

Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on September 10, 2020.

Opening and Roll Call.

The chairman of the Board, Rev. J.D. Louwse, led in opening devotions. All governors were present; some in person and some via zoom. The Board meeting was conducted via some of the new audio and video technology installed to allow CRTS to provide distance education due to COVID-19. Dr. J. Van Vliet was present as Principal and sr. L. Kuizenga was present as requested to take the minutes of the meeting.

Memorabilia

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows of professors. These include sisters Deddens and DeJong, and Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Dr. C. Van Dam, and Dr. G.H. Visscher and their spouses. Professor J. Geertsema was taken home to be with the Lord this past March.

Minutes and Agenda

The minutes of the meeting held on January 16, 2020 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established. Matters on the action log were reviewed.

Decisions, Reports, Agenda Items

1. Outgoing correspondence to various committees at CRTS and to the churches was reviewed. Two of the churches responded in a gracious way to this correspondence. The Board is thankful for the support of the churches.
2. A “Fall 2020 Committee” reported on the measures that needed to be taken to reopen CRTS in the Fall of 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. CRTS’s approach to the new school year was to teach face-to-face as much as possible and hybrid/online only as much as is necessary. Six of seven of our international students have not been able to get visas or to travel to Hamilton. As a result, CRTS needed to offer its courses in a hybrid model, teaching in class, while making the lectures available to students studying abroad. This has required adjustments to how professors teach their courses; extra training was taken, and support made available for teaching online students effectively. Close to \$80,000 was spent on audio and video equipment and software and web services. This is to allow lectures to be livestreamed and students to participate in class, as well as integrating interaction between professors, students and staff in one cohesive system. Personal health criteria were adopted so that all those coming into the CRTS building know how to self-screen for COVID-19. Hygiene and cleaning protocols, and physical distancing measures were put in place. This committee will continue monitoring the COVID-19 situation.
3. The Board received a “Metrics Report,” which provides feedback allowing the Board to evaluate how well the Seminary is functioning. This report was received with thankfulness, and it will be used in next year’s strategic planning session.
4. The Distance Education Committee gave an extensive report on its work. Due to COVID-19, CRTS has moved ahead with a hybrid method of teaching for at least the fall semester, and probably for the 2020-21 academic year. Yet this report considers the long-term desirability of teaching at least some of our students via distance education. The committee recommended approving a guiding principle for distance education that: “CRTS should make

an accredited, hybrid mode of its programs available to prospective students when a good argument can be made that this is the best option available for their particular circumstances.” Face-to-face instruction is extremely valuable, because training for the ministry involves whole person growth. Being part of a seminary community and participating in the spiritual formation program are critical parts of CTRS’ program, and these things are difficult to replicate on-line. Nevertheless, there are students who cannot get a Canadian visa, or who cannot come to Canada because of extenuating circumstances such as health, persecution, etc. There may also be circumstances where there are significant differences between the cultural context and the standard of living in a student’s home country and Canada. In such circumstances it may be necessary or preferable to teach students from a distance. The Board mandated the Senate and the Distance Education Committee to continue working on the implementation of a distance education program, and to provide a brief update on their work in January 2021, and a full report to the Board in September 2021.

5. A committee established to investigate a further emphasis on mission and church planting at CRTS reported to the Board. It recommended that training for evangelistic and missionary ministry be seen as an integral part of the Master of Divinity Program. It proposed that when a comprehensive review of the Master of Divinity Program is done, a specific course on church planting be included in the curriculum. It outlined some possibilities for post-graduate training in church planting and mission. The Board received this report with thankfulness, considers that the mandate of this committee has been fulfilled, and thanks the committee for its work.
6. The Board decides to conduct a Strategic Planning session in September 2021, and some preliminary plans for this are discussed.
7. The Executive Committee presented a proposal for how to involve the Australian Deputies for Theological Education so that they can interact with matters being addressed as Board, and how to allow for further communication with the Curators for Theological Education of the South African churches.
8. Revs. J. Slaa and J. Poppe reported on lecture visits to CRTS on March 20 & 23, 2020. Due to COVID-19 these visits were conducted via zoom. This report was received with thankfulness.
9. The Finance and Property Committee presented the CRTS annual budget for 2021, and it was approved. It presented the financial statements for 2019, and these were formally approved. The Finance and Property Committee will commence a planned capital drive later this year, in order to raise funds for building maintenance and improvements, and distance education. Minutes of their meetings since January 2020 were provided for information. The health and safety policy was approved by the Board.
10. The Governance Committee submitted proposals on various matters to update the CRTS Handbook. The By-law on “Resolutions by Mail” was updated to reflect that most of our communication takes place electronically. The By-law of the “Definition of a dependent” was specified more clearly. The By-law relating to “Sabbaticals” was adjusted to give more time to make final arrangements for a proposed sabbatical. A proposed By-law about “Freedom of Inquiry” for the librarian was sent back to the committee for further consideration. The changes to the By-laws need to be submitted to General Synod for final adoption.

11. Margaret Alkema was present for the next portion of the meeting as ATS Coordinator. CRTS belongs to the Association of Theological Schools, and in 2019 and 2020 we went through the accreditation process. ATS has reaffirmed the accreditation of CRTS for a period of ten years (the longest period possible under their guidelines). The Board is very thankful for the immense amount of work put in by our Assessment Coordinator, faculty, and staff to make this result possible. ATS has mandated that CRTS give attention to certain areas of needed growth, and it will require some follow-up reporting. An ATS Institutional Peer Profile Report 2019-20 and an ATS Strategic Information Report 2019-20 were received for information.
12. Margaret Alkema was also present for the discussion of the Annual Report of the Assessment Coordinator, the Minutes from Assessment Day (May 20, 2020), and the Alumni Survey 2020. These reports were received with thankfulness. The Board spent some time considering the workload of our professors and staff. This matter will be further considered at our strategic planning session next September.
13. The principal presented his principal's report, and it was received with thankfulness. The Chairman reported on a positive review of the work of our principal, who has dealt admirably in his role with all the extra pressures last year, including accreditation, 50th anniversary celebrations, COVID-19, and distance education.
14. The Senate recommended the appointment of two new adjunct lecturers for catechetics. The Board approved the appointment of Mr. Jack Huizenga and Mr. Menco Wieske, full time lecturers at the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teacher's College to give a few lectures in the Catechetics courses. Dr. A.J. De Visser presented a final copy of his Sabbatical Proposal and the principal gave an evaluation of it. These were approved by the Board. The Senate also recommended the appointment of an adjunct lecturer for Fall 2020 in the Ministry and Mission Course, while Dr. De Visser is on sabbatical. The Board approved the appointment of Rev. J. De Gelder.
15. The following annual reports were received with thankfulness: course work report, registrar's report, library report, website report, convocation committee report, Faber-Holwerda bursary report, publication foundation report, conference report, foreign student bursary report, and the lecture schedule for 2020-21.
16. Dr. J. Van Vliet reported on his attendance at the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents conference. Also this report was received with thankfulness.

New Business.

1. Lecture visits were organized for semesters 1 and 2 of the 2020-21 school year.
2. The date of the next Board Meeting was set for January 14, 2020 at 10:00 am.

Press release and Closing.

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Rev. M.H. van Luik closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,
Rev. J. Poppe (Vice-chairman)

