

October 25, 2000

## Report of the Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Church

### In the United States (RCUS)

#### I. History of the contact and mandate Fergus 1998

##### A. Our contact since 1984

As early as 1984 our churches have had (official) contact with the RCUS. In 1984 some church members visited RCUS churches in North and South Dakota.

A delegation of the RCUS visited our college in Hamilton with a view to establishing an RCUS seminary.

In 1985 Rev. P. Kingma was a visitor at the RCUS Synod. Rev. P. Kingma was again present at the 1988 Synod.

From 1987-1992 the consistory of the Church at Carman had official contact with the RCUS. This local consistory paid five visits to the RCUS, in Oct. 1987, in Oct. 1988, in Sep. 1989 to RCUS churches and pastors, in Feb 1991 to RCUS classis in Pierre SD, and in April 1991 Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer and Elder Jake Kuik attended the RCUS Synod in Garner, IA.

During the 1989 visit the Canadian Reformed visitors received an urgent request to provide a document which would state clearly what the doctrine of the church really all entails according to Canadian Reformed ecclesiology.

The object of Carman's contact was: continuing investigation to determine whether a proposal should be made to major assemblies to seek further contact with the RCUS and to work towards full recognition of each other as true churches of Christ Jesus.

The findings of Carman in 1990 were:

- that the objective cannot be realized at this time. There are too many inconsistencies within the RCUS such as concerning the communion of saints, church discipline and Christian education. Traditional influences seem to be an obstacle to overcoming these inconsistencies.
- that it recognizes the sincere intention of some in the RCUS to be truly Reformed and that through further local contact we can, the Lord willing, help them in the direction they desire to go.

Carman's concerns especially pertain to the doctrine of the Church (the invisible church), the admission to (an open?) Lord's Supper, and Erasure. They write to Synod 1992 that "there are serious doctrinal and church political difficulties which prevent us from making recommendations for ecclesiastical unity with the RCUS." (Carman disagrees with the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad that contact with RCUS should become a matter of the whole federation).

In 1991 the RCUS sent a letter to our Deputies on Relations with Churches Abroad, informing them that they would like to establish fraternal relations with our churches and will be sending an observer to Synod Lincoln 1992.

Rev. F. Walker was present at Synod 1992 as an observer and addressed our Synod. There he said: "It is clear that we are basically of one mind in Christ Jesus."

In his report to the 1993 RCUS Synod (Sutton) Rev. Walker complained about "overly critical and often inaccurate [CanRC] reports."

Synod Lincoln 1992 decided to make the contact with the RCUS a federative matter, and mandated the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the church at Carman, MB.

### **B. Mandate Synod Fergus 1998**

Deputies for Synod Fergus 1998 investigated the RCUS according to their mandate with due attention to the three marks of the church (BC art.27-29), and recommended: "that the CanRC enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS under the adopted rules."

However, Synod Fergus was not completely satisfied with the deputies' report and considered that closer investigation should take place on admittance to the Lord's Supper, Sunday observance, the doctrine of the Church, erasure and the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches.

Synod Fergus 1998 decided:

- A. To thank the CRCA for fulfilling its mandate with regard to the RCUS.
- B. To acknowledge with gratitude the commitment of the RCUS to the Word of God and the Reformed heritage.
- C. To decline the invitation of the RCUS at this time to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship.
- D. To give the following mandate to the CRCA:
  1. To continue working towards a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS;
  2. To resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted;
  3. To discuss the matter of Sunday observance and the doctrine of the church;
  4. To seek clarification of the concept of erasure;
  5. To investigate the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches;
  6. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the opening of Synod.

In fulfilling this mandate the sub-committee for contact with the RCUS met 13 times. The committee invited Rev. G. Syms to Carman for a general acquaintance visit. Two meetings with the full Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS (IRC) were held. Our committee attended 5 RCUS Worship Services and visited the 2000 RCUS Synod in Hamburg, MN.

Proper minutes and reports were duly made of these activities. The reports of our official meetings are appended to this report.

### **2. Conclusions**

The committee's findings are as follows:

**a. Working towards a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS.**

We have tried to foster a good rapport with the ICR committee and with many other RCUS members. We have studied the 1984-1999 RCUS Abstracts and other documents like position papers. We received great encouragement from the RCUS brothers and we have endeavoured to reciprocate the spiritual encouragement on the basis of the Reformed faith. Our contacts have fostered a greater appreciation of each other's heritage.

**b. Proper supervision of the Lord's Table.**

I. The Elders, who form the spiritual council, admit the baptized youth of the church to the Table of the Lord. The Elders first examine them (Article 193 RCUS Constitution), and then the young people make Public Profession of their Faith in a Worship Service. In the RCUS this procedure is called Confirmation.

As in our churches, the baptized youth receive extensive Catechism Instruction in view of their Public Profession of Faith. The IRC sent us the following information in regard to the examination by the Elders. "The catechism is recited to the Elders, normally in two or three segments on two or three days respectively. However, it is also our practice to have the youth recite the catechism in its entirety before the congregation. This is not normally done in a Worship Service but rather in a Sunday Bible Class setting with the congregation present. Again, such recitation of the catechism is normally done in two or three parts before the Elders and most often at the end of each years work."

2. The RCUS doesn't require an attestation from guests, but Elders will usually conduct an examination of prospective guests. Agreement was expressed with J. Murray's article on restricted communion (see Collected Writings Vol.2 p.381ff). On page 383 Murray writes: "It seems utterly unreasonable to leave the matter [= participating in the Lord's Supper celebration] entirely to the conscience of the person concerned, when this is not done and should not be done in the case of the members of the congregation."

On September 7, 2000, the IRC sent us the following information in regard to the procedure of such an examination.

A. [Guests seeking admission] are required to be prepared to be examined in a timely fashion. In other words we do not rush the examination process because they arrive at the last minute for worship. Our members know to bring guests to be examined well before our Lord's Day activities begin. If the elders have insufficient time to examine, the guests seeking admission receive an explanation and are not admitted.

B. The following statement of belief must be signed giving the name and address of their home church. This statement is as follows:

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is restricted to believers who have made a public confession of their faith and who are communicant members in good standing of an orthodox Protestant church. Please read the following statement and determine whether you agree with it. If you do then complete the information requested and return it to an Elder.

I believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

I believe that Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup in remembrance of Him, and has joined therewith these promises: First that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord communicated to me; and further that with His crucified body and shed blood, he Himself feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, as certainly as I receive from the hand of the Minister and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord which are given me as certain tokens of the body and blood of Christ.

I come to the Table of the Lord because I am displeased with myself because of my sins, yet trust they are forgiven me, and that my remaining infirmity is covered by the suffering and death of Christ; I also desire more and more to strengthen my faith and amend my life.

I believe that partaking of the Lord's Supper will not merit my salvation, but is a means of grace to strengthen my faith.

Your name:

Name and address of your home church.

Note: If you are a communicant member of a Reformed or Presbyterian Church would you like your church to be advised of your participation with us in the Lord's Supper?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Then the applicant fills out the following, which is gone over with him or her by an Elder (or Elders) thoroughly.

To determine whether they are sound in doctrine the following questions are asked:

1. Are you in complete agreement with the statement you just read?
2. Are you a regular active member of your home church?
3. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments to be the infallible Word of God and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?
4. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Saviour and sovereign Lord?
5. Do you confess that Jesus Christ is both God and man, two natures in one person?
6. Do you believe that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone?
7. Do you hold any doctrines or beliefs, that so far as you know, do not accord with historic orthodox Protestantism?

Then the following questions are asked to determine whether the applicant is sound in life.

1. Are you a member in good standing of your home church? (Under discipline? Under suspension?)

2. Are you engaged in profane or scandalous behavior or living secretly and impenitently in any sin?
3. Are you engaged in any activity that is a wilful, known violation of the Law of God?

The above comprises the substance of the questions asked. The Elder, of course, has liberty to move from these into other areas if the answers to the above warrant it.

The procedure of examining guests seeking admission to the Table in the RCUS clearly shows that the RCUS does not have an open but a fenced Table. Although we see differences here with regard to the doctrine of the church (e.g. what is an "orthodox Protestant church"?), the keys of the kingdom are exercised by the elders in the method outlined above.

Therefore we believe that the Lord's Supper is guarded in the RCUS in a manner consistent with Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 30, Question and Answer 82.

#### c. I. Sunday observance

Having only one Worship Service per Sunday has been a long tradition within the RCUS. Since the Bible doesn't say that people have to go to church twice, the important question for them is, where do you draw the line?

However, the RCUS has a statement about profaning the Sunday in its constitution. Art. 180 of their "Church Order" reads: "The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy ..."

The ICR committee informed us that the more recently instituted churches tend to have two Worship Services more often than the older established churches.

We found that there is awareness in the RCUS that they should not be complacent about how to observe the Lord's Day. Overall the RCUS is less strict on this point, but in its teaching and preaching it strongly emphasizes worship. On Sundays people should use their time for the Lord. We witnessed that this teaching is given. The profaning of the Lord's Day is addressed and if members do not attend church regularly, they will be disciplined.

#### 2. The doctrine of the church

Regarding this doctrine there remains a difference of approach. The RCUS speaks more in theological and practical terms about the church, while the CanRC speaks about the church as our confessions define the church.

The RCUS clearly rejects the separation of the church into a visible one and an invisible one. They emphasize that the distinction is used only to show two aspects of the church. The church is visible in the believers, as the gathering of the believers under the guidance of the office bearers.

However, not everything is visible in the church. There are hypocrites according to BC art. 29, and there can be a time that the church is hardly visible, since it is nearly extinct in the eyes of man. However, God keeps his chosen ones as in the time of Ahab, the 7000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal!

We feel, though, that the danger of separating the visible and the invisible church is not always avoided. Then one speaks about the plurifomity or the multiformity of the church; the latter term is used in their Church Unity paper. We warned against this danger of denominationalism, the danger of ignoring the mandate of the Lord to express the unity of faith.

The RCUS does not want to do away with the distinction visible/invisible to avoid the impression that they would claim to be the only true church. Furthermore, we could witness the strong emphasis within the RCUS regarding organic union.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the RCUS church “concept” differs somewhat from ours. This is an area, as has been acknowledged before, about which we need to continue to listen to one another, since both churches want to base their approach on Scriptures. And both churches strongly fight independentism and synodicalism. It must also be emphasized that the RCUS practices confessional membership.

While terminology may differ and practices vary, we conclude that the doctrine of the church in the RCUS is in agreement with the Reformed confessions.

#### **d. Erasure**

Erasure is a form of discipline and excommunication. Why does the RCUS have an official procedure for Erasure besides excommunication? The RCUS is of the conviction that everyone must have a hearing in disciplinary matters. However, if the person cannot be reached anymore, such a hearing cannot take place. Erasure, therefore, is the means to declare such a member outside of the body of Christ.

The RCUS brothers emphasized the same principle we do. Church members should not withdraw.

The RCUS has two kinds of erasure: disciplinary erasure and administrative erasure. In both cases the church makes a public declaration that the person is excluded from the body of Christ.

Erasure can be compared with the Can.Reformed practice of the public announcement regarding the withdrawal of a member by his/her actions. However, in the RCUS the element of discipline is more strongly emphasized in cases of erasure. The member who is erased cannot be readmitted unless he has received restoration.

#### **e. To investigate the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches.**

With strong support from the OPC but with CRCNA opposed, the RCUS became a member of NAPARC in 1994/1995. This council of churches in Northern America has existed for some 25 years. Its stated goal is “to promote greater spiritual unity among the member churches in view of organic union.” The RCUS pursues this goal with vigour in the midst of this council.

At the moment the CRCNA is suspended as member due to the CRC’s deviating position regarding Holy Scripture, in particular concerning issues like the position of women. The suspension of the CRCNA from NAPARC was an action in which the RCUS played an important role.

### **3. Some additional observations**

#### **a. Position Papers**

Among other things we observed in our various contacts with the RCUS churches, we note yet the matter of the status of position papers, which have been drawn up and approved by RCUS synods in the past.

As noted in the report concerning our visit to the 254th Synod of the RCUS, the RCUS has as a body made certain declarations in the form of position papers concerning various social, moral and theological subjects. These are: Principles of Church Unity, Creation in Six Days, Ecclesiastical Divorce and Remarriage, Theonomy, Women in the Military, Abortion, Homosexuality, Use of Pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were interested in what their Synod would decide about the status of these papers and declarations within the RCUS. Would they be given some type of semi-creedal status? This reminded us of our own history, when declarations were made by synods in the 1940's which were given status equal to Scripture and confessions and were the basis on which many were put out of the Reformed Churches at that time.

The 254th Synod of the RCUS decided that the contents of the position papers are authoritative advice to the members of the RCUS and serve as the RCUS's witness to the world of its understanding of Scripture and confessions. The positions put forward in these papers are therefore also not strictly binding on all, to the point that they can be used to discipline members as such.

We are thankful that the RCUS avoided giving such declarations and positions creedal or semi- creedal status. Their members ultimately remain bound to Scripture and confessions only.

We hope that this puts the "distinctive" positions held in the RCUS in proper perspective.

#### **b. Training for the Ministry**

The RCUS supports a number of theological seminaries. Their ministers, then, come from a variety of backgrounds. There is some recognition within the RCUS that they should have their own theological institution. We believe that this desire for a theological training of their own is encouraging.

In our discussions we agreed that the ecclesiastical relationship between the churches ought not to remain on a formal level only, i.e. exchanges of delegates to broader assemblies, sending the Acts of synods to each other, etc. Our relationship should be filled out also in more practical ways, i.e. working together in the Training for the Ministry, Mission, etc.

#### **c. Federation or Merger**

The IRC committee has asked how we see the relationship with them unfolding. Do we have the desire that the RCUS become Canadian Reformed?

We envisage that the RCUS remains a separate federation in the US (see "Hamburg" report p.5/6).

We are also of the opinion that this matter of federative organization within Canada and the United States needs to be considered in view of our developing relations with the URCNA churches.

#### **4. Recommendation**

**In the light of its research and contacts, this committee believes that it has fulfilled its mandate and that it has determined:**

**That the matter of the Lord's Supper celebration has been resolved, since members and guests alike are admitted in accordance with Lord's Day 30.**

**That the matter of Sunday observance has been sufficiently discussed and cannot be a bar to ecclesiastical fellowship,**

**That the doctrine of the church has been adequately discussed, and though there may be differing views in the RCUS, the statements of the Catechism and the Belgic Confession alone are binding,**

**That the concept of erasure has been satisfactorily clarified,**

**That the CRCNA has been suspended from NAPARC with agreement of the RCUS, and the RCUS's membership in this body should not hinder our relationship with the RCUS at this time.**

**Therefore we acknowledge with thankfulness that the RCUS stands on the basis of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity as a faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**We recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. J. Moesker (convener)

Rev. K. Jonker (secretary)

W. Gortemaker

A. Poppe

#### **Clarification on Overall mandate**

With regard to our mandate Synod Fergus stated "this Committee will take over the mandate of the CRCA in as far as it relates to the Americas by establishing and maintaining relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America." Synod gave specified instructions concerning the contact with ERQ, OPC and RCUS.

Each subcommittee had its own meetings throughout the past three years. To fulfill the overall mandate the CCCA met yearly to keep each other informed. Each subcommittee prepared its own report, in the form of recommendations. The draft reports were discussed by the whole committee at our meeting in September 2000.

The past three years have been an experiment for the CCCA. We have seen the merit and benefit of working together as subcommittees. Our yearly meetings have allowed us to touch base with each other as we seek to take a united approach in our contacts with other churches.

Nevertheless, we would like to bring the following points to your attention and ask Synod Neerlandia to give us further direction:

1. Although a great deal of correspondence could be done through email, the CCCA is spread out over two provinces. Cost and time restraints limit us from having more meetings than once per year. This restricts the overall work of the Committee. Our first meeting was largely used to discuss the mandate given by Synod Fergus, the second allowed each subcommittee to give a progress report and the main item on the agenda of the third meeting was the draft reports of the subcommittees. Of the almost three years between synods only two years allow for productive work.
2. We also wish to receive further clarification on the extent of the work that is included under our mandate
  - a. Synod Fergus gave our Committee the mandate to establish and maintain relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America (Acts, Article 72). Since, as we perceive it, the main purpose and function of the CCCA at the present time is to streamline the contact with churches in North and South America we question why the committee was structured in such a manner that our specific mandate was limited to the ERQ, the OPC and the RCUS. Why is the contact with the Orthodox Christian Reformed, United Reformed Churches of North America and the Free Reformed Churches of North America not under the umbrella of the CCCA? Synod Fergus gave no reason justifying why they should not have been a subcommittee of the CCCA.
  - b. To this point our contact has largely been with churches in North America. In July 2000 the missionary churches in Brazil formed a federation of churches. Is it our responsibility as Committee to seek contact with them? Who of the CCCA would be responsible for this, since Synod Fergus specifically assigned who would be in each subcommittee? Is it our responsibility to visit these churches?
3. Each subcommittee is expected to make their own report. What does Synod expect the CCCA to do if a subcommittee takes a different direction than desired by the whole committee? Can a report by a subcommittee be overruled by the other members who are not part of that subcommittee?
4. From our contacts with the ERQ, OPC and RCUS the question has been asked both formally and informally as to why we are not involved in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). It has always been a hindrance for us to be part of NAPARC because of the presence of the CRC. At the present time the membership of the CRC in NAPARC has been suspended. Since the ERQ, OPC and RCUS are involved in NAPARC, and obviously see the benefit of it, we request permission to send an observer to a future meeting of NAPARC who would be mandated to report on the character and the usefulness of joining this organization.

Respectfully submitted,

P.G. Feenstra (coordinator)

W. Gortemaker

W. Oostdyk

N.H. Gootjes (secretary)

K. Jonker

A.J. Pol

J. Boot

J. Moesker

A. Poppe

J. deGelder

G. Nordeman

G. VanWoudenberg

October 25, 2000

## Report of the Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Church

### In the United States (RCUS)

#### I. History of the contact and mandate Fergus 1998

##### A. Our contact since 1984

As early as 1984 our churches have had (official) contact with the RCUS. In 1984 some church members visited RCUS churches in North and South Dakota.

A delegation of the RCUS visited our college in Hamilton with a view to establishing an RCUS seminary.

In 1985 Rev. P. Kingma was a visitor at the RCUS Synod. Rev. P. Kingma was again present at the 1988 Synod.

From 1987-1992 the consistory of the Church at Carman had official contact with the RCUS. This local consistory paid five visits to the RCUS, in Oct. 1987, in Oct. 1988, in Sep. 1989 to RCUS churches and pastors, in Feb 1991 to RCUS classis in Pierre SD, and in April 1991 Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer and Elder Jake Kuik attended the RCUS Synod in Garner, IA.

During the 1989 visit the Canadian Reformed visitors received an urgent request to provide a document which would state clearly what the doctrine of the church really all entails according to Canadian Reformed ecclesiology.

The object of Carman's contact was: continuing investigation to determine whether a proposal should be made to major assemblies to seek further contact with the RCUS and to work towards full recognition of each other as true churches of Christ Jesus.

The findings of Carman in 1990 were:

- that the objective cannot be realized at this time. There are too many inconsistencies within the RCUS such as concerning the communion of saints, church discipline and Christian education. Traditional influences seem to be an obstacle to overcoming these inconsistencies.
- that it recognizes the sincere intention of some in the RCUS to be truly Reformed and that through further local contact we can, the Lord willing, help them in the direction they desire to go.

Carman's concerns especially pertain to the doctrine of the Church (the invisible church), the admission to (an open?) Lord's Supper, and Erasure. They write to Synod 1992 that "there are serious doctrinal and church political difficulties which prevent us from making recommendations for ecclesiastical unity with the RCUS." (Carman disagrees with the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad that contact with RCUS should become a matter of the whole federation).

In 1991 the RCUS sent a letter to our Deputies on Relations with Churches Abroad, informing them that they would like to establish fraternal relations with our churches and will be sending an observer to Synod Lincoln 1992.

Rev. F. Walker was present at Synod 1992 as an observer and addressed our Synod. There he said: "It is clear that we are basically of one mind in Christ Jesus."

In his report to the 1993 RCUS Synod (Sutton) Rev. Walker complained about "overly critical and often inaccurate [CanRC] reports."

Synod Lincoln 1992 decided to make the contact with the RCUS a federative matter, and mandated the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the church at Carman, MB.

### **B. Mandate Synod Fergus 1998**

Deputies for Synod Fergus 1998 investigated the RCUS according to their mandate with due attention to the three marks of the church (BC art.27-29), and recommended: "that the CanRC enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS under the adopted rules."

However, Synod Fergus was not completely satisfied with the deputies' report and considered that closer investigation should take place on admittance to the Lord's Supper, Sunday observance, the doctrine of the Church, erasure and the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches.

Synod Fergus 1998 decided:

- A. To thank the CRCA for fulfilling its mandate with regard to the RCUS.
- B. To acknowledge with gratitude the commitment of the RCUS to the Word of God and the Reformed heritage.
- C. To decline the invitation of the RCUS at this time to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship.
- D. To give the following mandate to the CRCA:
  1. To continue working towards a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS;
  2. To resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted;
  3. To discuss the matter of Sunday observance and the doctrine of the church;
  4. To seek clarification of the concept of erasure;
  5. To investigate the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches;
  6. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the opening of Synod.

In fulfilling this mandate the sub-committee for contact with the RCUS met 13 times. The committee invited Rev. G. Syms to Carman for a general acquaintance visit. Two meetings with the full Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS (IRC) were held. Our committee attended 5 RCUS Worship Services and visited the 2000 RCUS Synod in Hamburg, MN.

Proper minutes and reports were duly made of these activities. The reports of our official meetings are appended to this report.

### **2. Conclusions**

The committee's findings are as follows:

**a. Working towards a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS.**

We have tried to foster a good rapport with the ICR committee and with many other RCUS members. We have studied the 1984-1999 RCUS Abstracts and other documents like position papers. We received great encouragement from the RCUS brothers and we have endeavoured to reciprocate the spiritual encouragement on the basis of the Reformed faith. Our contacts have fostered a greater appreciation of each other's heritage.

**b. Proper supervision of the Lord's Table.**

I. The Elders, who form the spiritual council, admit the baptized youth of the church to the Table of the Lord. The Elders first examine them (Article 193 RCUS Constitution), and then the young people make Public Profession of their Faith in a Worship Service. In the RCUS this procedure is called Confirmation.

As in our churches, the baptized youth receive extensive Catechism Instruction in view of their Public Profession of Faith. The IRC sent us the following information in regard to the examination by the Elders. "The catechism is recited to the Elders, normally in two or three segments on two or three days respectively. However, it is also our practice to have the youth recite the catechism in its entirety before the congregation. This is not normally done in a Worship Service but rather in a Sunday Bible Class setting with the congregation present. Again, such recitation of the catechism is normally done in two or three parts before the Elders and most often at the end of each years work."

2. The RCUS doesn't require an attestation from guests, but Elders will usually conduct an examination of prospective guests. Agreement was expressed with J. Murray's article on restricted communion (see Collected Writings Vol.2 p.381ff). On page 383 Murray writes: "It seems utterly unreasonable to leave the matter [= participating in the Lord's Supper celebration] entirely to the conscience of the person concerned, when this is not done and should not be done in the case of the members of the congregation."

On September 7, 2000, the IRC sent us the following information in regard to the procedure of such an examination.

A. [Guests seeking admission] are required to be prepared to be examined in a timely fashion. In other words we do not rush the examination process because they arrive at the last minute for worship. Our members know to bring guests to be examined well before our Lord's Day activities begin. If the elders have insufficient time to examine, the guests seeking admission receive an explanation and are not admitted.

B. The following statement of belief must be signed giving the name and address of their home church. This statement is as follows:

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is restricted to believers who have made a public confession of their faith and who are communicant members in good standing of an orthodox Protestant church. Please read the following statement and determine whether you agree with it. If you do then complete the information requested and return it to an Elder.

I believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

I believe that Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup in remembrance of Him, and has joined therewith these promises: First that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord communicated to me; and further that with His crucified body and shed blood, he Himself feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, as certainly as I receive from the hand of the Minister and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord which are given me as certain tokens of the body and blood of Christ.

I come to the Table of the Lord because I am displeased with myself because of my sins, yet trust they are forgiven me, and that my remaining infirmity is covered by the suffering and death of Christ; I also desire more and more to strengthen my faith and amend my life.

I believe that partaking of the Lord's Supper will not merit my salvation, but is a means of grace to strengthen my faith.

Your name:

Name and address of your home church.

Note: If you are a communicant member of a Reformed or Presbyterian Church would you like your church to be advised of your participation with us in the Lord's Supper?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Then the applicant fills out the following, which is gone over with him or her by an Elder (or Elders) thoroughly.

To determine whether they are sound in doctrine the following questions are asked:

1. Are you in complete agreement with the statement you just read?
2. Are you a regular active member of your home church?
3. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments to be the infallible Word of God and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?
4. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Saviour and sovereign Lord?
5. Do you confess that Jesus Christ is both God and man, two natures in one person?
6. Do you believe that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone?
7. Do you hold any doctrines or beliefs, that so far as you know, do not accord with historic orthodox Protestantism?

Then the following questions are asked to determine whether the applicant is sound in life.

1. Are you a member in good standing of your home church? (Under discipline? Under suspension?)

2. Are you engaged in profane or scandalous behavior or living secretly and impenitently in any sin?
3. Are you engaged in any activity that is a wilful, known violation of the Law of God?

The above comprises the substance of the questions asked. The Elder, of course, has liberty to move from these into other areas if the answers to the above warrant it.

The procedure of examining guests seeking admission to the Table in the RCUS clearly shows that the RCUS does not have an open but a fenced Table. Although we see differences here with regard to the doctrine of the church (e.g. what is an "orthodox Protestant church"?), the keys of the kingdom are exercised by the elders in the method outlined above.

Therefore we believe that the Lord's Supper is guarded in the RCUS in a manner consistent with Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 30, Question and Answer 82.

### c. I. Sunday observance

Having only one Worship Service per Sunday has been a long tradition within the RCUS. Since the Bible doesn't say that people have to go to church twice, the important question for them is, where do you draw the line?

However, the RCUS has a statement about profaning the Sunday in its constitution. Art. 180 of their "Church Order" reads: "The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy ..."

The ICR committee informed us that the more recently instituted churches tend to have two Worship Services more often than the older established churches.

We found that there is awareness in the RCUS that they should not be complacent about how to observe the Lord's Day. Overall the RCUS is less strict on this point, but in its teaching and preaching it strongly emphasizes worship. On Sundays people should use their time for the Lord. We witnessed that this teaching is given. The profaning of the Lord's Day is addressed and if members do not attend church regularly, they will be disciplined.

### 2. The doctrine of the church

Regarding this doctrine there remains a difference of approach. The RCUS speaks more in theological and practical terms about the church, while the CanRC speaks about the church as our confessions define the church.

The RCUS clearly rejects the separation of the church into a visible one and an invisible one. They emphasize that the distinction is used only to show two aspects of the church. The church is visible in the believers, as the gathering of the believers under the guidance of the office bearers.

However, not everything is visible in the church. There are hypocrites according to BC art. 29, and there can be a time that the church is hardly visible, since it is nearly extinct in the eyes of man. However, God keeps his chosen ones as in the time of Ahab, the 7000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal!

We feel, though, that the danger of separating the visible and the invisible church is not always avoided. Then one speaks about the plurifomity or the multiformity of the church; the latter term is used in their Church Unity paper. We warned against this danger of denominationalism, the danger of ignoring the mandate of the Lord to express the unity of faith.

The RCUS does not want to do away with the distinction visible/invisible to avoid the impression that they would claim to be the only true church. Furthermore, we could witness the strong emphasis within the RCUS regarding organic union.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the RCUS church “concept” differs somewhat from ours. This is an area, as has been acknowledged before, about which we need to continue to listen to one another, since both churches want to base their approach on Scriptures. And both churches strongly fight independentism and synodicalism. It must also be emphasized that the RCUS practices confessional membership.

While terminology may differ and practices vary, we conclude that the doctrine of the church in the RCUS is in agreement with the Reformed confessions.

#### **d. Erasure**

Erasure is a form of discipline and excommunication. Why does the RCUS have an official procedure for Erasure besides excommunication? The RCUS is of the conviction that everyone must have a hearing in disciplinary matters. However, if the person cannot be reached anymore, such a hearing cannot take place. Erasure, therefore, is the means to declare such a member outside of the body of Christ.

The RCUS brothers emphasized the same principle we do. Church members should not withdraw.

The RCUS has two kinds of erasure: disciplinary erasure and administrative erasure. In both cases the church makes a public declaration that the person is excluded from the body of Christ.

Erasure can be compared with the Can.Reformed practice of the public announcement regarding the withdrawal of a member by his/her actions. However, in the RCUS the element of discipline is more strongly emphasized in cases of erasure. The member who is erased cannot be readmitted unless he has received restoration.

#### **e. To investigate the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches.**

With strong support from the OPC but with CRCNA opposed, the RCUS became a member of NAPARC in 1994/1995. This council of churches in Northern America has existed for some 25 years. Its stated goal is “to promote greater spiritual unity among the member churches in view of organic union.” The RCUS pursues this goal with vigour in the midst of this council.

At the moment the CRCNA is suspended as member due to the CRC’s deviating position regarding Holy Scripture, in particular concerning issues like the position of women. The suspension of the CRCNA from NAPARC was an action in which the RCUS played an important role.

### **3. Some additional observations**

#### **a. Position Papers**

Among other things we observed in our various contacts with the RCUS churches, we note yet the matter of the status of position papers, which have been drawn up and approved by RCUS synods in the past.

As noted in the report concerning our visit to the 254th Synod of the RCUS, the RCUS has as a body made certain declarations in the form of position papers concerning various social, moral and theological subjects. These are: Principles of Church Unity, Creation in Six Days, Ecclesiastical Divorce and Remarriage, Theonomy, Women in the Military, Abortion, Homosexuality, Use of Pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were interested in what their Synod would decide about the status of these papers and declarations within the RCUS. Would they be given some type of semi-creedal status? This reminded us of our own history, when declarations were made by synods in the 1940's which were given status equal to Scripture and confessions and were the basis on which many were put out of the Reformed Churches at that time.

The 254th Synod of the RCUS decided that the contents of the position papers are authoritative advice to the members of the RCUS and serve as the RCUS's witness to the world of its understanding of Scripture and confessions. The positions put forward in these papers are therefore also not strictly binding on all, to the point that they can be used to discipline members as such.

We are thankful that the RCUS avoided giving such declarations and positions creedal or semi- creedal status. Their members ultimately remain bound to Scripture and confessions only.

We hope that this puts the "distinctive" positions held in the RCUS in proper perspective.

#### **b. Training for the Ministry**

The RCUS supports a number of theological seminaries. Their ministers, then, come from a variety of backgrounds. There is some recognition within the RCUS that they should have their own theological institution. We believe that this desire for a theological training of their own is encouraging.

In our discussions we agreed that the ecclesiastical relationship between the churches ought not to remain on a formal level only, i.e. exchanges of delegates to broader assemblies, sending the Acts of synods to each other, etc. Our relationship should be filled out also in more practical ways, i.e. working together in the Training for the Ministry, Mission, etc.

#### **c. Federation or Merger**

The IRC committee has asked how we see the relationship with them unfolding. Do we have the desire that the RCUS become Canadian Reformed?

We envisage that the RCUS remains a separate federation in the US (see "Hamburg" report p.5/6).

We are also of the opinion that this matter of federative organization within Canada and the United States needs to be considered in view of our developing relations with the URCNA churches.

#### **4. Recommendation**

**In the light of its research and contacts, this committee believes that it has fulfilled its mandate and that it has determined:**

**That the matter of the Lord's Supper celebration has been resolved, since members and guests alike are admitted in accordance with Lord's Day 30.**

**That the matter of Sunday observance has been sufficiently discussed and cannot be a bar to ecclesiastical fellowship,**

**That the doctrine of the church has been adequately discussed, and though there may be differing views in the RCUS, the statements of the Catechism and the Belgic Confession alone are binding,**

**That the concept of erasure has been satisfactorily clarified,**

**That the CRCNA has been suspended from NAPARC with agreement of the RCUS, and the RCUS's membership in this body should not hinder our relationship with the RCUS at this time.**

**Therefore we acknowledge with thankfulness that the RCUS stands on the basis of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity as a faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**We recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. J. Moesker (convener)

Rev. K. Jonker (secretary)

W. Gortemaker

A. Poppe

#### **Clarification on Overall mandate**

With regard to our mandate Synod Fergus stated "this Committee will take over the mandate of the CRCA in as far as it relates to the Americas by establishing and maintaining relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America." Synod gave specified instructions concerning the contact with ERQ, OPC and RCUS.

Each subcommittee had its own meetings throughout the past three years. To fulfill the overall mandate the CCCA met yearly to keep each other informed. Each subcommittee prepared its own report, in the form of recommendations. The draft reports were discussed by the whole committee at our meeting in September 2000.

The past three years have been an experiment for the CCCA. We have seen the merit and benefit of working together as subcommittees. Our yearly meetings have allowed us to touch base with each other as we seek to take a united approach in our contacts with other churches.

Nevertheless, we would like to bring the following points to your attention and ask Synod Neerlandia to give us further direction:

1. Although a great deal of correspondence could be done through email, the CCCA is spread out over two provinces. Cost and time restraints limit us from having more meetings than once per year. This restricts the overall work of the Committee. Our first meeting was largely used to discuss the mandate given by Synod Fergus, the second allowed each subcommittee to give a progress report and the main item on the agenda of the third meeting was the draft reports of the subcommittees. Of the almost three years between synods only two years allow for productive work.
2. We also wish to receive further clarification on the extent of the work that is included under our mandate
  - a. Synod Fergus gave our Committee the mandate to establish and maintain relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America (Acts, Article 72). Since, as we perceive it, the main purpose and function of the CCCA at the present time is to streamline the contact with churches in North and South America we question why the committee was structured in such a manner that our specific mandate was limited to the ERQ, the OPC and the RCUS. Why is the contact with the Orthodox Christian Reformed, United Reformed Churches of North America and the Free Reformed Churches of North America not under the umbrella of the CCCA? Synod Fergus gave no reason justifying why they should not have been a subcommittee of the CCCA.
  - b. To this point our contact has largely been with churches in North America. In July 2000 the missionary churches in Brazil formed a federation of churches. Is it our responsibility as Committee to seek contact with them? Who of the CCCA would be responsible for this, since Synod Fergus specifically assigned who would be in each subcommittee? Is it our responsibility to visit these churches?
3. Each subcommittee is expected to make their own report. What does Synod expect the CCCA to do if a subcommittee takes a different direction than desired by the whole committee? Can a report by a subcommittee be overruled by the other members who are not part of that subcommittee?
4. From our contacts with the ERQ, OPC and RCUS the question has been asked both formally and informally as to why we are not involved in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). It has always been a hindrance for us to be part of NAPARC because of the presence of the CRC. At the present time the membership of the CRC in NAPARC has been suspended. Since the ERQ, OPC and RCUS are involved in NAPARC, and obviously see the benefit of it, we request permission to send an observer to a future meeting of NAPARC who would be mandated to report on the character and the usefulness of joining this organization.

Respectfully submitted,

P.G. Feenstra (coordinator)

W. Gortemaker

W. Oostdyk

N.H. Gootjes (secretary)

K. Jonker

A.J. Pol

J. Boot

J. Moesker

A. Poppe

J. deGelder

G. Nordeman

G. VanWoudenberg

**Appendix A**  
**Regarding the ERQ**  
**St. Georges de Beauce – Own Sound**  
***A developing relationship***

Two years ago our local congregation expressed a strong desire not only to fulfill the missionary calling of the church in a foreign land but also within our beloved country of Canada. As a result, a “mission committee” was established and met for the first time in August 1998. The Committee was instructed to look at the possibility of starting a new project or supporting one that already existed. Two areas of work were suggested: Northern Ontario or Quebec. The province of Quebec was given priority. The Committee was instructed to see if there was any way of helping the l’Église Réformée du Québec in their work of mission.

*A request from St. Georges*

In the process of doing this work a request was received from the ERQ church in St. Georges de Beauce (located approximately one-and-one-half hours south of Quebec City). They asked if we were willing to support the calling of a second minister who would help develop Reformed church life within the congregation. This is an area where there is a great need within the ERQ in general. Rev. Paulin Bedard was called by the congregation and he accepted the call on the condition that financial support would be forthcoming. Whereas their present minister, Rev. Mario Veilleux, will concentrate on evangelism, the emphasis in Rev. Bedard’s work will be on a teaching ministry (training elders, catechism classes, translating Reformed material etc.). Yet there will be some flexibility in the division of the workload.

By far the majority of the members in the church at St. Georges de Beauce, and all the congregations in the ERQ, are very new to the faith. The congregation is small (35 communicant and 30 non-communicant members, plus about 20 other participants who as yet have not professed their faith). Presently they are self-supporting. Yet the addition of a second pastor will require additional resources. As they wrote to us, “According to the experience of Rev. Paulin Bedard and the ERQ scale of wages for ministers, an annual amount of \$43,000 is needed.”

In their letter to us the consistory of St. Georges also wrote:

During the last few years, we have been encouraged and stimulated by the development of relationships between the Canadian Reformed Churches and l’Église Réformée du Québec, through many personal contacts and also through the work of our synodical committees. Our consistory believes that we can learn a lot through these contacts and that the Lord gives us opportunity to be a source of fraternal encouragement to each other. We see the usefulness and importance to deepen these relationships and promote them on a local level, between a CanRC congregation and an ERQ congregation. It is the reason why we approach you and present to you our project, so that you may pray more specifically for us and know our needs.

During the first week of August 1999, a delegation from Owen Sound was sent to meet with the consistory of St. George and to visit the congregation for a weekend. They found among the brothers and sisters a sincere desire to serve the Lord in a Reformed manner and an eagerness to learn more about church life in our federation. Many things we take for granted need to be developed in these young churches.