees > Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad.
6. Young Woo closed the meeting with prayer of thanksgiving.

Respectfully Submitted,
Gerrit Bos

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¹ *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, p.D-23. This can be found on the RPCNA website: www.reformedpresbyterian.org under the tab, "Convictions."

² *Testimony*, Chap. 25.8.

³ These statistics were reported by the KPCA (Kosin) to NAPARC 2014.

⁴ From the version of the Belgic Confession found in the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 2010) p.513. An electronic copy can be found at www.canrc.org under the tab, "Doctrine".

⁵ All article references are taken from the version of the Church Order of Dort adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches and found in the *Book of Praise* (see earlier citation), p.629 and following. An electronic copy can be found at www.canrc.org under the tab, "The Federation".

⁶ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) p.1061 (4.3.9).

⁷ Quoted in Peter Y. DeJong, *Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963) p.242.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.242.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.242.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.243. This information plus that in the rest of the paragraph is taken from this source.

¹¹ Please note that it has never been held by Calvin or the Dutch Reformed churches that 1 Timothy 3 speaks of women as deacons. This is relevant to our later discussion of the RPCNA view on women deacons.

¹² Orthodox Presbyterian Church *Form of Government*, Chap. 25, part 1.

¹³ *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church of America, Chap. 9-4 and 7-2.

¹⁴ *Book of Church Order* of the Associate Reformed and Presbyterian Church, Chap. 7.A.1&2.

¹⁵ We may also add that the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) do not ordain women as deacons but rather have the position of Kwonsa, which is essentially older women appointed (but not ordained) to do a specific type of diaconal work. We are also aware that the Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ), who come out of a "mixture" of Continental and Reformed traditions, do allow for the ordination of women to the office of deacon. However, this matter is in the process of being formally discussed in their midst. Synod Carman 2013 has also mandated our CCCNA to take up this issue with them.

¹⁶ With this reference we include all those considered confessional faithful to the Three Forms of Unity.

¹⁷ See p.2-3 of the cited Report, under "The Second Proposal..."

¹⁸ Calvin derived his teaching on two orders of deacons from Romans 12:8 as cited earlier in footnote #3.

¹⁹ Adopted Report of Synod 2001, p.3.

²⁰ Christian Adjemian in his paper is quite explicit about this matter in his detailed discussion of it in section 4.2, sub-points 1-4 on pages 8-10. He specifically mentions Calvin's exegesis on this point as being faulty (p.9).

²¹ Adopted Report of Synod 2001, p.3.

²² *Book of Praise*, p.613.

²³ *Essay on Ordination* by Pastor Jeff Stivason as attached to the Adopted Report of Synod 2001.

²⁴ Christian Adjemian in *ibid.*, p.10.

²⁵ Adopted Report of Synod 2001, p.2.

²⁶ January 28, 2014 letter from Canadian Reformed Churches Committee for Contact with Churches in North America, p. 5; citing Adopted Report of Synod 2001, p. 3.

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²⁷ Letter, p. 6.

²⁸ Wayne R. Spear, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013) 116.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 116.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

³¹ *Ibid*, 117.

³² *Ibid*, 123.

³³ *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, The Directory for Church Government, “The Officers of the Church,” Chapter 3, p. D-8.

³⁴ Spear, 116.

³⁵ Spear, *Op Cite*, 120.

³⁶ The matter of a congregation electing a woman deacon was brought to Synod by the Presbytery in which the congregation resided. While I do not have a copy of the 1887 Minutes of Synod, I have copies of the denomination’s periodical in which the matter is discussed and warrant for the practice justified. The first article, “The Female Deacon and the Sentimental Overflow of Synod” appears in *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, October 1888, Vol. XXVI, No. 10, pp. 357-359, and the other article, “Women and the Deacon’s Office” appears in *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, November 1888, Vol. XXVI, No. 11, pp. 383-407.

³⁷ Rev. D.S. Faris, “The Female Deacon and the Sentimental Overflow of Synod,” *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, October 1888, Vol. XXVI, No. 10, p. 357.

³⁸ Faris, p. 359.

³⁹ Faris, p. 357.

⁴⁰ Faris, p. 357.

⁴¹ Faris, p. 358.

⁴² Faris, p. 358.

⁴³ Small Committee, “Women and the Deacon’s Office,” *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, November 1888, Vol. XXVI, No. 11, p. 383.

⁴⁴ Small Committee, p. 384.

⁴⁵ Small Committee, p. 384.

⁴⁶ Small Committee, p. 384.

⁴⁷ Small Committee, p. 385.

⁴⁸ Small Committee, p. 385.

⁴⁹ Small Committee, p. 385.

⁵⁰ Small Committee, pp. 385-386.

⁵¹ Small Committee, p. 386.

⁵² Small Committee, p. 386.

⁵³ Small Committee, p. 387.

⁵⁴ Small Committee, p. 387.

⁵⁵ Small Committee, p. 387.

⁵⁶ Small Committee, pp. 387-388.

⁵⁷ Small Committee, p. 388.

⁵⁸ Small Committee, p. 389.

⁵⁹ Small Committee, p. 390.

⁶⁰ Small Committee, p. 392.

⁶¹ Small Committee, p. 399.

⁶² This was Rev. Woo’s “guess-timate.” Later at NAPARC, the figure submitted was 10,000. I’m not sure how to account for the discrepancy.

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**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

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

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

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To: General Synod Dunnville 2016

Mandate

General Synod Carman 2013 gave the coordinators of the CCU the following mandate:

1. To discuss with CERCU the areas of concern or fear in the URCNA that seem to be hindering progress toward a merger with the CanRC;
2. 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;
3. To mandate the coordinators to discuss with CERCU how to make preparations for Phase 3, such as through the reappointment of the subcommittees for theological education, liturgical forms and confessions and a common songbook;
4. To seek clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods and to encourage the URCNA to refrain from making further statements of this nature.

(Acts of General Synod Carman 2013, Article 129, p. 161)

Activities

1. In May of 2013, Rev. W. den Hollander was invited by several URCNA churches in Iowa to preach and make presentations to the congregations about the CanRC. He preached in Rock Valley IA on Ascension Day and did a presentation to the congregation. On Sunday, May 12, he preached in Sanborn IA and Orange City IA, doing presentations to each of these congregations.
2. On Sept 18, 2013, Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde met to discuss the mandate given by General Synod Carman 2013 as well as what we would talk about with the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) at the occasion of the annual meeting of NAPARC in Flat Rock, North Carolina.
3. Rev. C.J. VanderVelde attended Classis Ontario-East September 26, 2013 held in Toronto, ON and brought fraternal greetings.
4. Rev. W. den Hollander attended Classis Michigan October 8, 2013 and brought fraternal greetings, being invited to do so. After his presentation there was time for questions from the floor of Classis. A ministerial luncheon had also been organized for Rev. den Hollander to attend the next day, which gave further opportunity for discussion. Rev. den Hollander also used the visit to Michigan to preach in the Wyoming URC and the Byron Center URC on the Sunday preceding the Classis. After both services, he did a presentation to the respective congregations.

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5. On October 27 and November 3, 2013, Rev. den Hollander preached at the URCNA church in Cape Coral FL. On that second Sunday, he did a presentation to the congregation about the CanRC and the pursuit of merger.
6. In the evening of November 18, 2013 and in the afternoon of November 20, 2013, Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde met with the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) at the occasion of the annual meeting of NAPARC in Flat Rock, North Carolina. We presented the URCNA brothers with a copy of the *Acts of General Synod Carman 2013*. We used this occasion to seek clarification from CERCU about the authoritative status of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA Synods and to explain why the CanRCs do not like such statements. We also discussed how best to move the merger efforts forward. Please see Appendix #1 for the Press Release.
7. On Dec 1, 2013, Rev. den Hollander preached at the URCNA church in Pella IA as well as at the URCNA church in Des Moines IA. Both times he did a presentation to the congregation after the service
8. Rev. W. den Hollander attended Classis Pacific Northwest February 25, 2014 in Ripon, CA and brought fraternal greetings on behalf of the CanRC, being invited to do so. On the Monday before Classis, a ministerial took place at which Rev. den Hollander could speak personally with various ministers and address their concerns.
9. Rev. W. den Hollander attended Classis Southwestern Ontario March 12, 2014 in Brantford, ON and brought fraternal greetings on behalf of the CanRC.
10. On March 20, 2014, Rev. den Hollander spoke upon invitation to past, present, and future officebearers at the Providence URC in Winnipeg MB. This meeting was attended by URC and CanRC men and addressed the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity between the URC and CanRC.
11. Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde attended Synod 2014, for its duration, from June 2-5, 2014, which was held at Visalia, California. Rev. den Hollander brought fraternal greetings on behalf of the CanRC; see appendix #2 for the address.
12. The Council of the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis, Australia sought our input as to whether they should initiate an overture through their broader assemblies to the effect that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) take up the invitation of the URCNA to explore the possibility of entering a relationship of Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the URCNA. In a letter written in June 2014, we strongly recommended pursuing this.
13. On September 24, 2014, Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. C.J. VanderVelde met with Rev. J.A Bouwers to have a brainstorming session about how to move the relationship between the CanRC and UR-

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certain progress, though at times difficult, is nevertheless encouraging. We discussed the wisdom of having a period of time in which there is no pressure of having Phase 3A on the immediate horizon but in which efforts can be made to cultivate our relationship in the USA. This may be of benefit to those churches in the USA where there is a lingering discomfort about the unity efforts. In addition, we had much opportunity to discuss informally with members of CERCU how the pursuit of unity can best be enhanced.

By the Spring of 2014, all of the American Classes within the URCNA had been visited. The overall impression is that among the Classes in the USA the response generally speaking was somewhat ambivalent, lacking the interest and support one may expect for a federative pursuit of church unity with a federation of the same precious faith. There could be all kinds of reasons for this. On the one hand, there appears to be little sense of an ecumenical imperative toward union. On the other hand, the sentiment was expressed by some officebearers that the URCNA federation has changed a lot since 2001, with the result that the effort toward merger is no longer supported as it was before 2001 when the federation was dominated by the Canadian URCs. Furthermore, the (perceived) Canadian Reformed view of the covenant was challenged by some – a concern which has in many ways been removed by the colloquium at Synod Visalia 2014. In view of the above, let us pray that further efforts made by CERCU and CCU may be blessed with a growing interest federation-wide among the URCNA.

The Status of the Doctrinal Statements

Synod Carman 2013 mandated the coordinators of the CCU to seek clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods. This mandate arose from a concern that the churches might be binding themselves beyond the confessions. The *Synodical Rules of Procedure* adopted by Synod Nyack 2012 as they pertain to doctrinal affirmation and pastoral advice are as follows:

1. **Doctrinal Affirmation:** A *Doctrinal Affirmation* is an interpretation of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity on a specific point of their teaching (*Acts of Synod 2004*, Article 76.B.b., p. 29).
 - 1.1 A Doctrinal Affirmation serves the churches by directing them to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity, applying them in response to doctrinal questions that has arisen in the churches.
 - 1.2 A Doctrinal Affirmation should be received by the churches with respect and submission, and it may not be directly or indirectly contradicted in preaching or in writing (Church Order Articles 29 and 31; *Form of Subscription*). The Scriptures, Ecumenical Creeds, and the Three Forms of Unity alone may serve as grounds in matters of discipline (*Acts of Synod 2007*, Article 67.4, p. 36).

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1.3 A Doctrinal Affirmation may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31 (*Form of Subscription, Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B).

2. **Pastoral Advice:** *Pastoral Advice* is Synod’s application of the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity to particular circumstances in the life of the churches.

2.1 Pastoral Advice expresses the collective wisdom of Synod to guide the churches in their pastoral care.

2.2 Pastoral Advice should be received with respect. It would be unwise to disregard Pastoral Advice in preaching or writing. It may not, however, serve as grounds in matters of discipline.

2.3 Pastoral Advice may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31 (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B).

(*Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, Article 45, p. 37*)

The Fifteen Points adopted by Synod London 2010 were doctrinal affirmations prefaced with the statement “That Synod affirm the following teachings of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity” (*Acts of Synod London 2010, Article 113, p. 66*). This means that the Fifteen Points may not be directly or indirectly contradicted in preaching or in writing. At the same time, it is important to note from the above rules of procedure that only the Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity may be used as grounds for discipline; doctrinal affirmations and pastoral advice are not given that status.

The doctrinal affirmations by their very definition thus present a particular interpretation of the Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity. Anytime there is a further definition or interpretation of something in our Confessions there is a (potential) narrowing of the range of interpretation allowed. This has been the longstanding concern of the CanRC regarding such statements, and we as coordinators conveyed this to CERCU at the meeting in Flat Rock, NC in November 2013.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that there are also other ways in which doctrinal statements could be made which seek to define or interpret something in the Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity. This too could result in narrowing the range of interpretation allowed. For example, when a CanRC ecclesiastical assembly is faced with an appeal about a doctrinal matter, the considerations leading up to the recommendation could consist of doctrinal affirmations involving the definition and interpretation of something in the Scriptures or the Confessions. The *status* of such considerations would not be equal to the status of the points adopted by recent URCNA synods, but the *practice* in such instances also amounts to articulating certain points of doctrine. The difference is that in the case of the points adopted by the URCNA the doctrinal statements are codified, whereas this is not the case when doctrinal statements are made in the considerations leading up to an ecclesiastical assembly’s decision. To be fair and to present as balanced a picture as possible in this whole matter, we as coordinators also mentioned this in our discussion with CERCU.

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Moreover, much could depend on how the Fifteen Points are understood. For example, point #5 of the Fifteen Points of London affirms that “Adam was obligated to obey ‘the commandment of life’ in order to live in fellowship with God and enjoy His favor eternally (Belgic Confession, Article 14, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 3).” Does this mean that an officebearer must hold to the existence of a covenant of works before the Fall into sin? That particular language is not used, but what is the import of this statement? When we as coordinators mentioned the discomfort that many in the CanRC have with the language of “covenant of works” and read some quotations to that effect from a published work, this sparked considerable discussion and led to the expression of some concern on the part of several members of CERCUC. It was partly because of this discussion at Flat Rock, NC in November 2013 that CERCUC felt that perhaps a colloquium should be organized to give a keener focus on whether our differences are within what we confess together in the Three Forms of Unity. This discussion at Flat Rock, NC underlines our concern about extra-confessional statements because it shows that doctrinal affirmations made to interpret the Confessions are themselves open to interpretation.

Herewith we pass along to Synod Dunnville 2016 that we as coordinators have sought and received clarification from CERCUC on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods.

Synod Visalia 2014 on Unity Matters

In its report to Synod Visalia 2014 as included in the *Provisional Agenda*, CERCUC made many heartening comments with respect to the effort toward church unity. We read: “One third of the URC has discovered that the Canadian Reformed are our dear brothers and sisters in the faith. That two thirds of the URC has not had the opportunity to discover this truth firsthand continues to present real challenges, but we pray that the two thirds will accept the testimony and witness born [sic] by the one third” (*Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014*, p. 77). The CERCUC report goes on to say:

In our discussions together as CERCUC we observe that three types of concerns remain regarding the unity process. One is theological. We need to be convinced as churches that the doctrine of the covenant taught in our respective churches can live healthily side by side in one federation within the bounds of our confessions. The second is church political. Given our negative past experiences, there are continued fears concerning perceived hierarchical tendencies in the Proposed Joint Church Order. The third has to do with the will to ecumenism generally; some are not convinced that churches that share a confession are required to seek organizational unity. As a committee we are of a mind that if the first two types of objections can be addressed to our mutual satisfaction, the hesitations with regards to the third will also be alleviated.

According to its mandate, and the ongoing encouragement of synodical decisions, CERCUC remains committed to pursuing unity with

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these sister churches. Since November 2012, CERCU has communi- cated by way of press releases and reports to classes, that it decided that we announce to Synod 2014 our intention to propose at Synod 2016 entering Step A – *Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union* (of Phase Three *Church Union*). Our *Guidelines* describe this step as follows...:

Step A – Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful church- es, the federations shall make preparation for and a commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of ecclesiastical union which shall outline the timing, coordination, and/or integration of the following:

- a. the broader assemblies
- b. the liturgies and liturgical forms
- c. the translations of the Bible and the confessions
- d. the song books for worship
- e. the church polity and order
- f. the missions abroad

Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by the consis- tories as required in Church Order, Art. 36 (*Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014*, p. 77).

Furthermore, in an effort to clear up theological misconceptions, CERCU proposed that a colloquium be held at Synod Visalia. We read the following in the CERCU report:

To continue to promote better understanding of one another, we are also proposing a one hour colloquium be held at this synod between two respected leaders from each of our federations. We have invited Dr. Robert Godfrey and Dr. Cornel Venema from the URC and Dr. Ja- son Van Vliet and Dr. Ted Van Raalte of the CanRC. We have asked each group to prepare a paper dealing with the theological concerns that are between us, and then for each group to write a response to the other’s paper. Those papers will be available, Lord willing before synod and then at synod the four men will present their conclusions and with each other in a public “colloquium” during an hour we are proposing be set aside during the meeting of synod. By allowing representatives of our churches to dialogue publicly over points of critical interest and im- portance, it is hoped that greater confidence in our mutual adherence to our Confessions may be promoted

(*Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014*, p. 78).

Under the heading “The Lord’s Work,” the CERCU report ends its section on the Canadian Reformed Churches by making these important remarks:

It was the work of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, which brought about the formation of the URC. It was God who gave

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the faith, courage, love, and mutual trust that united our churches under Scripture and the confessions with a new church order. If a similar love, courage, and trust will bring about a new union with other brothers and sisters of common confession and heritage, this also must be of God. This is why prayer is of utmost importance. Prayer acknowledged [sic] this dependence on God. Prayer means seeking God's will, and not our own. Prayer expresses and reinforces the importance of "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

The committee has pursued its mandate to seek unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches with the belief that such union would be according to God's Word, and thus pleasing to Him. But such belief alone neither accomplishes anything nor proves it to be the will of God. This is why we have included a recommendation that synod urge the churches to regularly pray for the Lord's guidance and grace that we may know and do His will, and that He might do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . . to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations" (Ephesians 3:20-21)

(Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014, p. 79).

Regarding the recommendations of CERCU to Synod Visalia, we note that Recommendation #8 reads: "That Synod remind the churches of our mutual responsibility to engage one another in our ecumenical task through prayer, classical dialogue, local efforts and the expression of concerns." Recommendation #10: "That Synod receive for information the announcement of CERCU that it plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that we proceed to Phase Three A of church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, we would begin the *Development of a Plan of Union*." Recommendation #11 seeks to get the local churches more involved: "That Synod urge the churches to seriously consider which, if any specific articles or stipulations of the PJCO they believe should be changed before it can be adopted for a united federation, and seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their classis." And Recommendation #12: "That Synod approve the cooperation of the PJCO [Proposed Joint Church Order] Committee with CERCU for the working on as yet unresolved difficulties that will be encountered in formulating a plan of union" *(Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014, p. 84).*

One final recommendation which, although lengthy, is worth quoting in its entirety:

That Synod continue to encourage each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill our pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers

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regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection

Grounds:

- a. Those who have been involved in the process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process, further dialogue has consistently resulted in warm and cordial relationships and misconceptions have been dispelled.
- b. This would be an encouragement to the Canadian Reformed Churches who through their synodical communications have expressed their willingness to continue working through the challenges involved in seeking unity.
- c. Our own unity as emerging URCNA churches was formed through much of these kinds of relations and interactions before our own official start together.

(Provisional Agenda Synod Visalia 2014, pp. 84,85).

As fraternal delegates representing the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) at Synod Visalia 2014, your coordinators enjoyed much good fellowship with the URC brothers as we attended Synod Visalia for its duration. With two delegates present from each congregation, it is a good opportunity for us as coordinators for church unity to interact with people from all regions of the federation. In addition to the speech by Rev. den Hollander bringing greetings from our federation, the highlight for us as CanRC was the one-hour colloquium (learned discussion) which took place on the floor of Synod by Dr. Robert Godfrey and Dr. Cornel Venema from the URCNA and Dr. Ted VanRaalte and Dr. Jason VanVliet from the CanRC (Article 50). The topic was covenant views. A one-hour question period followed the colloquium, allowing for questions from delegates to Synod Visalia. This colloquium was held at the suggestion of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) of the URCNA. The purpose was to help clear up misunderstandings and to see what the differences are when it comes to prevalent covenant views in the URCNA and the CanRC.

Prior to the colloquium, the two URCNA brothers wrote a paper outlining what they perceived to be the prevalent view within the URCNA, and the two CanRC brothers wrote a paper outlining what they perceived to be the prevalent view within the CanRC. It was made clear at the colloquium that two men cannot speak for an entire federation but that what was presented was fairly representative of each federation. The papers were the basis for the colloquium at Synod. These papers were distributed to all the Councils of the URCNA federation prior to Synod Visalia.

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The colloquium papers indicate no significant differences regarding covenant views and the colloquium itself also led to no disagreement, with the four participants concluding that we are on the same page regarding covenant views. The colloquium was a very positive experience and helped to clear up misunderstandings. As representatives of the CanRC, we received much positive feedback about the colloquium from the delegates of Synod. The colloquium papers can be read at the website of the URCNA at www.urchna.org and have also been sent to the Councils of all Canadian and American Reformed Churches by your coordinators for church unity. There was an audio recording of the colloquium and the question period, which has been transcribed. The papers and the entire proceedings have been published as a book: John A. Bouwers and Theodore G. Van Raalte, eds., *The Bond of the Covenant within the Bounds of the Confessions: A Conversation between the URCNA and CanRC* (St. Catharines, ON: Church Unity Publications, 2015). We hope that many will read it.

In dealing with the CERCU report, the advisory committee of Synod recommended that Synod encourage CERCU in its plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that the URCNA proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the CanRC; this would mean that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, CERCU would begin the *Development of a Plan of Union*. This was “tabled indefinitely,” which according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* means that Synod Visalia did not want to adopt or defeat this recommendation, choosing instead to postpone a decision about it (Article 53, Recommendation 9). This decision shows that the URCNA is not ready to proceed further with concrete steps toward merger at this time. While this decision is disappointing for us as CanRC, we can be thankful that the recommendation was not defeated but tabled indefinitely. With the time remaining in our mandate as coordinators for church unity, we continued to build relationships within the American section of the URCNA, and we tried to cultivate a will to ecumenism. We will see how the LORD decides to bless our efforts in the future.

Synod Visalia did adopt a recommendation of the advisory committee that the churches seriously consider which, if any, specific articles or stipulations of the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) they believe should be changed before the PJCO can be adopted for a united federation, and that the churches seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their Classes (Article 73, Recommendation 10). Synod instructed the PJCO committee to wait with doing further work on the PJCO until after a decision to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC (Article 69, Recommendation 1).

The reasoning which led Synod Visalia to instruct the PJCO committee to wait with doing further work on the PJCO until after a decision to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC is a departure from the approach of previous Synods. The ground is that the PJCO work properly belongs to Phase 3A, and the URCNA is not yet in Phase 3A with the CanRC (Article 69, Recommendation 1). However, the PJCO committee had been working for several years already in anticipation of a future merger, thereby doing groundwork for such a merger.

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Furthermore, in keeping with Synod Nyack 2012, Synod Visalia reiterated that each Classis and Consistory continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting CanRC ministers to fill pulpits, inviting CanRC representatives to Classes, seeking open dialogue with CanRC brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with CanRC congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection (Article 26, Recommendation 12).

As we look back over the years, we realize that the process toward merger between the CanRC and the URCNA has been very slow, but we also realize that there has been a gradual but steady movement toward one another. The colloquium and the conclusions that can be drawn from it are another step on that road. Our increasing contact as coordinators with churches and Classes in the USA has built relationships and deepened awareness of the CanRC.

Synod Visalia on Other Matters

In other news from Synod Visalia, we pass on that Rev. Richard Bout was elected to serve as Missions Coordinator. Rev. Bout had served as a church-planting missionary in Mexico for the past fifteen years and was awaiting a call after repatriating (Article 66, Recommendation 8, Article 84, Recommendation 8). His task will be to offer support and direction to the various church-planting projects of the URCNA, both abroad and at home. Two Councils are prepared to supervise Rev. Bout as Missions Coordinator; one of them will take on this task.

Furthermore, Synod adopted a Psalm Proposal of the 150 Psalms to be the Psalter portion of the new songbook for the URCNA. (About twenty of these Psalms are Genevans from our *Book of Praise*.) This Psalm Proposal was the joint effort of a URCNA committee and an Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) committee (Article 32, Recommendation 4). An OPC General Assembly meeting at the same time elsewhere also adopted this Psalm Proposal. The work on the Hymn section is ongoing and is expected to be completed in time for Synod 2016, the LORD willing (Article 32, Recommendation 7).

Synod Visalia also decided to invite the OPC to hold its 2016 General Assembly at the same time and place as the next Synod of the URCNA (Article 32, Recommendation 11). The grounds are that this would be an expression of unity as sister churches in Christ, an expression of appreciation for the OPC invitation to join them in the production of a new songbook, and an opportunity to hold a joint discussion on the songbook should both assemblies desire to do so. It was decided that Synod 2016 will be held in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area.

Synod Visalia decided that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv), the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC), and the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia

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(GGRTNTT). Synod Visalia decided to discontinue Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the Free Protestant Church in Argentina. Synod Visalia decided that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT) and the Evangelical and Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW). Synod Visalia decided that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase Two) with the United Reformed Churches of Congo (URCC) (Article 33 and 54).

Other Developments

Classis Pacific Northwest October 14-15, 2014 (Article 30) dealt with -- and adopted -- an overture from one of the churches (Zion URC of Ripon CA) "...to overture Synod Wyoming 2016 to direct CERCU to discontinue all further action, advancement, processes, efforts or steps towards unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches and specifically advancement to Phase 3, Step A." Ground #2 adduces that "...two-thirds of the federation does not approve of unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches and is resistant to CERCU's proceedings." [Note: This is based on a misreading of CERCU's report to Synod Visalia 2014.] Ground #3 reads: "The URCNA's current Phase II status of unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches is altogether satisfactory and effective and no compelling need to proceed to total union is presented." Ground #6: "Phase II Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches presently satisfies biblical requirements for pursuing Christian unity." Ground #5 asserts that the process has been "significantly distracting" from other matters such as missions and evangelism and from "...the very unity that we now do share and appreciate with the Canadian Reformed Churches." The overture does not close the door entirely on merger efforts because Ground #9 posits: "Staying in Phase II for the foreseeable future will in no way prejudice later initiatives to advance unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches."

While Synod Visalia 2014 "tabled indefinitely" the recommendation to *encourage* CERCU to work toward recommending to Synod 2016 that the URCNA proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the CanRC – meaning that Synod Visalia did not want to vote for or against it – this overture going to Synod 2016 seeks to *stifle* any effort intended to lead to unification. If this is adopted by Synod Wyoming 2016, it will spell the end of any effort toward merger for the foreseeable future.

Moreover, Classis Pacific Northwest October 14-15, 2014 (Article 32) also dealt with an overture from one of the churches (Immanuel's Reformed Church of Salem OR) to the effect that Classis Pacific Northwest overture Synod 2016 "...to declare that the Proposed Joint Church Order (a church order proposed for use in the prospective union of the United Reformed Churches with the Canadian Reformed Churches) is unusable for that purpose." Classis Pacific Northwest October 14-15, 2014 adopted this overture, and so it too is going to Synod 2016. The overture asserts that the Proposed Joint Church Order "vacates" a principle held dear by the URCNA, namely, that authority in Christ's church resides with

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the local eldership and not broader assemblies. The overture maintains that this principle is violated by such stipulations as having to maintain a seminary, licensure by Classis, counselors appointed for vacant churches by Classis, the role of deputies of Regional Synod, having Regional Synods, admission to the pulpit, etc. The fact that this overture is going to Synod 2016 shows that we are still a long way from agreement on how a merged federation would operate.

Furthermore, Classis Central US April 13-14, 2015 (Article 35) also dealt with an overture arising from one of the churches (Cornerstone URC of Sanborn IA), and adopted this overture, with the result that it too will be an overture on the agenda of Synod 2016. The overture seeks to change the mandate of CERCU. The mandate of CERCU currently reads: "With a view toward complete church unity, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order." The overture proposes that it read: "With a desire to pursue a broader unity with churches that share a common confession and faith, and acknowledging the desirability of union with churches of like faith and practice, where feasible, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order." In explanation, Ground #6 states: "The current terminology '*With a view toward complete church unity...*' appears to be used by the committee in a way which seems to keep driving toward organic union with the Canadian Reformed Churches without recognizing differences in like-faith, like-practice and the desire of churches in our federation to acknowledge them as a true church but not proceed further at this point."

While this overture is not as far-reaching as the overture going to Synod 2016 from Classis Pacific Northwest October 14-15, 2014 (the overture originating from Zion URC of Ripon CA), our concern is that this proposed change to the CERCU mandate is designed to put the brakes on unity efforts with the CanRC and seems to suggest a weaker commitment to efforts toward merger. Especially the words "where feasible" could potentially lead to a neglect of the calling to work toward unity. The fact that it was adopted by Classis Central US and is going to Synod Wyoming 2016 as an overture is further evidence of a lingering discomfort regarding merger efforts among URC churches. If adopted, the message to CERCU is clear with respect to its dealings with the CanRC. If not adopted, it is still clear that there is a lingering discomfort among URC churches regarding merger efforts. And if the overture from Classis Pacific Northwest October 14-15, 2014 is adopted, the overture from Classis Central US April 13-14, 2015 becomes a moot point regarding the CanRC.

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Considering the above, the future for unity efforts looks less hopeful. We will have to await the outcome of Synod Wyoming 2016. Let us remember Synod Wyoming 2016 in our prayers, both as congregations and individuals, and pray that the vision of Synod Escondido 2001 -- which agreed to the Phase Two relationship and looked beyond to eventual merger -- may not be lost.

At the same time, it should be noted that positive remarks were made regarding unity at Classis Eastern US October 2014, at which time the question was asked: "Why are churches holding to the Three Forms of Unity not united?" CERCU was even told to present this question at NAPARC's meeting in Grassie, Ontario in November 2014. Hopefully, this sentiment too will be heard at Synod Wyoming 2016.

While it is easy to become discouraged by the unity efforts, we should not lose sight of the many blessings which we enjoy in our relationship together as churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship -- all of which are the result of a slow but steady growing together over a period of twenty years. Pulpit exchanges take place in many parts of Canada, we work together in Streetlight Ministries (a mission church in Hamilton, Ontario) as well as in Campfire (an evangelistic camping experience for the unchurched), there is a combined effort in the Anchor Association (an association to help handicapped brothers and sisters), we work together in Reformed schooling, there are combined young people's activities, and there were two full-time interim ministries by a retired CanRC minister in URCNA churches during a time of vacancy (Rev. W. den Hollander in Dunnville, Ontario and Hamilton, Ontario).

Considerations

1. As coordinators, we have sought and received clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods. We as coordinators conveyed the concern of the CanRC that such doctrinal statements have the potential of narrowing too much the range of interpretation allowed and that these doctrinal statements themselves are open to interpretation.

At the same time, it is clear to us that the URCNA is committed to the doctrinal statements made by recent Synods and that these will not be reversed. It is a reality on the North American ecclesiastical scene that churches make statements on various matters in order to further delineate where they stand on the theological issues of the day. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) has done it, as well as the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and now also the URCNA. Our concerns about this practice have been stated, and we should leave it at that.

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by recent URCNA synods and to encourage the URCNA to refrain from making further statements of this nature, and to consider this matter finished.

- 5. That Synod Dunnville reappoint Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity.
- 6. That Synod Dunnville give the Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity a specific and well-defined mandate.

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

Appendix #1**NOTES**

Press Release CERCU/CCU November 2013

The annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) once again provided a venue for representatives of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) to meet and discuss their efforts toward merger. Those present from the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) were Rev. Bill Boekestein, Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Dan Donovan, Rev. Casey Freswick, Rev. Dr. Michael Horton, Rev. Rick Miller, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Ralph Pontier, and Rev. William Van Hal, while Rev. William den Hollander and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde were present as the CanRC's Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU).

Meetings were held on the evening of Monday, Nov 18 and the afternoon of Wednesday, Nov 20, 2013 in Flat Rock, North Carolina. The focus of the meetings was how we can best move forward in our relationship leading to merger. Rev. William den Hollander reported on his visits to URCNA classes and churches in the United States since our meeting a year ago. So far he has visited all the American classes, except Classis Pacific Northwest which he hopes to visit in the spring of 2014. Rev. den Hollander has also used those occasions and other occasions to preach in American churches and attend ministerials of the URCNA. These visits served as excellent opportunities for brotherly interaction about the issues involved in the efforts toward merger. These invitations were issued in light of Synod Nyack 2012's mandate to the churches "to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger."

In an effort to understand one another better, we discussed covenant views in the CanRC and the URCNA. The discussion then moved on to why the CanRC dislike extra-confessional statements. We also discussed the status of the doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods.

We discussed CERCU's intention to move the relationship to Phase 3A, which would mean a commitment to making concrete preparations for an eventual merger. It is CERCU's intention to present Synod Visalia 2014 with a preliminary outline of such a plan leading up to a finalized proposal to Synod 2016. Part of this plan would be to encourage URCNA churches to interact with those issues that need resolution before merger. Furthermore, to enhance understanding of the issues involved, the hope is that a colloquium can be held at Synod Visalia 2014 in which two representatives from the URCNA and two from the CanRC will address covenant views and perhaps other theological issues.

As we work toward merger, may the Lord bless our humble efforts in such a way that they serve as a witness to the world and for the glory of his Name.

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Appendix #2

Fraternal Greetings by Rev. W. den Hollander to Synod Visalia 2014

Esteemed Brothers in the Church of Christ

It truly is an honour and privilege that I may once again be present in your midst and address you as General Synod of the URCNA. The fact that I can address you in your broadest assembly with *all* your churches represented by its delegates makes this moment very special. Since GS Nyack 2012 I have been in the rather unique position of visiting seven of your eight Classes. Included in these visits were some 16 opportunities to conduct worship services in URC congregations, and besides those to preach as well in *other* churches among your Classes upon special invitations. Aside from these preaching engagements I could address your Classes and congregations to introduce the federation of CanRC and its history and heritage. In short, if ever it has been appropriate to apply the figure of “ambassadors” to the servants of Christ as they make their appeal on Christ’s behalf [2 Cor. 5:20], I certainly felt like I came in that function! My appeal, however, on behalf of Christ, was not so much as saying, “Be reconciled to God,” but to encourage you with the other words of the apostle, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace!” Indeed, your invitations, your receptions, and your interests and inquiries, together with my humble attempts in fulfilling my mandate, did add up to the apostle’s appeal to manifest the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit and to promote the will to ecumenicity through the bond of peace!

Brothers, I consider myself exceedingly blessed by the experiences enjoyed during these visits and occasions. Just as we are exulting here at GS Visalia 2014, so I rejoiced in each and every of the other opportunities, in the truth of the words of Psalm 133, “Behold, how pleasant and how good, that we, one Lord confessing, together dwell in brotherhood, our unity expressing!” [PH #279] When the CERCU report to your synod mentions that “Growing love, mutual knowledge and trust, as well as increased cooperation in such things as education, evangelism, youth activities, conferences, joint services, and pulpit exchanges have marked the past number of years,” among the churches in closer geographical proximity that is, then I may add that *also* these *my* personal encounters contributed to a similar growth in love, mutual knowledge and trust! Your committee report is so true when it observes that “It is significant that the closer and more frequent the interaction has been, the greater is the interest and openness toward progressing onward in this endeavour.”

At times the question was put to me whether I was *still* as convinced and motivated that the process toward organizational unity should be pursued, having experienced and discovered that “significant ambivalence remains concerning the whole process among the US Classes of the URC.” [As your CERCU report refers to my findings.] Let me assure you with all the sincerity of my heart and integrity of my faith, that my exposure to these

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US churches and Classes and my interaction with the brotherhood in the URCNA have become an even greater incentive for this pursuit than I have had since the beginning of my involvement in 1992. In fact, the *miracle* of the growing unity among the churches in Canada to the point of its present integration and immersion and cooperation at every level of church life, congregational communion, and the pursuit of kingdom service in a growing number of areas of life, this *miracle* must be a strong motivation to *continue* our pursuit to the point at which we may see *the miracle of the 21st century* come true in the union of the URCNA and CanRC to the greater glory of God our Saviour and as testimony to the world!

Why this should be? Well, brothers, we all know that the church gathering work of Christ is a dynamic process. When you, in 1995/6 set out to establish the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America, you pursued a union by faith, in love, with courage, and in mutual trust (as your CERCU report testifies!), because you knew that this was in accordance with the Word of God. You did so because the entire Scripture reveals this dynamic process toward union in Old and New Testament: in the service of God at Shiloh, in *one* tabernacle, *one* temple, for the *one* people of God (which was composed of twelve so very different tribes!), a unity of God's people which our Saviour articulated when speaking about *one* flock and *one* Shepherd, revealing to us in the NT gathering of His church that He breaks down dividing walls to unite Jews and Gentiles, uniting them into *one* holy nation, working towards the *one* multitude! God is one; He unites under the headship of Jesus Christ, and He restores unity as well!

Then the Scriptures reveal to us that this work is *visible*: the multitude in Revelation 7 came about through Christ, as He walked among the 7 churches in Asia Minor, holding their stars in His *one* hand, being the *one* foundation under their local churches, which expressed their unity by being a hand and foot to each other, in the congregations and among their federation! Indeed, it is this dynamic work of God that we can see throughout the history of the church, as we confess in the *oneness* and catholicity of the church! Hence, we are urged to look at *God's* work and not at the people and their feelings, reservations, or their ambivalence, but we must see our faith working through love, Scripturally, confessionally, historically, and organizationally! The church is pillar and foundation of the truth; it's this truth which unites believers, congregations, and federations! We have seen the miracle of this unity develop and grow in Canada, as it continues to manifest itself; in the same spirit of unity in the truth we may see this dynamic character of the church become evident in the union that we continue to pursue as brothers and sisters of common confession and heritage!

Esteemed brothers, just as GS Escondido 2001 was pivotal in promoting a growing momentum by its forward-looking decisions and appointments, you have gathered in one of the churches in California again with the opportunity to maintain and increase the momentum through decisions and CERCU's recommendations which pursue this unity in the truth (including our common understanding of the richness of the doctrine of the cov-

Appendix #3

Summary of the Doctrine of the Covenants: A URCNA Perspective

Cornelis P. Venema and W. Robert Godfrey
June, 2014

Introduction

We have been asked by the CERCU of the URCNA to address the question whether our federations' (URCNA and CaRCs) hold to different views of the doctrine of the covenant, and whether these views, though different, fit within the boundaries of acceptable teaching, as these boundaries are defined by the Three Forms of Unity. In order to fulfill this mandate, we decided to focus upon two doctrinal matters: 1) the doctrine of the pre-fall covenant relationship between God and the human race in Adam (commonly termed the "covenant of works"); and 2) the doctrine of the covenant of grace, particularly in respect to its relationship to the doctrine of election. We believe that these are the two primary topics where there may be differences between our two federations.

It should be observed that we do not intend to offer a summary in what follows that fully expresses the diversity of opinion that obtains within the URCNA. What we present is a summary of what we believe is a common understanding of these topics within the URCNA. The key questions are: Are these opinions in conformity to, or within the boundaries set by, the Three Forms of Unity? Are they opinions that the CaRCs believe are within confessional boundaries?

The Pre-fall Covenant ("covenant of works")

We believe that the following theses summarize a common view of the pre-fall covenant, which is held by many in the URCNA to conform to the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity:

Adam's obedience to the requirements of his pre-fall fellowship with the Triune Creator was the "condition" for his continuance in and entrance into further life in blessed fellowship with God. The "life" implicitly promised (indeed, the promise of "eternal life" in immutable fellowship with God; cf. Gen. 3:22) in this fellowship would not be a "free gift" of God's *saving grace*, but a covenanted reward granted in the way of (and in no other way) of Adam's "perfect obedience." What Adam would have received from his Triune Creator, were he to have obeyed the requirements of the pre-fall covenant, would fully accord with divine truth and justice. (See Belgic Confession, Article 14, the "commandment of life"; HC Lord's Day 3.6, "so that [aus dass] he might live with Him in eternal blessedness"; HC Lord's Day 16.40.)

Adam's "justification" prior to the fall, though a matter of his "reputation" by God's declaration (forensic), was not on account of the righteousness of Another, but on account of a righteousness which was his own (though his by virtue of God's favor, enablement and provision). Prior to the fall into sin, Adam was properly reckoned to be righteous by God, but this was not

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and free justification, the restoration of the image of God, renewal in righteousness by the Spirit, and the promise of everlasting life. When believers and their children do not believe or embrace the covenant promises, or walk in a manner that is consistent with the covenant's demands, they break the covenant and come under God's judgment.

3. Believers and their children may be assured of God's gracious promise to them, which is communicated through Word and sacrament, and be confident in the reliable Word that God speaks to them. The doctrine of election is one that honors God alone as the Savior of His people, and provides a sure basis for the believer's confidence in God's saving power. However, the doctrine of election must be handled with appropriate care, and never be treated in a way that undermines the believer's confidence in God's covenant Word or promise.
4. It is important to distinguish the covenant of grace in its *historical administration* and the covenant of grace in its *saving efficacy* (sometimes called the "dual aspect" of the covenant). In its substance and saving efficacy, the covenant of grace is the means whereby God saves his elect people in Christ. Redemption is ultimately a divine gift and gracious inheritance granted in Christ to fallen but elect sinners. The covenant of grace, so far as its saving efficacy is concerned, is not merely a "conditional offer" of salvation to those who are "under" the covenant, but it is also the instrument whereby God communicates to his elect people all that is granted them in Christ. With respect to the saving efficacy of the covenant of grace, God grants to the elect all that is theirs in Christ. The very "conditions" that God stipulates in the covenant of grace, are obtained and granted to the elect upon the basis of the perfect work of Christ on their behalf. (See Canons of Dort, II.8; II, Rejection of Errors 3-6.)
5. The covenant of grace, though it graciously realizes what was typified by the covenant of works, is properly viewed as a "second covenant," and not simply as a re-institution of the covenant relationship. Because Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, accomplishes all that is necessary for the redemption of His people, and communicates the promise effectually to them by His Spirit, we may not view the promises and demands of the covenant of grace as formally the same as the promises and demands of the covenant of works. Christ gives to His own what He requires of them in the covenant of grace. (See F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Twelfth Topic, Q. 4, #7, 2:191-92 (*quoted below))
6. Though the Three Forms of Unity do not expressly speak of the "visible" and "invisible" church, they do distinguish between those who are "externally" in the church but not genuinely members of Christ (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). The distinction between the covenant in its historical administration and the covenant in its saving efficacy, is parallel to the distinction between all believers and their children who are

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members of the visible church, and the elect who are known to God (2 Tim. 2:19) and who are properly and genuinely members of Christ and partakers in His saving work. This distinction is an important one to maintain, and is supported by the apostle Paul's distinction between those who enjoy certain covenant privileges but are not, strictly speaking, "children of the promise" in the sense of God's purpose of election (Rom. 9:6-8).

(Note: Regarding the distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church, we believe that Article 29 of the Belgic Confession is translated properly in the English translation in use in the URCNA. In this translation, the third paragraph reads: "With respect to those who are members of the church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith, *and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior*" In the English translation of this Article in the Book of Praise of the CaRCs, the third paragraph omits the "when" of the original French and Latin (it reads: "Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour"). Omitting the "when" of the original may suggest a rather different view as to who genuinely belongs to and is of the church of Jesus Christ.)

*"Nor can it be objected here that faith was required also in the first covenant and works are not excluded in the second They stand in a far different relation. For in the first covenant, faith was required as a work and a part of the inherent righteousness to which life was promised. But in the second, it is demanded—not as a work on account of which life is given, but as a mere instrument apprehending the righteousness of Christ (on account of which alone salvation is granted to us). In the one, faith was a theological virtue from the strength of nature, terminating on God, the Creator; in the other, faith is an evangelical condition after the manner of supernatural grace, terminating on God, the Redeemer. As to works, they were required in the first as an antecedent condition by way of a cause for acquiring life; but in the second, they are only the subsequent condition as the fruit and effect of the life already acquired."

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The considerations below have been crafted in response to questions posed by Drs Godfrey and Venema in an email dated Feb 19, 2014, as well as the summary they have put forward (see “Summary of the Doctrine of the Covenants: A URCNA Perspective”). Thus, our considerations should be understood in that context and not regarded as a comprehensive treatment of the covenant, either pre-fall or post-fall.

Their initial questions were:

1. What is the understanding of our respective federations regarding the nature of the pre-fall relationship (or covenant) between God, the Triune Creator, and mankind as represented by Adam? We have attached a short summary of what we believe is a common understanding of this pre-fall relationship within the URCNA (see attachment), and would invite you to comment on it from the perspective of the CanRC’s.
2. What is the understanding of our respective federations regarding the nature of the post-fall covenant of grace? We are especially interested in the question of the relation between the formulation of the doctrine of the covenant, with its “promises” and “demands” (conditions? In what sense?), and the doctrine of election. In the URCNA, it is common to speak of the “dual aspect” of the covenant (G. Vos), and to recognize that the conditions of the covenant are ultimately fulfilled in accordance with God’s “purpose of electon” (Rom. 9:1ff.).
3. How do the CaRCs regard the decisions of recent URCNA synods—re the doctrine of justification, the federal vision controversy, and the relation between covenant and election? The question is not so much whether the URCNA has (arguably) adopted some form of “extra-confessional binding.” Rather, the question focuses upon whether it is permissible, even necessary, to distinguish between the covenant in its historical administration and the covenant in its substance and efficacy in the salvation of the elect (what is often called the “dual-aspect” of the covenant, or what is expressed by the distinction between the “visible” and “invisible” church).
4. In the URCNA, it is commonly believed that Article 29 of the Belgic Confession warrants a distinction between those who truly belong to Christ and his church and those who are “externally” members of the (visible) church. This Article is thought to warrant a distinction like that between the “visible” and “invisible” church, or the distinction between those who are “in” but not “of” the covenant people of God. What is the understanding of the CanRC’s re this distinction? (Note: We are curious that the English translation of the Article in the Book of Praise, third paragraph, reads: “Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour” In our translation, it reads: “With respect to those who are members of the church, they may be known by the marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior” Your translation seems to ignore the “when” of the original French and Latin, and may suggest a rather different view as to who genuinely belongs to and is of the church of Jesus Christ.)

Key Considerations concerning the Covenant before the Fall

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Concerning Question 1 and Theses on the Pre-fall Covenant [Venema & Godfrey]

1. We agree that God's covenanted reward of "immutable fellowship" would be given in Paradise by way of Adam's perfect obedience. We agree that Adam was created with the freedom of choice to serve God or not, a freedom he had to exercise rightly, so that he would show in act and fact that he truly loved his God by submitting to his authority and fulfilling the God-given mandates. However, we point out several nuances:
 - a. When God said that his creation was "very good" (Ge 1:31) and when he walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve in the Garden *pre-lapsum* (inferred from Ge 3:8) they enjoyed a sinless and uninhibited fellowship with God. Therefore their entrance into "further life" should not be understood to be more than the entrance into a state of *non posse peccare*, or of "immutable fellowship with God" and whatever that entailed. In other words, Adam and Eve already enjoyed the gift of life with God and we should not speak of them as though they lacked any gift or capacity from God, lest we impinge upon created goodness.
 - b. When God threatened the sentence of death in the very day that Adam took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge 2:17), he thereby taught Adam that he had within him the possibility of sinning against God and his neighbour, depending upon the choice of his will. This text, more than Genesis 3:22, ought to be the ground for speaking of Adam's state of *posse peccare*. The history of redemption and history of revelation teach us of God's purpose to bring man to the state of *non posse peccare* (e.g., Re 21-22).
 - d. When Adam obeyed God he did so out of a heart of trust in God. His calling was to have that faith in God which took God at his Word, that hope which looked in faith to the time of "immutable fellowship," and that love which flowed out of such faith. In other words, while the leading measure of Adam's faithfulness was his "personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience" (WCF 7.2, WLC 20), this loving obedience could only have been present together with faith and hope, and particularly as the fruit of such faith/trust. The Westminster Confession thus uses not only "covenant of works" but also "covenant of life" and indeed theologians of the period also spoke of a "covenant of friendship," "legal covenant," "first covenant," and "covenant of nature."
 - d. We caution against stringing together phrases from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession without due attention to their context, as is done in thesis 1. To wit, the result clause in HC, LD

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3.8 “so that he might . . . live with him in eternal blessedness” is not in the context of Adam doing good works but in the context of having been created good – “God created man good and in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that . . .” The fuller quotation emphasizes that Adam was created in true righteousness, not that he had to earn it.

- e. In sum, the life implicitly promised would be a covenanted reward granted in the way of Adam’s perfect obedience. As a covenanted reward, it would still be a gift out of God’s favour to the creature. Adam’s prefall obedience should be understood to be the leading measure of his trust in God.

2. We affirm that Adam’s righteousness or “justification” prior to the fall was a righteousness of his own, though our typical use of the word “justification” applies it to our post-fall forensic justification in Christ. The reward granted to Adam prior to the fall would indeed have been a reward for his obedience within the terms of his relationship with God, that is, a *meritum ex pacto* that consists in claiming the promises that God is already holding out. In our view, Adam could not have merited his reward by strict justice outside of any covenant terms because that would require the creature to produce something entirely of his own (*ex nihilo*, as it were). But everything, including the terms of Adam’s pre-fall relationship with God, is a gift of God (1Co 4:7).

Turretin writes, “From these [foregoing considerations] we readily gather that there now can be no merit in man with God by works whatsoever, either of congruity or of condignity . . . Hence it also appears that there is no merit properly so called of man before God, in whatever state he is placed. Thus Adam himself, if he had persevered, would not have merited life in strict justice, although (through a certain condescension [*synchatabasin*]) God promised him by a covenant life under the condition of perfect obedience . . .” (Turretin, *Institutes*, 2.712; also quoted in URCNA *Report of the Synodical Study Committee on the Federal Vision and Justification*, footnote 52).

3. We agree wholeheartedly with Godfrey & Venema’s thesis. Our confessions clearly teach that Christ alone fully merited our salvation and that God imputes to his elect both the active and passive obedience of Christ.

- a. Although the debate generated by Piscator about the imputation of the active obedience of Christ was subsequent to the composition of the BC and HC we affirm that these should be understood to affirm the doctrine, on the grounds that the *textus receptus* of the BC, as improved by the Synod of Dort 1618-1619, clearly affirms the doctrine in Article 22, “he imputes to us all his merits and as many holy works as he has done for us and in our place.” We note also the closing of HC 23.60, “He grants these to me . . . as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for

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me.” Our Form for Lord’s Supper celebration also includes, “By his perfect obedience he has for us fulfilled all the righteousness of God’s law.”

- b. At the same time we caution against pressing the term “passive obedience” too far, for it does not mean that Christ was not active in pursuing the cross for our sakes, but that he *suffered* for us as the Paschal Lamb. In this case the word “passive” should be understood according to its shared root with the word “passion,” as in the “passion [=suffering] and death” of Christ.
4. We agree that in the decisive matter of the believer’s justification, law and gospel are antithetical concepts. Indeed, to affirm this is fundamental to our salvation, as the various confessional references in this thesis affirm (see further our comments on the role of faith in justification below under Covenant of Grace, Consideration 7). Yet we also affirm that in the language of Scripture the gospel is to be “obeyed” and even includes threats (Jo 3:36, Re 3:14-22, 2Th 1:8, Latin & French of CD 5.14). Scripture thus also speaks of the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2; 1Co 9:21). Scripture teaches us, too, that the law or Torah is a wonderful instruction of the LORD that is full of promises (Ps 119, Eph 6:2-3). Thus, we caution against an arbitrary dichotomization of Scripture texts containing commands into “law” and those containing promises into “gospel.”
5. We wholeheartedly agree that we may use the language of merit for Christ’s work. We humbly and earnestly confess that Christ has merited our entire salvation. He is our only Saviour, given by grace alone and to be received by faith alone.
6. Venema and Godfrey have affirmed that “everything that constitutes a *necessary and sufficient* basis for affirming a pre-fall covenant of works in distinction from a post-fall covenant of grace is set forth in the Three Forms of Unity.” This would seem to imply that all confessors of the TFU *must* affirm the distinction and perhaps also the terms “covenant of works” and “covenant of grace.”

On the one hand, we agree in affirming the distinction and disjunction between the pre-fall and post-fall situations. Indeed, we affirm a radical discontinuity that must be strongly emphasized so as to avoid Pelagian errors. Without doubt the fellowship in Paradise could not be restored by man himself; it was done and gone *unless* it was restored through Another, a Mediator, and by faith in him. Adam and Eve died spiritually “on that day,” and were thrust permanently from the fellowship in body and soul that they enjoyed with God in the Garden. That fellowship will not be restored fully until our Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory to bring in the new creation.

On the other hand, we do not hold each other to the term “covenant of works,” since the TFU do not require the term. We note that the Westminster Standards also use “covenant of life” (WLC, 20) and speak of the covenants of works and grace as “commonly called” (WLC, 30), implying that other terms are possible. Indeed Reformed theologians have affirmed

Key Considerations concerning the Covenant after the Fall, or the Covenant of Grace

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Concerning Questions 2 & 3 and Theses on the Covenant of Grace
[Venema & Godfrey]

1. Concerning the relationship between the covenant of grace and election, it is clear that the two are not identical even though they are connected to each other in significant ways. To mention but one obvious difference, election is a decree that God made before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4), while the covenant of grace is a relationship initiated by God after the fall and in history (Gen 15:18). Furthermore, not every child of the covenant is elect (Rom 9:6-13). In this sense, there is a certain duality in the covenant: there were both elect and reprobate among the circumcised in the OT, just as there are both elect and reprobate among the baptized in the NT. Another way of expressing this is that the circle of the covenant is larger than the circle of the elect.
2. The more challenging question is: what is the best way to describe the aforementioned duality in a scripturally responsible and pedagogically effective way? Over time various terms have been proposed: external and internal, administration and essence (substance), or conditional and absolute. Although these terms attempt to express the truth of the previous point (#1 above), they do have limitations. For example, the following can be mentioned:
 - a. although not decisive in and of itself, it is noteworthy that these terms do not appear in Scripture or our confessions;
 - b. although the proponents of these terms often wish to prevent it, it does happen that the dual aspect of one covenant becomes, for all intents and purposes, two distinct covenants in the minds of God's people—an external covenant and an internal covenant—while our confessions speaks of one covenant of grace (BC 34; LD 27; CoD 1:17) with two dispensations, old and new (LD 27);
 - c. these terms can leave parents in the pew, who are holding their just-baptized baby, in a state of uncertainty, wondering whether their child is *really* in the covenant or not;
 - d. these terms do not always do full justice to the scriptural reality of covenant breakers and profaners (Lev 26:15; Deut 31:16,20; Mal 2:10; Heb 10:29): if someone is only externally or conditionally in the covenant can he *truly* break it?
3. Considering the aforementioned limitations, it is helpful to take another look at the terminology that is found in Scripture, namely, that of the blessings (Deut 28; Gal 3:7-14) and the curses (Deut 29:1, 9-14; Gal 3:15-18) of the covenant. These passages shift our attention from *aspects* of the covenant to *outcomes* of life within the covenant. Clearly, there are two different outcomes for covenant people, those who be-

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lieve “are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:9) and those who do not embrace Christ by faith are under the curse (Gal 3:13-14). In this way, there is a clear confession of one covenant, while the two outcomes express the duality which was already mentioned in point #1 above.

4. At the same time, there is more than a difference in outcomes (#3 above), there is also a difference in the way that individual believers live *within* the covenant. Someone can merely “go through the motions” and live within the covenant in a merely external and superficial manner. This is ungodly hypocrisy. Conversely, someone can live within the covenant genuinely, that is to say, from the heart in true dedication to, and with fellowship with, the Lord. This is the way it should be. Yet both kinds of people can be found within the covenant, as the apostle Paul indicates in Rom 2:28-29. Here an analogy may help. The Lord compares his covenant with his people to a marriage covenant (Jer 31:32, Eph 5:22-33, etc). Just as a couple can be truly and legally married yet not live together in true harmony and love, so too people may be truly and legally part of the covenant, but not live in genuine faith and love toward the LORD.¹
5. In addition much can be gained by emphasizing the two parts of the covenant: promise and obligation (Gen 17:4, 9; *Form for Baptism*). If the preacher emphasizes both parts, in the right order and in a balanced way, his congregation will not walk away with the impression that one is automatically saved simply because he is baptized. Furthermore, the obligation is, in the first place, a call to trust the LORD and believe in the covenant promises he has given, and then, flowing out of that to also live a life of holiness (LD 23-24, 32-33).
6. The doctrine of election should not overshadow the doctrine of the covenant in such a way that doubt, rather than assurance, is cultivated in the hearts of God’s people. Believing parents who bring their covenant child forward to be baptized should be certain that their child belongs truly—not merely possibly or potentially—to the covenant of grace. Along the same lines, the maturing Christian should be fully convinced of the reality of God’s promises for him, as well as the reality of his obligations toward God, rather than constantly questioning whether he is elect or not, or whether he is actually in the covenant or not. In this respect, the concluding paragraphs of the Canons of Dort regarding “the consolation of afflicted souls” are very much to the point. We read the Canons of Dort precisely to underline the divine origin, full efficacy, and transforming and preserving power of God’s sovereign grace, leading us to assurance rather than doubt.
7. With respect to the role of faith, we need to distinguish carefully between justification and sanctification. With respect to justification, faith relies entirely upon, and accepts, the free gift of Christ’s perfect righteousness, satisfaction and holiness. This is what we confess when

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we say that we are saved only by faith and without any merit of our own (LD 23, 32). With respect to sanctification, faith produces the fruits of good works, as described in the letter of James and summarized in BC 24 (“We believe that this true faith... regenerates him and makes him a new man.”)

Considerations concerning Question 4 and Theses on the Covenant of Grace [Venema & Godfrey]

1. BC 29 clearly speaks of hypocrites who are *in* the church but not *of* the church. The CanRCs not only confess this truth with the mouth but also believe it with the heart (to borrow some language from BC 1). Thus, the issue is not with confessing the truth that there are hypocrites in the church, or in the covenant (see #4 above), but rather how this sad reality is best described in theological terms. Here the CanRCs tend *not* to use the terms invisible and visible church. To begin with, such terminology is found neither in Scripture nor in our confessions. In addition, past experiences, particularly in the Netherlands in the time surrounding the Liberation of 1944, have taught us that speaking of an invisible church *can* lead to a certain pluriform view of the church which, practically speaking, often compromises the truth we confess in BC 28, namely, everyone’s duty to join the church, being active members within it and respecting the authority of local office bearers. In short, the CanRCs have no difficulty with using the *in* the church but not *of* the church distinction, but we generally avoid the terms invisible and visible church for the reasons stated above.
2. Concerning the translation of BC 29, we do not think there is any significant issue here. The sentence in question reads: “With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Saviour, they avoid sin, etc” (URCNA Psalter-Hymnal) or “Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin, etc” (CanRC Book of Praise). The question revolves around the presence of the word “when” (Fr. *quand*). First of all there is a textual issue that adds a certain wrinkle in the translation history of this sentence. The original text of 1561 did not have *quand ayans recue un seul Sauveur Iesus Christ*, but rather *ce qu’ils reçoivent un seul Sauveur Iesus Christ*. Now, the *textus receptus* (Synod of Dort 1618-19) certainly does have *quand*, but the different word choice between the original and the *textus receptus* already indicates something about the semantic force of the word *quand* in that sentence. In that case the word is not suggesting that church members must at a certain point in time receive the Lord Jesus Christ in some kind of special conversion experience. Rather, it is logically connecting the various marks, or indications, that ought to be noticeable in the life of a sincere Christian, specifying that the works of sanctification are not simply parallel with

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the gift of faith, but flow from it. We fully agree with this, as is clear from many other places in the confessions. Whether the word *quand* is there (as in the *textus receptus* & URCNA Psalter Hymnal) or not there (as in 1561 edition & CanRC translation), the meaning of the sentence remains the same. As a matter of interest, an earlier translation of the BC used in CanRC had the word “when” in it (see *Book of Praise* 1972). The word “when” was removed in a linguistic and stylistic revision in the early 1980s. We have consulted some internal archive documents of that revision process, and we have the distinct impression that the change was made simply for linguistic reasons (i.e., ease of English expression) and not theological reasons.

¹ In its main lines, this is also what L. Berkhof, citing G. Vos, is saying on pp 286-87 of his Systematic Theology. It also coheres well with K. Schilder’s emphasis on the legal reality of the covenant, even if the communion within the covenant has not yet flourished due to immaturity (in the case of infants) or is being rejected in unbelief (in the case of hypocrites). See Schilder’s Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant, esp pp 3, 11-12.

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the URCNA proceed to Phase Three A of church unity with the CanRC; this would mean that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, CERCU would begin the *Development of a Plan of Union*. This was “tabled indefinitely,” which according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* means that Synod Visalia did not want to adopt or defeat this recommendation, choosing instead to postpone a decision about it. This decision shows that the URCNA is not ready to proceed further with concrete steps toward merger at this time. While this decision is disappointing for us as CanRC, we can be thankful that the recommendation was not defeated but tabled indefinitely. With the time remaining in our mandate as coordinators for church unity, we will continue to build relationships within the American section of the URCNA, and we will try to cultivate a will to ecumenism, as we have been doing. We will see how the LORD decides to bless our efforts in the future.

Synod Visalia did adopt a recommendation of the advisory committee that the churches seriously consider which, if any, specific articles or stipulations of the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) they believe should be changed before the PJCO can be adopted for a united federation, and that the churches seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their Classes.

Furthermore, Synod Visalia, in keeping with Synod Nyack 2012, reiterated that each Classis and Consistory continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting CanRC ministers to fill pulpits, inviting CanRC representatives to Classes, seeking open dialogue with CanRC brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with CanRC congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection.

As we look back over the years, we realize that the process toward merger has been very slow, but we also realize that there has been a gradual but steady movement toward one another. The colloquium and the conclusions that can be drawn from it are another step on that road. Our increasing contact as coordinators with churches and Classes in the USA has built relationships and deepened awareness of the CanRC. Please remember in your congregational prayers the efforts toward unity. “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1).

Brotherly greetings,

Rev. William den Hollander
Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde

Appendix #5 Article in *Clarion* after Synod Visalia

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Synod Visalia 2014 of the URCNA

By Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde

Close to 250 men met at the beautiful and spacious facilities of the Trinity United Reformed Church at Visalia, California from June 2-5, 2014 for the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). With temperatures hovering around 100 degrees Fahrenheit outside, the men met inside the comfortably air-conditioned facilities to deliberate and decide on the matters before Synod. Synod was marked by the warmth of brotherly fellowship and a very efficient handling of the matters on the agenda. It was the first Synod in the history of the URCNA which was finished one day ahead of schedule.

As fraternal delegates representing the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) at Synod Visalia 2014, Rev. William den Hollander and I enjoyed much good fellowship with the URC brothers as we attended Synod Visalia for its duration. With two delegates present from each congregation, it is a good opportunity for us as coordinators for church unity to interact with people from all regions of the federation. In addition to the speech by Rev. den Hollander bringing greetings from our federation, the highlight for us as CanRC was the one-hour colloquium (learned discussion) which took place on the floor of Synod by Dr. Robert Godfrey and Dr. Cornel Venema from the URCNA and Dr. Ted VanRaalte and Dr. Jason VanVliet from the CanRC (Article 50). The topic was covenant views. A one-hour question period followed the colloquium, allowing for questions from delegates to Synod Visalia. This colloquium was held at the suggestion of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) of the URCNA. The purpose was to help clear up misunderstandings and to see what the differences are when it comes to prevalent covenant views in the URCNA and the CanRC.

Prior to the colloquium, the two URCNA brothers wrote a paper outlining what they perceived to be the prevalent view within the URCNA, and the two CanRC brothers wrote a paper outlining what they perceived to be the prevalent view within the CanRC. It was made clear at the colloquium that two men cannot speak for an entire federation but that what was presented was fairly representative of each federation. The papers were the basis for the colloquium at Synod. These papers were distributed to all the Councils of the URCNA federation prior to Synod Visalia.

The colloquium papers indicate no significant differences regarding covenant views and the colloquium itself also led to no disagreement, with the four participants concluding that we are on the same page regarding covenant views. The colloquium was a very positive experience and helped to clear up misunderstandings. As representatives of the CanRC, we re-

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ceived much positive feedback about the colloquium from the delegates of Synod. The colloquium papers can be read at the website of the URCNA at www.urchna.org and have also been sent to the Councils of all Canadian and American Reformed Churches by your coordinators for church unity. There was talk of an audio recording of the colloquium and the question period; if this becomes available, it will in all likelihood be posted on the website of the URCNA.

In dealing with the CERCU report, the advisory committee of Synod recommended that Synod encourage CERCU in its plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that the URCNA proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the CanRC; this would mean that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, CERCU would begin the *Development of a Plan of Union*. This was “tabled indefinitely,” which according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* means that Synod Visalia did not want to adopt or defeat this recommendation, choosing instead to postpone a decision about it (Article 53, Recommendation 9). This decision shows that the URCNA is not ready to proceed further with concrete steps toward merger at this time. While this decision is disappointing for us as CanRC, we can be thankful that the recommendation was not defeated but tabled indefinitely. With the time remaining in our mandate as coordinators for church unity, we will continue to build relationships within the American section of the URCNA, and we will try to cultivate a will to ecumenism, as we have been doing. We will see how the LORD decides to bless our efforts in the future.

Synod Visalia did adopt a recommendation of the advisory committee that the churches seriously consider which, if any, specific articles or stipulations of the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) they believe should be changed before the PJCO can be adopted for a united federation, and that the churches seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their Classes (Article 73, Recommendation 10). Synod instructed the PJCO committee to wait with doing further work on the PJCO until after a decision to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC (Article 69, Recommendation 1).

Furthermore, in keeping with Synod Nyack 2012, Synod Visalia reiterated that each Classis and Consistory continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting CanRC ministers to fill pulpits, inviting CanRC representatives to Classes, seeking open dialogue with CanRC brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with CanRC congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection (Article 26, Recommendation 12).

In other news from Synod Visalia, we pass on that Rev. Richard Bout was elected to serve as Missions Coordinator. Rev. Bout had served as a church-planting missionary in Mexico for the past fifteen years and was awaiting a call after repatriating (Article 66, Recommendation 8, Article 84, Recommendation 8). His task will be to offer support and direction to the various church-planting projects of the URCNA, both abroad and at home. Two Councils are prepared to supervise Rev. Bout as Missions Coordina-

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tor; one of them will take on this task.

Furthermore, Synod adopted a Psalm Proposal of the 150 Psalms to be the Psalter portion of the new songbook for the URCNA. (About twenty of these Psalms are Genevans from our *Book of Praise*.) This Psalm Proposal was the joint effort of a URCNA committee and an Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) committee (Article 32, Recommendation 4). An OPC General Assembly meeting at the same time elsewhere also adopted this Psalm Proposal. The work on the Hymn section is ongoing and is expected to be completed in time for Synod 2016 (Article 32, Recommendation 7).

Synod Visalia also decided to invite the OPC to hold its 2016 General Assembly at the same time and place as the next Synod of the URCNA (Article 32, Recommendation 11). The grounds are that this would be an expression of unity as sister churches in Christ, an expression of appreciation for the OPC invitation to join them in the production of a new songbook, and an opportunity to hold a joint discussion on the songbook should both assemblies desire to do so. It was decided that Synod 2016 will be held in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area.

As we look back over the years, we realize that the process toward merger between the CanRC and the URCNA has been very slow, but we also realize that there has been a gradual but steady movement toward one another. The colloquium and the conclusions that can be drawn from it are another step on that road. Our increasing contact as coordinators with churches and Classes in the USA has built relationships and deepened awareness of the CanRC. Please remember in your personal and congregational prayers the efforts toward unity. "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps 127:1).

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**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

CCU Theological Education Subcommittee

**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

**Report of the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Subcommittee
for Church Unity**

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working toward an eventual merger. Until the URC committee receives such a mandate, it makes one wonder what the value is of having our own Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee dedicated to (an aspect of) this merger. Three years ago Synod Carman weighed this question, and considered that “it is advisable to have a committee available to meet with its URCNA counterparts, should the URCNA committee be mandated by its next synod to work together with the CanRC committee” (Consideration 3.2). Given that we do not know how the work of the joint URC and OPC committee will be received within the URCNA, perhaps it is wise to remain available for another inter-synodical period.

4. Recommendations

We humbly recommend that Synod Dunnville

1. Reappoint a Liturgical Forms and Confessions subcommittee of the CCU, with the mandate to be available to review and compare the Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayers of the CanRC and the URCNA with a view to merger;
2. Ask the CCU to speak with CERCU about the possibility that the URC synod would once again mandate their Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee to work in closer conjunction with its CanRC counterpart.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Bouwman (convener)
 T. Van Raalte
 J. Van Vliet

**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

**Report of the Church Order Sub Committee
to Synod Dunnville 2016**

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1.Mandate

Regarding mandate, Synod Carman 2013 decided:

- 4.6 To reappoint the current committee with the mandate to continue working with the church order committee of the URCNA:
 - 4.6.1 To make further changes to the Church Order and the Forms for Discipline in light of the letters received from the churches;
 - 4.6.2 To finalize the synodical regulations.
- (Acts of General Synod Carman 2013, Article 149, p. 187):

2. The Committee and its activities

The committee members are Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg (convener), and Dr. Art Witten. Since Synod Carman 2013 the committee met five times.

Since Synod Carman 2013 the committee did not have any face to face meetings with the URCNA committee members. Near the end of November 2013 the committee sent the URC brothers a letter containing:

- 1) a copy of Article 149 of Synod Carman, including our mandate;
- 2) a copy of the *modus operandi* that we adopted to fulfill our mandate (see section 4 below);
- 3) a request to indicate if they have received any input from any URCNA churches that will require further negotiation;
- 4) a recommendation that we have a joint meeting early in 2014.

In response the URC brothers indicated that they were not ready for such a meeting given that CERCU was busy with efforts to stimulate unity between the two federations that would utilize PJCO 2012. The committee therefore indicated appreciation for these developments, a willingness to “wait and see what develops”, and a readiness to help in whatever way it could.

3. Mandate to make further changes to the Church Order in light of the letters received from the Churches (4.6.1)

Synod Carman 2013 considered the following:

- 3.2. *Because it is not in the purview of Synod to do the joint committee’s work and because these is no apparent urgency to finalize the PJCO, the letters from the churches that deal with minor matters in the PJCO 2012... should be referred back to the Church Order subcommittee for consideration and evaluation.*
- 3.3 *Some letters deal with major items and require input and direction from Synod, including the following...`*
 - Article 7 (et al) – Place of Deacons...*
 - Article 7 – Examination of Ministers from Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship...*

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Article 26 – Church Visitors...

Article 43 – Admission to the Lord's Supper...

Article 57 – The Reception and Departure of Members

This led to mandate 4.6.1 (a).

To carry out this mandate the committee reviewed both the Synod Carman directives as well as the letters sent by the churches to Synod 2013 regarding the PJCO. It did so with the following *modus operandi*:

1. Where these directives or input convince us that provisions in PJCO 2012 could/should be modified, we will propose modifications for negotiation with the URC brothers;
2. Where these directives or input do not convince us that provisions in PJCO 2012 ought to be modified, we will explain our rationale to General Synod 2016 and/or remind this Synod of rationale that has already been submitted to previous synods.

See the following attached documents

1. Attachment 1: "Response to the directives"
2. Attachment 2: "Other items from the letters of the Churches"

4. Mandate to make further changes to the Forms for Discipline in light of the letters received from the Churches (4.6.1)

Synod Carman 2013 considered the following:

- 3.2. *Because it is not in the purview of Synod to do the joint committee's work and because there is no apparent urgency to finalize the PJCO, the letters from the churches that deal with ...the proposed Forms for Discipline should be referred back to the Church Order subcommittee for consideration and evaluation.*
- 3.6. *...The committee notes that the proposed forms still quote from the NIV 1984, but highlights this as a matter for further review*

This led to mandate 4.6.1 (b)

The committee noted the letter of Carman West dated Feb 1, 2013 and hoped to discuss this with the URC brothers, but was not able to do so.

The committee hoped to meet with the URC brothers to fulfill this mandate, but was not able to do so.

5. Mandate to finalize the synodical regulations (4.6.2)

Synod Carman 2013 considered the following:

- 3.2. *Because it is not in the purview of Synod to do the joint committee's work and because there is no apparent urgency to finalize the PJCO, the letters from the churches that deal with...the draft synodical regulations.... should be referred back to the Church Order subcommittee for consideration and evaluation.*

This led to mandate 4.6.2

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Grounds:

- a. Those who have been involved in the process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process, further dialogue has consistently resulted in warm and cordial relationships and misconceptions have been dispelled.
- b. This would be an encouragement to the Canadian Reformed Churches who through their synodical communications have expressed their willingness to continue working through the challenges involved in seeking unity.
- c. Our own unity as emerging URCNA churches was formed through much of these kinds of relations and interactions before our own official start together.”

6.3. Pertinent Decisions of Synod Visalia

- 1. Synod Visalia adopted recommendation 13 above (Acts of Synod Visalia, Article 26).
- 2. Synod Visalia tabled indefinitely the following recommendation from its advisory committee (Acts of Synod Visalia, Article 53):

“That Synod encourage CERCU in its plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that we proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches so that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, they would begin Development of a Plan of Union.

Grounds:

- a. *This is consistent with the mandate given to CERCU.*
- b. *While this decision does not prejudice any decision in 2016, it does encourage the committee to do the work of presenting this matter for our consideration in 2016.*
- c. *This would also encourage the consistories to do the work of writing overtures and communicating with the committee on this matter.”*
- 3. Synod Visalia adopted the following recommendation from its advisory committee (Acts of Synod Visalia, Article 69):

1. That Synod instruct the PJCO Committee to await further work on the PJCO until after the anticipated decision at the next Synod concerning the proposal to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC.

Ground:

The PJCO work properly belongs to Phase 3A and we are not yet in Phase 3A with the CanRC.

- 4. Synod Visalia adopted the following revised recommendation from its advisory committee (Acts of Synod Visalia, Article 73):

That Synod urge the churches to seriously consider which, if any, specific articles or stipulations of the PJCO they believe should be changed before it can adopted for a united federation; and seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their classes.

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Grounds:

- a. *This is consistent with the decision of Synod 2012 as reflected in Article 53.4 and 53.5 of the Acts of Synod 2012.*
 - i. *Article 53.4: That Synod accept for continued study the Proposed Joint Church Order 2012 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches.*
 - ii. *Article 53.5: That Synod strongly encourage the churches to review Proposed Joint Church Order 2012 and inform them that suggested changes should be directed to Synod by way of overture through the classis.*
- b. *This will be an effective way to address concerns from the consistories related to this pursuit of unity.*

6.4. Comments on these reports and decisions

While we were pleased with the positive introduction and set of recommendations that CERCU submitted to Synod Visalia, we were disappointed and confused by the decisions of Synod Visalia itself.

Synod Visalia, in Article 53, decided to “table indefinitely” the recommendation of its advisory committee to “...encourage CERCU in its plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that we proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches so that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, they would begin Development of a Plan of Union” (see 6.3 above). If our understanding is correct, “tabling indefinitely,” particularly in an American context, means “to postpone consideration indefinitely.” We find this very disheartening! Does this not indicate that the unity process, at the very least, is “indefinitely on hold”?

It is true that Synod Visalia, in a subsequent article (Article 73), adopted a recommendation of its advisory committee to “instruct the PJCO Committee to await further work on the PJCO until after the anticipated decision at the next Synod concerning the proposal to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC.” It appears that this “anticipated decision,” however, refers to the very decision that was “tabled indefinitely.”

On a positive note, Synod Visalia did not disband its PJCO committee.

We find these decisions confusing and contradictory. In any case, they have the effect of putting our work “in limbo.” These decisions also made it difficult for the committee to even come to a recommendation as to whether or not the Canadian Reformed Churches should even maintain a PJCO committee. In the end we deemed it prudent to perhaps at least have a PJCO committee available if Synod Wyoming 2016 does in fact decide to proceed to Phase 3A. We also decided to suggest that Synod Dunnville mandate the CCU coordinators to seek clarification from CERCU regarding this “limbo situation.”

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7. Conclusion

The committee thanks the Lord for the work that it could do. We pray that the Lord will bless our efforts as we move forward as federations towards full unity.

8. Recommendations

The committee recommends that:

1. Synod thanks the committee for the work it has completed;
2. Synod accepts our report and recommendations as a response to the mandate given by Synod Carman and therefore also refrains from entertaining further changes to the PJCO at this time.
3. Synod mandates the CCU coordinators to seek clarification from CER-CU regarding the “tabled indefinitely” situation.
4. Synod reappoints the committee (perhaps with an additional member for continuity down the road) and mandate it to resume its work as mandated by Synod Carman 2012 only if Synod Wyoming 2016 pursues Phase 3A or mandates their joint CO committee to take up contact with us.

9. Appendix

In order to perform its work given by Synod Carman 2013 the committee incurred a total of \$ 0.00 in expenses.

Respectfully submitted,
 G. Nederveen
 G. J. Nordeman
 J. VanWoudenberg (convener)
 A. Witten

Attachment 1: Response to the "Directives" from General Synod Carman 2013

1. Re. Article 7 et al of PJCO 2012: Place of Deacons

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“Surveying the PJCO 2012 as a whole, it can be observed that the place of deacons seems to have been marginalized, without any rationale provided for this change. This is at odds with what we confess in Belgic Confession Article 30, where the elders, deacons and pastors together “form the council of the church.” As Aldergrove states, “The inclusion of the deacons in all aspects of Reformed Church government accords much better with our historical practices and roots dating as far back as Synod Emden 1571.” Articles in the PJCO where the deacons have been removed from the corresponding articles in our present Church Order include 7, 11, 15 and 56. The joint committee should work toward reinstating the role of the deacons within these articles.”*

After pondering this matter the committee decided to point out to General Synod 2016 that although General Synod 2013 clearly was sympathetic to what Aldergrove suggests, the committee is not convinced by Aldergrove since Aldergrove’s suggestion:

1. does not go back to Dort as we were mandated to;
2. does not interact with the report sent to General Synod 2010 which provisionally adopted PJCO 2010 without giving special directives about this matter;
3. goes beyond even what we currently have in our current CanRC CO, as the following examples show:
 - 3.1. Re. PJCO 21, Ecclesiastical Assemblies. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because “Deacons are involved in many of the governing aspects of the church especially the Ministry of Mercy and therefore should be recognized as part of the “Ecclesiastical assemblies.” This, however, does not reflect our current CanRC CO 29.
 - 3.2. Re. PJCO 22, The Consistory. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because “Maintaining a strong diaconal presence in the consistory serves the congregation in a better way. There must be close cooperation between deacons, elders and minister. Otherwise, we end up promoting the notion that the minister and the elders take care of “spiritual” needs and the deacons of the “practical.” Including the deacons in this Article would be in line with Article 30 of the Belgic Confession.” This, however, does not reflect our current CanRC CO 38 or 39.
 - 3.3. Re. PJCO 24, Instituting a New Church. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because, “Churches should not be instituted without deacons. This proposal reflects current practice

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as seen in the history of most CanRC churches.” Such a stipulation, however, goes beyond our current CanRC CO 40 and 41.

The committee also decided to further serve Synod 2016 with the following interaction with Aldergrove’s submission to Synod 2013:

1.1. Interaction with Aldergrove’s Submission to Synod 2013

The church of Aldergrove is of the opinion that the inclusion of the deacons in all aspects of Reformed Church Government accords much better with our historical practices and roots dating as far back Synod Emden 1571. It argues that this inclusive approach is displayed in our current Church Order and in the Belgic Confession (Article 30).

With regards to Art. 30 of the Belgic Confession your committee reiterates its position as stated in our report to Synod 2013.

Particularly from the Canadian Reformed sources we received input that the deacons should be considered part of the consistory to prevent the danger of hierarchy by the elders over the deacons. The input appealed particularly to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession which includes the deacons under the term “council” and speaks of the work of the council in terms of governing. **We decided, however, not to add the deacons to the consistory since the office of deacon is not one of ruling or governing the church. This is also in line with the Church Order of Dort.**

Regarding the term “council” in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, the original Dutch version does not call it “the council” but says that **it functions as a council (als een raad)** of the town. The term “council” itself has reference to “civic bodies of government (cf. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma in *The Revised Church Order Commentary*, p. 111 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967)). **The Belgic Confession, therefore, as a confession of testimony to the outside world, compares the government of the church to a civil government for illustrative and explanatory reasons.** To use the terminology of this comparison to suggest that therefore the deacons too have a ruling office is improper. In fact, consistency in using this comparative terminology to say that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession stipulates that the office of deacon includes “governing” necessitates saying that Article 30 also stipulates that the office of elder includes ensuring “that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need.” Both matters are found in the same context. Scripture, however, is clear: governing belongs to the office of elder, and caring for the poor belongs to the office of deacon.

In PJCO 2007 we used the term “council” throughout the articles of the Church Order, and further specified in Article 22 that “the term council designates not an assembly of the church, but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory,

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at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the Church Order or as assigned by the consistory." We reverted back to the terminology of "consistory with the deacons" given what is stated in the paragraph above about the term "council" as well as the following considerations:

- Though the terminology "consistory with the deacons" is perhaps more cumbersome than the term "council," it is less confusing;
- The terminology fits with the terminology used in the Dort Church Order;
- The term "council" gives credence to the mistaken view that the deacon's office is a ruling office;
- The popular conception of the authority of "the council" as the highest governing body in the church, even over the consistory, is a concern. In times past the deacons were considered part of the consistory, and had a lot of power.

In addition to this, the committee wishes to stress how the Form for Ordination differentiates between the offices. The mandate of the elders in supervising and governing the church is quite distinct from the task of the deacons in the ministry of mercy. Consequently the charge given to the elders is very distinct from the charge given to the deacons. This difference is carefully maintained by Dort and in the PJCO.

As to the request by Aldergrove to bring the PJCO into harmony with the current CanRC church order, we remind the churches that the PJCO is a combined product based on the mandate that the Joint Committee draft a Church Order along the principles of Dort.

Dort makes a clear distinction between the Consistory and the Consistory with the Deacons. It never refers to consistory with the deacons as Council, which only makes the distinction more pronounced. According to Dort:

1. The consistory is an ecclesiastical assembly (Art. 29). Consistory is made up of ministers and elders (Art. 37). Deacons are not mentioned. Deacons may be added to the consistory if consistory is very small (Art. 38).
2. Ministers and elders are to carry out supervision of fellow office-bearers and exercise discipline where necessary (Art. 16 and 23). The role of the deacons is the ministry of mercy and they are to give account to consistory (Art. 25).
3. Ministers who refuse to subscribe to the Three forms of Unity are *de facto* suspended by the consistory (Art. 53)
4. When suspension of office-bearers is necessary, this is done by the preceding sentence of the consistory (Art. 79)
5. The only instances where the consent of the Consistory with the Deacons "as a team" is required is when a minister accepts a call elsewhere (Art. 10) or at the election of elders and deacons (Art. 4, 5).

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As a result of our investigation of the specific articles that Synod 2013 instructed the committee to review (Art. 149, 3.3) we make the following observations based on the grounds given by Aldergrove in its correspondence to Synod 2013:

Article 7 PJCO 2012

Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship . . .

A minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship shall be declared eligible for a call within the federation only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

Aldergrove proposal: *“after an adequate period of supervision determined by his consistory with the deacons...”*

Ground: *Calling of minister(s) has always involved the deacons and they can give their unique practical perspective which elders do not always have. See current Art 5.b. I and PJCO 2012 Art 6. If we needlessly eliminate deacons from Article 7, it will be easy to argue in the future that they should also be removed from the provision Article 6 (PJCO) any longer. (sic)*

CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove has not taken note of the 2 step approach of the PJCO. The consistory is to supervise the member with a view to being ready for the calling process to begin. Once the process begins, the deacons become involved in the calling of that man.

Article 11 PJCO 2012

Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the consistory with the deacons. If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Aldergrove proposal: *“If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory with the deacons shall obtain the concurring advice of classis.”*

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CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove fails to differentiate between the offices. Ministers and elders as the overseers are charged to protect the congregation by means of instruction etc.

Article 19 PJCO 2012

The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of ...

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render a regular account of their work to the consistory. The deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.

Aldergrove proposal: *and they (the deacons) shall render a regular financial account of their work to the consistory with the deacons"*

Ground: *This change reflects historic practice and avoids giving the impression that deacons operate 'under' the consistory when in reality they are "with" the consistory.*

CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove's suggested change does not reflect historic practice. Our current CanRC CO 42 and the PJCO reflect the historic Dort.

Article 21 PJCO 2012

Ecclesiastical Assemblies

A. Identification

Among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms classis and synod designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. As assemblies, classes and synods are deliberative in nature, and exist only for the duration of their meetings.

Aldergrove proposal: *"four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory with the deacons ..."*

Ground: *Deacons are involved in many of the governing aspects of the church especially the Ministry of Mercy and therefore should be recognized as part of the "Ecclesiastical assemblies"*

CO Committee Comment: This does not reflect Dort 29 nor even our current CanRC CO 29.

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Article 56 PJC0 2012

The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Aldergrove proposal: *“he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the deacons.”*

Ground: *Inclusion of the deacons in discipline of fellow office-bearers (whether deacons or elders) is stipulated by our current Church Order (Art 71). No reason has been given to exclude them from this responsibility. There is no reason to exclude them from this process. They should work with the elders when there is need to suspend or depose someone from office.*

CO Committee Comment: It is true that CanRC CO 71 includes the deacons in this act. However, Dort does not, and we share the view of our URCNA counterparts that this is not really the task of the deacons.

2. Re. Article 7, “Examination of Ministers from Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship”

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“Several churches point out that, according to the PJC0 2012, ministers coming to our federation from a sister church need to undergo a complete examination at classis, whereas presently a colloquium is held. If we take seriously our ecclesiastical relationships and the ordinations that take place in sister churches, there is no need for this provision in our Church Order and a colloquium would be sufficient.*

In reviewing this matter the committee considered the following:

1. The churches bring forward specific cases that indeed show that a modified candidacy exam simply does not fit here;
2. The examination was crafted to serve as a safety in cases of federations in ecclesiastical fellowship with uncertain orthodoxy. The real place to address this concern, however, is in the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship;
3. The term “colloquium” is not even in the PJC0 anymore.

The committee therefore decided:

1. To bring this matter to the URC brothers, suggesting that we craft an examination that is not just a modified candidacy examination, and is more specific to the situation at hand;

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In further reflecting on this matter the committee came to the following considerations:

1. While the CanRC committee members could easily adopt what General Synod 2013 suggests, we are hesitant to bring this up again since we have gone around the mulberry bush so often with this matter. We feel that we've gotten the best we could get;
2. The word "preferably" is weak, especially in a Church Order;
3. The word "written" is before "verbal:" this already states the preference.

The committee therefore decided to not approach the URC brothers for further revision on this article.

5. Re. Article 57, "The Reception and Departure of Members"

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *"There is concern with the provision in this article that, "Departing members remain under the supervision and care of the consistory until they are received as members into [the receiving] church." The committee notes the role of the individual "to come under the care of other elders of another church," but stresses that the elders also have a responsibility and that there should be no time when a member is not under supervision. The joint committee needs to consider the point that this makes it difficult for the sending church to maintain interim oversight of a member who moves a great distance from their current church."*

In reviewing this matter the committee came to the following considerations:

1. It is true that we cannot have supervision at a distance, but that is not the intent. The point of this article is to prevent people from asking for an attestation in order to disappear from the scene;
2. The point really is not "transfer of membership" but "transfer of spiritual care" from one body of elders to another. You never put this spiritual care in the hands of an individual.
3. True, the role of the person is important: he/she is responsible to make the decision to come under the care of other elders of another church. The elders, however, also have a responsibility. There should be no gap or time when a sheep is not under oversight. The important part here is "continuing care."

The committee therefore decided to not approach the URC brothers for further revision on this article.

NOTES**Article 7 (part 1)****Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation**

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after sustaining a colloquium doctum as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

**Colloquium Doctum for a Minister from a Church
with Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship
(cf. Article 7 part 1)**

A. Documents:

1. A letter of call
2. A letter of acceptance
3. Letter from the consistory of the church from which he is leaving concerning his doctrine and life, his ministerial service, and his honorable release from his service in that church
4. Letter from the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis
5. Letter from the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with its request that the colloquium be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. In this colloquium Classis shall focus on:
 - a. Reformed doctrine: his knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
 - b. Church Polity: his knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the colloquium. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

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Attachment 2: Other items from the letters of the Churches to General Synod Carman 2013 (unfinished business to be discussed with the URC church order committee counterpart)

The committee decided to discuss matters and to seek revision of the PJCO with the URC brothers on the following matters.

1. To agree with Grand Valley that “been” is missing in PJCO 25 B: the phrase should read, “...that no matters have **been** submitted by...”
2. To agree with Grand Valley that for the sake of consistency the pronouns used in reference to God in PJCO 45 should not be capitalized.
3. To agree with Carman West that the terminology of “with a consistory” in PJCO 21 D would be improved with “from a consistory.”
4. To agree with Carman West that “shall be convened” is better than “shall convene” in PJCO 28 given that this fits better with Regional Synod not being a permanent body, and that this wording is in line with PJCO 30 regarding General Synods
5. To agree with Abbotsford that the question of whether or not churches are honouring the decisions of the major assemblies should be added to PJCO 25. This matter is very important; the fact that this is mentioned in Foundational Statements 10 and PJCO 21 E and PJCO 31 is not sufficient.
6. To agree with Abbotsford that neither the PJCO nor the draft regulations themselves indicate how the regulations might be changed. We should take note of this as a “to do item” as we continue to work on the regulations.
7. To agree with Abbotsford that in the Guideline for Appeals to General Synod, the sentence, “An appeal is a written request for a judgment regarding a matter previously decided upon by a regional or general synod” could better be written as “An appeal is a written request for a judgment regarding a matter decided upon by a previous regional or general synod.”

The committee decided to discuss matters and to seek revision of the examination regulations with the URC brothers on the following matters.

1. To agree with Flamborough and Elora that the examination regulations should stipulate that the decision to proceed to the next part of the exam should be made in closed session.
2. To agree with Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Flamborough, and Elora that the ecclesiastical examination for a minister coming from a church with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship needs work. The current examination regulation does not contend sufficiently with the reality of ecclesiastical fellowship; A colloquium doctum would be more appropriate.
3. To agree with Elora that the examination regulations should stipulate that the “practica” ought to be done in closed session. This would serve to protect the integrity of the brother.

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9. Re. Flamborough's and Grand Valley's reservations re. PJCO 26 regarding the phrase "and they shall admonish those who have been negligent. The phrase is in CanRC 46.
10. Re. Surrey's suggestion to change "they shall admonish" to "they shall fraternally admonish" in PJCO 26. The word "fraternally" occurs earlier on already.
11. Re. Surrey's suggestion that the first sentence of PJCO 52 A 2 should be improved linguistically: true, it is a run on sentence but the meaning is sequential and clear.
12. Re. Surrey's suggestion that "No Lording it over" (PJCO 54) should be moved to section II. It is in section III in the Dort CO and in the CanRC CO.
13. Re. Surrey's suggestion that the last sentence of PJCO 58 is unnecessary. PJCO 58 highlights how property exists and how it is managed. Should there be a disagreement on how it is managed, the management of the property is governed by its own rules and that is made clear with the last line. This is necessary as a safeguard.
14. Re. questions from Grand Rapids, Langley, and Lynden about the PJCO being "provisionally" adopted. It should be noted that "provisional" in this context means "providing union happens between the federations."
15. Re. Carman West's view regarding the synodical regulations that once the convening church has examined the credentials and reported the results to the meeting of delegates, then there is nothing further to report. The convening church cannot report to a synod that is not yet constituted; its last act, therefore, is to give its report to synod that is now in session.
16. Re. Carman West's view regarding the synodical regulations that the phrase that the chairman "shall state matters of fact" should be either clarified or deleted in light of the fact that prior to that there already is the phrase, "he shall place before synod every motion that is properly made and seconded, etc." There is no problem here as these actions go in tandem.
17. Re. Abbotsford's request that the committee give attention to the matter of incorporation. Our committee has flagged this for synods twice already.
18. Re. Abbotsford's concern that the PJCO decentralizes financial assistance given to seminary students while the CanRCs have recently centralized it. This fails to recall that the PJCO is for a new federation.
19. Re. Abbotsford's concern that the report makes no mention of previous CanRC Synod decisions about speaking an edifying word. This fails to recall that the PJCO is for a new federation.
20. Re. Abbotsford's suggestion that laying on of hands could be done by "the executive of the consistory." This does not square with equality of the office-bearers.

**Reports to
General Synod Dunnville
2016**

Needy Students Fund



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Section 1 - Executive Summary

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Background

General Synod Burlington 2010 founded the *Committee for Needy Students of Theology* (cited herein as the *Needy Student Fund Committee*) as a centralized federal body responsible to work with all member churches of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. The Committee was tasked to administrate financial support for all members of these churches who are enrolled as students at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. (See Section 2 – Synodical Mandate and Support Guidelines) Synod Burlington appointed the Committee to operate under the direction and counsel of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie. (Acts of Synod 2010 Art. 91.4) The Committee has since endeavoured to fulfill this mandate, and reports back to each successive General Synod. The Committee also reports annually to all member churches regarding funds dispensed and assessments per communicant member for the upcoming calendar year. The last report submitted by the Committee to Synod was to General Synod Carman 2013.

Current Situation

- i) Funds Dispensed & Students Supported* - This report will outline developments and funds dispensed between the years Jan 2012 – Aug 2014. The Committee has financially supported a total of **ten (10)** individual students since 2012. Each year the Committee dispensed an average amount of \$120,416.00. Between 2012-2014 a total of **\$361,249.00** was granted to eligible students. The Committee endeavours to maintain an account surplus to address emergent or unexpected expenditures as students present them. All funds are held in an account with the Meridian Credit Union. The Committee maintains fiscal accountability by means of dual signatories. Annual audits are performed on year-end Committee financial statements, and reported to the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church Council.
- ii) Assessments* - Churches continue to be assessed annually based on projected enrolment and anticipated fees. Individual church assessment is calculated on the membership base of the previous year as listed in the annual yearbook of the churches. The Committee sends assessment notices to member churches by November of each year. On occasion, follow-up correspondence is required to ensure payment. Rates per communicant member have remained stable in between \$10.00 - \$12.00 over the past three years. It can be noted with thankfulness that all member churches were able to fulfill their annual assessments during the period reviewed by this report.
- iii) Grant Application Process and Student Relationships* – Students who are eligible for financial assistance are made aware of the Fund and application process by means of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) website. An electronic link directs applicants towards the registrar where they are able to secure appropriate forms

Section 2 – Synodical Mandate and Support Guidelines

NOTES

Committee for the Needy Students of Theology Mandate

Introduction:

1. The Committee for the Needy Students Fund (Background):
 - a. The Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie, Ontario (“Grassie Church”) has been appointed by General Synod Burlington 2010 as the “Committee for Needy Students of Theology” (the “Committee”), responsible for extending financial aid to Canadian and American Reformed students of theology who are in need of financial support, and are enrolled at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (the “Seminary”).
 - b. The Consistory with the Deacons (the “Council”) of the Grassie Church has appointed a committee consisting of four members of the church plus a liaison to the Council. The Committee will tend to all the day-to-day affairs of the fund.
2. The Mandate of the Committee is as follows:
 - a. To propose to the Council a mandate for administering the Fund, and procedures for governing this Committee, within the mandate given by General Synod 2010 to the Grassie Church,
 - b. To propose to Council guidelines for the support of needy students (refer to Synod’s recommendations). These guidelines will be developed as we receive feedback from the different classis and will be published at a later date,
 - c. To establish the need for the support of students prior to each school year. Eligible students are to contact the Committee by August 1 outlining the specifics of their request,
 - d. To annually (each Fall) assess the churches in the Canadian and American Reformed Church federation (the “Federation”) , based on the number of communicant members in the current yearbook, in order to anticipate funding required for the upcoming calendar year,
 - e. To report all activities on an ongoing basis to the Council via the Council liaison, and
 - f. To report annually to each church in the Federation of the activities of the Committee. The report to the churches will be completed in the Spring, and will include an audited financial statement. In addition, the Committee will report tri-annually to the General Synod its activities and situation.
3. Committee Structure
 - a. The structure of the Committee shall consist of a Chairman, a Vice-all, a Treasurer, a Secretary, and a Council member as liaison.

NOTES

- 4. Duties of Committee Members:
 - a. The Chairman is responsible for directing the activities of the committee in fulfilling its mandate. The chairman will call a meeting at regular intervals and as required.
 - b. The Vice-All acts as Chairman and Secretary in their absence, and assists the Committee with carrying out its mandate.
 - c. The Treasurer is responsible for managing the receipts and disbursements of funds, and, together with the Chairman and Vice-All, is a signing officer on the bank account. In addition, the Treasurer
 - i. Will be responsible for managing supporting documentation for all expenditures
 - ii. Is to submit a bi-monthly statement of receipts and expenditures to the committee
 - iii. Sets the annual assessment to be submitted to the churches in the Federation, with the Committee
 - iv. Prepares the annual statement in January of each year, and presents it to the Committee for approval, and
 - v. Assists the church appointed auditors in their task.
 - d. The Secretary is to keep minutes of all meetings and to distribute them electronically shortly after the meeting. The secretary shall manage and retain all incoming and outgoing communications. The committee shall approve out-going communications; urgent matters of communication must be reviewed and approved by the Chairman or Vice-All. The approval of out-gong communication does not apply to the matter of miscellaneous correspondence.
 - e. The Liason is to keep Council informed of the activities of the Committee, to relay requests by the Committee for appointments and other matters, and to inform the Committee of decisions of Council that apply to the Committee.
- 5. Appointments:

Committee members are appointed by the Council, and will generally serve a four year term, with the option of one additional term at the discretion of Council. Members will generally retire in rotation.
- 6. Auditors:

Council shall appoint two auditors to examine the books of the Treasurer at the end of each fiscal year.
- 7. Report to General Synod:

The Committee shall tri-annually submit a report to the Council (eight months prior to the next scheduled General Synod of the Federation), detailing its activities and outcomes, for Council review and submission to Synod in the appropriate timeframe.

NOTES

- 1.6. Applicants may request assistance on an annual basis. All requests must reflect all costs associated with realistic and anticipated living expenses. Requests for additional funds after September 1 of the current calendar year may not be accepted and alternate sources of funds required to cover any shortfall would be the students responsibility.
- 1.7. Students who are supported by the Fund should keep comprehensive records of expenses in each of the categories noted in the application form. In cases of subsequent years of support, these records will validate and support the requested amounts in the student's applications.
- 1.8. Vehicle maintenance will be supported at a monthly rate of \$25, as applicable. Any expenses above and beyond this amount may be reimbursed upon receipt of statement of invoices. Applicants are encouraged to use the most economical means of car repairs wherever possible.
- 1.9. Applicants are expected to take ownership for the cost of their studies. Applicants must recognize that the support for the students is from assessments to communicant members of our churches, many of which themselves struggle at times financially. In addition, all students of post-secondary education relying on conventional means of financial assistance (typically government) do assume the vast majority of the cost for their education. As such, while the Fund is charged with assisting the living needs of the students of the Seminary, it also has a responsibility to the membership.

Section 2 Application Process

- 2.1. A student must apply to the Committee substantiating their request for support. The submission shall include a letter of request, as well as a completed Financial Assistance Application form.
- 2.2. Students are to submit a request (using the referenced forms) before the first day of August prior to the school year, and provide any other information requested by the committee.
- 2.3. If a student is dismissed from the Seminary, he is under obligation to repay the Fund the full amount of aid received with interest at a rate set by the Committee starting at the date of dismissal. In the case of withdrawal from the Seminary, aid received may be required to be repaid upon Committee review.
- 2.4. In cases for which this mandate does not apply, the Committee shall ask the advice of the Grassie Council.
- 2.5. This document may be reviewed and changed as needed.
- 2.6. Normal terms of support are for 9 months of the recognized school year (September – May).

Section 3 Acknowledgement

NOTES

To the Applicant:

3.1. Have you read and are you willing to abide by the guidelines for application to the Needy Students Fund as outlined in this document and adopted by the Council of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie on July 9, 2013 and,

3.2. Do you allow the Committee to contact the Council of your home congregation for other personal information, where applicable, and,

3.3. Do you understand that you are receiving aid from your fellow church members for support and growth of the church, and that therefore you should endeavour to live economically, remembering your own responsibility in the stewardship of gifts received by the grace of God, and,

3.4. Do you agree to the terms and conditions outlined in this document? The undersigned hereby declares that the information herein given is correct, and accurately describes his financial position.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Signature of Committee Chairman, Date

Signature of Committee Clerk, Date

Horizontal lines for notes, starting from the top of the page and extending down to the bottom.

Section 3 – 2012-2014 Financial Statements

Needy Student Fund Committee Statement of Receipts and Disbursements for 2014, 2013 & 2012

	<u>Notes</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>
Receipts (CAD)				
Assessments		105,772	123,209	0
Investment Income	1			645
Refunds to churches for overpayments		-746	-3,254	-392
Returns from students	2	211	0	0
Total Receipts		105,237	119,955	253
Disbursements/Expenses				
Student support		119,858	143,426	97,530
Bank Charges		20	21	17
Committee administration	3	0	185	192
Total Disbursements/Expenses		119,878	143,632	97,739
Surplus / (deficit)		-14,641	-23,677	-97,485
Assessment per communicant member		10	12	0
No. of students Jan - May	4	6	8	5
No. of students Sept - Dec		6	6	8

Needy Student Fund Committee Statement of Financial Position as at December 31

Assets (CAD)				
Cash		28,101	42,109	53,264
Accounts receivable				
Advances to Students				
Total Assets		28,101	42,109	53,264
Liabilities and Surplus				
Accounts payable				
Assessments received in advance				7,040
Accumulated surplus		28,101	42,109	46,224
		28,101	42,109	53,264

<u>Notes</u>	1	GIC investment in 2011
	2	Disbursement given for estimated vehicle repair, surplus returned when repair completed under-budget
	3	Pre-certified cheques and office supplies
	4	Total 10 individuals supported

