

Canadian Reformed Church

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164

General Synod 1992
to be convened, DV, November 3,
at Lincoln, Ontario

Esteemed brothers:

The consistory of the Church at Carman has initiated contact with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS). The purpose for this contact is to investigate and possibly come with proposals and recommendations to the federation for ecclesiastical unity.

Briefly, the reason we initiated this contact is that in 1986 we received a letter from the church at Chatham suggesting that we take up contact with these churches because, geographically Carman is the closest to some of the RCUS congregations of all the Canadian Reformed Churches. The consistory of Chatham sent this letter to Carman because through their membership they were made aware that members of our dutch sister churches through the organization *De Verre Naaste* had contact with these churches. We, the consistory of the church at Carman, decided to follow up the suggestion of the Church at Chatham. Because at the time we did not know where the RCUS churches were exactly located, we wrote a letter to Dr. R. Grossman who informed us that Rev. George Syms was the chairman of their committee inter-church relations and lived in Minot, North Dakota. It was decided to visit the church at Minot because geographically it is not that far from Carman, but it was emphasized that we would try to maintain the talks, as much as possible, at a local level. When contact was made to arrange for a meeting, Rev. Syms suggested that he invite the minister of a neighbouring congregation Rev. Bass from Upham (still closer to Carman) and we immediately agreed. This gave us the opportunity to come into contact with two local congregations.

Even though Rev. Syms was the chairman of the RCUS inter-church relations committee, we informed them that because the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of local autonomous churches, initiative comes from the local churches. We showed some hesitation to become involved with their classis and synod because we felt that by speaking on a more local level we, in practice, maintain the principal of reformed polity.

However, after a number of visits, which always proved difficult to arrange, beginning in October 1987, and noticing that there is quite some diversity within the RCUS, it was decided that if we were ever going to reach a good evaluation of the RCUS we would have to broaden our scope. It was therefore decided to visit a few more of the local churches in S. Dakota. On advice of some of their ministers who saw to it that we received an official invitation, we visited the Northern Plains classis for three days and their national synod held in Garner Iowa was visited for four and a half days.

Section I

Recognition of Observer

During our talks with the RCUS we have urged and challenged them to investigate us, the Canadian Reformed Churches. We did so knowing that if ecclesiastical unity is to be established they have to learn about us as well. They informed us that they intend to send an observer to Synod Lincoln, 1992.

Our request to synod is that synod give recognition to this observer and show hospitality to him. We realize that this observer has no other function at synod but to observe on behalf of the RCUS.

Section II

Regarding the Request of *The Committee Relations with Churches Abroad*

In May of 1987 the consistory of Carman received a letter from *The Committee of Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA)*. In this letter they say that they have heard of our intentions to take up some contact with the RCUS and requested us keep them informed about these contacts. We have honoured this request by sending copies of reports concerning visits that have been made including our evaluation of some points of the RCUS *Constitution* and some of the decisions made by their major assemblies.

In June of 1990 the consistory received another letter from *CRCA* (see attachment # 1) In this letter appreciation is expressed for keeping the committee posted. We are informed that the *Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad* of the *Reformed Churches in the Netherlands* has recommended to Synod Leeuwarden that sister church relations be established with the RCUS. They furthermore inform us that "our Committee has come to the conclusion that it would be proper to approach the next General Synod on this matter of the RCUS and request a mandate to take up official contact. In that way a proper evaluation can be made of the RCUS as a federation to see whether or not sister church relations can be recommended."

The consistory is convinced that it is not in the province of the *CRCA* to make this last mentioned request or receive such a mandate. In a letter, dated July 16, 1990 (see attachment # 2), the consistory informs the *CRCA* of this.

The *CRCA* tried to refute our arguments in a letter dated, March 1, 1991 (see attachment # 3) and indicated their intentions to go ahead proposing to General Synod 1992 "that either our Committee or another Committee appointed by General Synod take up official contact with the RCUS..."

Some within the RCUS must have found out about this intention of the *CRCA*. The RCUS *Committee for Inter-church Relations* informed us that they heard about this intention. The RCUS church polity, being more presbyterian in nature, were not used to working on the local level and therefore began to question which was the proper place for contact. To a certain extent the RCUS has suspended contact with us until this matter is clarified.

We request Synod to judge that:

1. The Church at Carman was correct to initiate such contact on the local level and to encourage her to continue it.
2. That Synod does not appoint a Committee with a mandate for contact with the RCUS while local investigation and study is incomplete.

We request Synod to consider the same arguments that were addressed to the *CRCA* (attachment # 2) and take note of the following in reply to the points of the *CRCA's* letter of March 1, 1991 (attachment #3).

Concerning: Point One

Please note that the *CRCA* knows that "requests to enter into relations with other churches normally come from the churches". As much as possible we should maintain *normal* church polity. We find it unnecessary and wrong for work already being done on a local level to be placed in the hands of a committee.

Concerning: Point Two

Please note that although the federation of Churches is officially known as the "Canadian Reformed Churches", this has not prevented local churches in the US joining the federation and agreeing to institute churches there (eg. Blue Bell, Laurel, Lynden). Moreover, for the sake of argument, even if we assume that our relationship with the RCUS should be as "sister churches" we would like to emphasize that a "sister church relation" *is* "full ecclesiastical unity" and not a vehicle to work towards it.

Concerning: Point Three

Please note that the *CRCA* miss-interprets the quotation given in our letter. In the quotation of Acts, General Synod 1986 "local churches" refers to churches within the federation who put the requests on the agenda of the major assemblies and make judgments upon it. Thus, for example, when Carman is ready with a proposal, a classis of Alberta/Manitoba would be the proper address.

Concerning: Point Four

It is true that, at the time the *CRCA* gave this reply, our contacts were at a local level. However, as shown in the introduction, Carman has proven that it did investigate and talk beyond the "local level". A classis and a national synod were visited upon their invitation.

The statement: "If the contacts are to be fruitful and to give a fair evaluation of the RCUS as a whole, then they will need to be on a broader basis." is only partly true. We would like to emphasize that to give a fair evaluation we must know just as much about what takes place at the local level, within the local congregations. We would like to stress this point because if it does come to ecclesiastical unity (as sister churches or otherwise) it is at the local level that this unity will be practised (eg. admitting each other to the Lord's Supper, exchanging attestations, etc.)

Section III

We request Synod to take note of the following and take it into account when dealing with any points pertaining to this matter.

We are well aware that our sister churches in the Netherlands, *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* (GKN) have established sister-church relations with the RCUS so that the Canadian Reformed Churches are put in a third-party relations position. We find that GKN acted in a hasty way. Note that in 1989 the GKN had contact with the RCUS (see Acts of General Synod Winnipeg, 1989, pp. 147-148), but not yet in 1986 (see Acts of Synod Burlington, 1986, p. 181 where the RCUS is not found among the churches with which they have contact. This hasty action by our sister churches should not pressure the Canadian Reformed Churches into similar hasty decisions concerning affiliation or consideration for membership into the ICRC.

Moreover, although visits have been made with the RCUS since 1987, the consistory is convinced that more talk is necessary concerning a number of points before recommendations concerning ecclesiastical unity can be made. These include:

- a. the method and use of church discipline (including erasure)
- b. diversity in and among the local congregations
- c. participants at the celebration of the Lord's Supper
- d. (unofficial, but practical) contact with the Christian Reformed Churches (eg. involvement with MARS and Dort College, combined worship services).
- e. keeping the day of rest (we have received conflicting reports about this matter)
- f. giving and receiving of attestations from other "conservative" denominations.

These are only some of the areas that need further attention. These examples are not given in order of importance.

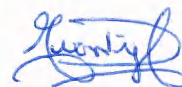
We are convinced that more discussion concerning these points will be fruitful and therefore intend to continue.

We wish you the Lord's blessing in all your deliberations.

for the consistory:



Rev. P.K.A. de Boer



Elder G. VanDijk

**The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
of The Canadian Reformed Churches**

Secretary:
Dr. J. Visscher
5734-191A St.,
Surrey, B.C.
V3S 4N9

June 18, 1990

The Canadian Reformed Church
Box 164,
Carman, Manitoba,
ROG OJO

Esteemed Brethren,

We would like to express our appreciation for keeping us posted on the state of your ongoing discussions with some of the congregations of the Reformed Church in the U.S.

We must also inform you that the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands has recommended to Synod Leeuwarden that sister church relations be established with the RCUS.

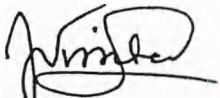
Our Committee was caught off-guard by this decision and has communicated to the Dutch deputies our reservations about this course of action. From information received from you, as well as from other sources, we concluded that a number of issues needed further attention.

Our Committee has delegated two of its members to visit Scotland and Holland. The Revs. Cl. Stam and J. Visscher will also include this matter in their discussions with the sister churches there.

Furthermore, our Committee has come to the conclusion that it would be proper to approach the next General Synod on this matter of the RCUS and request a mandate to take up official contact. In that way a proper evaluation can be made of the RCUS as a federation to see whether or not sister church relations can be recommended.

With brotherly greetings, on behalf of the Committee,

Sincerely Yours
In His Service,



J. Visscher, convener/secretary

The Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers
of the United States Congress

Washington, D.C.
20540-5000
Telephone: (202) 225-2222
Fax: (202) 225-2222

June 10, 1998

The Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers
of the United States Congress
Washington, D.C.
20540-5000

Dear Sirs:

We have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of June 8, 1998, regarding the activities of the Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers of the United States Congress.

We are pleased to inform you that the Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers of the United States Congress is currently conducting a study on the activities of the Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers of the United States Congress.

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Sincerely,
The Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers

Committee on Relations with Foreign Powers

Canadian Reformed Church

July 16, 1990

POST OFFICE BOX 164
 CARMAN, MANITOBA, CANADA

ROG OJO
 The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
 of the Canadian Reformed Churches
 c/o Dr. J. Visscher
 5734 - 191 A St.
 Surrey, B.C.
 V3S 4N9

Esteemed Brethren:

Thank you for your letter dated June 18, 1990. We sincerely appreciate that you informed us of the recommendation given by the committee on relations with churches abroad of our sister churches in the Netherlands to their Synod Leeuwarden. We understand that in the mean time this synod has adopted these proposals. We whole heartily agree with your reservations about this course of action and are thankful that this matter was addressed at Synod Leeuwarden through our deputies.

However, we cannot agree with your conclusion "to approach the next General Synod on this matter of the RCUS and request a mandate to take up official contact" for the following reasons.

1. Although the committee has received a mandated concerning churches which participate in the ICRC, it has received no mandate concerning other churches and therefore the church orderly way would be that such a request comes from the churches and not from a committee appointed by a synod.
2. Because the RCUS is a federation within America where there are churches with which we are in federation, we cannot speak about the RCUS as a "church abroad". Rather than speaking about a sister church relationship we should be speaking about exercising full ecclesiastical unity. By analogy, the OPC has never been dealt with by the committee for correspondence abroad (now known as the committee on relations with churches abroad) for the same reason.
3. General Synod 1986 decided, Article 85 p. 32 that "The procedure for admitting other churches to the confederation has always been a matter of local churches with the judgment of Classis and the concurring advice of Deputies of Regional Synod." This is the procedure which we must follow.
4. As you must have learned from our reports, our discussions with the RCUS have been slow, but frank. Although communication with them, will, the Lord willing, be fruitful, and therefore we will continue local contact, there are serious doctrinal and church political difficulties which prevent us from making recommendations for ecclesiastical unity with the RCUS to major assemblies at this time.

/please see the other side

May the Lord continue to bless you in the task you have been given and may He grant that all His children practice the unity of the true faith.

fraternal greetings
for the consistory

Rev. P.K.A de Boer

Elder J. Kuik (corresponding clerk)

**THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD OF
THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES**

Dr. J. Visscher
5734-191A St.,
Surrey, B.C.
V3S 4N9 Canada

March 1, 1991

The Canadian Reformed Church
Box 164,
Carman, MB
ROG OJO

Esteemed Brothers,

Our Committee dealt with your letter of Sept.7, 1990, at its meetings of Nov. 1, 1990 and Feb. 28, 1991. In response we would like to make the following comments about the points which you raise:

Regarding your **point one**, we would remind you that the mandate of our Committee is not limited by the ICRC or churches who participate in it. Before the creation of the ICRC our churches already maintained relations with sister churches abroad, and even after the emergence of the ICRC our churches continued to maintain a sister relationship with the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerken in South Africa which did not join the ICRC until 1989.

While agreeing with you that requests to enter into relations with other churches normally come from the churches, it is a fact that General Synod 1986 adopted the recommendation of our Committee to enter into discussions with the Free Church of Scotland.

Regarding **point two** our Committee would point out to you that we are a Committee appointed by the Synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The fact that we have a number of congregations in the United States does not change the fact that we are officially a Canadian federation. In that sense it is not out of order to regard the RCUS as a foreign church or as a church abroad.

Furthermore, if we assume, for the sake of argument, that your position of our being Canadian and American Reformed Churches is a correct one, we would still question the implication that this calls solely for "full ecclesiastical unity" with the RCUS. The impression which we receive from your letter is that it is either unity or no recognition at all. For our part we are of the opinion that a better course of action would be to recognize each other as sister churches (based on the necessary grounds) and within that framework come to know each other and so to have our churches (or those local churches of ours in the US) work toward full ecclesiastical unity with the RCUS.

As for the OPC not being a matter dealt with by our Committee because it is not a "church abroad", we are not aware that this same reasoning was applied when the original decision for contact with the OPC was taken. If we are mistaken, we stand to be corrected.

Proceeding on to **point three**, in light of the fact that we do not consider the RCUS to be a "local church", we are not convinced that this Article 85 of Synod 1986 applies.

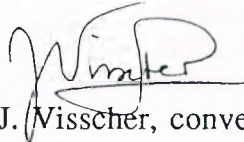
Finally, it is on to **point four**, and here we observe that your discussions to date have been with several local congregations and ministers in the RCUS. While we commend you in this regard for your activity and dedication, we are of the opinion that it is not sufficient to keep discussions of such a nature as this confined to a few local churches. If the contacts are to be fruitful and to give a fair evaluation of the RCUS as a whole, then they will need to be on a broader basis.

As a result of the above, our Committee remains convinced that this is a matter for General Synod. We will therefore propose to General Synod 1992 that either our Committee or another Committee appointed by Synod take up official contact with the RCUS with a view to possibly establishing sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

As ever, brothers, we are appreciative of your efforts for the unity of the body of Christ. May the Lord bless your efforts.

With brotherly greetings,

For the Committee,



J. Visscher, convener/secretary