

VI ART 73
(also in ART 92, 93)

REPORT

of the Committee for the
Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity
to
Synod Neerlandia 2001
of the
Canadian Reformed Churches

November, 2000

Members: Rev. R. Aasman, Dr. J. De Jong, Rev. W. DenHollander,
Rev. W. Slomp, Mr. P. VanWoudenberg, Mr. F. Westrik

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY TO SYNOD NEERLANDIA 2001

A. MANDATE

The Committee appointed by Synod Fergus 1998 received the following mandate:

"Synod decide...

E. To give this committee the following mandate:

1. to make their presence known for the purpose of information and consultation wherever necessary;
2. to represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of pursuing ecclesiastical unity;
3. to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches in North America with a view towards establishing federative unity;
4. To represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity;
5. To make themselves available upon request of Canadian Reformed Churches for advice on local developments;
6. To discuss and develop a proposal as to how to proceed in encouraging federative unity;
7. To provide information to the churches at regular intervals, and to serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod. (Acts General Synod Fergus 1998 Article 96 V E, pp. 85-86).

With regard to the Free Reformed Churches, the following addition was made to the mandate:

1. To take up contact with the External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.
2. To initiate fraternal dialogue with the Free Reformed Churches in North America with a view to establishing federative unity." (Acts General Synod Fergus 1998 Article 98 IV B p. 99).

B. THE COMMITTEE AND ITS WORKINGS

The Committee has once again enjoyed a good working relationship. Most of the work is done by correspondence, but recently we have been making more use of e-mail options. We have followed the general rule that the local concerns in western Canada would be dealt with by western delegates, and local issues (meetings, consultations, etc.) in eastern Canada would be covered by the eastern delegates.

C. ACTIVITIES

1. Contact at federative meetings
- A. Alliance of Reformed Churches

Although we were invited to attend the 1998 meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, we declined this invitation, since it appeared that ecclesiastical unity was no longer a part of the agenda of this organization. In 1999 the Alliance was disbanded, since its *raison d'être* had ceased to be a living issue among the remaining churches. In effect, it was always seen as a sort of shadow federation paving the way for the formation of a genuine federation of churches. Those churches that have not federated have since formed regional alignments or remained independent, but most have no intention of pursuing unity talks with the Canadian Reformed Churches or the United Reformed Churches.

B. Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, held in Kalamazoo on June 15-17, 1999.

Dr. J. De Jong and Rev. W. Den Hollander attended the third synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, held in Hudsonville on June 15-17, 1999. The line charted in our previous report was continued at this synod. The United Reformed Churches have consolidated as a federation, and are engaged in pursuing ecumenical relations with a substantial number of church groups on our continent as well as around the world. The report of this synod as well as the speech of our fraternal delegate were published in *Clarion* (Appendices 1 and 2).

The dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches received extensive attention both in the report of the Committee to synod and in the discussions at synod. The activities and proposals of the External Relations committee with regard to our churches were approved by synod. Synod thereby approved the placement of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the position of contact at the first Phase of the URCNA "Guidelines" on ecumenical relations. This is an exploratory phase designed to foster discussions leading towards the establishment of closer ties and fellowship.

The Committee felt it was our obligation to pursue continued talks with the URCNA Ecumenical Relations Committee, while not necessarily adopting all elements of their "Proposed Guidelines to Ecclesiastical Relations" (See Appendix 3). We felt that according to the arrangements we had adopted at the outset in this Committee, we would not sanction a closer relationship of pulpit exchange or table fellowship until a substantial margin of agreement had been achieved on fundamental issues, including the mutual adoption of a time frame towards federative unity. As will be clear later in the report (See section 2: "Committee Contact"), we believe the time has come to move to closer forms of fellowship in the context of our overall plan towards full and integral unity by 2004.

On September 27, 2000, Rev. W. Den Hollander functioned as a fraternal delegate at Classis Ontario (Fall, 2000) of the URCNA in Etobicoke, Ont. He was invited to address classis, and used the opportunity to explain the "Statement of Agreement" as adopted by the Unity Committees of both federations.

C. Synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, Cambridge, ON , October 17-19, 1999.

One member of our Committee functioned as fraternal delegate to the synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches held last fall in Cambridge, ON. Rev. W. Den Hollander was present at various times for most of the synodical deliberations. A report of the meeting, along with Rev. Den Hollander's address to synod is accompanied with this

report (Appendices 4 and 5). The synod did not deal with the matter of establishing correspondence with the Canadian Reformed Churches, nor was there an official request for them to do so. However, they were extensively engaged with the issue of federative union with the United Reformed Churches, having received the official offer from the latter body allowing all OCR churches to join their federation without their ministers being required to take a colloquium doctum. This was a unilateral declaration of trust extended to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, but the OCR concluded that it was not ready to unilaterally enter the URCNA fold.

On March 27, 1999 Rev. W. Den Hollander attended an Officebearers' Conference hosted by the OCRC in Bowmanville. At the conference he presented a paper concerning the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The spirit of the Conference was very positive, and we believe there is great potential for more detailed talks with this federation.

D. Synod of the Free Reformed Churches held in Hamilton, May 23-26, 2000

Two of our deputies, Dr. J. De Jong and Rev. W. Den Hollander also visited the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches on May 23-May 26, 2000. Dr. J. De Jong addressed this Synod as a representative of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The text of this speech as well as our report on this synod are included with this report (Appendices 6 and 7). This federation of churches has also adopted a tiered grid with regard to ecclesiastical relations with other Reformed and Presbyterian church groups. The Synod decided to include the Canadian Reformed Churches into the first category on the FRCNA grid, called "Limited Contact" (See Appendix 8 for the grid).

As in the case of the URCNA, and given our mandate, our Committee felt duty bound to enter into talks with the FRC without thereby endorsing all elements of their adopted guideline for ecclesiastical unity. It should be understood that the FRC at this point in their history are still discussing on the committee level whether federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches, or with other Reformed federations, ought to be pursued. Currently their blueprint for unity, adopted in line with the criteria functioning in the ICRC, ends with the relationship of "Corresponding Relations" covering all churches with whom they are in contact, including those federations within the same territorial region.

The position of our Committee on this point is that although the churches may not endorse this scheme, everything possible should be done to foster closer understanding of each other's unique histories, and every opportunity should be exploited to bring our two federations closer together. Perhaps a revised model will surface in the FRCNA in the future. In the meantime, we ought to continue to pursue discussions with the FRCNA as opportunity allows, retaining for our own purposes the goal of federative union with this body of churches. If we for some time in the future continue to be explicit about our aims, we can thereby afford the FRCNA every opportunity to revise its goals and strategies in line with what we see as a higher set of aims and goals regarding ecclesiastical unity.

2. Committee Contact

Intensified Committee contact has occurred especially with two of the above mentioned federations:

- a) United Reformed Churches of North America

Since our report to Synod Fergus 1998 a total of eleven (11) meetings were held with dialogue between three representatives of the Canadian Reformed Committee (the eastern delegation, composed of the members Dr. J. De Jong, Rev. W. Den Hollander and br. F. Westrik) along with four representatives of the URCNA External Relations Committee. These meetings, in which a brotherly spirit of cooperation and frank discussion was always present, were conducted along the lines of the "Guidelines for Ecumenical Relations" as adopted by the URCNA with the provisos as previously mentioned. The results of these discussions was agreement on all the outstanding areas of discussion which would be of concern to our two federations. The memorandum of agreement is appended to this report, (See Appendix 9). On the basis of this agreement, we recommend that the URCNA be recognized as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that both federations initiate steps to move to a second phase of discussions and consultations, including occasional pulpit exchange on a local level, with possible table fellowship in due time, particularly in those localities where discussions have progressed well for some time.

b) Free Reformed Churches of North America

At the time of the writing of this report three meetings have been held with representatives of the Free Reformed Churches and a delegation of our Committee (Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. W. Slomp, and elder P. Van Woudenberg). At these meetings papers were discussed dealing with pertinent issues related to our differences with the Free Reformed Churches. The first meeting, held on September 29, 1999, dealt with confessional and non-confessional issues in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity. The document in discussion was a part of a paper presented by Rev. H. Overduin to the consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, B.C. wherein the questions were raised, "What must we agree on and what can be tolerated in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity?" In the paper Rev. Overduin argued that in things essential there must be unity. He agreed that "in pursuit of ecclesiastical unity, the Word of God as summarized and explained in the Three Forms of Unity deals with matters essential." But "...how do we define common agreement and adherence to the Reformed confessions?" He asks whether there should also be a common understanding of what the confessions teach and mean. Great divisions and strife can come within a church union if this is not respected. "Common subscription to the confessions does not mean common adherence to the confessions."

A second meeting held on February 3, 2000, dealt with the topics "What is experiential preaching?" (FRC delegate) and "How do we see the congregation?" (CanRC delegate). The results of these discussions have been positive in the sense that appreciation was expressed on both sides for the opportunity to articulate the different perspectives and chart a course in order to deal with them openly and frankly. Reports on these discussions as well as the papers involved were published in *Clarion* for the benefit of our membership, (Appendices 10-11).

A third meeting was held on September 27, 2000. The topic of this day was, "Biblical Principles of Church Unity." During the morning session an OPC report entitled "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church" was introduced. Various points of that report were discussed, such as the idea of the pluriformity of the church, hierarchy, and the need for federative unity. The Canadian Reformed brothers made clear that "Unity" implies not only spiritual unity, but also federative unity. The Free Reformed brothers agreed that they do not have an answer as yet as to the need for such a unity, and that such

an answer will be crucial for the future of our meetings. In the afternoon a paper published by the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the CanRC was discussed. Some of the same points of the morning session were discussed, and it was agreed that a joint statement be drawn up to spell out the various points we agree on. In this way our discussions should be further facilitated. Another meeting is set for February 15th, 2001. At that time the topic will be, "The Historical Development of our Churches." This will also be combined with a public meeting wherein two speeches will be delivered, one by a Canadian Reformed minister, and another by a Free Reformed minister.

At the FRCNA synod the possibility whether similar discussions could take place among the eastern delegates of the Committees was also discussed, but this remains in the planning stage.

3. Local Discussions

We received reports on the progress of discussions with local URCNA congregations from Winnipeg (Grace) and London. A Memorandum of Agreement was also received from Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, outlining the agreement between this congregation and the URCNA congregation of Wyoming. We received formal requests for advice from Winnipeg (Grace) and Rockway. In both cases, the local congregations have come to the point where they can recognize the local URC congregation as a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they are ready to move to more advanced forms of fellowship. In order to provide a guideline for situations like these (of which there may be more in the future) we have included a separate section charting a suggested procedure for conducting local discussions (see Section E).

A request for advice was also received from the Canadian Reformed Church of Ancaster, relating to a non-federated independent congregation. We also received all correspondence from the URC of London with regard to their consultations with Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church in London.

On February 7, 2000 a meeting was hosted by the Hamilton Canadian Reformed Church in which a delegate from the URCNA External Relations Committee (Rev. J. Bouwers) and one from our Committee (Dr. J De Jong) spoke on the progress of the unity discussions up to that point. This is another situation in which there is a more advanced recognition between the two local churches.

On February 23, 2000 a similar meeting was held in Smithers, B.C. with Rev R Stienstra representing the URCNA Committee, and Rev. R. Aasman speaking for the Canadian Reformed Churches. This meeting was hosted by the Canadian Reformed Church in Smithers. The surrounding area has two URCNA congregations. A similar meeting was held on June 23, 2000 in Neerlandia, which also has a congregation affiliated with the URCNA in the neighborhood.

E. Summary

Relative to our last report we can say the work of the Committee on the federative level has been fruitful. While we were only marginally known among several of these groups at the time of our last report, currently we have been included in the ecumenical endeavour of two of these federations. This indicates that the Canadian Reformed Churches are respected by these federations for their faithfulness to Scripture, and their willingness to

seek closer ties with like minded church groups. We should continue in this vein until it becomes clear that further progress with any federation appears impossible.

D. DEPUTIES' ASSESSMENT

Our assessment on the progress so far is as follows:

a) United Reformed Churches

We feel with the agreements as presented to your synod that we have reached a stage in which a closer form of cooperation with the URCNA is warranted. Although there are a number of outstanding issues, there is substantial agreement on most key areas of church government and general ecclesiastical policy, (See Appendix 9). We are therefore confident that synod can recommend entering into Phase 2 of the negotiations on our own proposed strategy schedule (See Appendix 12), which is almost analogous to the second phase of the URCNA grid. On the basis of the Statements of Agreement which are the results of our discussions regarding the marks of the true church ad Art 29 B.C., we recommend that Synod recognize the URCNA as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and express the hope and wish that through our deepened cooperation and fellowship, we may benefit one another and serve each other in the service of Christ. This would mean that the synod allow closer ties of fellowship such as occasional table fellowship (recognizing each other's attestations) as well as occasional pulpit exchange in those localities where talks have progressed to such a point that both parties are ready for this stage,-- all with the proviso that the URCNA, in their forthcoming synod, have adopted the proposed time schedule towards ecclesiastical unity and also adopt the agreement reached by our respective sub- committees, and adopted by our full Committee. Barring any unforeseen obstacles, this should move us to a position of federative unity in 2004.

The implementation of our recommendations is thus a local matter, and can vary from place to place, depending on the level of discussions that have taken place at the local level between churches of the two federations. Where these discussions have advanced to the level of deepened mutual recognition and understanding, fellowship on the Phase 2 level can take place, as long as both local churches involved commit themselves to calling their own federations to federative unity on the adopted basis by the year 2004.

b) Free Reformed Churches

As mentioned, the FRCNA are still in the process of discussing whether federative unity must be pursued. In that sense contact with this group of churches falls outside of the immediate concern of our Committee. However, we concluded that we should give this body of churches the benefit of the doubt, and first ascertain the motivations behind their adopted strategy schedule for external relations, and determine what would prevent them from working towards the goal of federative unity, especially in the light of the overwhelming scriptural evidence in favour of it. As indicated, these issues are also a part of the negotiations being conducted at the present time, and therefore we would recommend that these discussions be continued until we have a more advanced clarification concerning which direction the FRCNA wishes to pursue with regard to our federation.

Unity negotiations take much time and patience. The discussions on the federative level between our counterparts in the Netherlands, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt have been going on for over thirty years. But

they also testify to a new rapprochement which has brought the federations closer together than they ever were prior to this point. Therefore, we are convinced that an easy abandonment of the discussions from our side would be out of place, even though our federation may find some valid grounds to do so from a formal and legal point of view. Therefore, we would recommend that synod express its gratitude for the initiative taken by the FRCNA, and mandate the Committee to work within the 'limited contact' category of the FRCNA guidelines towards full ecclesiastical unity.

c) Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

So far no formal discussions have been initiated with this body on the federative level. However, from all reports that we have received, as well as classical press releases, we are discovering that on the regional and local level, the exchange of delegates is occurring more frequently. The OCRCs are more conscious of our existence, and are also showing a greater desire to reach out to other like minded fellowships in order to foster mutual understanding and growth towards unity. Therefore we are of the opinion that steps should be taken to address this federation formally concerning the call and duty to pursue federative unity. We are eager as committee members appointed by synod to be instrumental on behalf of the churches for the purpose of promoting unity on the federative level.

E. PROPOSAL RE FEDERATIVE UNITY

Part of the mandate given to our Committee was to chart out a proposal for the best way of encouraging federative unity. In the initial meetings we had with delegates from the URCNA the CanRC delegates also introduced a strategy proposal regarding federative unity with like minded church groups. However, since the URCNA Guidelines had been adopted by URCNA Synod 1997, the CanRC Committee agreed to continue working within the context of their guidelines. But this did not imply that we abandoned our own proposal. In effect, we feel we are still working along the lines of our proposal, and have dovetailed our own criteria within the parameters dictated by the URCNA guidelines.

The Strategy Proposal for Church Unity is appended to this report, and can be used as a working document by all churches involved in discussions at the local level as well (see Appendix 12) With regard to the local discussions we have learned much from our counterparts in the Netherlands who have developed a series of specific guidelines for local churches. Making some necessary modifications and adjustments, we would offer these guidelines to synod Neerlandia to serve as a general directive for churches involved in discussions at the local level. These guidelines serve to ensure that local discussions are properly dovetailed into discussions at the federative level, and that in all local discussions the obligation we owe to each other as churches of one federation are not forgotten. These guidelines concern especially discussions with the FRC and OCRC, but may include discussions initiated with other Reformed bodies as well. They do not apply directly to our discussions with the URCNA, since we are beyond this stage at the federative level. But for all other federations, we would offer the following points for consideration:

1. The goal of local ecclesiastical discussions with churches from another federation is ecclesiastical unity of the two (or more) participating churches on the basis of God's Word and in submission to the Reformed confessions, according to the regulations of the Reformed Church order.

2. In local discussions the participating churches promise to submit to all which accords with the Word of God, inclusive of all matters properly brought forward from both parties.
3. In the discussion the congregations involved must be kept informed. Important steps will not be taken except with the approbation of the local congregations. The consistory will only proceed when according to its judgment there is sufficient unity of mind on the issue of unity to move ahead.
4. According to the rule of Art. 31 C.O. local churches must abide by the decisions of broader assemblies, and take note of the work and directives adopted by synod as suggested by the committee for ecclesiastical unity and correspondence on the federative level.
5. Regular reports concerning the progress of local discussions will be given at classis in the context of Art. 44 C.O. Major policy decisions should only take place with the approbation of Classis. Classis here shall make use of the advice of the deputies of regional synod ad art. 49 C.O.
6. Major policy decisions include: a) recognizing the other church in the discussion process as a true church of Jesus Christ; b) granting occasional pulpit exchanges; c) recognizing each other's attestations for table fellowship.
7. Recognizing each other as true churches can only take place if the congregations involved promise each other a) to work for federative unity with the other party's body of churches in their own federative relationships; b) not to accept members from each other's churches except by mutual agreement; c) to adopt and follow through with each other's disciplinary processes.
8. Local churches shall only allow pulpit exchanges or table fellowship after it has been clearly determined at the federative level that the churches with which they have contact stand on the basis of God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity, and have also indicated in a federative context that they are prepared to work towards federative unity within a mutually adopted pre-established time frame.
9. Local fusions of churches shall not take place as long as federative negotiations are still in progress. If such negotiations eventually break off, a local fusion or entrance of another church to the federation can only take place with the approbation of classis coupled with the advice of the deputies of Regional Synod ad Art. 49 C.O.

We would expect the above points to be applied in the context of the Statement of Strategy that we have proposed to synod (See Appendix 12). Local churches can make minor adaptations of the schedule to their own situation, but in principle the guidelines should be followed for the sake of preserving federative unity as much as possible. Two local churches in negotiations do not exist on an island. Therefore it will be incumbent on them to preface all their unity declarations with the promise not to practice full unity until they have gotten their own federations on side in the unity process. This accords with the principle that one's primary obligations are to the federation of churches, above and beyond

what may arise in terms of other faithful churches in a local setting.

F. SUGGESTIONS AND REQUESTS

We have the following suggestions:

1. A more concrete proposal toward establishing talks with the Orthodox Reformed Churches should be mandated by Synod. All our meetings to date have indicated that these churches are not only sincere in their desire to serve the Lord according to his word, they also recognize more than in the past the obligations that churches have to help and serve each other in one federation. Some of the local congregations are beginning to realize that living on your own in a very small federation poses problems for the youth and for suitable church growth, including internal growth. Hence, they are more open to discussion with our churches than they perhaps were in the past. It may then be in the interest of our synod to mandate that a formal letter be written to their churches with a view to pursuing more official talks on the federative level for the purposes of promoting unity between the two federations.
2. If synod would move in the direction charted above, it may be appropriate to add two more ministers to the committee, (one from the east and one from the west) in order that in these matters we can continue to divide the work load among the various members of the committee, allowing certain members to concentrate on one federation.

Our recommendations are :

1. that synod thank the URCNA for accepting the CanRC into Phase 1 of their guidelines for ecumenical relations, and express gratitude that with this acceptance via appointed committees much contact could be experienced with the URCNA.
2. that deputies be instructed to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches of North America with a view towards establishing federative unity.

This will include the following elements:

1. That the Statement of Agreement with its accompanying time frame be adopted by Synod 2001, and that, with the recognition of the URCNA as faithful churches of Jesus Christ, we move to Phase 2 of the negotiations on the Statement of Strategy (Appendix 12) all with the understanding that both federations are committed to reach the final phase of these discussions in 2004.
2. That special committees be appointed in accordance with the recommendation in the Agreement regarding the church order and theological education, for the purpose of meeting with the URCNA counterparts in the period 2001-2004.
3. that synod acknowledge that the CanRCs have been received into the stage of 'limited contact' of the FRCNA unity guidelines at the FRCNA synod May, 2000, and thank the FRCNA for this initiative, expressing the hope that it may lead to federative unity.
4. that the Committee continue dialogue with the Free Reformed Churches of North America with a view to promoting federative unity, and identifying whatever obstacles there may be with the FRCNA on this path.

5. that the Committee represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity.

6. that local churches with OCR churches in their vicinity be encouraged to initiate local contacts with these churches, out of which eventually more formal federative talks may evolve.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. R. Aasman

Dr. J. De Jong

Rev. W. Den Hollander

Rev. W. Slomp

Elder P. Van Woudenberg

Elder F. Westrik

Note: Archives of all correspondence will be available at Synod in Neerlandia

APPENDIX 1

**Third Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America,
Hudsonville, Michigan: June 15-17, 1999**

Opening

On Tuesday, June 15, 1999, at 1:30 p.m., the chairman of the calling church, the Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Hudsonville, opened the third synod of the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America in a Christian manner. A roll call of the delegates was held and the credentials reported on. All delegates assented to the Form of Subscription, after which Synod was constituted.

All delegates, fraternal delegates, observers, visitors, and guests were welcomed. Upon their request to be admitted to the federation, 10 churches had joined through their respective Classes. Synod could give ratification for membership to these churches. Delegates of these churches as well assented to the Form of Subscription. An election of officers took place, resulting in br. Chuck Dijkstra, chairman, Rev. A. Besteman, vice-chairman, while the stated clerk, Rev. Jerome Julien, complemented the moderamen. A time-schedule was adopted, together with a schedule of advisory committees appointed to serve Synod with pre-advice regarding the matters on the Agenda.

Agenda

In his report to Synod, the Stated Clerk attended to the duties he fulfilled since the previous synod. Besides handling correspondence, carrying out many administrative activities, and coordinating the preparation of this General Synod, the Rev. Julien represented the federation at the Assemblies of the OPC. He informed Synod of developments in the federation concerning local congregations, new ministers received by way of a *colloquium doctum*, others received by ordination, candidates who received license to exhort in the churches. From the correspondence it appeared that the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico approved establishing fraternal relations with the federation of the UR-CNA. Classis Western Canada informed Synod 1999 that they entered into official ecumenical relations with the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. Before adjourning this first session, Synod finally received a Financial Report submitted by the churches appointed as Treasurers for Canada and the US. During the remainder of the afternoon the advisory committees met in their designated rooms. The undersigned, delegates on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, joined the committee which dealt with the Report from the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. In this advisory-committee meeting we received the privilege of the floor, which gave us ample opportunity to speak about the progress in the contacts with our churches!

Fraternal Delegates

On Wednesday Synod gave opportunity to fraternal delegates to address the meeting. On behalf of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church the Rev. Ray B. Lanning spoke, Dr. J. DeJong for the Canadian Reformed Churches (for the text of this address, see elsewhere in this issue), Rev. Claude DePrine for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, rev. Alan D. Strange for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Rev. R. Van Overloop for the Protestant Reformed Church, Rev. M. Koerner for the Reformed Church in the US, Rev. Barry York of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and Rev. Henk Van Veen for the Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt) in the Netherlands. During the lunch break the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA organized a meeting with all fraternal delegates and observers present. The respective representatives shared with the attendants the latest developments and progress in the area of contacts with other federations. At this meeting as well we had opportunity to discuss the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity of the URCNA, stressing particularly the seriousness of the objective of this process, namely the intent of full integration and complete union as expressed in the guidelines for the third phase: Church Union!

Matters before Synod

In its plenary sessions on Wednesday and Thursday, Synod started out by dealing with the overtures on more practical matters such as a Health Insurance Plan and a Voluntary Retirement Pension Plan for pastors, the churches' charitable status, tax exemptions, and Federative Structure (i.e. questions regarding incorporation). Synod discussed the question, first of all, whether some of these matters were not the responsibility of each local church rather than for the federation. Synod shied away from appointing committees for all sorts of purposes, but did see the need for assistance and cooperation. Hence Synod 'requested' certain local churches to assist the churches in the federation to investigate the feasibility of a Health Insurance Plan and a Retirement Pension Plan. In view of the confusion among the churches regarding the matter of charitable status, however, Synod appointed an ad-hoc committee to examine the rules of Revenue Canada, while the Stated Clerk was instructed to apply for "Recognition of Exemption" on behalf of the churches in the US. An Ad-hoc Committee for Federative Structure appointed by the previous Synod, assisted by a lawyer, ushered Synod through the discussion on incorporation and its purposes. The recommendations of this committee were adopted and a Board of Directors for Canada and the US, respectively, appointed.

Synod did not only receive fraternal delegates and listen to their addresses, its delegates also spoke extensively on matters regarding inter-church relations. Classis Western Canada submitted two overtures to Synod pertaining to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. They proposed officially to invite the federation of OCRC's to unite with the URCNA in federative union, and to do so on the basis of the URCNA Church Order. Should the Synod of the OCRC fed-

eration decide to accept this invitation, they proposed to receive them immediately into the federation, without conducting a *colloquium doctum* for their ministers. Synod adopted these proposals; the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity should prepare this Church Union. In accordance with article 36 of the C.O. of the URCNA, however, Synod decided that this invitation be submitted for ratification first by all the churches in the federation, requiring a 2/3 majority for implementation! This invitation, then, is to be sent to each OCRC consistory with a request that, should they favour such union, they forward it for consideration to their next Classis and Synod. In October 1999 the Synod of the OCRCs will be convened in Cambridge, Ontario.

The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity served Synod 1999 with an extensive report on its activities. From Synod 1997 the Committee received the mandate to pursue ecumenical relations with twelve selected Reformed and Presbyterian federations of churches. In its actual pursuit the most intense contacts took place with the Canadian Reformed Churches and with the Free Reformed Churches, while one meeting was held with the Protestant Reformed Church. In the case of the RCUS, OPC, and PCA, the contact entailed a presence at their respective assemblies, combined with discussions during such visits. In the case of other federations the contact was mostly by correspondence. The Committee recommended that Synod appoint a separate committee for contact with churches abroad. As part of its mandate the Committee drafted a 'mandate' for itself and 'guidelines for ecumenicity and church unity.'

Synod's advisory committee studied and discussed the Committee's recommendations carefully. Synod was advised to adopt all these recommendations. With a few amendments the 'Mandate' and 'Guidelines' were adopted. In the discussion on the floor the matter of continuity in the contacts developed so far received much emphasis. As a result Synod re-elected (except for replacing elder B. Bruining with elder Chuck Dijkstra) and appointed the brothers who have been so diligently involved in this work during their first term (yet Synod decided that there should be a maximum of two terms only in such a committee). Upon the recommendation to appoint a committee for contact with churches abroad, Synod appointed Dr. M. Horton, Rev. J. Gangar, Rev. D. Royall, and Rev. R. Sikkema as members of this committee (who have to work with the same guidelines). Synod also decided officially to enter into "Corresponding Relations" with the Can/AmRCs (!) and with the FRCs, while it reaffirmed last synod's decision to continue being in "Corresponding Relations" with the OPC.

An interesting discussion developed in regard to the recommendation to approve the work of the committee. This discussion did not focus so much on the work done in the contact with the CanRCs, as might be expected, but rather on the report of a meeting held with the Protestant Reformed Committee for Contact with Other Churches, on April 26, 1999. According to some of the delegates too many concessions were made regarding the PR positions on 'Common Grace' and on the 'General Offer of the Gospel.' Members of the Committee, however, stressed the process in which the Committee is involved, pursuing

ecumenical relations, forging a position of this federation. A motion just 'to receive' the work of the committee was defeated. Synod decided 'to approve the work of the committee for ecumenical relations without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.' Upon arriving at this gratifying decision, the chairman expressed the significance of this moment and requested the meeting to sing from the Psalter Hymnal the song on Psalm 133!

As far as other matters of ecumenicity and church unity were concerned, Classis Southwest US overtured Synod "to instruct its Committee for Ecumenicity and Church Unity to extend an invitation to other faithful Reformed Churches to begin with them serious discussions with a goal of joining each body into a General Synod (or Assembly) of a single new denomination, each body constituting a particular Synod." Although some delegates suggested at least to investigate the feasibility of this overture, most speakers rejected the idea of an 'umbrella synod.' Perhaps the ICRC could be overtured to establish a North American Chapter for the pursuit of these ideas, or NAPARC could be used to facilitate a discussion on this matter, yet the reality of the division among federations and the issues which separate them are such that such a pursuit is beyond the focus of the ecumenicity committee. As one of the members of the Committee put it succinctly, "It's the Committee's work to pursue uniformity, while the overture tries to accommodate pluriformity." Synod did, however, recommend sending an observer to the next NAPARC meeting, while the new committee for contact with churches abroad should send a representative of the federation to the next meeting of the ICRC.

Other Business

On its 'Agenda' Synod had other important matters, such as an overture to appoint a committee to articulate a Biblical and Reformed philosophy for missions. This study should include an articulation of the proper relationship between "Word" and "deed" in the mission of the churches; as well, an articulation of a proper Biblical balance between the responsibility of the "autonomous" local church for the carrying out of missions, on the one hand, and a federational responsibility toward cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement on the other. Synod also was requested to appoint a study committee to investigate the opportunity for missions in Mexico. This study needs to include attention for the question with which Mexican Federation to cooperate, and whether it is feasible to cooperate with other northern North American federations in identifying specific geographic locations for division of labours. Synod indeed complied with these requests and appointed committees with these mandates.

Synod 1997 had appointed a Psalter Hymnal Committee with the mandate "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." This committee reported on its findings. Their report included a recommendation to appoint a committee to begin the work of producing, for publication, a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal. Meanwhile, however, they recommend, Synod

should approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal. In regard to these recommendations, Synod decided to re-appoint the Psalter Hymnal Committee (expanded), with as mandate to recommend what songs should be included and what other materials (liturgical forms, Creeds, Confessions, Prayers, etc.). An amendment to its mandate was adopted, recommending that the Committee would consult with similar committees in federations with whom the URCNA has established an ecumenical relationship(!). Synod also accepted the recommendation to reprint a generic version of the Psalter Hymnal (from which references to the CRC are to be dropped) which should be used in the mean time. Synod did not accede to the request to appoint a study committee to propose a set of unified liturgical forms. Besides, the request to draft a formulary for the exclusion of members by baptism did not receive sufficient support. Synod decided to continue the (adjusted) use of the Form for Excommunication for that purpose.

Finally, Synod's direction was requested for the adoption of Baptismal Certificates, a Ministerial Identification Card, Classical Diplomas, etc. It was requested to endorse an organization called Reformed Youth Services, producing study material for URCNA churches. Synod, however, did not want to get into the business of 'endorsed causes' again, leaving it up to the individual churches to investigate these materials. After it dealt with some minor issues and clarifications requested by the Stated Clerk, Synod came to a close on Thursday-evening. Seeing how many of the matters discussed and decided upon at this Synod still reflected the process of establishing itself as a federation of churches, Synod decided to have its next Synod convened again in two, instead of three, years, namely in the year 2001 (in Escondido, California).

The experiences of the undersigned, fraternal delegates at this Synod, were very positive. Throughout the discussions a strong desire prevailed to deal with all matters in accordance with the Scriptures and the Church Order. Delegates appeared keenly aware of the causes and pitfalls behind developments in the CRC, so that a better way of dealing with all matters was followed. The spirit of the meeting was one expressing the unity in the bond of peace! In his prayer of praise and thanksgiving, the Rev. Ray Sikkema submitted the work of Synod 1999 for a rich blessing to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted by
Dr. J. DeJong (speaker) and
Rev. W. den Hollander (reporter).

APPENDIX 2

Fraternal Greetings¹

Esteemed brothers and fellow workers!

It's an honour and a pleasure to be in your midst once again at this your third general synod to represent together with my fellow delegate Rev. W. Den Hollander the Canadian and American Reformed Churches and to pass on to you our greetings and best wishes on their behalf. Like the neighbour or close friend down the road, we have followed your development from the formation of your federation to this very day, and have witnessed the increased growth and consolidation of your fellowship. We are thankful that you are striving to maintain the true doctrine of the Word of God, the riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the bond of peace.

I stand here as a member of the Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and from the perspective of that position I only underscore that this is what we are about. We seek to be confessional churches, faithful to the Reformed standards we have inherited from our forebears. But we also feel called to pursue a true and integral unity with all those who want to live in fellowship with the same gospel we confess, according to the same order that God has allowed us to maintain through the generations, as embodied in the church order of Dort, 1618-1619. We believe that continued reformation means not only going forward according to God's norms, but also continually returning to our birthright and heritage as God in his mercy has allowed us to share it.

We are then eager to pursue integral church unity. It all goes back to our perspective, as voiced in my remarks at your 1996 synod, that our day and age is not really helped with the formation of an ever greater number of Reformed denominations. We need to work for one strong and united Reformed church comprising all those who truly want to maintain the doctrinal standards of our heritage along with its accompanying order.

We believe you're the closest to us with regard to these primary and essential goals. We have spent many hours working with the eastern section of your Ecumenical Relations committee, and from our side I can report that our sentiment is that these meetings proceeded very well and went a long way in helping to understand each other and in forming a clearer picture of each other's doctrinal perspectives and concerns. Some proposals with regard to the progress of church union have come out of these meetings and your Ecumenical Relations Committee will introduce those proposals to you. We hope that you can give your committee the support that is needed to keep these talks moving in a positive direction.

We have agreed to work along with the *Guidelines* adopted for ecumenical relations by the URCNA, but only with what we see as a necessary qualification, and that is that we can enter Phase 2 of the guidelines only after both parties have agreed upon an established time frame to full and integrated union. We can agree with the sentiment expressed by your fraternal delegate at our recent synod held in Fergus (1998) that "mutual recognition of each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord needs to take place on the road to full ecclesiastical unity between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches," that is "during the process rather than at its

¹ Text of the fraternal greetings passed on to the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America held in Hudsonville, MI, June 15 to 17, 1999. Slightly revised.

conclusion." Yet when it comes to the specific application of this recognition in pulpit exchanges or table fellowship, our conviction has been that we are ready to do this only if and when a specific time frame towards full and integrated union has been adopted by both parties at their broadest assemblies and supported by their respective churches.

We're also here to answer any questions you may have about us and to share with you concerning the important work of the gathering of Christ's church! We are of good hope that true believers will not simply splinter and live in separate communions, but wherever possible will gather together as one body with the strength he supplies. The church is one! Jesus calls us to be one! He prayed that we all be one! We do hope and pray that this spirit of ecumenicity in its biblical sense may fill your hearts as you carry on your church business at this meeting, also as you deal with your relations with other churches. May God guide you with his Spirit in all your deliberations!

(Dr.) J. De Jong

APPENDIX 3

GUIDELINES FOR ECUMENICITY AND CHURCH UNITY United Reformed Churches in North America

Phase One - Corresponding Relations

The first phase of ecumenicity is one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the two churches' lives:

- a. view and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. creeds and confessions
- c. formula of subscription to the confessions
- d. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
- e. church order and polity
- f. liturgy and liturgical forms
- g. preaching, sacraments, and discipline
- h. theological education for ministers

Ecumenical observers are to be invited to all broader assemblies with a regular exchange of the minutes of these assemblies and of other publications that may facilitate ecumenical relations.

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship

The second phase of ecumenicity is one of recognition and is entered into only when the broadest assemblies of both federations agree this is desirable. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship entailing the following:

- a. the churches shall assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline
- b. the churches shall consult each other when entering into ecumenical relations with other federations
- c. the churches shall accept each other's certificates of membership, admitting such members to the Lord's Table
- d. the churches shall open the pulpits to each other's ministers, observing the rules of the respective churches
- e. the churches shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted
- f. the churches shall invite and receive each other's ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies as much as regulations permit

Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order, Art. 36.

Phase Three - Church Union

The third phase of ecumenicity is one of integration with the intent that the two federations, being *united in true faith*, and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union. This final phase shall only be embarked upon when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of 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

APPENDIX 4

Observer's Report of the Synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, held on October 21-22, 1999, at Cambridge Ontario.

1. The Meeting

On Thursday, October 21, at 9:00 a.m., the Rev. C. DePrine led in opening devotions. He delivered a meditation (sermon) on Deut. 32:36. It took the delegates quite a long time to go through the proceedings in order to come to the constitution of Synod and the adoption of the Agenda. As first item on the Agenda each church reported on the local situation and well-being of the congregation. Upon the completion of three reports three members of Synod took turns leading in prayer for these congregations; this way all fourteen churches shared their concerns and received the prayers of the assembly. Upon a word of welcome to the Invited Observers, each of them received the opportunity to address the Synod: URCNA - Rev. R. Stienstra; CanRC - Rev. W. den Hollander [speech attached]; FRC - Rev. L. Roth; ARPC - Rev. Van Eyck. At 2:30 p.m., finally, Synod started its work on the Overtures and Reports on the Agenda.

2. Overtures & Reports

a. The churches of Nobleton, ON, and Sunnyside, WA, submitted overtures with regard to Synodical Deputies. Due to confusion and uncertainty about the place, task, and function of such deputies at the examination of students for the ministry by a Classis (C.O. art. 4), these churches were seeking clarity. Article 4 of their C.O. does not give these deputies much of an involvement in the actual examination, neither does it stipulate that these deputies should give concurring advice. Synod supported these overtures in so far as the deputies' participation in the examination was concerned. In regard to the matter of concurring advice, however, Synod did not establish a practice to which the Classes should be bound. An inconsistency was noted between the procedure in connection with ministers *entering* into the ministry and the procedure at the time of *dismissal* (art. 11 C.O., when concurring advice is required). In order to correct this situation a new overture to change the Church Order would have to be submitted to a future Synod.

b. The church of Wingham, ON, overtured Synod to amend C.O. art. 68, seeking to facilitate the possibility that churches allow their ministers also to preach on the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort besides the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in the afternoon service. This overture, seeking to change the Church Order, did not receive the required support of a two-third majority (one vote short!).

c. Synod, further, discussed the provisions which are in place for the financial assistance to students for the ministry among the OCRC's. In its discussion the question whether this support should be considered a grant or a loan was debated extensively (it ended up being a forgivable loan). The point of contention related to the fact that students leave the denomination (or the ministry). Now, when they leave the ministry, each year of service will have decreased the loan with 10%, while the loan will be forgiven when they

join another "Bible-believing" or "confessionally reformed" church (and complete in such a church at least 10 years of ministry).

d. The churches of Cambridge and Nobleton, ON, overtured Synod on the matter of lifetime eldership. The former requested a change in the C.O. to make this possible, while the latter requested Synod to appoint a committee to study the matter of "allowing a lifetime option for service as elder or deacon." Synod decided to appoint a Committee of two churches in the West (Cambridge and Nobleton) and three churches in the East (Burlington, WA, New Westminster, and Surrey, BC) to study the matter and report to the next Synod.

e. Due to lack of documentation and preparation, Synod decided not to establish fraternal relations with the IPC of Mexico.

f. Finally, Synod discussed the "Invitation" of the United Reformed Churches in North America to unite with them in federative union (to be received immediately into the federation without conducting a colloquium doctum for their ministers). This discussion took place in a format which was called "committee of the whole," which means that the entire Synod turned into a committee in order to prepare proposals for Synod regarding the issue. In this "committee meeting" also the overtures submitted to Synod by the churches of Cambridge, ON (against) and Everson, WA (in favour) could be considered. Upon the return to the Synod-setting, the proposals adopted by this "committee-meeting" were to be discussed and voted upon by Synod.

The delegates of each congregation received the opportunity to report on the outcome of local meetings, discussions at local councils, and their resulting positions. The reports showed that only two churches expressed a majority support for acceptance of the invitation. Some of the churches supported the idea initially, but upon further reflection and discussions had second thoughts, and became reluctant to pursue the matter at this time. The main issues which became obstacles in the way toward acceptance of the invitation were the Creation issue (URC has not expressed itself on the Framework Hypothesis of Meredith Kline, i.e. 6 regular 24 hour days of creation or not; some among the URCNA have spoken positively about this theory), the absence of a "regulative principle of worship," and the fact that some churches have the NIV Bible Translation.

In the discussion on these reservations it became clear that the delegates would first want to receive a response from the URC. A motion proposing to request the URC to keep the invitation open till such a response had been considered by the OCRC was defeated by Synod. In the end this response was requested by Synod on the matter of the Creation issue only. The members realized that the OCRC does not have an official position on the "regulative principle of worship" either (except for the expression of it in LD 35 HC "nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word.") Hence they could not request an official response and position from the URCNA on this matter. On the Creation-issue, however, the OCRC did adopt an official position in the past, which it wants to see supported by the URCNA. Synod decided to adopt its reply to the invitation of the URCNA as the answer to the overtures from Cambridge and Everson as well.

In the course of the discussions it became clear that those churches which were in favour of accepting the invitation had difficulty with their position among the federation of the OCRC. In the end they were instructed to report Synod's decision at home and to make a decision regarding it as local congregation. A real tension appeared between the obligations and responsibilities of churches within a federation, while also the meaning, place, and purpose of a federation of churches was viewed in different ways. The contentious question was whether a federation is an expression of the 'one-ness' of the church (and thus belongs to the 'essence' of the church) or just an arrangement for the 'well-being' of the local churches (and therefore does not belong to the 'essence' of the church). The views concerning this question clearly expressed a thinking about the church in terms of the pluriformity of the church and of 'the church' being invisible.

3. Observations

The meeting was held in a brotherly spirit and conducted in an orderly fashion. The views that were expressed concerning the issues before Synod showed a weakness in the way the Confessions and Church Order function in the thinking and argumentation of the brothers. Especially the discussion on the matter of the invitation of the URCNA brought out a lack of understanding of the Confession regarding the Church, the function of art. 31 C.O., or the process of admonition and discipline in the case of deviant ideas among the officebearers (e.g. art. 71, 72 C.O.). There clearly was no consensus on the general principles for a living together in a federation of churches. Confusion could be observed in regard to the place and status of the position-paper on Creation (extra-confessional or 'just' a position-paper).

Finally, the opinions that were expressed and the approach that was taken concerning the invitation of the URCNA was disappointing to say the least. Although your observer agreed that the wiser course to follow was the way of preliminary discussions between committees representing the federations (the three-phases-approach we are taking with the URCNA), the discussion about 'views' on Creation, about 'practices' that were tolerated in certain congregations (e.g. choirs during a worship-service, soloists, musical instruments), or about 'lifestyles' that have become apparent among some of the URCes, was regrettable. The latter resulted from a lack of ability to discern the principles and points of consideration that are important and relevant in terms of confessions and church polity. Especially for these reasons I would like to suggest that we keep this Observer's Report for internal use among our Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity only, and do not publish it in Clarion nor include it with the material submitted to Synod 2001.

Humbly submitted this October 26th, 1999,
W. den Hollander, observer.

APPENDIX 5

Here follows the text of the address of the Rev. W. den Hollander, member of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, to the Synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, convened at Cambridge, On., on October 21-22, 1999.

Esteemed brothers,

It is a privilege and honour that I may stand here to convey Christian greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. We greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head of His Catholic Church. We confess Him in the unity of the true faith with the Church of all times and all places. With you we share in this confession, not only *in name*, by way of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity which we have in common, but also *in deed*, in the way we seek to abide by these standards in our participation in the church-gathering work of this our Head and our Lord. We both pursue this work in loyal observance to what in essence is the Church Order of Dort. We are convinced that in this Church Order our confession of the Word of God is worked out faithfully by applying confessional principles in practical ways and beneficial arrangements. It is our sincere desire that you may be blessed in your Synod and may be fruitful in your meeting, by remaining faithful to your confession. May the Holy Spirit lead and guide you in your deliberations by His Word.

In a Synod you are involved in this work as a federation of churches. In the past you founded your federation on the confessional basis which I just described. You recognized the calling for such a federation in the Scriptural notion of Christ's walking among the candle-sticks and other Scriptural inferences. You bound yourselves together, vowing faithfulness and loyalty to each other. At least, that's what the root-word for federation, *foedus*, denotes! You established this bond in order to help one another, support one another, and to hold on to each other for the preservation of this unity of faith and confession. In this Synod also, you are called to deal with matters which pertain to the entire federation. Together you are at a cross-road situation, and together you are responsible for the direction and decision-making of the federation. We wish to express our heartfelt prayer that the Spirit may help you to fulfil your vows of faithfulness and loyalty to each other.

As federations we have been living beside each other for a few decades now. That situation is a reflection of the brokenness of life due to sin. This brokenness does not pass by the Christian's life; also the church gathering work of Christ takes place in the midst of this sorrowful reality. Thankfully, at the local level there have been contacts and interactions, especially out West. Initially, during the early years of your existence, there were the hopes for greater unity. At the local level, however, these hopes were not fulfilled. In the broader context of our federations we have not had an opportunity yet to pursue and promote such ecclesiastical unity. However, there are encouraging signs that in both West and East these local and regional contacts may lead to the establishment of such an official pursuit of unity on behalf of our respective federations. Indeed, it is this "*in tandem*" approach which we pursue: as local addresses of the church of Christ *and* in the context of the federation we are called to promote the unity and catholicity of the church. The efforts at the local level should be supportive of the unity-pursuits on the federal level, *and vice versa*. Thus also this promotion of ecclesiastical

unity should be done in accordance with the principles of loyalty and faithfulness in a covenant bond of churches. On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches I urgently entreat you to facilitate such contact at the level of our federations, so that we may renew our acquaintance of each other and in due time find each other in a mutual bond and unity which is pleasing to the Lord.

You will understand that as Canadian Reformed Churches we are keenly interested in the debates and decisions of this Synod in regard to the invitation from the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America. We ourselves rejoice in the progress we have made with the URChurches over the past years in our mutual understanding of the matters and issues which play an important role in the process toward merger. The points on which we have expressed our common agreement are very essential and crucial for the mutual recognition as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the course of our contact and interactions with them we have pursued the "in tandem" approach as well. We have found them to be mandatory as well as beneficial for the pursuit of unity, locally and federally. We sincerely hope that we may engage in a similar pursuit with your federation. We, also, honestly and openly express the hope and advice that *you* will follow the same approach in *your* considerations of unity with the URCNA.

In the discussions which we should have together, we should come to better understanding of our history. Our primary concern should not be "who was there first" and "who should have joined whom." At *this* time in the history of each of our federations we should come to understand the reasons for the course we have walked. Together we will have to evaluate the causes behind the separate existence of our federations. Especially when we agree to submit our discussions to the Word of God and use the confessions as normative for our life as churches, we should be able to agree on a process toward unity in which the oneness in the Lord, in hope, faith, and baptism comes to fruition in a church-unity which is pleasing to our one God and Father, who is over all and through all and in all. [Eph. 4:4-6]

In order to establish a true unity, which is a unity in the truth [John 17:17, 21], we cannot be too presumptuous as believers who still struggle with weaknesses and sins. We should only submit ourselves in all humbleness to the Spirit of truth, and in that spirit seek each other in true brotherly love. We pray that this spirit may pervade your meeting and that it may move us as federations to continue in our pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in obedience to our Head and Lord, Jesus Christ. May we acknowledge with thankfulness that the momentum for such unity is growing. May we also, together, receive the wisdom and patience of the Spirit to come to a true and lasting Union at God's time and under His blessing. I thank you heartily for your kindness shown in inviting us and granting us this opportunity to express our greetings to you and our petitions for you.

APPENDIX 6

Synod of the Free Reformed Churches, Hamilton, May 23-26, 2000

On Tuesday, May 23rd, the delegates to the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches joined in a Prayer Service of the Hamilton FRC. This worship service was conducted by the Rev. C.A. Schouls, minister of the FRC in Chatham, ON. The text for his sermon was taken from Psalm 93. Following the service, a meeting of delegates was held in which the Rev. N. Pronk led the brothers in a devotional on Acts 15. He worked it out by expressing the desire that by the power of God (Ps. 93) the brothers would work together in the same unity and love as portrayed in this passage. The executive was elected and Synod constituted. The next morning, in the opening devotions, the Rev. L.W. Bilkes drew the attention of the delegates to the Word of God in 2 Cor. 5:9, "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." [KJV] In this way the work of this Synod was placed on the basis of God's Word, in the framework of God's preserving power, and with the intent desire of being well pleasing to Him. We may thankfully report that this spirit and objective prevailed throughout the proceedings!

One of the highlights on the Agenda of this Synod was the application for admission of the Bethel Reformed Church at Monarch, Alberta. This congregation used to belong to the federation of the Reformed Church of America (RCA). After their pastor left, other RCA ministers, whose preaching lacked the experiential emphasis that they had appreciated in their former pastor, served them. During the past two years they had invited ministers of the FRC into their pulpits, which led to a growing relationship with this federation. Through the counsel and advice of the Rev. L.W. Bilkes, minister of the 'neighbouring' church at Abbotsford BC, a process was started to come to a membership within the federation of the FRC. The congregation first voted to leave the RCA, the RCA ensuring that the FRC would receive them. After everything was done to make the transition in a decent and orderly way, they now requested admission to the federation of the FRC. After discussing certain aspects in the process of transition, Synod unanimously received this congregation into its federation. As the chairman of Synod, the Rev. Schouls stated in his word of welcome: this was a first in the history of the FRC over the past thirty years. Upon the reading of Eph. 4:1-6, singing and prayer, and the public agreement by the delegates with the Three Forms of Unity, the delegates of this congregation were seated as members of Synod.

The Agenda then required Synod's attention for matters of Evangelism, Home Mission, and Foreign Mission. The work of the radio ministry of the Rev. N. Pronk was discussed, and the response to it in the various areas. The attention in this ministry will be focussed more and more on Africa, from where the response is overwhelming. The Committee is presently investigating possibilities also to make use of the Internet for outreach purposes. Another successful Home Mission project is pursued on Vancouver Island, in the Cowichan Valley (60 km. NE of Victoria). Since there is no other faithful reformed witness on the island, the group that's gathering here is composed of members of various reformed backgrounds. Lately the ministers of the FRC, especially, have been rendering services at this place. A retired minister, the Rev. H. VanEssen, worked here during a few winter months. The possibility is considered to call a Home Missionary for this house congregation, in order to work towards the institution of a FRC.

For the purpose of discussing the affairs of the Foreign Mission, Synod turned into a membership meeting of the Foreign Mission Inc. The secretary and treasurer of this

Incorporation were present and the report on the work in Guatemala was discussed. The report presented the many blessings and progress the Lord is granting on the work of the Rev. K. Herfst and his helpers. The meeting accepted a recommendation that the Rev. Herfst and a Board member attend the ICRC conference in Brazil (October) of churches working in Latin America. This way they are seeking contacts, discover good Spanish books, and make their missionary needs known. One of these needs will be the replacement of the Rev. Herfst in 2002 as missionary in Guatemala.

For Thursday the Executive had set aside Synod's discussion of the Report of the External Relations Committee. At this time the chairman welcomed especially the fraternal delegates invited by this Committee. These delegates received the floor to convey greetings on behalf of the federations of churches they represented. For the Canadian Reformed Churches Dr. J. De Jong addressed Synod [speech, see elsewhere], for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches the Rev. M. Luimes spoke, the Rev. J. Fergusson of the London OPC represented the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, while the Rev. R. Stienstra spoke on behalf of the United Reformed Churches in North America. Each speaker received a response from one of the members of Synod.

These presentations set the stage for a discussion on the work and contacts of the External Relations Committee. Most of the addresses had noted the common heritage and confessional foundation among the Reformed churches present. The speakers had stressed the desire for more intense contact and cooperation, and the calling to pursue the Scriptural mandate for ecclesiastical unity. In the context of the discussion on the Report and the presence of these fraternal delegates, a discussion then developed on the position and practices within the FRC regarding external relations. The question was raised whether the FRC should be seeking federational unity, or pursue the preservation of its own identity. Even if churches have the confessional standards in common with other federations, should the FRC not observe the existence of a 'religion of the confession'? How does this 'religion' function, for instance, in regard to the appropriation of salvation, the experiential preaching, the struggle of faith, the way the preachers view the congregation, and other distinctives? In other words, is there among the FRC a 'will for ecumenicity'? Hence the issue was raised concerning the FRC's integrity and honesty in regard to the question whether church unity should be pursued or not.

The last sessions of Synod held on Friday May 26, were witnessed by Dr. J. De Jong. During these sessions, the report of the External Relations Committee was adopted, with Synod voting in favour of pursuing "Limited Contact" with the Canadian Reformed Churches. A similar proposal was passed with regard to the Heritage Netherlands Congregations as well as the United Reformed Churches. Various other ecumenical contacts were approved.

The "highlight" of the Synod was the examination of Candidate Jack Shoeman, who had completed a course of study at the Puritan Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. Cand. Shoeman, a former Guido De Bres High School student, preached a sermon on John 1: 35, and was examined in the areas of Old and New Testament Exegesis, Doctrine, Homiletics and Church Government. This session was followed by an extensive personal examination concerning the candidates's road to the gospel, and to the gospel ministry in particular. For us as fraternal delegates it was interesting to observe this examination and to note how the FRC examiners bring out certain emphases while by-passing other matters. One particularly noticeable gap was the absence of an examination in several important areas of ministry normally covered in

our peremptory examinations.

On the whole it was a rewarding experience to be witnesses to this synod and to establish further contacts with the delegates to synod. It was very clear in the discussions and meditations throughout the synodical sessions that the brothers are seeking to live in accordance with the Word of God. We therefore can be thankful for the initiative of the FRC in inviting us to their synod, and we hope that this may be reciprocated by our synod in 2001, and that these contacts may be intensified in the future.

For the Committee,

Dr. J. De Jong

Rev. W. Den Hollander

APPENDIX 7

Esteemed brothers!

We were very grateful for your initiative in inviting fraternal delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches to visit your General Synod. We take this invitation as a sign that you wish to further contact and discussion with other like minded bodies in order to promote the unity of the church of Christ in this country.

You may be assured of our desire to pursue unity negotiations with the Free Reformed Churches. We have a common background and a common heritage! We live by the same confessional statements, the Three Forms of Unity. Over the years, local discussions have taken place in various localities. We have also cooperated in the area of the training for the ministry, and several of your ministers are graduates of our Theological College. From personal experience, I may say that it has been a pleasure to meet your students, to get to know them and work with them, and (to speak frankly) I was disappointed that our cooperation in this area -- which I had hoped would intensify on both sides -- was recently broken off.

In more recent years different areas of discussion and interaction have been explored. In 1997 we published the pastoral letter of your synod to your membership, because we recognized in it your concern about the danger of adopting the style of the world. We need to warn against the same patterns among our own people. The Statement on the Appropriation of Salvation written by Drs. A Baars was also published and discussed in one of our magazines. There has been growing cooperation in the magazine for the church's officers called *Diakonia*. And since 1998, meetings have been held with representatives of our Unity Committee and your External Relations Committee in order to set the ground for more intensive contact on the federational level. The interim reports that we have received concerning these meetings indicate that they have proceeded very well, with a renewed sense of willingness to clear away whatever misunderstandings may have arisen through the years. In all of these things we recognize how

close we are with respect to living out our Christian task and calling in the world.

You are no doubt aware that our counter parts in the Netherlands, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt have been engaged in discussions for the last twenty or so years, but in more recent years there has been a much closer alignment of both churches, a rapprochement stemming from both sides of the discussion. Much greater understanding has been achieved in the issues of the appropriation of salvation, and the way the congregation is viewed. Grater harmony of insight has also been uncovered in the view of the preaching and its applicatory aspects. And from an historical point of view, there is a willingness to acknowledge that the Lord continues to preserve his faithful children and gather his churches also among those who did not feel that it was right at the time to join with the Union of 1892.

The ever closer ties between our counterparts in the Netherlands should also form an added incentive for us, next to the command and obligation set upon us by the word of Christ himself! The outstanding issues between our federations should not form an obstacle for us in the pursuit of federative unity. We value your contribution to Reformed life in this country, we value your commitment to maintain God's infallible Word, and uphold the confessions of the church. Does not Christ call us to share our gifts and work together as one body? May He bless the efforts of our mutual committees entrusted with the task of discussing these matters, and may He also bless your church life, both on a federational level, and in your local communities. May He also guide you in your deliberations in this assembly and so lead you by his Spirit and Word that this assembly too, will stand as a contribution to the greater unity and solidarity of God's people across this great country, and around the world.

J. De Jong

ATTENDANCE - 11/14/00

sending two deputies, Rev. K. Gangar and Rev. J.W. Wullschleger, as observers to the November 2000 NAPARC meeting.

ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches)

The next ICRC conference is set for June 20-29, 2001 in Philadelphia, USA. The five main speakers at the conference are Rev. P. den Butter (CGK), Dr. J. DeJong, (Can.Refd.) Dr. D. McKay (RPCI), Rev. C. Pronk (FRC), and Rev. G. I. Williamson (OPC). Our membership and support for ICRC continues. More and more federations are showing interest in the ICRC. No recommendations need to be made this year.

Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship

At last year's Synod the Committee's proposed "Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship" was adopted "provisionally, with a view to ICRC consultation in order to finalize this adoption at Synod 2000." We received no further recommendations from the ICRC, and **recommend** now both to adopt the following (slightly edited from last year) "Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship" and to replace our present Article 51 of the Church Order with this new policy.

Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship

A. Limited Contact including:

1. the attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
2. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*;
3. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts, toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3):
4. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

B. Limited Correspondence including:

1. opening the Lord's Table to each other;
2. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers.
3. the attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
4. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*;
5. offering spiritual Support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward Scriptural solutions:

- b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints," (Jude 3);
6. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

C. Complete Correspondence including:

- 1. the mutual acceptance of each other's (membership) attestations.
- 2. opening the Lord's Table to each other;
- 3. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers.
- 4. mutually considering each other's ministers eligible for call;
- 5. mutual consultation with each other regarding significant actions such as, for example, the revision of the confession or of the Church Order, the extension or reduction of a relationship of correspondence. etc.;
- 6. the attendance of each other's synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
- 7. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*
- 8. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3);
- 9. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and cooperation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

In connection with the Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship as Committee we look for approval on our understanding that establishing level "A" of ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation in no way "makes binding" or "expected" or "necessary" moving towards the other two levels. In other words, establishing "limited contact" form of fellowship does not necessarily require moving towards the next level of contact, while it does open the door for such development under God's blessing. We see level "A" primarily as a communicative level in an official and brotherly manner. With that in mind at our Fall meeting we as Committee made the following decision. "This Committee having discussed the matter of "limited contact" and having considered in some detail the necessity of establishing such contacts in order to facilitate meaningful discussion with other churches, resolves that the criteria needed to be met before such contact can be established are the following: unreserved commitment to and agreement with (1) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scriptures and, (2) the validity and relevance of our Confessions."

APPENDIX 9

STATEMENTS OF AGREEMENT

Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

Canadian Reformed Churches

and

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

United Reformed Churches in North America

Church History

We acknowledge from both sides, that with sin and shortcoming, both of the most recent secessions in our history, the liberation of 1944 and the 1990s secessions, were acts of obedience required and obligated in keeping with the will of God as confessed in Art.28 and 29 BC.

The Covenant

The covenant is a relationship between God and man established by God at the time of His creation of Adam and Eve. It is one sided in origin and two sided in existence. God established it to live in fellowship with man and show him His love and favour, and to receive from man love, obedience, trust, and honour. When man broke this covenant of favour by his rebellion and fall into sin, God in His grace maintained this relationship and promised to redeem man by the sacrifice of His Son, the Seed of the woman in its deepest sense. The Lord makes this covenant of grace with the believers and their offspring.

The promises of the covenant together with the demand to repent from sin and believe the promises must be proclaimed throughout all the world. All who repent and believe and receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour are grafted into the covenant and share in its promises and blessings. The death of Christ on the cross represents the fulfilment of the terms of the old covenant. Therefore in the new dispensation of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, believers and their seed are called by the power of God to live in true thankfulness and live according to all the commandments of God.

In an obedient response to the covenant obligations the believers are called to gather together in unity with Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, and in unity of faith with the church of all ages. These gatherings are found where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed in purity, where the sacraments are administered in purity, and where church discipline is exercised for the correcting and punishing of sins. All people belonging to God's covenant of grace are called and obliged to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. The fullness of this covenant takes place at the consummation of all things when the one triune God will live with His chosen people in perfect love and fellowship through all eternity.

The Church

We acknowledge that due to the many limitations and shortcomings of human understanding there is a brokenness of the church both in local situations and in broader federations. This implies that there can be more than one true church in a particular place at any given time. We need to reject a broad denominationalism on the one hand, as well as a narrow sectarianism on the other. Churches

of various backgrounds but one confession have the duty to pursue the highest forms of ecclesiastical fellowship possible in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in the federation of churches.

The Church Order

The unity committees express their gratitude that both federations have maintained the principles, structure, and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort in their respective adaptations for Reformed church life. The committees discussed the specific differences between the orders of the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches. The agreement was reached that a recommendation be sent to the next synods that each synod appoint a church order committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort. The differences between the current orders of the federations would be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and Confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort.

NOTE: The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches has agreed to recommend to synod 2001 that the last sentence of Art.34 of the URC Church Order be suspended during the period of *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Canadian Reformed Churches, should both synods agree to enter such a relationship. The sentence in question reads, "*Fraternal activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity.*" The committee will also recommend to synod that all churches are urged to maintain this provision.

The Song Book

The unity committees gratefully observe that both federations have maintained the principle that while preaching is the central ingredient in the church's worship, congregational singing suitably accompanied forms a significant part of a Reformed worship service. The committees discussed the differences between the Canadian Reformed *Book of Praise* and the United Reformed *Psalter Hymnal*. The agreement was reached to recommend to the 2001 synods that when the two federations agree to enter into *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* each synod appoint a song book committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan psalter and other suitable metrical versions, while including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The committees recommend that the churches continue to use their accustomed song books, also after the Union should the Lord grant this, until the new song book is ready and adopted.

Creeds, Confessions, Liturgical Forms, and Prayers

for Inclusion in the Proposed Song Book

The unity committees also note with thankfulness that both federations have translations of the Three Forms of Unity in their song books which adhere to and reflect the original languages as adopted by the Synod of Dort. The committees are also grateful that the liturgical forms and the prayers for special and designated purposes appear in each federation's song book since they form a direct link with the history of the early Reformed churches in Europe where they originated. The unity

committees recommend that the first Synod of the new combined federation, should the Lord grant the Union to take place, appoint a committee or committees to coordinate and harmonize the present translations of the Ecumenical Creeds, the Three Forms of Unity, the liturgical forms, and the special prayers, consulting where possible the original languages, for eventual inclusion in the new song book.

Agreement on Theological Education for Ministers

With thanks to God the unity committees concur that both federations have maintained the traditional Reformed practice of requiring and providing a thoroughly confessional and scholarly theological education and training for their students aspiring to be ministers of the Word. The Canadian Reformed Churches own and support their Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario, and the professors are Canadian Reformed. Graduates normally become candidates and ministers in their churches. The United Reformed Churches have no federational seminary, and the candidates for their ministry are trained by a number of Reformed seminaries, especially by the independently owned and operated Mid America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, but also by the similarly independent Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

The committees discussed the potential and actual differences in the confessional requirements, the church membership of the professors and teaching staff of these three theological schools, the appointment procedures, as well as the institutions' curricular diversities. Agreement was reached to recommend to the synods of 2001 that when the two federations agree to enter into *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* each synod appoint a theological education study committee. The unity committees recommend that each synod's committee also have serving on it one or two professors from its own theological school or schools, and that the two committees work together to draft proposals for their synods in preparation for the eventual Plan of Union in accordance with their mandates.

The unity committees recommend to the synods of 2001 that the mandates for the proposed theological study committee of both federations contain provisions for the commitment that should the Lord of the Church grant eventual Union, the resulting United Churches will retain at least one federational theological school and that the synod recommend the school's professors and teaching staff for appointment. A further recommendation to be included in the study committees' mandates is that the synod of the United Churches select those non-federational seminaries for the preparation of its future candidates for the ministry whose professors and all teaching staff sign the Form of Subscription indicating agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Another recommendation for inclusion in the study committees' mandates is concerning an aspiring candidate's failure to have adequate instruction in significant courses such as Reformed Church Polity or Reformed Church History. He will be required to supplement his education in those courses to conform to the standards of the churches' theological school(s) before being able to be declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word in the United Churches.

Preaching

Grateful to the King of the Church, the unity committees report their agreement that both federations seek to maintain a high standard of preaching as required by Scripture. Fully trained and ordained ministers are called to preach the whole counsel of God. This includes the regular preaching of the

Reformed Confessions focussing especially on the Heidelberg Catechism during one of the worship services on each Lord's Day. The committees agree that preaching the full counsel of God requires the proclamation of the promises of God, together with the command to repent and believe the gospel, thus calling all to flee from the wrath to come. With suitable exhortations and admonitions all the hearers are encouraged to appropriate the promises of the gospel with a living faith. In this way, the committees agree, every effort is expended in the churches of the two federations to promote the proper explication and application of the Scriptures for the building up of the congregations.

Agreement on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Noting that the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them is a mark of the true Church, the unity committees agree that in both federations the sacraments are maintained and administered according to the ordinance of God. The elders exercise supervision with regard to the administration of both sacraments, and only confessing members in good standing are allowed to present their children for baptism. After making public profession of faith members are admitted to fellowship at the Lord's Table. It is in this way that the sacraments are celebrated to the glory of God and for the edification of His people.

The committees discussed the different practices of supervising the participation of guests at the Lord's Supper. The Canadian Reformed practice is to require of guests an acceptable certificate or attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct issued by the elders of their "sister churches." The United Reformed Churches generally accept upon an interview with the guest, his or her signed personal attestation concerning doctrine and conduct thereby assuring the consistory of their church membership by profession of faith and of their godly walk.

Agreement was reached that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is entrusted to the congregation in each location, and that its elders are charged by Christ with the pure administration of this sacrament. In receiving guests from elsewhere, the committees have agreed that a travel attestation from a guest's home consistory is a time honoured and effective practice in supervising guests at the Lord's Table. A personal attestation prepared and administered by the consistory of the church celebrating the Lord's Supper is also an acceptable and Reformed way of supervising attendance at the Lord's Table, when as much as possible the elders have attempted to secure confirmation of the guest's godly life from appropriate sources. In the attestation the signatories state that they are communicant members not under discipline of a faithful church which fully confesses the doctrines of the Scriptures. The consistory would send the personal statement to the person's home church.

Ecclesiastical Discipline

Since both federations seek to govern themselves according to the pure Word of God, all of the churches exercise church discipline for correcting and punishing sins, the unity committees agree that the implementation of Scripture, the Confession, and the Church Order are duly practised in the churches. The Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches consider Christian discipline to be spiritual in nature, and for the purpose that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church and his neighbour, and that all offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

APPENDIX 10

Report of the meeting of the sub-committee for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the sub-committee of the External Relations Committee of The Free Reformed churches, held on Sept. 29, 1999 in the Langley Free Reformed church building at 2 p.m.

The following brothers were present:

Rev. L. W. Bilkes of the Free Reformed church at Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Rev. H. Overduin of the Free Reformed church at Chilliwack, British Columbia.

Rev. J. W. Wullschleger of the Free Reformed church at the Langley, British Columbia.

Rev. R. Aasman of the Canadian Reformed church at Edmonton, Alberta

Rev. W. B. Slomp of the Canadian Reformed church at Neerlandia, Alberta

Rev. Kuldip Gangar from the Free Reformed Churches and elder P. VanWoudenberg from the Canadian Reformed Churches were not able to attend because of previous commitments.

Rev. Overduin opened the meeting with the reading from John 17:17-26. He also read a meditation on this passage. Rev. Bilkes chaired the meeting and read from their Acts of Synod 1999 where their mandate was outlined as follows: "The Canadian Reformed Churches have asked 'to pursue talks' with us 'for the purpose of establishing federative unity'. The four ministers in the West, all of whom are also on the External Relations Committee have been mandated to meet as sub-committee with a delegation of the Canadian Reformed Churches in pursuit of better communications and understanding between each other." The opportunity was given to each minister to introduce himself. From these introductions it became clear that there has been and continues to be much contact of late between the Canadian Reformed churches and the Free Reformed Churches in the Fraser Valley. It was also for that reason that the Western ministers were chosen to take of contact with the Canadian Reformed churches.

The following document, previously prepared for a recent meeting with the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Chilliwack was tabled by Rev. Overduin:

Questions # 3 and 4 "Where must we agree on and what can be tolerated in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity?" "May we maintain the distinction formal/confessional agreement with the truth?"

I take these two questions together because they overlap and fit together. In the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity what is of utmost importance and a bottom line requirement is common agreement and adherence to the Reformed faith, or the Christian gospel summarized in the Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. It is possible, certainly, to have real fellowship with believers who don't necessarily subscribe to all that is taught in the doctrinal standards of the Three Forms of Unity. But we are talking now about a Reformed church pursuing after ecclesiastical unity with another church, even another Reformed church. There is an old saying that says:

In things essential, let there be UNITY;

In things non-essential, let there be LIBERTY;

In all things, let there be CHRISTIAN LOVE.

Well, I think we can agree, in pursuit of ecclesiastical unity, the Word of God as summarized and explained in the Three Forms of Unity deals with matters essential. If there can be a common agreement and adherence to those confessions, then there can be progress towards further actual unity and possibly even federative unity.

But now the question is how do we define common agreement and adherence to the Reformed Confessions. As Question #4 puts it, "May we maintain the distinction formal/confessional agreement with the truth" What is behind this question is the whole Union of 1892 and it's follow-up history as explained also in the book, The Challenge of Church Union. In the Union of 1892 Bavinck was satisfied with a formal union and Lindeboom favoured a real, essential union. (p.27) The Union of 1892 took

place finally on the basis of a formal union, a formal agreement on subscription to the Three Forms of Unity, but there wasn't a real essential agreement on what those confessions said and how they are to be taught and applied. On page 27 Rev. Pronk asks the question, "Is formal agreement with the confession a sufficient basis for a union of churches which held such widely different views on key doctrines of the confession?" Without getting in a debate about 1892, must we not say, that it is essential in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity, that there be not only formal agreement to the confessions, but a common understanding of what the Confessions teach and mean? Great divisions and strife can come within church unions if this is not respected. Common subscription to the Confessions does not mean common adherence to the Confessions. "Do we hold to the confessions in the same way?" is not an irrelevant or unnecessary question to ask.

Some words here also by Dr. B. R. Short in the *The Challenge to Church Union* are appropriate here: "We are to be discussing what we as Reformed brethren can do in order to promote unity amongst us.... I believe it is important that we do not underestimate our differences. I would suggest that it would be absolutely necessary to create some forum wherein the various differences either real or perceived could be openly discussed without pressure of union hovering in the background which could deter open and frank exchange. Any union (or pursuit of ecclesiastical unity) not based on honesty and openness would be a farce. We must not pretend for the sake of unity certain things do not exist if in fact they do.... All I am saying is that one must be very careful in uniting (and in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity). I agree with the principal. I agree that the church of Jesus Christ is to be one to the best of our ability, but I think at the same time we have to be as realistic about it as possible." (P. 161-2, 171-1)

Having said all the above, isn't it important that we work on ways to discover whether there is essential real agreement with us concerning the Word of God, and the Confessions, the Church, the way of salvation, the preaching, etc. We know there is formal agreement on the Three Forms of Unity--but whether there is essential agreement, is something questioned from both sides. How only can we deal with these "questions" and "fears"? Isn't the answer found in what C. Venema writes on page 137: "If the desired unity between (reformed) churches is ever to be realized in significant measure, it will only occur within the setting of a history and a practice of 'inter-church contacts'... One of the greatest obstacles to unity is our lack of understanding of each other. Because we have been isolated from each other and because we have our own unique histories as churches and denominations, our debates and conversations have often been intramural and introverted. We have not pursued the kind of contacts with each other that are indispensable to greater understanding and the resolution of historic differences. Without such contacts, relations between our churches have been adversely affected by historical incidence and anecdotal stories which have been prejudicial to healthy contacts." Along the same line Dr. J. Faber suggests even "joint congregational meetings"..."joint meetings of societies of men and women and a Bible study clubs"... In order to recognize one another, he says, we have to see and to hear one another. Love for God's church will free us from narrow-mindedness and make us creative and inventive." (P. 152-3)

Without doubt, the key to real confessional unity is more "grassroots", informal discussion and communication between us. The more we realize that we are one in Christ, the more progress we will also make towards ecclesiastical unity.

Quotation to ponder: "The will to act ecumenically is a primary distinguishing mark of the church." (P. 112--Rev. Visscher summarizing Dr. K. Schilder)

This document, and the various questions and answers raised, was not further discussed. The issues introduced will be dealt with at later meetings.

Rev. Aasman and Rev. Slomp then asked several questions designed to gain further information about the Free Reformed churches.

- *What is your practice with regard to the singing of Psalms and Hymns in the worship services?* The Psalter is used exclusively in the worship services. Certain churches have introduced the singing of Hymns before the actual worship service has commenced. Hymns are not sung because of the role they played in the Secession of 1834.
- *What about the Theological College? Why do you no longer have your young men study at our College?* Two reasons: In the first place it was felt that there was not enough emphasis in the College on applicatory preaching. In the second place it was felt that some of the Free Reformed ministers should have been given the opportunity to give guest lectures. The further comment was made that the Free Reformed Churches had been seeking their own college for a long time. They admitted that there could have been better communication with the College about these various issues.
- *What do the parents do with regard to schooling?* There are various practices. Some cooperate with the U.R.C.; others send them to a Netherlands Reformed school; again others will send them to a Canadian Reformed school; and there are those who will send them to a general Christian school. Home schooling is also becoming more of a practice, and somewhat of a concern.
- *What is experiential preaching?* Experiential preaching is a reformed distinctive. In experiential preaching the Scriptures come first. The Holy Spirit works through the preaching. It is a preaching where not only we are told to believe, but also to experience that faith. The emphasis is on the fact that Christ is not just for us, but that Christ is also to be in us.
- *Why do you use the King James translation exclusively?* This is an issue that they are currently very much struggling with. It is therefore a matter of ongoing discussion.

After these questions were answered it was decided that we should meet together once again in the near future. It was agreed to come together on February 3rd, 2000, in the Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford. One of the Free Reformed ministers will introduced topic, "What is experiential preaching?" One of the Canadian Reformed ministers will introduce the topic, "What is the church?"

Rev. Aasman then closed the meeting with prayer.

For the Committee,

Bill Slomp

APPENDIX II

Report of the meeting of the sub-committee for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the sub-committee of the External Relations Committee of The Free Reformed churches, held on February 3, 2000 in the Abbotsford Free Reformed church building at 10 AM.

Opening

The following brothers are present:

Rev. L. W. Bilkes of the Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Rev. H. Overduin of the Free Reformed Church at Chilliwack, British Columbia.

Rev. J. W. Wullschleger of the Free Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia.

Rev. R. Aasman of the Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton, Alberta

Rev. W. B. Slomp of the Canadian Reformed Church at Neerlandia, Alberta

Elder P. Vanwoudenberg from the Canadian Reformed Church at Chilliwack.

Rev. Kuldip Gangar from the Free Reformed Churches was not able to attend because of the illness of his mother.

Since brother Vanwoudenberg was not present at the previous meeting, he is now given the opportunity to introduce himself.

Division of duties

Rev. Bilkes opens the meeting with the reading from Acts 20: 17-38, and leads in prayer. It is decided that Rev. Bilkes will chair this meeting and that Rev. Aasman will do so the next time. The chairman then gives Rev. Overduin the opportunity to read the record written by Rev. Wullschleger of the meeting held Sept. 29, 1999 as presented their committee. Rev. Slomp is then given the opportunity to read his record of the minutes. It is remarked that both accounts closely represent what has taken place. It is decided that from now on there will be only one set of minutes. This time Rev. Slomp will do the recording and the next time Rev. Wullschleger will do so. They will consult one another before passing them on to the various committee members.

Positive comments on the paper by Rev. Overduin, "Some reflections on experiential preaching..."

The chairman suggests that in dealing with the various papers presented first the positive elements be brought out. He gives the floor to Rev. Aasman. Rev. Aasman expresses appreciation for the stress on applicatory preaching. He also appreciates that Rev. Overduin recognizes that "experiential preaching... can sometimes result in or arise from a limited view of the covenant of grace and a negative view of the congregation."

Rev. Slomp expresses appreciation for the fact that the paper shows the importance of not just a hearing of the gospel, but also experiencing it in one's own life. Indeed it must be stressed that people cannot just take it and leave it for the preaching must be applied in the lives of the believers. He also appreciated the reference to Scripture [in this regard, for the references show how the Lord God Himself wants His Word to be applied in our daily lives.

Brother Vanwoudenberg is also given opportunity to comment. However, since he had no opportunity to read the paper beforehand, having just received it, he is not able to comment.

Rev. Overduin makes the comment that the fourth point in this paper should be discussed separately from the other points. For that point deals with the implication of unity between our respective churches. We all agree that this will be a topic for discussion at a later date.

Rev. Bilkes gives some further elucidation of what experiential preaching is all about. He states that experiential preaching is not a description of experience, nor is it a dichotomy between the objective and the subjective, but a preaching which calls for full participation in Christ, a preaching, which opens the Scripture and which proclaims Christ's work for us and in us.

Positive comments on the paper by Rev. Wullschleger, "Some thoughts on experiential preaching..."

Rev. Wullschleger explains that his contribution was more of an afterthought to the paper of Rev. Overduin, and that there was very little to add. His point was to bring out the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching. How does the work of the Holy Spirit function in preaching? He explains further that he himself is still learning what experiential preaching is all about. We agree that Pastor Overduin and Pastor Wullschleger will attempt to incorporate the main thought of Pastor's Wullschleger's paper into the one by Pastor Overduin.

Positive comments on the paper by Rev. Aasman, "How do we see the congregation?"

Rev. Overduin expresses appreciation for the fact that in this paper the Scriptures and confessions are extensively quoted. Rev. Wullschleger agrees with his colleague and also states that he appreciates that in the paper the different stages in the believer's life are shown. Rev. Bilkes likes the fact that the seal of the Holy Spirit is addressed. He states that this paper could have been written by one of them. It is balanced, Scriptural and pastoral.

Critical remarks on the paper by Rev. Overduin, "Some reflections on experiential preaching..."

The Canadian Reformed brothers are now given the opportunity to interact critically with the paper of Rev. Overduin. Rev. Aasman asks the following questions (prepared beforehand in cooperation with Rev. Slomp):

1. "On page one you refer to 'first time and ongoing faith'. How much emphasis do you place on 'first time faith' in the preaching?" Rev. Overduin explains that "first time faith" is emphasized quite a bit in the preaching. For the youth needs to become converted. There has to be the recognition that there are covenant children who have not yet come to faith. Rev. Bilkes interjects that he considers this a good question for here we see the difference between us. The Canadian Reformed emphasize "daily conversion" The Free Reformed brothers clarify that this is not meant to create doubt and fear in church members' minds but to challenge and call them to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. " Before there can be a daily conversion there is the need for a first conversion or for a being grafted into Christ by a true faith, cf. L.D. 7, Q. + A. 20.

2. "On page two of your presentation you quote from Rev. C. Pronk who appears to make a distinction between two groups within the church. Do you also make such a distinction?" Rev. Overduin states that he does not think that we ought to separate the church into two camps. He says that the preaching should imply it however. Rev. Wullschleger agrees, and states that we should not divide the congregation but adds that we should recognize that there are unconverted members in the congregation. He states further that all those who make profession of faith should also then be attending the Lord's supper. He would not allow someone to make profession of faith if he did not have the desire to attend the Lord's supper. The other Free Reformed brothers agree.

3. "What do you mean when you state on the top of page 3 that "experiential preaching is preaching God's word as from the heart of God, Biblically based, through the heart of man, Biblically led,

to the heart of man, Biblically grounded."? Rev. Overduin explains that we must know the heart of God which is made know through the Word and therefore must be exegeted carefully and that application must be based on the Bible. For the preaching comes from the heart of God and His word must reach right into the heart of man.

Critical remarks on the paper by Rev. Wullschleger, "Some thoughts on experiential preaching..."

"You begin your paper with a comment from a member of the Liberated Church in the Netherlands: "Those Free Reformed people must first have experienced something before they believe." How exactly do you yourself answer this question because it is not clear from your paper. Rev. Wullschleger says that this question is asked because this is how we are perceived. Rev. Wullschleger refers to the last paragraph of his paper which shows that the Holy Spirit convicts a sinner of his sin, and that this usually happens before he believes. But it is a misconception to say that you first must experience something before you believe. The danger is that we would make the offer of grace conditional. According to Rev. Wullschleger all Biblical preaching is experiential preaching. It must not just be an added element to the preaching. A person must experience what God has done in your life. Rev. Bilkes explains that the term "experiential preaching" is not found in the Confessions, and that therefore we cannot demand the terminology as such. But we must demand the reality of it in the Confessions. In this discussion this very important point was made: the expression experiential does not mean a reference to a stage or experience before someone comes to faith—it is not separate from and different from faith.

At this point brother Vanwoudenberg makes the comment that God commands unity. We can talk about these various issues "until the cows come home", but we must become one Federation of churches. Rev. Bilkes explains that we must carefully and slowly deal with all the issues. All the other brothers agree. Rev. Overduin asks, "What is meant by being one?" That question still has to be addressed. And we should deal with the fact whether or not a different interpretation should keep us apart. Rev. Aasman asks whether or not their "distinctive" is an impediment to unity? It is agreed that these issues ought to be dealt with, but that we should do so at another time.

Rev. Aasman asks, "Do you think that some doubt is good?" "Do you want to send the people home with doubt in their hearts?" "Is it praiseworthy to doubt?" Rev. Overduin states that it is not unusual to doubt, but it is not praiseworthy. Rev. Bilkes states that in the past it has been said that it is praiseworthy. Rev. Aasman gives an example of a minister of the Free Reformed church who preached in such a way that the people became very much depressed because they did not feel that they measured up to what God in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It was admitted that such preaching does occur. Such preaching, although it clearly is one aspect of biblical preaching, cf. Lord's day 44 H.C., Q. + A. 115, is not something that is promoted.

Critical remarks on the paper by Rev. Aasman, "How do we see the congregation?"

Rev. Overduin states, "You state on page 4 of your paper that 'the Free Reformed Churches have accused the Canadian Reformed Churches of not being sufficiently cognizant and mindful of the dangers of covenantal automatism.'" It would be better to state that this was a comment rather than an accusation. He also states that they too struggle with automatism.

Rev. Wullschleger wants to ask one basic question, which combines all questions he has about the whole paper. "Do you emphasize in your preaching the need for regeneration? We have the impression that you are prone to regard the church idealistically rather than realistically." Rev. Aasman states that he had to address how we view the congregation, and not the preaching as such. However, he would still

answer the question. He states that his preaching also has weaknesses. He recognizes, however, that a sermon must be applied. Rev. Bilkes states that he is happy to hear that emphasis on application is also found in the Canadian Reformed churches. He states that they have characterized the Canadian Reformed churches as not having it.

One last critical remark on Rev. Overduin's paper.

The one aspect of Rev. Overduin's paper was left to the last, and it deals with the question whether or not the distinctive of experiential preaching has to keep us separate as Federation of churches. Rev. Slomp is given the floor. "Rev. Overduin, in your paper you quote from the RCUS report where it says that 'within the multiformity of the visible Church there is true uniformity, and that multiformity does not per se obscure the unity of Christ's church. Therefore, it is not absolutely necessary to unite the visible Church on earth into a single church government by merging all faithful denominations into an organic union.' Do you as Free Reformed churches hold to the Kuyperian principle of the pluriformity of the church?" He stated, and the other brothers agreed, that they do not.

Closing

All the brothers agree that the papers presented today should be made available to the committee members. Rev. Wullschleger and Rev. Overduin will combine their paper, and leave out the fourth question dealing with unity. For that question will be dealt with at the next meeting.

It is agreed that the following meeting will be held once again in Abbotsford. It will be held on September 28, 2000 from 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m.. At that time we will deal with a topic of unity. Rev. Aasman will send material to the brothers, so that we may be properly prepared. Rev. Aasman promises to make available to all parties a paper entitled Biblical Principles of Church Unity from the OPC, and the paper from the Canadian Reformed committee on Church Unity which was sent out to the churches prior to General Synod 1995. Rev. Aasman will also put something down on paper by way of presentation.

Rev. Aasman then closes the meeting with prayer.

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY

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Position Paper :Strategies to Church Unity

Preamble

The final goal of all local discussions with churches from other Reformed federations is ecclesiastical union on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, in agreement with the Reformed confession, according to the rules of Reformed church government.

All parties in the discussions should agree at the outset to submit in all things to the word of God, and to a commonly agreed upon confessional framework (in our case the *Three Forms of Unity*).

The respective congregations should be kept informed of the progress made in the discussions throughout the entire process.

Local congregations will also factor in the decisions of the broader assemblies with regard to ecclesiastical unity and maintain these decisions in their own local discussions. Reports of the discussions should also be presented at classis, and essential decisions regarding the advance of the discussions should receive the approval of classes from both federations.

Discussion must proceed on both the local and national level, and one approach should never cancel out the other. These various levels of discussion should not end up working at odds with each other. Discussions at the level of synodical committees will keep the churches informed by means of regular published reports.

The Stages

We can distinguish three main stages in the process of discussions towards ecclesiastical unity: recognition, acceptance, and union. We will review these stages in turn:

a. Initial Recognition and Exploration

In the first stage the discussions should be exploratory and should concern a mutually agreed upon understanding of the confessional heritage of the church, specifically of Articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession. Here use can be made of work done by the Ecumenical Relations Committee, (URC) as well as statements agreed upon by participating consistories in various locales.

This recognition stage would benefit from a mutual understanding that accepts one another's more recent histories as being, despite many weaknesses and shortcomings, required and obligated separations according to the standards of the word of God, especially the Liberation 1944, and the 1990 separations in the CRC.

This stage of recognition should also isolate areas where differences of approach exist, and which need to be examined more closely in order for progress to be made towards a integral ecclesiastical union, i.e. worship, theological education, schooling, and so on. There should be some form of agreement as to the scriptural and church orderly way that these differences can be overcome.

b. Acceptance and Cooperation

This stage of the discussions envisions a mutual acceptance by the two participating consistories of each other's faithfulness as churches to the Word of God and the confessions of the church. In other words, the consistories are able to declare agreement on the fundamentals, and to publicly note that they recognize each other as true churches of Jesus Christ.

Ideally this stage will also include a specific proposal regarding the options open to come to closer ecclesiastical fellowship. This could occur if the agreement reached at the level of the synodical committee could receive the approbation of the churches by the time it is ready to be forwarded to the broadest assemblies.

Once the point of recognition has been achieved certain forms of cooperation can be explored and implemented. For example various groups may hold combined meetings, e.g. men's clubs, women's service agencies, Bible studies, speeches or addresses by each other's ministers, cooperation in evangelism, and so on.

Delegates should also visit broader assemblies, e.g. classes and synods. Meetings of combined consistories (or meetings of consistory committees) should be held regularly to isolate the specific differences that need further attention.

If agreement could be reached on a proposed time schedule towards union (say the period 2001 to 2004) with a commitment to attain integrated unity by the set target date, the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship as outlined in the URCNA "Guidelines" (a to f) could be implemented in the relationship between the two church federations.

c. Advanced Recognition to Union

In the stage of advanced recognition the consistories should come to an agreement as to

the form of merger they wish to pursue. If both consistories defend and promote federative unity, proposals regarding a mutually agreeable time table should be tabled at consecutive classes and synods. With the assistance of the deputies for ecclesiastical unity, these proposals should be coordinated into one mutually acceptable draft plan for union, agreeable to all parties, all along the lines of the agreement reached in Phase 2.

The more detailed draft plan for union, including the formulation and adoption of a mutually agreed upon text of the church order, should be ready for adoption by the broadest assemblies of both federations in 2004.

The agreement of Phase 2 should include some initial mutually agreeable provisions regarding theological education, song books, liturgical forms and customs, and Bible translations. The further coordination of these matters in a definitive form would be the subject of the more detailed arrangement in Phase 3, as well as subsequent negotiations.

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