Reports to
General Synod Smithers
2007

Committee for the Official Website

**Report to GENERAL SYNOD SMITHERS 2007
from the COMMITTEE FOR THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE**

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit our report to General Synod Smithers 2007, as mandated by General Synod Chatham 2004.

1. COMMITTEE MANDATE

Synod Chatham 2004 gave the committee the following mandate:
1. To maintain the existing hardware and associated technical functions of the website, purchasing new hardware only if necessary to meet the ongoing needs of the website and if financially responsible;
2. To maintain the existing content of the website, revising this content whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the *Book of Praise* is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by General Synod;
3. To add new content to the website as listed in Observations 3.4.1-3.4.5;
4. To provide web services and e-mail services to the churches such as listed in Observations 3.4.6-3.4.7;
5. To approve the annual budget of $500.00;
6. To serve Synod 2007 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

2. COMMITTEE FUNCTIONING

2.1 Communication
2.1.1 Meetings
Three meetings were held in Guelph, with the three committee members from Ontario present, the other two members from Western Canada participated in these meetings by means of a telephone conference call.

2.1.2 E-mail
Between these meetings, the communication took place mainly by e-mail. This, together with the annual meetings mentioned under 2.1.1., appeared to be sufficient for the committee to function effectively.

2.2 Members and distribution of tasks
Synod Chatham 2004 appointed one new member, Rev. A. Souman, who took the place of Rev. R.E. Pot. The brothers T.J. Flach, J.M.

Hoogerdijk and A. VandenHoven focused on the technical aspects of the work and sr. M. VanderVelde, who also served as convenor and Rev. A. Souman, who served as secretary of the committee, focused more on the administrative aspects and the content.

3. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

3.1 Hardware and technical set up

3.1.1. Internet Service Provider

The services of a local Internet Service Provider (ISP) called "BBS42" in Guelph are reasonably priced and reliable. The committee continued to make use of these services.

3.1.2 Hardware

The committee discussed the need of purchasing a new server, but decided not to do so. Instead, the committee decided, rather than buying and maintaining a new server, to switch to having the website hosted by Dreamhost.com. This will be cheaper than buying and maintaining a new server and the committee will be able to continue to provide the same services. At this moment the committee is in the process of switching from having our own server to hosting.

3.1.3 Domain name

The domain name for the website is www.canrc.org and continues to be actively registered for the web-site and e-mail services.

3.2 Existing content

The existing content continues to be maintained on the website and updated regularly, where necessary. This concerns the introduction to the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, the Online Resources, the Church Directory, Church News and the Theological College. There is also a search engine which enables site visitors the search the entire web-site by key words.

With regard to the posting of news items, the committee decided that only those calls will be posted, of which the committee is informed either by the minister who received the call or by the consistory of the church which extended the call, to ensure that the information posted is correct. The committee encourages the churches and ministers to provide the information in a timely manner. Without the required input, this section of the web site will soon become incomplete and ineffective.

The committee is working on a redesign of the entire site, which will also make it easier to keep the site up to date.

3.3. New Content

As mandated by Synod Chatham 2004, the committee added the following new content to the website.

3.3.1 More information regarding each local church

A letter was sent to all the churches in which they were offered the possibility to have more information added regarding their local church. Only a few churches made use of this possibility and submitted more information, like the church's mailing address and address for the bulletin. This is in addition to the information regarding worship places and times and the minister's name and e-mail address, which is already on the website for all the churches, as well as a link to the church's own website, if the local church has a website.

After the redesign of the site will be completed, the churches will be given the opportunity to directly update their own information instead of having the committee updating it at their request.

3.3.2. Links to other websites

There is a page with links to other websites. Some websites were added to these links. The links on this page are websites from organizations and churches which have a clear and official relationship with our churches as well as a link to Bible Gateway, which provides the text of the Bible in many translations.

3.3.3. Posting of sermons

The committee has been discussing the posting of sermons and is in contact with others to set something up. The committee is still working on this, but has to deal with some technical problems. The committee is in contact with 'theseed' to come to a form of cooperation, but it is not so easy to convert the text of the sermons they have to the desired format for the website. The committee expects that this problem will be solved after the redesign of the website is completed.

3.3.4. Posting of Press Releases of broader assemblies

Press Releases of broader assemblies as well as of some of the committees of Synod are posted on the Resources page.

3.3.5 Posting the Acts of General Synods only

This was already being done and the committee will continue to do so. No acts of assemblies other than the Acts of General Synod have been posted.

3.4 Web services and email services
3.4.1. Web Services
The committee provided a domain name for the local church website of the church of Chilliwack (http://chilliwack.canrc.org).

This is a redirect. It is possible to provide those domain-names to local churches as long as the service provider of the local church allows it.

3.4.2. Email services
a) ministers email

The committee continues to provide the ministers in our federation with permanent email addresses as well as host a mailing list for discussion and correspondence between the ministers. For the last couple of years the ministers are receiving a lot of SPAM at these addresses and the committee is working hard to find a long term solution for this problem.

Part of this solution will be to change the email addresses of the ministers and publish them on the website in such a way that they can not easily be harvested by SPAM machines. The committee also hopes that the change to hosting instead of maintaining its own server, will make it easier to fight SPAM.

b) Consistory Clerks email

The committee offered email addresses to the churches for their clerks. About 12 churches signed up for a clerk email address.

There is no list yet for synodical committees, except for the website committee itself.

3.5 Cost and expenses
The costs for developing and maintaining the website and email lists for 2004 and 2005 were $ 642.00 per year and for 2006 they are expected to be about $ 650.00. In comparison: the costs for 2001-2003 were 2940.11, that is $ 980.00 annually.

There was some confusion about the decision of Synod to approve the annual budget of $ 500.00. The proposed budget in the report to Synod Chatham 2004 mentioned annual expenses of $1,178.50.

Part of it was $ 500.00 for a repair and capital replacement allowance. Apparently Synod decided to approve this part of the budget, but did not make a decision on the part of the budget regarding the average annual operating expenses of $ 678.50.

The annual costs from 2004 - 2006 are below the proposed budget. The committee decided not to purchase new hardware but to change to hosting instead of maintaining its own server. The expected costs for this will be about the same or maybe even less than the average annual costs of the past few years. The committee asks Synod to approve an annual budget of $ 750.00.

3.6 Feedback

From time to time the website committee receives comments from visitors of the website, which are in general positive. Sometimes the committee is made aware of minor mistakes on the website, what is also appreciated by the committee. In several e-mails which the committee receives, people ask for more information, for instance about the churches, about the Reformed doctrine, or about aspects of our church life. These e-mails are answered, as much as possible, by the convenor, sr. M. VanderVelde, or the secretary, Rev. A. Souman.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site content

At this moment, the committee is of the opinion that no new content should be added. The recommendations of the committee to Synod Chatham 2004 were based on a survey, sent out to the churches in November 2004. The committee has been working on adding the recommended content to the website and most of it is done by now. The committee is still working on putting sermons on the website, but hopes to be able to accomplish this with the redesign of the website. This should be done by the time Synod convenes.

Thereafter, the committee should mainly focus on maintaining the website and promoting the services which are offered to the churches, especially the e-mails for clerks of the churches.

4.2 Future direction

The website has proven to be a valuable tool for many to find information about the Canadian Reformed Churches and also to present the federation to others. It is important to maintain the website and keep it up to date. The committee asks Synod to recommend to the local churches also to make use of this valuable tool to present the churches and the message of salvation on the internet. If the desire exists among the churches and Synod agrees to add this to the mandate of the committee, the committee can serve the churches with advice about how to set up and maintain a website. There are still approximately 29 local congregations who do not have a presence on the Internet.

The committee also recommends to Synod, to mandate the committee to contact the website committee of the United Reformed Churches, to come to a form of cooperation, if possible, and to discuss the impact of future church unity between our federations on the work of the website committees.

4.3 Committee composition

The current composition of the committee works well. The committee consists of three members with advanced technical abilities, as well as the librarian of the Theological College and one minister. The committee recommends that a similar composition of the committee be maintained.

A member is appointed for a term of three years and then usually reappointed for two more terms, totaling nine years.

The committee recommends that this practice be changed, so that a member is usually reappointed only once and serves six years. There should be a possibility, in special circumstances, at the recommendation of the committee, to appoint a member for a third term, but that should not be common practice. The committee depends totally on the work of volunteers who all have their own job and family and other responsibilities. It is not always possible to respond to situations as quickly and adequate as should be done and is usually done by professional providers. In nine years many things can change and often members of the committee get busier with many other things over time.

Two members of the committee are slated to retire. The committee will be sending a list of nominees for potential consideration by Synod under separate cover to be held in confidence and presented to the committee appointed by Synod to deal with the matter.

4.4 Hardware and technical set-up

The decision to make use of Dreamhost, as opposed to the committee maintaining a server, means that there is no need to purchase new hardware.

It is possible to provide the same services as is done now by the committee with its own server, for the same amount or less. This also saves the committee a lot of work when it comes to the blocking of SPAM.

4.5 Mandate

The committee recommends that General Synod Smithers 2007 give the committee the following mandate:

1. To maintain the existing website and associated technical functions.

2. To revise the content of the website whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the Book of Praise is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by General Synod.

3. To provide web services and email services to the churches and serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own web sites.

4. To contact the website committee of the URC to see if cooperation between the committees is possible and to discuss the impact of future church unity between our federations on the work of the website committees.

5. To serve Synod 2010 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

The committee also recommends that General Synod Smithers 2007 decide:

1. To approve the annual budget of $ 750.00.

To agree with the committee that members should usually be reappointed for only one more term of three years, unless there are special circumstances which make an appointment for another term of three years necessary or desirable.

To appoint two new members to the committee.

Respectfully submitted by your committee:

T.J. Flach (Fergus, ON)
J.M. Hoogerdijk (Edmonton, AB)
A. Souman (Smithville, ON), secretary
A. VandenHoven (Cloverdale, BC)
M. VanderVelde (Hamilton, ON), convenor

Appendix: Financial statement and budget

Invoice Date	Product / Service Purchased	Payable To		CDN Cost	USD Cost
11/19/98	1 year web site hosting - 1999	BBS42 Internet		$321.00	
11/24/98	2 year renewal of domain name - canrc.org	Network Solutions	x	$105.00	$70.00
11/15/99	1 year web site hosting - 2000	BBS42 Internet		$321.00	
10/20/00	1 year renewal of domain name - canrc.org	Network Solutions	*	$52.50	$35.00
11/1/00	1 year web site hosting - 2001	BBS42 Internet		$321.00	
	Total 1998 - 2000 Expenses			$1,120.50	
9/6/01	Web server computer	System Resale Solutions IV		$777.25	
10/22/01	2 year renewal of domain name - canrc.org	Network Solutions	x	$105.00	$70.00
11/1/01	1 year web site hosting - 2002	BBS42 Internet		$321.00	
12/4/01	Power supply backup for Web Server	Business Depot		$229.95	
11/4/02	1year web site co-location hosting - 2003	BBS42 Internet		$642.00	
11/14/02	Survey distribution costs	Various c/o Margaret Vandervelde		$45.18	
12/21/02	Replacement Network Card	Dorotech Canada		$44.85	
11/3/03	1year web site co-location hosting - 2004	BBS42 Internet		$642.00	
10/20/03	5 year renewal of domain name - canrc.org	Network Solutions	*	$132.88	$95.00
	Total 2001 - 2003 Expenses			$2,940.11	
11/2/04	1year web site co-location hosting - 2005	BBS42 Internet		$642.00	
11/1/05	1year web site co-location hosting - 2006	BBS42 Internet		$642.00	
	Projected Costs (not invoiced at report time)				
11/1/06	1year web hosting - 2007	Dreamhost		$650.00	
	Total 2004 - 2006 Expenses			$1,934.00	

* Payment made directly by General Fund.
CDN amount shown at conversion factor of 1.5.
All amounts include applicable taxes.

Projected annual budget:

Domain name registration	$ 50.00
Website hosting	$ 650.00
Miscellaneous costs	$ 50.00
	$ 750.00