

Report of the Church Order Sub Committee to Synod Carman 2013

1. Mandate

The committee, reappointed by Synod Burlington 2010, received the following mandate (Acts of General Synod Burlington 2010, Article 151, p. 238):

- 4.4.1 To give a final evaluation of the letters from the churches.
- 4.4.2 To finalize those matters deemed to be yet unfinished (see: Article 4 PJCO).
- 4.4.3 To adopt the recommendations under Consideration 3.3 in consultation with the committee of the URCNA.
- 4.4.4 To prepare a final edition for Synod 2013, sending it to the churches six months prior to synod.

2. The Committee and its activities

The committee members are Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg (convener), and Dr. Art Witten. Since Synod Burlington 2010 the committee met five times:

1. Three evening meetings to go through the letters from the churches sent to Synod Burlington 2010 and in preparation for a joint meeting with the committee re: church order of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).
2. One four day meeting in June 2011 with the URCNA Church Order Committee to come to a final edition of the Proposed Joint Church Order;
3. One two day meeting in July 2011 with two URCNA brothers from Ontario to draft a proposal for the joint committee, re. synodical regulations.

The URCNA committee members are Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, and Mr. Harry VanGurp. Since Dr. Kloosterman, our previous chairman indicated that he could not be present at the joint meeting we chose Rev. Scheuers as our chairman. As before, br. Nordeman prepared the Press Release, br. VanWoudenberg recorded the minutes, and br. Nederveen kept track of the changes adopted to the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) since 2010. A single set of minutes was kept and a common press release published. We continued to enjoy excellent working relationship both internally as well as with the brothers of the URCNA.

3. Decisions of URCNA Synod London 2010

Regarding PJCO 2010 and the URCNA Church Order Committee, Synod London made two sets of decisions.

The first set is found in Article 41:

- To thank the committee for the work it has completed;
- To receive for information the committee report and the PJCO 2010;
- To accept for continued study the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches;
- To remind the churches that suggested changes to PJCO 2010 should be directed to the Synod by way of overture through the Classes;
- To take note of and mandate the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee to develop Forms of Discipline for a united federation;
- To reappoint the current committee for the sake of continuity, with the mandate to continue working closely with the church order sub-committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address matters yet unfinished (such as PJCO Article 4).

Synod London gave the following grounds for the above:

- Recommending continued study by the Churches would promote the opportunity for harvesting the good fruit produced by the committee.
- The wording of "accept for continued study" instead of "adopt" is used because the PJCO 2010 is a work in progress.

The second set is found in Article 45:

- To withhold action on the recommendations of the Majority and Minority Reports regarding Article 35 (PJCO 2010, Article 36). Grounds: the PJCO 2010 has been received and accepted for continued study, it is still subject to change by way of overture.

Hence, while Synod Burlington 2010 decided to adopt the PJCO "provisionally" as the Church Order for a united federation, Synod London 2010 decided to accept PJCO 2010 "for continued study."

This mandate of Synod London 2010, which directed the churches to send suggested changes to PJCO 2010 to Synod instead of to the committee, meant that the URCNA committee had no further recommendations for the joint committee to consider. At the same time the committee still could deal with the directives from Synod Burlington 2010 and the recommendations drafted by the CanRC committee upon reviewing the letters from the churches sent to Synod Burlington 2010.

4. Mandate from CanRC Synod Burlington 2010 to give a final evaluation of the letters from the churches (4.4.1)

Synod Burlington 2010 made the following consideration: *“Since it is not the task of Synod to do committee work, the letters from the churches that deal with minor matters and linguistic questions should be referred back to the Church Order Committee...for final consideration and evaluation.”* This led to mandate 4.4.1.

To carry out this mandate the CanRC committee first reviewed the letters from the churches. On the basis of this review it proposed a number of changes to PJCO 2010 for consideration with the URCNA brothers. The attached document called “Comments on PJCO 2012” constitutes our report on this matter.

5. Mandate to finalize matters unfinished (cf. PJCO 4) (4.4.2 of the mandate from Synod Burlington 2010; Article 4.1 of Synod London 2010)

While deliberating with the URCNA brothers regarding the recommendations crafted in response to the letters from the churches to Synod Burlington (Mandate 4.4.1 above), and while deliberating with them on the directives from Synod Burlington 2010 (see Mandate 4.4.3 below), we also consulted on PJCO 4, specifically the paragraph on Theological Education. Thankfully we were able to finalize this article. The attached document called “Comments on PJCO 2012” constitutes our report also on this matter.

6. Mandate from Synod Burlington 2010 to consider synod directives (4.4.3)

Synod Burlington 2010, while referring the letters of the churches back to the committee also directed the committee to present a number of formulations regarding specific articles in the PJCO (cf. Acts of Synod Burlington, Article 151, Consideration 3.3) for consideration by the joint committee. We did exactly that. The attached document called “Comments on PJCO 2012” constitutes our report also on this matter.

7. Mandate to provide a final edition of the PJCO (4.4.4 of Synod Burlington 2010);

In carrying out the above mandates we were able to carry out this mandate as well. In addition to sending out our report to the churches six months prior to synod, we submitted a press release both to Clarion and to Christian Renewal in July 2011, and also posted this to the following website: <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco/>.

8. Mandate to draft forms for discipline (Synod London, article 41)

Synod London 2010 mandated its Church Order Committee to also draft forms for discipline, evidently in consultation with the CanRC Church Order Committee. Forms for Discipline, however, belong with the Liturgical Forms subcommittee. Knowing that the URCNA committee would not want to deal with two separate CanRC committees, we consulted with our CanRC Creeds and Forms Committee and offered to take on this matter in conjunction with the URCNA Church Order Committee in their place. This committee agreed to this. Thankfully we were able to draft proposed forms for discipline for a united federation. Please find this in an attached document called “Proposed Forms for Discipline for a United Federation.”

9. Synodical Regulations

Synod London 2010 also mandated its committee to continue working closely with the church order sub-committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure. Particularly given how this matter is so closely connected to the church order, and how Canadian Reformed Synods in the past had mandated our committee to address this matter, we attempted to also deal with this matter. We were not able in the course of our single joint meeting to come to a proposal on this matter. We also did not consider it a prudent usage of time and resources to call for another joint meeting (requiring substantial travel) just to finish off this matter, particularly since such regulations would only function if the PJCO is actually adopted for usage in a combined federation.

The joint committee had several rounds of discussion noting such points as:

- Regulations should focus on “housekeeping” rules. These regulations can fairly easily be modified, whereas the Church Order cannot easily be changed;
- The regulations should fit with the PJCO;
- The difference in length of the current procedures in each federation is due to history. The CanRCs have a number of “unwritten procedures” that function. There is not as much of this in the URCNAs as compared to the CanRCs;
- The regulations should foster deliberation;

- There is a common fear of functionaries with power: this has to be kept in mind. The joint committee then mandated the brothers living in Ontario, Canada to compose a draft that could eventually be used by the joint committee to come with a definitive proposal. This draft could give the churches an idea of how the synods of a united federation would work. At the same time this draft could serve as the basis for an actual proposal from the joint committee upon the synods adopting the PJCO. Please find this draft in an attached document called "Draft for Synodical Regulations."

10. Incorporation Matter

Upon reviewing our mandate from Synod Burlington 2010 we noted that this synod did not deal with the matter of incorporation. We had included as part of our report to Synod the following: *"As the committee did its work it discussed how incorporation of churches could impact Church Polity. The committee did not do too much work on this issue since it does not really appear to be part of our mandate. We felt, however, that we should at least alert synod to this matter, and therefore have enclosed a brief report drawn up on this issue by one of our members."*

We decided, therefore, to take this matter off our agenda by passing it on to the Church Unity Coordinators. We sent them the report but received the following back from them, *"...we discussed the letter you sent us on behalf of the Church Order Sub-Committee regarding the matter of "incorporation." We decided to return the matter to the CO Sub-Committee since it is a matter of Church Order (at least indirectly). We are Coordinators, who are not mandated to go into CO matters specifically. At this time the matter is somewhat irrelevant for us as well, considering that the likelihood of a merger is still far off. We decided to return it to your committee with the suggestion to include it in your report to General Synod Carman 2013."* Given this development we decided to once again attach the incorporation report.

11. Other Matters

Synod London 2010 decided that the next general synod of the URCNA would be in 2012 instead of 2013. Given the desirability of having a joint report as much as possible, we decided to formulate our main report before the URCNA general synod in 2012. Depending on what the URCNA General Synod of 2012 decides, we could add some further recommendations, but will do that while keeping this main report intact.

12. Conclusion

The committee thanks the Lord for the work that could be done, and for the ongoing spirit of brotherly harmony and growing understanding and love between the brothers from the United Reformed Churches and the brothers from the Canadian Reformed Churches. We pray that the Lord will bless our work as we move forward as federations towards full unity.

With a sense of humble gratitude to the Lord for blessing our efforts we present to General Synod Carman 2013 this report and the following attached items:

1. The revised Proposed Joint Church Order called PJCO 2012;
2. A two-column document comparing PJCO 2012 to PJCO 2010;
3. Comments on PJCO 2012;
4. The Press Release of our June 2011 joint meeting;
5. Proposed Forms for Discipline for a United Federation;
6. Draft for Synodical Regulations;
7. A report on the matter of incorporation (originally submitted to Synod Burlington 2010).

13. Recommendations

In concert with the Church Order Committee of the URCNA, the committee recommends that:

1. Synod thank the committee for the work it has completed;
2. Synod receive the committee report and the PJCO 2012 (with the two-column document comparing PJCO 2010 and PJCO 2012 as an appendix);
3. Synod provisionally adopt PJCO 2012 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches;
4. Synod provisionally adopt the Forms for Discipline for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches;
5. Synod, upon (provisional) adoption of PJCO 2012 by the URCNA general synod, reappoints the current committee for the sake of continuity, with the mandate to continue working closely with the church order committee of the United Reformed Churches in North America to finalize synodical regulations.

The committee also recommends that:

1. Synod receive our report regarding incorporation and give direction for how to proceed with this matter

14. Appendix

In order to perform its work given by Synod Burlington 2010 the committee incurred a total of \$ 968.73 in expenses.

Respectfully submitted,
G. Nederveen
G. J. Nordeman
J. VanWoudenberg (convener)
A. Witten

Addendum added in Sept 2012 in light of Synod Nyack 2012 of the URCNA

The official Acts of Synod Nyack were not yet available to us by the time we had to send this addendum to the Churches. The official Press Release, however, states the following:

1. *“Concerning the relationship between the URCNA and the CanRC, the body also received for information numerous documents including a Proposed Joint Church Order and Proposed Regulations”* (Press Release Day 2);
2. *“In addition, the body gave further direction to the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee instructing it to process any forthcoming information regarding the “Proposed Synodical Regulations for use in a joint federation.” It also encouraged the churches to review the Proposed Joint Church Order and suggest changes to the committee”* (Press Release Day 3).

We therefore conclude that:

1. Synod Nyack 2012 did not provisionally adopt the PJCO as recommended by the joint committee;

2. Synod Nyack 2012, in contrast to Synod London 2010, did encourage the URCNA churches no longer to send suggestions for improvement to the next Synod but to the committee for evaluation by the joint committee.

Given these developments we recommend that Synod Carman 2013 takes note of these facts and make decisions accordingly. Should Synod Carman 2013 decide to reappoint a Church Order Committee, then we recommend reappointing the existing committee for the sake of continuity.

Respectfully submitted,
G. Nederveen
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J. VanWoudenberg (convener)
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