

**REPORT
TO
GENERAL SYNOD FERGUS 1998
OF THE
CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES**

**THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS
WITH
CHURCHES ABROAD**

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OF
THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES
REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD FERGUS 1998**

Esteemed Brethren,

We hereby submit to you our report on the activities of the Committee on Relations With Churches Abroad (CRCA), appointed by General Synod 1995.

I. MANDATE

General Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave our Committee the following mandate:

A. General

1. To continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in accordance with the adopted rules. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, B)

2. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to our sister churches abroad to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to General Synods of such churches abroad if invited and when feasible. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, D)

B. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

3.1. to request the CRCA to convey our appreciation for the support given by the Free Reformed Churches in Australia to our Theological College in Hamilton.

3.2. to mandate the CRCA to solicit a response to our reservations about the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship adopted by the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, C, E)

C. The Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK)

4.1. to continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with . . . the Presbyterian Church in Korea in accordance with the adopted rules.

4.2. to mandate the CRCA to investigate the suggested exchange of professors between Hamilton and Pusan. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2, 3)

D. The Free Church of Scotland (FCS)

5. to continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland . . . in accordance with the adopted rules. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2)

E. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)

6.1. to mandate the CRCA to discuss with the Dutch deputies, pursuant to our Rule Six, our questions concerning the blessing elder and its possible consequences regarding the distinction between the offices of elder and minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

6.2. to mandate the CRCA to seek clarification from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands concerning the use of the word 'inform' in Rule Three. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, F, G)

F. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

7.1. to continue the mandate regarding the Reformed Church in the United States to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the church at Carman, MB.

7.2. to report on this to the churches at least six months prior to the next General Synod, and to the next General Synod. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, III, C, 1, 2)

G. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

7.1. that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC and report to Synod 1998 its findings and evaluation.

7.2. that the Canadian Reformed Churches be represented at the next meeting of the Conference scheduled to take place in Korea during the month of August in the year of our Lord 1997.

7.3. that Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Dr. N.H. Gootjes be sent as voting delegates. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, IV, C, 1, 2, 3)

H. Committee Mandate

8. to give the CRCA the following mandate:

1. to investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship;
2. to respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Assemblies, Synods, or meeting of other churches;
3. to report on its findings with suitable recommendations to the next General Synod. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, VI, C, 1, 2, 3)

I. Finances

9. Synod decided to adopt the following budget for the CRCA:

ICRC (fees)	2,500.00
Meeting of ICRC	3,000.00
Meeting RCUS	1,500.00
Miscellaneous	3,000.00
Total	\$10,000.00

II. RULES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL FELLOWSHIP

The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship read as follows:

1. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the

respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.

5. The churches shall open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.

In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit." (Acts 1992, Art. 50, IV B, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

III. GENERAL ACTIVITIES

1. Declarations

a. The following ministers and professors of the Canadian Reformed Churches, planning to travel abroad, requested and received a declaration that they are ministers in good standing in the Churches:

The Revs. K. Jonker and H. Versteeg and the Profs. J. Geertsema and N.H. Gootjes.

b. The CRCA was also requested to grant a declaration to Candidate J. Plug with a view to his trip to the Netherlands.

c. The CRCA was informed that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia had issued a declaration to the Rev. A. Veldman,

2. Acts

When the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 were received, a sufficient number of copies was sent to those churches with which we maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

3. Notifications and Invitations

Letters of notification and invitation were sent to the sister Churches regarding the convening of General Synod Fergus 1998. Copies of the Provisional Agenda were sent.

4. Interim Information to the Churches

A number of articles have appeared in *Clarion* during the last couple of years informing the Churches of some of the activities of the CRCA. They are as follows:

- November 15, 1996, Rev. J. Moesker reported on his visit to the FRCSA;
- August 22 and September 5, 1997, Rev. K. Jonker reported on a visit he made on behalf of the CRCA to the 1996 General Assembly of the FCS.

In the *Acts* 1995 of Synod Abbotsford mention is made of a church in the federation that objects to the use of *Clarion* for making reports to the churches. In a consideration Synod agreed with this objection; however, Synod failed to come back to this matter in its Recommendation regarding the Mandate of the CRCA. As a result, the CRCA

continued to make use of *Clarion* during the past years. If Synod 1998 wants the CRCA to communicate directly to the churches, it should realize that this will greatly increase the workload of the CRCA, as well as add to its expense. The CRCA would as a matter of course communicate directly with the churches if it needed to pass along sensitive material. Up until now, this has never been the case.

IV. THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA (FRCA)

1. Correspondence

- a. After the Synod of 1995 met, the FRCA was informed about the decisions taken that pertained to them. Appreciation for their support of the Theological College was expressed. They were also asked to respond as yet to our reservations to one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- b. On March 13, 1996, the FRCA informed us about their forthcoming 1996 Synod of Kelmscott and invited us to send delegates.
- c. On June 21, 1996, the FRCA informed us that they had decided to terminate their membership in the ICRC. The main reason for this action was "the membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches." As a result of this decision, the FRCA withdrew its proposed constitutional amendment.
- d. On Sept. 24, 1996, the Deputies of the FRCA informed us that they questioned whether there was ever a Supplementary Report to Synod Lincoln 1992 in which comment is made about one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. (A copy of this Report was located and sent to them.) They also sent us two copies of Synod Kelmscott and requested us to bring Article 89 to the attention of the Standing Committee on the Book of Praise. (This request was passed along to it.)
- e. On May 20, 1997, the Deputies of the FRCA responded to the reservations that Synod Lincoln 1992 originally expressed about one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which reads "the churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties." Synod had said about the words "give account" that they were "too intrusive, and it was never practised." The Deputies explain that in their opinion this wording "provide(s) details and grounds for the impending relationship that was to be entered into by our Sister Churches, and would then enable rule 1, 2, and 3 to be practised should that be deemed necessary by the informed church." They also add that this rule was never intended to "lord it over" any sister church.

2. Acts of Synod Kelmscott 1996

From the Acts we glean the following highlights:

- a. The following officers were elected: Chairman - Rev.W. Huizinga; Vice Chairman - Rev.A. Veldman; First Clerk - Elder B. Veenendaal; Second Clerk - Rev.C. Bouwman.
- b. Synod decided to continue sister relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed

Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (Sumba, Savu and Timor).

- c. It was decided to give permission to theological students to "speak an edifying word/preaching consent" under certain conditions.
- d. A proposal from the Church at Kelmscott to form three classes was not adopted.
- e. Synod declared its gratitude for the faithfulness that the Deputies found in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and decided to strive for sister relations with the RCNZ.
It was decided to discontinue the contacts with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore seeing that there had been no improvements in the contacts.
With respect to the Reformed Churches of Timor and Savu, the Synod decided to work towards an eventual recommendation of sister relations. Synod accepted the decision of the Reformed Churches of Australia wherein they acknowledged that their sister relations with the GKN(S) were "unjust, inconsequential and the express cause for lack of unity" but refrained from entering into official contact with the RCA because of current trends. It was decided to send a letter of appeal to the RCA.
- f. It was decided to continue to "recommend" the NKJV as the translation for use in the churches and to "recognise" the NIV as a faithful and reliable translation which may be used by the churches which prefer this translation.
- g. Synod decided to request the churches to contribute \$38.00 per communicant member per annum for the support of the Theological College in Hamilton. It also requested those churches who were supporting a theological student to provide details to the deputies in order that the burden is spread over all the churches. In addition, it was decided to look into the possibility of inviting guest lecturers from Hamilton.
- h. Synod was in favour of a change in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons so that the charge to the Deacons now reads, "Encourage the congregation to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith." The Canadian Reformed Churches were to be informed of this change since both federations use the *Book of Praise*.
- i. Synod decided to terminate membership in the ICRC, with the main reason being that "membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches."

3. Considerations

- a. From the general correspondence and the Acts, we may conclude that the FRCA continue to be faithful to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions and the Church Order.
- b. It is reason for much thankfulness that the FRCA continue to be major supporters of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.

- c. While respecting the decision of Synod Kelmscott 1996 to terminate the FRCA membership in the ICRC, it should remain our fervent hope that the Lord will restore harmony and unity to the FRCA, and that this will also make it possible for the FRCA to re-join the ICRC at a future date.
- d. Seeing that a response has been received from the Australian Deputies about their Rules and that the wording of their Rules do not hamper our mutual contact, this matter has been sufficiently addressed.

4. Recommendations

Your Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Furthermore, it recommends that the FRCA be thanked for their support of the Theological College.

V. THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KOREA (PCK)

1. Correspondence

- a. On May 22, 1995, we were informed about the meeting of the 45th General Assembly in Kwangjoo City and invited to send a delegate. A letter of greeting and blessing was sent.
- b. On July 26, 1996, we were informed about the meeting of the 46th General Assembly in Pusan and invited to send a delegate. A letter of greeting was sent and the PCK was informed that finances were limited and that next year two delegates from the CanRC would be in Korea for the meeting of the ICRC.
- c. On Nov. 18, 1997, your Committee wrote to the PCK asking them to provide us on annual basis with an English summary of the decisions of their General Assembly. This had been done in the past but perhaps due to a change in the make-up of their Committee it has been overlooked for the last three years.

2. Considerations

- a. Although the CRCA receives regular letters of invitation to attend the General Assembly of the PCK, we have no longer been receiving an English summary of their decisions and activities. A letter has been sent asking them to revive the former practice.
- b. From the Acts of the sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands, as well as from the impressions received by your delegates to the ICRC in Seoul, it would appear that the PCK continues to conduct herself as a faithful Church of Jesus Christ.

3. Recommendations

Your Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Furthermore, it recommends that every attempt be made to improve the communications between our respective churches.

VI. THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (RCN)

1. Correspondence

- a. The CRCA wrote to the RCN on Nov. 11, 1995, and informed them about the decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995 to maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship. They were thanked for the presence of their two delegates at Synod 1995 and were asked to respond to two matters mentioned in the ACTS of 1995 about "the blessing elder" and about the word "inform" in their Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- b. On Dec. 1, 1995, the RCN informed us about the upcoming Synod of Berkel 1996 and invited the CRCA to send delegates. (They were informed that the CRCA would not be sending a delegate(s) to this Synod due to budgetary restraints.)
- c. On Sept. 18, 1996, the RCN sent us a copy of the decision of Synod Berkel 1996 regarding the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil. They did so because of the mission work being done by the Canadian Reformed Churches in Brazil.
- d. On Sept. 27, 1996, the RCN informed us about decisions taken with respect to the Christian Reformed Church in North America. They also requested information about those churches that have left the CRC. (This last request was passed on to the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity.)
- e. On Feb. 18, 1997, the RCN, through its Deputies, sent us copies of decisions made by Synod Berkel 1996 on the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Church in the United States, and the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

2. Acts of Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996

From the Acts we pass on the following highlights:

- a. Synod received 35 submissions with respect to the decision of Synod Ommen 1993 giving voting rights to women. Synod upheld the decision.
- b. Synod decided to study the procedure of classical examinations as Classis Kampen was burdened with an extraordinary work load since most of the students resided in churches in that classical region. For the time being it was decided that examinations should be conducted by the classis to which the church belonged that issued a student's attestation before he went to the Theological University. In order to be examined a student must also submit a certificate that he has completed a practical segment added to the training for the ministry.
- c. The Synod received many letters concerning the decision of Synod Ommen to permit elders to give the benediction. The decision Synod of Ommen was upheld.

- d. Much attention was paid to matters of liturgy. A variant of the "B Liturgy" was adopted which gives room for confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness early in the worship service. The law is then read after the preaching of the gospel. There is much activity to provide the churches with a greater selection of hymns.
- e. Synod approved an alternate Form to be used to solemnize a marriage. The notable difference in this form is that it has deleted reference the husband's obligation to work faithfully in his daily calling that he may support his family.
- f. Contact with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken is to be continued. Synod noted with thankfulness that the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken no longer speak of serious differences which would prove a hindrance on the way to ecclesiastical unity. Deputies have the mandate to also discuss the contacts the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken have with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken as well as the matter of the authority of Scripture.
- g. Synod decided to cease all official contact with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken especially in light the toleration of deviation from the reformed confessions in those churches.
- h. Synod adopted rules for contact with churches of another church federation at a local level. A local church must have the approbation of classis in such matters as mutual recognition as true church, access to the pulpit, and admission to one another Lord's Supper Celebration. Such decisions shall only be made when the churches involved are communicating on a national level and have both declared that they wish to stand on the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions.
- i. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands continue to be very busy in their contact with churches abroad. Of particular interest are the following:
 - CanRC - Synod decided to maintain the sister church relationship. Particular attention is to be paid to developments of the relationship with the OPC and RCUS. Deputies were also mandated to consult with the CanRC in relationships with churches in those regions where CanRC are or where the CanRC are doing mission work.
 - OPC - Synod mandated the deputies to develop the existing relationship in close cooperation with the CanRC and the RCUS and to possibly propose to the next Synod the establishing of a sister church relationship.
 - CRC - Synod mandated the deputies to remain alert to developments in the CRCNA, and seek contact with churches that seceded from the CRC and the church federations formed by such churches.
 - RCUS - Deputies were instructed to inform the RCUS of the decision concerning the appeals with regard to women's voting since the RCUS indicated difficulties with the decision of Synod Ommen 1993.
 - IPB (IGREJA PRESBITERIANA DO BRASIL) - Deputies have come to know the IPB as a church of Christ which takes seriously her calling in the world. Synod decided to intensify contact with this church, to provide assistance in theological instruction and mission and or evangelization.

3. Considerations

- a. The elimination in the alternate Form for Marriage of the husband's duty to be faithful in his daily calling to support his family and help those in need is not explained in the grounds. The deputies should be asked to give further information, since on the surface this suggests a shift in a long standing view of the task of the husband to provide for his family. Such a change needs more explanation.
- b. The Dutch sister churches continue to be very active in contact with churches abroad. The question should be posed as to whether the large number of contacts will make it difficult to exercise relations meaningfully according to the adopted rules. Further, the question should be asked whether it would not be better to leave contact with churches in other countries to be pursued by churches with whom they already have a sister church relationship in those countries.

4. Recommendations

- a. Your Committee recommends that it be given a mandate to discuss with the Dutch Deputies matters pertaining to the alternate Form for Marriage, as well as the development of a better strategy for pursuing relations with other churches.
- b. Your Committee recommends to General Synod 1998 that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in accordance with the adopted Rules.

VII. THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (FCS)

1. Correspondence

- a. On Nov. 11, 1995, the CRCA sent copies of the ACTS 1995 to the FCS.
- b. On Jan. 30, 1996, the FCS informed us that the 1996 General Assembly would meet in May and invited us to send a delegate.
- c. On May 9, 1996, we issued a credential to the Rev. K. Jonker to attend the General Assembly of the FCS as a delegate of the CanRC after he informed us that he would be in Scotland during that event. (The CRCA has long had a policy of deputizing ministers and professors if their trips abroad coincide with a major assembly of a sister church.) Rev. Jonker's report on this visit can be found in the August 22 and September 5, 1997, issues of *Clarion*.
- d. On Jan. 24, 1997 we were once again informed of the May meeting of the General Assembly and invited to send a delegate. (We informed them we were not in a position to send a delegated and extended the greetings and best wishes of the CanRC by mail.)

2. Acts of General Assembly 1995

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. Due to the difficult financial position of the FCS a number of appointments could not be made and the Assembly agrees to delay them until such time as the financial position of the church has improved. It was also decided to appoint a Day of Humiliation and Prayer because of these difficulties.
- b. It was agreed to change the name of the Presbytery of Ontario and Western Canada to the Great Lakes and Western Canada Presbytery.
- c. The regulations regarding the Admission of Ministers and Probationers from other denomination or churches into the FCS were revised and clarified.
- d. The Assembly also approved a re-organization of the Board of the Free Church College.
- e. The General Assembly noted with regret that there is an "apparent lack of interest in arrangements for maintaining the Reformed tradition of Psalmody, especially among the next generation. They invite Kirk Sessions to consider how they might stimulate such interest within their Congregations."

3. Acts of General Assembly 1996

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was congratulated on her 70th birthday. The Assembly received a visit from Princess Anne as her Majesty's Commissioner.
- b. The Assembly appointed a new editor for *The Monthly Record* in the person of the Rev. I.D. Campbell and thanked the retiring editor, Mr. R.C. Christie.
- c. In response to the Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion and Morals, the Assembly spoke out again on a number of issues, among them being lotteries, homosexuality, care for the elderly.
- d. The same Committee was also mandated "to undertake a careful and full study of the teachings of Theonomy ... with particular reference to their relationship to the Confession of Faith."
- e. Seeing that he was visiting Scotland at that time, the Rev. K. Jonker of Winnipeg was deputized by the CRCA to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the General Assembly. He was very well received and his insightful report can be found in *Clarion*. (August 22, September 5, 1997).
- f. A number of decisions were made pertaining to the FCS mission fields in India, Peru and South Africa. It was also decided to continue the support for the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF).

4. Acts of General Assembly 1997

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. It was decided that "the teachings commonly known as Theonomy or Reconstructionism contradict our subordinate standard, the Confession of Faith and are inconsistent with our supreme standard, the Bible, particularly on the question of the expiry of the judicial laws."
- b. Prof. A.I. Macleod, who occupied the Chair of Apologetics and Practical Theology at the Free Church College, asked to be released from his post seeing that he had received a call from the Free Elder Memorial Church in Leith. This was granted, and the Rev. Dr. D. MacDonald was appointed as his replacement.
- c. For some time now the FCS has been involved in a controversy regarding the person of Prof. D. Macleod. Apparently criminal charges were brought against him by persons unknown to us and this resulted in much unrest in the Church with members and ministers taking sides. In the fall of 1996 Prof. Macleod was acquitted of all charges in the Sheriff Court. Steps were taken by this Assembly in an attempt to promote healing in the Free Church.

3. Considerations

- a. From the general correspondence and the principal Acts of 1995, 1996, 1997, we may conclude that the FCS continues to be faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.
- b. From the Acts it also is evident that the FCS has been going through a very trying time in the matter relating to Prof. D. Macleod and that much healing needs to happen before the FCS will be restored to full unity.

4. Recommendations

- a. Your Committee recommends that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Free Church of Scotland under the adopted Rules.
- b. Your Committee recommends that it be charged to express the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches for the Free Church of Scotland as it enters into what will hopefully be a time of healing and reconciliation.

VIII. THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA (FRCSA)

1. Correspondence

- a. On May 30, 1995, the Deputies of the FRCSA sent us an update regarding developments in their churches. Mention was made of several ministers from the Dutch Reformed Church leaving and requesting membership in the FRCSA.
- b. On Oct. 1, 1995, we received an English summary of the Acts of the Synod of Johannesburg 1994.
- c. In early January of 1996 the Convener of the CRCA received a telephone call from the Secretary of the Deputies of the FRCSA requesting us to send

a delegate to their next General Synod in April. Our Convenor urged them to send us a letter repeating the request, which they did on Feb. 8, 1996. The CRCA weighed the request carefully and decided that because of the urgent nature of the request, as well as the changing situation in the FRCSA, it would be best to send a delegate. Rev.J. Moesker was appointed and the account of his visit can be found elsewhere in this report.

- d. On July 4, 1996, the Deputies sent us a letter expressing "deep appreciation and thankfulness" for the visit of the Rev.J.Moesker and his wife, Christina.

2. Acts of Synods 1995 and 1996

a. Ad-Hoc Synods 1995

- i. An Ad-Hoc Synod was convened in Capetown on May 26, 1995, for the purpose of dealing with the request of a brother to be admitted to the ministry of the Word according to Article 8 Church Order, and also to deal with a request by Rev. C.F. Heiberg (formerly minister in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA) to be admitted to the ministry in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA).

The brother was examined, but Synod was not convinced that he possessed the exceptional gifts to be admitted to the ministry of the Word.

Rev. Heiberg delivered a sermon and was examined in dogmatics, symbolics and church polity. Synod decided to grant this brother eligibility for call within the federation, and he signed the Form of Subscription. After Synod, he accepted a call to the church of Johannesburg.

- ii. Another ad-hoc synod was convened on October 20, 1995, at Bethal. The purpose of this assembly was to consider the request of a congregation and its minister, Rev. P. Nel, to be admitted to the FRCSA. This church and its minister had separated from the DRCSA in Bethal due to liberal theology and practices. Synod decided to admit the church at Bethal to the federation. After examination in matters of doctrine, Synod decided to admit Rev. P. Nel as minister of the Word in the FRCSA. This church has since experienced steady growth.

b. Synod Capetown 1996

- i. A Synod of the FRCSA met from August 6th to 9th, 1996. In his opening words, Rev. E. Viljoen of the church at Capetown mentioned that this was the first synod of the FRCSA where 4 churches (instead of 3) were represented. For the first time delegates of the church at Bethal were present. This church, together with Rev. P. Nel, had separated from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA) due to liberal theology and practices in that church and was accepted into the federation in 1995. Each church in the FRCSA sent three delegates to Synod. Three missionaries and one emeritus minister, the Rev. W. Boessenkool, were present as advisers.

ii. A major item on the agenda was the peremptory examination of candidate D.M. Boersma, missionary-elect of the church of Pretoria. He successfully completed this examination, signed the Form of Subscription and was given best wishes for his work as missionary in Soshaghuve.

iii. Mission work dominated much of the agenda. A number of churches in the Netherlands have agreed to support the expanding mission work carried out in the Pretoria and Capetown areas. Four mission deputies were appointed to maintain good contact between mission and supporting churches in the Netherlands. Deputies for Diaconiology in Mission Churches also made an extensive report reflecting on the structure of the offices in the mission churches. The deputies explored the idea of an office of evangelist, and Synod instructed the deputies to look further into the office of evangelist in mission, paying attention to, among other things, the distinction between this office and that of minister and elder, the task description of such an office, the term of such an office, and the preparations needed to fill such an office. A report will be made to the next Synod.

iv. Synod instructed deputies for theological training to look into initiating theological training in South Africa, possibly supplementing training given at theological colleges within the country.

v. Synod also dealt with an extensive report of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA). Deputies reported on communication with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Synod decided to continue sister-church relations with these churches. Synod instructed the deputies to urge the Australian sister-churches to reconsider their withdrawal from the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Thankfulness was also expressed for personal contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches through the visit of Rev. J. Moesker in April 1996. He met with the deputies and visited all the churches, reporting on the situation of the churches in Canada. Synod also decided to continue the brotherly contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (RCSTS), and the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK).

Exploratory contact will be maintained with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Igreja Reformada Colonia Brasolandia, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire, the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Benin, the Christian Reformed Fellowship in Kenya, and the Eglise Reformee du Quebec.

A successful African mission conference of ICRC churches was held in Capetown in 1995. The next African mission conference is scheduled for 1999, to be hosted by the Eglise Reforme Confessante du Zaire in Lubumbashi. Synod decided to send a delegate to the 1997 ICRC conference in Korea, as it is important for a small church federation which is not large enough to maintain relations with many churches to maintain contacts via the ICRC. Synod also instructed deputies to study the Report on Theological Affirmation made to the ICRC in 1993, and to exchange ideas with sister churches concerning the recognition of other churches as "true churches" within the same country.

vi. Deputies for Contact with Churches within South Africa (DCC) reported on their expanding work. There are numerous contacts with concerned members and ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA), and the deputies were urged to continue to seek them out. Synod decided not to adopt a set protocol for churches or ministers who request to join the FRCSA, since every situation differs. Synod encouraged local contacts with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA) according to guidelines which have been drawn up by the DCC. This includes half-year reports to the KBK by churches holding talks. Contacts will also be maintained with the English Reformed Church in Randburg, the Free Reformed Church "the Door" in Pretoria, the Presbyterian and Reformed Church Monte Vista, and the Free Church in Southern Africa.

vii. Synod discussed the uncertainty surrounding the use of the New Afrikaans Translation of the Bible, and confirmed its decision that only the Afrikaans Version of 1933 is suitable for official use in the churches. The New Afrikaans Translation will be further examined and any new developments in Bible translations will be closely followed by deputies Bible Translation.

viii. It was decided to update the language of the church order, but not to change the articles to reflect the assemblies in the small FRCSA situation since the Church Order should represent the "normal" situation in a larger federation, and as such does not hinder the functioning of the present federation.

ix. Synod decided to mandate the Deputies for Liturgical Music to establish guidelines so that the congregations can try hymns as to content and music. Such a guideline, together with a selection of new hymns, will be passed on to the churches.

c. Ad-Hoc Synod 1997

Another ad-hoc synod was convened on July 4, 1997. The following information is from a short report published in the Capetown church bulletin "Pro Ekklesia".

This synod dealt with two main matters. First, it examined Dr. H. Breytenbach, a minister who separated from the DRCSA due to liberal teachings in that church and joined the FRCSA. He was questioned about his convictions concerning Reformed doctrine and church polity. He also presented three sermons, one of which was delivered in the presence of synod. Synod decided to grant this brother eligibility for call within the churches. He would be given some time before a call for the purpose of studies at Kampen, the Netherlands, to orient himself in the liberated churches. He has since accepted a call to Capetown to take over the work of mission there from Rev. E.L. Van'tFoort who is repatriating to the Netherlands near the beginning of 1998.

The second matter dealt with by this synod was a report of Deputies for Theological Training which proposed a start to such training within the FRCSA commencing in 1998. Five instructors and five curators were appointed for this work. As of January 1st, 1998, the FRCSA will have its own theological college.

d. Consideration

From the Acts and correspondence received it is evident that the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa continue to govern their church life according to the Holy Scriptures, the subordinate confessions and the Church Order.

e. Recommendation

Your Committee recommends that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa under the adopted Rules.

IX. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (ICRC)

1. Correspondence

- a. On May 31, 1995, The Secretary of the ICRC, the Rev. M. van Beveren, sent us a report of the Committee on the Revision of the Constitution and Regulations of the ICRC. He also informed us that the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America were applying for membership.
- b. On Oct. 19, 1995, the Secretary sent us a Newsletter dealing with the subjects and speakers at the Seoul, Korea meeting. We were informed that the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands were applying for membership in the ICRC.
- c. On Oct. 7, 1996, the Secretary sent us another Newsletter in which he informed us that also the Reformed Church in East Africa, the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and the United Reformed Churches in North America were applying for membership.
- d. From April to September 1997, the Secretary sent us many documents in view of the ICRC meeting in Seoul, Korea for October 1997.

2. The Fourth Meeting of the ICRC in Seoul, South Korea, Oct. 15 - 23, 1997

- a. For specific details of this meeting we refer you to the *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches* (Oct. 15 - 23, 1997, in Seoul, South Korea).
- b. Delegated to this meeting were Dr. N.H. Gootjes and Rev. C. Van Spronsen. Rev. M. Van Beveren and br. H.A. Berends also attended as Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. Only the delegates were paid directly by the Canadian Reformed Churches for their traveling expenses.
- c. Your delegates participated in the public discussions on the speeches and proposals. In addition, they had many private discussions with other delegates. They see this as valuable for mutual understanding, support and encouragement.
- d. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia withdrew their membership.

The following churches were received as new members:
 The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (North America);
 The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
 (Christelijk Gereformeerd);
 The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales;
 The Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir N.T.T. (Indonesia);
 The Reformed Churches of New Zealand;
 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America;
 The United Reformed Churches in North America.

This brings the membership in the ICRC to 21.

- e. The budget for the next four years amounts to US\$ 119,000. The share for the Canadian Reformed Churches for this period amounts to US\$ 4,180.
- f. The next meeting of the Conference has been scheduled for 2001, to be held in the U.S.A. The hosting Church will be the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

3. Considerations

- a. Your Delegates felt that membership and participation is a most worthwhile effort for the promotion of the church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ through out the world. The main themes of the Conference that stood out were the matters of expressing our unity in the Lord and the execution of the great commission to preach the Gospel to all nations.
- b. Delegates felt that it is important for the participating churches to have discussions on topics of general interest. However, the days were mostly filled with sessions during which official business was dealt with and the papers were discussed. There was little time reserved for formal and informal meetings between delegates. We think that the value of the ICRC meetings could be increased by limiting the number of papers to four and by reserving more time on the agenda for the delegations to have meetings.
- c. The benefits of meeting member churches from all over the world are mutual. We can learn much from each other. We must also bear in mind the benefits for other, smaller churches, often living in great isolation, to be able to have a forum to share their experiences, to be encouraged in their work for the Lord and to stimulate each other to remain faithful to Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. It also urges us to seek closer fellowship at home with those Churches near to us with whom we share the same Reformed faith.

4. Recommendations

- a. Your Committee recommends that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC and that the CRCA submit a report to General Synod 2001 on the activities of the Conference, along with an evaluation.

- b. Your Committee asks for a mandate to recommend to the ICRC that the next meeting of the Conference limit its speeches to four and allow for more meeting time between delegations.
- c. Your Committee recommends that the CRCA be mandated to send a normal size delegation of two voting delegates and two advisors to the next meeting of the Conference to be held in the northern U.S.A.

X. THE REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS)

1. Correspondence

- a. On March 6, 1997, the CRCA received an invitation to attend the 251st Synod of the RCUS which would be meeting in Sacramento, CA. from May 19 - 22, 1997. The CRCA decided to send a delegate; however, because of other commitments none of the Committee members were available. Greetings and best wishes were extended to the Synod by means of the telephone through the good offices of the Rev. Ron Potter, Chairman of the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the RCUS.
- b. On Oct. 20, 1997, the CRCA received a letter from the RCUS stating, "It is with great joy that I convey to you the formal action of the 251st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States with respect to the Canadian Reformed Churches namely, to invite you to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister-church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship with us." (See the Appendices for this letter in its entirety).

2. Reports

- a. From May 21 - 23, 1996, the Rev. C. VanSpronsen visited the 250th Synod of the RCUS (His report is included in the Appendices).
- b. On Oct. 18, 1995, Rev. E. Kampen, Elder A. Nap, and Rev. C. VanSpronsen met with representatives of the RCUS in Spokane, Washington (Their report is included in the Appendices).

3. Activities

- a. The Committee has gratefully used the work done by the Church at Carman (See Acts Synod Lincoln 1992, pages 136-154).
- b. Since receiving a mandate with respect to the RCUS in 1992 it has:
 - a. Studied the history, background, doctrinal standards and their maintenance, church government and practices of the RCUS (See Acts Synod Abbotsford 1995, pages 181-183 & Report of CRCA to Synod 1995, pages 27-32).
 - c. Sent observers to Synods of the RCUS in 1993, 1994, and 1996.
 - d. Been witness to a number of worship services.
- c. On Oct. 18, 1995, Rev. E. Kampen, br. A. Nap and Rev. C. Van Spronsen met with Rev. N. Hoeflinger, Rev. T. Jorgensen and Rev. N. Jones who represented the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Synod of the RCUS. The minutes of this meeting are added as an appendix.

- d. Rev. C. Van Spronsen visited the 250th Synod of the RCUS, held May 21-23, 1996, in Eureka, S.D.

4. Developments

Two items are worthy of note:

- i. Since the RCUS officially has adopted the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, it was discussed whether the form for profession of faith should be modified to reflect that. It was noted that there was a desire "to be a more confessional church", with the result that the form will be modified to refer to the Three Forms of Unity. However, the required approbation by Classes was not received. The ground for this rejection is the belief that this would require more than the Scriptures do of a candidate for baptism and church membership. (From communication received from Rev. Potter, Chairman RCUS Interchurch Relations)

The Synod of 1997 proposed the following wording for the first vow in the forms for Baptism of Adults, Confirmation and Profession of Faith: "Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament, to be the inerrant and infallible Word of God, and its doctrine, summarized in the confession of this church, to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?" (1997 Abstract, p. 69, point 3) This will need to be ratified by the classes.

- ii. The Inter-Church Relations Committee suggested a study of the possibility of establishing differing levels of fellowship as well as formulate guidelines and a philosophy of ecumenical relationships (Abstract 1996, p. 30). This was not adopted by the Synod (Abstract 1996, p. 70, # 18).

5. Evaluation

The Marks of the Church

- a. In article 29 of the Belgic Confession we confess that "[t]he true church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practices the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby the true church can certainly be known...." In order to ascertain whether we can enter into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a federation, the RCUS must be evaluated according to these three marks.
- b. *Pure preaching of the Word.* Though there were only limited opportunities to hear the Word preached, the sermons which were heard reflected the preaching of the gospel of grace. Also in discussions it could be noted that there is a real desire to uphold the preaching of God's grace and flee all evidence of Arminianism. This desire to be reformed also is reinforced by the official adoption of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort beside the Heidelberg Catechism. By means of these confessions the preaching is safeguarded further. Licentiates are required to subscribe to the following formula and undergo rigorous examinations:

"I hereby testify that I honestly and truly accept the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dort as in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, and promise faithfully to preach and defend the same. I also declare and promise that I will carefully observe all the ordinances in accordance with the Word of God which now are, or may hereafter be enacted by the authorities of the Church, and that I will cheerfully submit to all the admonitions and decisions of these authorities so long as I remain in connection with the Reformed Church in the United States." (article 22 of the Constitution)

Before a licentiate is ordained to the Gospel ministry he shall undergo trials. Trials for ordination for a candidate who has been licensed by the Classis shall consist of the following: (1) the evaluation of written and oral testimonials as to the candidate's satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the Gospel ministry; (2) an examination of any areas of weakness as evidenced in the candidate's licensure examination; (3) an examination, as the Classis may require, in the Confession and Constitution of the Church and the presentation of written discourses. If one-third of those voting in the Classis are dissatisfied with the examination, the candidate shall not be ordained but be required to undergo another examination at a future meeting of the Classis. A satisfactory vote of the majority on the second examination shall be sufficient for ordination. The report of the committee examining the candidate may report weaknesses and require further study in the weak areas. His progress is to be reported in his parochial report. (article 24 of the Constitution)

The respect for the preaching is also shown in the articles pertaining to worship.

ARTICLE 178. The essential parts of public worship are a call to worship, salutation, invocation, singing, prayer, reading of the Word, preaching a sermon, giving the offerings, the benediction, and the doxology. These elements of worship approved or recommended by the Synod shall be used in the regular Lord's Day service.

ARTICLE 179. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost -- and all days appointed by ecclesiastical or civil authority for fasting or thanksgiving -- may be duly respected and observed by congregations and families by attending public worship in their churches.

ARTICLE 180. The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy. Week-day meetings for prayer and daily family worship are also commended as important religious services.

- c. *Pure administration of the sacraments.* As we share the same confessions, we can conclude that the sacraments are understood scripturally. The following section of their constitution shows how they work out the confession concerning the sacraments.

ARTICLE 181. The sacraments of the Church instituted by Christ are two: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

ARTICLE 182. Children are received into the Church by baptism and are subject to its care and discipline. As soon as they are old enough to learn the Catechism and to be benefited by the pastor's instruction, they shall become members of the catechetical class.

ARTICLE 183. A child shall be baptized if one of its parents is a member of the Church.

ARTICLE 184. The previous article shall not be so construed as to prevent persons who adopt orphans or other children into their families from bringing them to God for baptism and giving them the sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

ARTICLE 185. Adults shall be baptized if a minister has ascertained that they possess correct views of Christian doctrine, give evidence of true repentance and faith, and are willing to yield obedience to the requirements of Christ. But if in these respects the minister discovers deficiencies, he shall direct them to attend the usual catechetical instruction, and shall afterward proceed in relation to them as with other catechumens. If this, however, is impractical, he shall instruct them in some other suitable way.

ARTICLE 186. Baptism shall be administered publicly in the church, if possible. The forms provided in the liturgy of the Reformed Church in the United States shall be used.

ARTICLE 187. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be observed publicly in every congregation at least twice a year, and the celebration conducted according to the established order of the Reformed Church in the United States.

ARTICLE 188. Every sermon based upon Scripture must necessarily conform to the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper; and unless the Spiritual Council has taken official disciplinary measures against a communicant member, he shall not be denied the privileges of attending the Lord's Table. In the congregational records the dates on which the holy communion has been administered and the names of the members who have communed shall be noted.

ARTICLE 189. Members, in good standing, of other congregations of the Reformed Church, and of other denominations holding the essential doctrines of the Gospel, should be invited to participate in the observance of this sacrament.

ARTICLE 190. The Lord's Supper shall be administered to the sick and infirm communicants who are not able to come to the house of God and who express a desire to receive the sacrament.

The point of admission to the Lord's Supper was discussed in the meeting held in Spokane. It was noted that here we have more a theoretical rather than a practical problem. Though there is divergence of practice in terms of admission of guests, we conclude that efforts are made to guard the table of the Lord and that the Sacraments are administered according to the Word of God.

- d. *Proper administration of discipline.* What follows is a sampling of some of the articles of their constitution dealing with the application of discipline:

ARTICLE 112. Christian discipline is the exercise of that authority and the application of those laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has established in His Church, to preserve its purity and honor, and to promote the spiritual welfare of its members.

ARTICLE 113. An offense is anything in doctrine, principles, or practice of a church member, officer, or judicatory that is contrary to the Word of God: and nothing shall be admitted as matter of accusation or considered an offense which cannot be proved contrary to the Scriptures or to the regulations of the Church founded on them. The following sins especially merit discipline: heresy, schism, blasphemy, adultery, fornication, lascivious wantonness, theft, fraud, perjury, lying, contentiousness, intemperance, profanation of the Lord's Day, impudent scoffing, cruelty, and other violations of the Ten Commandments.

ARTICLE 114. Discipline shall be exercised in the form of admonition, censure, erasure of name, suspension, deposition, excommunication and restoration. The Spiritual Council shall inform the disciplined offender(s) of the right to appeal, the right to counsel, and the necessary procedures in filing an appeal.

ARTICLE 115. Should any of the lower judicatories pass an action of censure or reproof upon an individual or any part in the Church in their unavoidable absence, the Secretary or Stated Clerk of said judicatory shall give those concerned immediate notice of such action; and should they feel aggrieved by it, they shall have thirty days time from date of notice for giving notice of appeal to the officers of said judicatory, and thirty days further time for lodging their reasons for appeal.

ARTICLE 116. Every case in which there is a charge of offense against a church member or officer shall be known, in its original and appellate stages, as a judicial case. Every other case shall be known as a non judicial or administrative case.

ARTICLE 117. All members of the Church are subject to its government and discipline. If the unconfirmed fall into sinful ways, the pastor and elders shall remind the parents of their duty in regard to them, and shall also seek by direct approach to bring them to the obedience of Christ.

ARTICLE 118. Members of the Church who upon being convicted of an offense reject the admonition of the Spiritual Council or judicatory that found them guilty, or who have committed an act of public scandal, shall be suspended from the communion of the Church. Those thus suspended shall be treated not as enemies, but as erring brethren, and shall be admonished as such, in accordance with apostolic direction (2 Thess. 3:6-15). But if this suspension and these admonitions are ineffectual, offenders shall be excommunicated (Matt. 18:17). A suspension may or may not be announced publicly, at the discretion of the church judicatory that tried the case; a sentence of excommunication, however, shall always be publicly pronounced.

ARTICLE 119. If a member is negligent in partaking of the Holy Communion, or refuses to contribute to the support of the Church, or continually absents himself from public worship, such conduct, in one or all of these requirements, shall be regarded as an offense against the Church, and he shall be admonished by the pastor or elders. If after admonition he continues in such negligence of duty, the Spiritual Council shall notify him that he is no longer in good and regular standing. If after not less than six months and not more than one year of such suspension he continues in such neglect of duty, the Spiritual Council shall erase his name.

If any member shall unite with another congregation of the Reformed Church or of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal, the Spiritual Council shall likewise erase his name.

When a member is erased, it shall be specified in the minutes of the Spiritual Council whether this action is administrative or judicial.

ARTICLE 120. If a minister, an elder or a deacon shall commit an offense that brings dishonor upon the Church or is punishable in the criminal courts, such a person shall upon trial and conviction by a church judicatory be removed from office; if an elder or a deacon, by the Spiritual Council; if a minister, by his Classis. In case a minister is involved in a grave public scandal, the Spiritual Council shall temporarily prevent him from exercising his ministerial function and refer him at once to his Classis for trial.

ARTICLE 121. If an ill report concerning the moral conduct of a minister, an elder or a deacon is in circulation, the Spiritual Council shall institute an immediate investigation and proceed as the interests of religion and as justice to the individual may require. If the Spiritual Council neglects to investigate ill reports concerning a minister, the Classis shall investigate them without waiting to be requested by the Spiritual Council. But if the Classis discovers that the Spiritual Council is already occupied with the case, it shall for a reasonable time await the result of the inquiry. A prosecution based on evil rumors shall not be instituted unless there is a specification of particular sin or sins and the rumors are generally circulated, permanent and not transient, and accompanied with strong presumption of truth (1 Tim. 5:19).

ARTICLE 122. If a pastor shall have been suspended or deposed from his ministerial office, the relation previously existing between him and his pastoral charge shall be dissolved and the charge declared vacant.

ARTICLE 123. If a minister accused of an offense shall refuse to appear, either in person or by counsel, after having been cited twice, he shall for his contumacy be suspended from his office; and if after another citation he refuses to appear, either in person or by counsel, he shall be suspended from the communion of the Church, if the alleged offense warrants such suspension.

ARTICLE 124. An accusation in case of scandal shall not be heard unless presented within one year after the crime is alleged to have been committed, except it can be shown that insurmountable difficulties existed, which prevented the presentation of the accusation within that time.

It was acknowledged that there was weakness in actual application, but there was a desire to grow in faithfulness (see minutes of Spokane meeting). Though there are different practices (eg. Erasure), the articles of the Constitution show that effort is made to apply discipline according to the Scriptures both for doctrine and conduct.

6. The doctrine of the Church.

The major concern in the findings of the Church at Carman was the functioning of the doctrine of the Church as this showed up especially in admission of visitors to the Lord's table, and in the way members could transfer to other denominations. For the benefit of all, the "Report of the Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity" as submitted to the RCUS Synod of 1995 has been appended. Obviously, this will remain an area of discussion in the Reformed Churches in general. As for the practical implications in terms of admission to the Lord's Supper, as can be noted in the Minutes of the Spokane meeting and is worthy of reiteration, this problem is more theoretical than practical. The RCUS does not practice open communion in terms of no restraints whatsoever.

7. Further Information

- a. Statistics (1996)
 - i. The RCUS consists of 38 churches and 3 chapels.
 - ii. The RCUS has 40 Ministers on the roll of Synod, 97 Elders, 93 Deacons, 3 licentiates and 4 students under care.
 - iii. The RCUS has 3185 communicant members, 1065 non communicant members (total: 4250) and 1676 families.
- b. Ecclesiastical Relations

The RCUS maintains Fraternal Relations with the following churches:

 - The Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico
 - The Orthodox Presbyterian Church
 - The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
 - The Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire
 - The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

The RCUS is also a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches and a member of NAPARC.
- c. The 251st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States meeting from May 19 - 22, 1997 in Sacramento, CA., decided to send two observers to the 1998 General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

8. Recommendation

In light of its investigation and contacts which show the RCUS to meet the marks of the true church, the Committee recommends that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules.

XI. OTHER MATTERS

A. The Lanka Reformed Church

1. Correspondence

- a. On January 6, 1997, the CRCA received a letter, with enclosures, from the Lanka Reformed Church informing us about the history of this Church, its creedal basis and requesting money be sent for building rentals, ministerial stipends, and printing of materials. They also requested that missionaries and theological teachers be sent.
- b. On Feb. 25, 1997, the CRCA informed the Lanka Reformed Church that it had no funds at its disposal. More information was also requested from this church.
- c. On June 25, 1997, the Lanka Reformed Church asked us to send a copy of our Church Order, Liturgical Forms, Three Forms of Unity. They also mentioned that they had recently received a delegation from our Dutch sister churches. Finally, they requested permission to translate certain material into Sinhala and Tamil.
- d. On July 2, 1997, the CRCA sent a *Book of Praise* to Sri Lanka.
- e. On August 6, 1997, the CRCA received a letter from the Lanka Reformed Church supplying further information about the number of churches, pastors and members, as well as a list of urgent financial and material needs.
- f. During August and September, 1997, a considerable number of email messages have been received by the Convener of the CRCA. Some of these included attachments that could not be deciphered.

2. Considerations

- a. If Synod decides that there is merit to our new strategy as far as international contacts is concerned then it would stand to reason that the Lanka Reformed Church be referred to our sister churches in the area of Asia.
- b. Seeing that the Canadian Reformed Churches already have two sister churches in Asia, namely the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and the Presbyterian Church in Korea, it would be possible to refer this church to them.

2. Recommendation

The CRCA recommends to General Synod 1998 that the Lanka Reformed Church be advised to take up contact with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and/or the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

B. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council

The CRCA regularly receives invitations to send observers to the meetings of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Thus far we have always declined to do so. Furthermore, the CRCA, having studied the structure of NAPARC, as well having taken note of decisions made by that organization, sees no benefit to the Canadian Reformed Churches in sending observers. Unless instructed otherwise by General Synod 1998, the CRCA will maintain this policy of non-involvement.

C. The Foreign Mission Board of the Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto

The Foreign Mission Board requested the advice of the CRCA regarding future contact with the Reformed Churches in Irian Jaya. Advice was given.

XII. STRATEGY FOR FUTURE CONTACTS

a. Considerations

For some time already the CRCA has been having internal discussions on the matter of how best to deal with requests to enter into new relationships with churches in different parts of the world. In this connection the request of the Lanka Reformed Church is but the latest in a series.

At the same time the CRCA has also been led to question whether it is possible for a small church federation such as ours to do justice to an ever-increasing number of relationships? How many relationships can we responsibly handle?

In addition, there is also the fact that the Canadian Reformed Churches have established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with churches in different parts of the world. As well, we are member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which includes faithful Reformed churches in still more foreign countries.

To illustrate the current situation, we may point to the approach of one of our sister churches, namely the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). They have relations and contacts with so many churches around the world that the question arises as to whether it is possible to stay abreast of all of these situations. As there is no indication that this process will slow in the future, we can expect that even more churches will be added to their list of sister churches.

In addition, the RCN are also becoming more active in pursuing contacts in North America and have requested the CRCA to give them information on various church federations on this continent. These requests for information can only be with a view to gathering information and possibly establishing relations with these churches at a later date.

It has to be recognized that the RCN is much larger than the CanRC and thus has more resources, as well as manpower, to deal with this situation. It also has to be admitted that the CRCA has never received a mandate to object to the RCN establishing ties with churches on this continent.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that this does make for a more complicated, even confusing, ecclesiastical scene. Why is the RCN so eager to expand its contacts in North America? Is this really necessary? Would the RCN look forward to receiving requests for information from the CanRC about the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken?

From our perspective it would seem more realistic and responsible for the RCN to concentrate its efforts on establishing relations with faithful Reformed churches in its part of the world and for the CanRC to do the same in North and South America.

b. Recommendations:

In order that the Committee

- a) may have a more focused approach;
- b) be able to do greater justice to present and future relationships;
- c) make better use of manpower and resources;
- d) prevent overlap and possible disagreement between sister churches;

it is recommended that Synod mandate the Committee as follows:

- a) Whenever the CanRC receives new requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC priority will be given to churches located in the Americas, that is North and South America;
- b) Whenever the CRCA receives a new request from a church located in Africa, Asia or Europe to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC, it shall direct that church to take up contact with one of the sister churches in that part of the world;
- c) Discussions be entered into with those churches with which we currently maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a view to the merits of this strategy and to ask them to give serious consideration to adopting the same. For us as CanRC this would lead to new requests from Asia being directed towards the FRCA and the PCK, to new requests from Europe being directed to the FCS and the RCN, and to new requests from Africa being directed to the FRCSA. Should a church be too small to deal with such request it could either request the assistance of neighbouring sister churches or of churches which are members of the ICRC.

XIII. RETIREMENTS AND APPOINTMENTS

According to the retirement schedule adopted by Synod Abbotsford 1995, the terms of the following members of the CRCA have run their course: A. Nap, J. Visscher, and J. Vanderstoep. In addition, br. S.H. DeBoer has moved to the Maritimes and can also be considered as retired. In order to aid Synod in finding suitable replacements living in the Fraser Valley, the CRCA will send a separate letter to General Synod containing the names of possible replacements.

XIV. BUDGET 1998 - 2001

The CRCA submits for your consideration and approval the following budget for the years 1998 - 2001.

ICRC (fees)	3,500.00
Meeting of ICRC 2001	1,000.00
Travel	2,500.00
Miscellaneous	3,000.00
Total	\$10,000.00

Respectfully submitted by your Committee,
 Mr. H.A. Berends
 Rev. E. Kampen
 Rev. J. Moesker
 Mr. A. Nap
 Dr. J. Vanderstoep
 Rev. C. VanSpronsen
 Dr. J. Visscher (convener)

List of Abbreviations:

CanRC = Canadian Reformed Churches
 CRCA = Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
 DRCSA = Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa
 EPCI = Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
 ERCS = Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore
 ERCZ = Confessing Reformed Church in Zaire
 ERQ = Reformed Churches in Quebec
 FRCA = Free Reformed Churches in Australia
 FCS = Free Church of Scotland
 FRCNA = Free Reformed Churches of North America
 FRCP = Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines
 FRCSA = Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
 ICRC = International Conference of Reformed Churches
 LRC = Lanka Reformed Church
 NAPARC = North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council
 OPC = Orthodox Presbyterian Church
 PCEA = Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
 PCK = Presbyterian Church in Korea
 RCA = Reformed Churches of Australia
 RCN = Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
 RCNZ = Reformed Church of New Zealand
 RCSA = Reformed Churches in South Africa
 RCSTS = Reformed Churches of Sumba-Timor-Savu
 RCUS = Reformed Church in the United States
 RCZ = Reformed Churches in Zaire
 RPCGA = Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly
 RPCI = Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

APPENDICES:

1. FRCSA - Report of the Visit to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in April 1996.
2. ICRC - Press Release 1997.
3. ICRC - Report on the Fourth Meeting of the ICRC held in Seoul, Korea from Oct. 15 - 23, 1997.
4. RCUS - 1995 Report of the Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity.
5. RCUS - Minutes of the Meeting of the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee and the Canadian Reformed Churches Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, Oct. 18, 1995 in Spokane, WA.
6. RCUS - Report on Visit to the 250th Synod of the RCUS, May 21-23, 1996, in Eureka, SD.
7. RCUS - Letter from the 251 Synod inviting the Canadian Reformed Churches to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS.

Report Visit to Free Reformed Churches South Africa, April 1996

My wife and I visited the following churches:

April 21/96 Free Reformed Church of Belhar (mission)

April 21/96 Free Reformed Church of Capetown

April 24/96 Free Reformed Church of Bethal

April 25/96 Free Reformed Church of Johannesburg

April 27/96 Free Reformed Church of Pretoria

April 28/96 Free Reformed Church of Sosanghuve-North (mission)

Opportunity was used in the two mission churches to speak a few words of greeting on behalf of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. It was expressed that even though there are great differences in race and culture and language and location, it is a wonderful thing to experience our unity in Jesus Christ. It was also stated that we hoped that with God's blessing the growth in those churches may continue in faith as well as numbers. I was also asked to preach the Word in the church of Sosanghuve-North, which I did. The sermon was translated into Sotho by the missionary, Rev. A. deVisser.

In each of the instituted churches in the federation, I was given the opportunity to convey greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In each presentation an overview of the Canadian Reformed Churches was given which included some of the history of the churches, statistical information, some information about the Theological College, some of the issues dealt with at Synod Abbotsford 1995, and some of the latest developments in contacts with other churches both within and outside Canada and the United States. It was noted that in spite of differences in size and circumstances, that there are many similarities between the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and Canadian Reformed Churches. Membership of largely immigrant origin, ministers received into the federation from other denominations, growing contacts with other Reformed groups within the country, and mission within the country were some of the similarities. This means that there is good reason to also strengthen the contact with South Africa, as we can learn from each other and encourage each other to be and remain Reformed churches in an fast-changing world. Each presentation was accompanied by a slide presentation which included views of some Canadian Reformed church buildings throughout the country, home mission work of Smithers, and the Theological College of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches in Hamilton. Opportunity was given after each presentation for questions. Questions were asked among others about where church growth mainly comes from, relations with ex-Christian Reformed groups and with the Eglise Reformee du Quebec, and the Hymn section of the Book of Praise. Interest was shown for the Theological College by a number of young men in the churches of Capetown, Bethal and Pretoria. Each church was given a 1996 Handbook, Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1996, and Handbook of the Theological College of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

On April 23rd, 1996, I met with two of the members of the South African Committee for Relations for Churches Abroad, chairman Rev. L. van't Foort and secretary Mrs. G. van den Berg. Mr. J. Moes, the other member of the committee was unable to be present due to travel abroad. They were presented with copies of our 1996 Handbook, Acts Synod 1996, and Handbook Theological College.

In the discussion some concern was expressed about differences in the rules for correspondence between the GKN (Vrijemaakt), Can. Ref. Churches and Free Ref. Churches Australia. The Dutch churches promise to "inform" other churches about major changes, the Canadian churches state they will "seek the advice of" the other churches, and the Australian churches want the churches to be "accountable to" each other about major changes. It was felt that advice should be sought from sister churches when there are developments in relations with other churches within the countries where those sister churches are located.

It was also stated that the South African churches, due to changes in the country and in the composition of the churches, want to be somewhat less directed solely towards the Netherlands and more to sister churches in other countries.

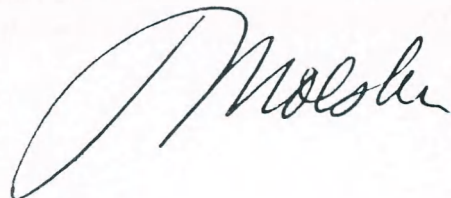
The S.A. Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad questioned the practical use for sister church relations with the Presbyterian Churches in Korea for themselves. They rather would advise more concentration on seeking relations with churches on the African continent. They would advise seeking brotherly contact, to guard against binding to ties that cannot be practically and properly maintained. A number of contacts have been made after the ICRC Mission Conference held in Capetown last year. (A report of this meeting will be issued soon). Can there be different kinds of contacts for churches in very different culture/language situations?

Some concern was expressed about the direction of the Australian sister churches, i.e. their move out of the ICRC. What can we do? Should concern be expressed in communications with Australia?

There is also some question about what to do with issues that "spill over" from the Netherlands, such as womens voting rights and the "blessing elder". Are these issues in the Canadian Reformed Churches now? (I replied that it did not appear that they were large issues according to Synod 1995)

It was felt that it would be good to have closer contact between Canada and South Africa. After expressing goodwill in both directions, I was given the opportunity to close the meeting with thanksgiving.

In conclusion, I believe that our visit was beneficial and that connections were made which will be maintained. I have had follow-up contact with a number of ministers and members of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Hopefully we can then be of much assistance to each other in future and encourage each other as sister federations to remain true to the King of kings.



ICRC 1997 Press Release

The fourth quadrennial meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Seoul, Korea, from 16-23 October 1997. The venue was the Seo-Moon Church complex, just south of Olympic Park.

The host church, the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) provided for the delegates with great generosity and consideration, and created a memory that will long remain with those who were privileged to attend.

New Members and Visitors

When the meeting opened, there were 14 member churches; after the reception of new member churches, there are now 21, representing over 450,000 people across the world. These are from 11 countries and four continents, plus Australasia. Interested visitors from 10 other churches were also present. Introductions were presented by delegates from:

Christian Witness to Israel
 Church of Christ in Sudan among the Tiv
 Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico
 Institute of Reformed Theological Training
 Lanka Reformed Church
 Missionary Training Institute
 Presbyterian Church of Australia
 Reformed Church in Japan
 Reformed Churches in South Africa
 Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India
 Synod
 Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Cardiff
 Taiwan Reformed Presbyterian Church

Papers

Five papers were presented to the meeting, and discussed. These papers will appear in the printed Proceedings of the meeting.

The first paper was presented by Mr Mark T. Bube on 'Principles of Reformed Missions.' Beginning with the premise that worship lies at the heart of the church's missionary endeavors, Mr Bube outlined God's decree to save a people for himself, for the manifestation of his glory. He noted that God has foreordained all the means by which such is to be accomplished; that it is to the church that Christ has entrusted this ministry for the gathering and perfecting of the saints; that in this supernatural ministry, God is especially pleased to make the preaching of the Word an effectual means of accomplishing that end; and that, in his Word, God has fully supplied the elders in his church with all that is necessary for them to carry out this work.

Dr Soon-Gil Hur spoke on "Women in Office, with Particular Reference to 'Deaconesses.'" He stated that eldership is restricted to male members of the church because its task is to exercise authority over the congregation. This is a clear teaching of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 2:12). However, diaconal office does not involve the exercise of authority. Therefore, it seems possible that female members may be installed as

unordained deaconess or assistant-deacons, seeing that women were positively involved in the life of the apostolic church.

Dr Robert C. Beckett's paper discussed "Biblical Principles for the Relation Between Church and State". Dr Beckett affirmed the total sovereignty of God over all the structures of authority in both secular and ecclesiastical realms. The New Testament does not give approval to any specific form of government. Democracy involves the determination of laws by the majority views of fallen man, and is a perilous substitute for the infallible Word of God. Both church and state are established by God under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and are distinct structures that should peaceably co-exist and support each other. Complete separation of church and state is an unbiblical illusion, and Christians should be encouraged to act as 'salt and light' within the political process. Involvement of pastors as politicians is forbidden by Scripture, and brings dangerous confusion to the gospel message. Within a pluralistic society, the church can best fulfil its duty to God and the state by prioritizing the Great Commission. Obedience is to be rendered to the state as far as humanly possible, without transgressing the law of God. When the demands of the state are in conflict with the law of God, God must be obeyed rather than man, and civil disobedience becomes inevitable.

The fourth paper was presented by Dr Richard B. Gaffin. The subject was 'Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition,' and Dr Gaffin addressed two issues: the meaning of Pentecost (being baptized with the Holy Spirit); and, the cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit.

On the first issue, Dr Gaffin argued that Pentecost has its significance in terms of *historia salutis* (the completed accomplishment of salvation), not *ordo salutis* (the ongoing application of salvation). It does not provide a repeatable paradigm event for individual Christian experience. In the light of the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:45 ('the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit'), Pentecost reveals the unbreakable unity between the activity of the exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit in the church in all aspects of their conjoint activity. On the issue of cessation, Dr Gaffin argued that New Testament prophecy possessed inspired and infallible authority, and was present in the life of the church only for the period when the NT canon was in the process of formation. The view that NT prophecy continues today with lower, fallible, authority, was shown to be not sustainable exegetically and to undermine the final authority of Scripture.

Finally, the Rev. David John spoke on 'The Ministry of the Word Amongst Asian Religious Peoples.' He gave information about Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism in India, stating that many Asian people respect their elders; they worship ancestors; and seem to be very respectful and humble.

They claim to be seekers of wisdom, peace and light, desiring to become one with god and achieve salvation. To achieve this goal they go to extremes, such as 'yoga', transcendental meditation, and asceticism. This often means a withdrawal from real life—its hardships, trials, and responsibilities.

Tradition holds that the gospel was brought to India first by Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, in AD52. Christian missions, including both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have been present in India ever since. Besides evangelism, educational work and establishments of mercy have been founded. It is said that annual church growth in India is about 3.4%, and that there are now about 97,700 'Christian' congregations with 7,300,000 members and 16,000,000 adherents. It should go without saying that the only approach to all religions is by the Word of God and the only salvation is by the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Constitutional Update

The meeting also revised the constitution and regulations of the ICRC. In a significant move, the meeting agreed to amend section 1.a to read:

Those Churches shall be admitted as members:

- a. which faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;

This defines the faith shared by the member churches as the Reformed Faith expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and the several versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith, thus making clearer the intent of the original wording. Various other changes of a more minor or cosmetic nature were also made.

Missions Conferences

Following the Conference's 1993 decision to encourage the holding of regional ICRC missions conferences during the years between ICRC meetings, this meeting took the further step of including \$8,000US per year in its budget to assist in this. The member churches were encouraged to cooperate in missions endeavours where possible. An ICRC Missions Committee was appointed to assist in the cultivation of missions interest in the member churches. The meeting also encouraged cooperation in areas of evangelism, diaconal ministries, and training for the ministry.

Mutual Accountability

A large forward step was taken toward perfecting unity among ICRC members by the meeting's suggestion to members that each take initiative in informing the others, and seeking their advice, if they were contemplating actions that could affect their mutual relations. This would enable the churches to offer advice as thinking on the subject developed, and prevent surprising one another with actions already accomplished that could affect their relationships.

Next Meeting

A four-year budget, extending through the next ICRC meeting, was adopted; this amounted to \$119,000US, or less than \$30,000US per year, or less than 7c per church member per year.

The 21 member churches are:

- The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*
- The Canadian Reformed Churches*
- The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales*
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland*
- The Free Church of Central India*
- The Free Church of Scotland*
- The Free Church in Southern Africa*
- The Free Reformed Churches of North America*
- The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa*
- Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir N.T.T.*
- Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia N.T.T.*
- The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*
- The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia*
- The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)*
- The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated)*
- The Reformed Church in the United States*
- The Reformed Churches of New Zealand*
- The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland*
- The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*
- The United Reformed Churches in North America*

The next meeting of the ICRC is to be hosted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 2001.

FOURTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES HELD AT SEOUL, KOREA, OCT. 15-23, 1997

The Fourth Meeting of the the ICRC took place in the huge metropolis of Seoul in Korea, home to some 20 million people. Ever since its constituent assembly in Groningen the Conference has experienced a steady growth, meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1985, Langley, BC ,in 1989 and Zwolle, the Netherlands, in 1993. The 1997 Conference began with 14 members but admitted another 7 member Churches bringing the total to 21, representing over 450,000 people across the world. The Canadian Reformed Churches were represented by Dr. N.H. Gootjes and Rev. C. Van Spronsen. Rev. M. VanBeveren, as corresponding secretary of the Interim Committee and Mr.H. A. Berends, the treasurer also were present.

It is a wonderful experience to meet together with reformed/presbyterian brothers from all continents of the world and many racial origins, all standing on the one foundation of Jesus Christ, confessing the same faith and engaged in the same spiritual warfare. It is a blessing of the Lord to have this forum by which we may help, encourage and learn from one another how we are to be Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The hosting Church for this year's assembly was the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin) with whom we have a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship since 1992. They did an excellent job of organizing and hosting this Conference, showing us the real Korean hospitality and courtesy. Meetings were held in the splendid facilities of the Seo-Moon Presbyterian Church where meals were also provided in the dining hall. After some initial shuffling, all guests were accommodated comfortably in the Olympic Parktel hotel, adjacent to the Olympic Park with its whole array of facilities and buildings from the Olympics held in Seoul in 1988. This hotel also served as a youth hostel for large numbers of school students visiting the city from elsewhere, even abroad, which caused some congestion in the elevators in the evening.

Prayer Meeting

On Wednesday evening, prior to the opening of the Conference, a Prayer Meeting was held, conducted by Dr. Soon-Gil Hur, president of the seminary. Rev. John P. Galbraith (OPC) delivered a sermon on "Perfecting Fellowship", based mainly on Eph. 6:10-18. We are to display the unity we have in Christ and see our responsibilities in this world as well as over against each other. Striving for further unity needs a great deal of humility. Each one of us must be "as a dying man to dying men". He closed by expressing the wish and prayer that the ICRC may be an instrument in God's hand and urged us all to make the purposes of the ICRC a matter of our prayers!

The Seo-Moon Church choir contributed to the program and in the congregational singing Korean and English voices blended together very well to the familiar melodies. After the Prayer Meeting there was an opportunity to meet the delegates and mingle with the local churchmembers while enjoying some refreshments.

Opening

In his opening and welcoming words Dr. S.G. Hur mentioned that they would have liked to host the Conference in 1993 but that the facilities of the new seminary were not available at that time. Even now the new buildings are only half way done but they found an alternate venue. He welcomed us on behalf of the Korean Presbyterian Church. Although it is only just over 100 years that Christianity was introduced to Korea, the Lord has greatly blessed the advance of the Gospel in this nation so that now three quarters of the population are considered Christians, the most christianized nation of the the Asian countries. They have gone through difficult times during the first half of this century but the blood and the sweat of martyrs have been the seed and fertilizer for the planting of churches.

As the executive the following were chosen: chairman - Dr. S. G. Hur (KPC), vice-chairman - Rev. J. J. Petersen (OPC) and recording secretary - Rev. P. VanderMeyden (FRCNA). Rev. M. Van Beveren and Mr. H.A. Berends (both CanRC) were reappointed as corresponding secretary and treasurer respectively. A number of sub-committees were appointed to review the applications for admission as members. A fairly rigorous meeting schedule was agreed upon:

breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and meetings to continue till 9:00 p.m. with some generous breaks in between.

In his secretarial report Rev. M. Van Beveren remembered the fact that Dr. K. Deddens was disabled by his illness to serve the Mission Committee for the full term. His place was taken by Prof. A. C. Boyd.

New Memberchurches

According to the Constitution churches can be admitted if they meet the following standards (Art. IV1):

- a. faithful adherence to the confession standards mentioned in the basis (i.e. the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity);
- b. acceptance by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches, every member church having one vote.

They must also be recommended as members by two churches who already are members.

After favorable reports from the sub-committees who reviewed the applications the following churches were admitted as new members:

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (North America)

The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijk Gereformeerd)

The Evangelic Presbyterian Church of England and Wales

Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir N.T.T. (Indonesia)

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

The United Reformed Churches in North America.

A number of other interested Churches from Mexico, Australia, East and South Africa, Korea, Cardiff (U.K.), Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Japan were represented by observers. These received the opportunity to introduce their churches to the Conference in various time slots.

The Conference expressed regret over the withdrawal of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. It was noted that the reason given was not disagreement with the ICRC as such but the fact that membership in the ICRC had not benefited the peace and harmony within their own churches.

Major Issues

Overlooking the proceedings of the Conference one could say that the major issues or themes were those of church unity and missions. Besides the Interim Committee which makes all the practical arrangements for the Conferences the only standing committee is the Mission Committee. Not only were these two themes the main items on the agenda but also in many of the informal talks amongst the delegates these were the recurring issues, understandably so since the constitution in Art. III also states these as the purpose of the ICRC.

Church Unity

- Art. III of the constitution begins by stating that "The purpose of the Conference shall be:
1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
 2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches."

It may therefore be expected that the matter of church unity receives due attention at each Conference but opinions may vary as to how far the ICRC can play a role in coming to greater unity.

The Dutch churches (liberated) would like to see the Conference assume a more influential role by discussing "how the member churches can more concretely and effectively utilize the relation they have with each other". They feel that "attention should be given to contacts and exchanges between institutions for the training for the ministry, combined projects in areas such as evangelizing, mission, assistance, as well as consideration of dogmatical and ethical questions". They also proposed that the Conference "bring about a regional cooperation of the member churches in fulfilling their calling to be missionary churches".

However, the consensus of the meeting appeared to indicate that the general preference was to keep the Conference a conference. They can only suggest or recommend certain actions but not "bring about". Concerning regional conferences it was suggested, in line with the 1993 meeting, that "the member churches keep in mind the benefit of regional conferences on particular, timely topics, and plan such conferences when deemed appropriate". This was also in line with the sentiments of the Canadian Reformed Churches expressed in the report of the "Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad" to Synod '95 that "unless a specific need can be cited, there is little justification for such regional conferences."

In order to improve the relationship amongst the member churches it was recommended that whenever matters arise that would affect the relationship to each other, such as a change in their doctrinal basis or ethical practices, the church should inform the interchurch relations committee of the other members concerning the proposal, ask them for the official position of their church and advice and keep them informed on developments in the matter as it is progressively dealt with by the church. This suggestion was also in response to proposals submitted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This same Church also submitted a proposal for unity, a framework for discussion, together with a document outlining "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church". Since some of this material arrived on the late side and because of the significance of this topic it was decided that a special paper on "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church" be prepared for the ICRC 2001, with contributing speeches from both the Presbyterian tradition and the (Continental) Reformed tradition.

Under the heading of "Church Unity" we could also pass on the accepted amendment to the constitution Art. IV, 1.a which now reads: "Those churches shall be admitted as members:

a. who faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed faith." This defines the faith shared by the member churches as the Reformed Faith expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and several versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith, thus making clearer the intent of the original wording.

In light of the purpose of the ICRC to "encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches" the delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of North America also held talks together and presented a positive report of their findings to their sending bodies. Both parties agreed that we must strive for a greater and stronger expression of our unity not only in Seoul, Korea but also at home in Canada. An interim relationship similar to ecclesiastical fellowship may be a wise stepping stone towards future federative unity.

Informal but informative talks were also held with the delegations of the Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

Missions

Some of the activities of the Mission Committee were stagnated due to the disabling illness of Dr. K. Deddens who was the convener of this committee. A Mission Newsletter appeared not as regular as it was intended and neither did it seem to reach all the member churches. Another Mission Committee was appointed with the following mandate:

1. to update information from the member churches regarding missionary activity in general, and also about missionary training and methodology of mission in particular;
2. to ask the respective member churches to organize four different mission conferences, two years after each ICRC, one in the West (Curacao, Surinam, Brazil, Peru), one in Africa (South-Africa, Ghana, Republic of Congo), one in the East (Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan India, Papua New Guinea), and one in Europe (including Eastern Europe). The reports of these conferences have to be sent at least one and a half years before the next ICRC to the Mission Committee;
3. to ask the churches which are working among the Jews to contact one another and to send their report to the Mission Committee at least one and a half years before the next ICRC;

4. to inform the member churches each and every half year about mission work, stating also their needs and strategies in a newsletter;
5. to send the report to the Corresponding Secretary at least one year before the next ICRC.

The Mission Committee intends to publish a bi-annual *Mission Handbook* with all relevant material to fulfil part of this mandate. At the next ICRC a paper is to be presented on work among the Jews, not merely restricted to the Jews living in the state of Israel but focusing on Jews wherever they live.

In two areas mission conferences are already being held, namely in Latin America and in Africa. For the other two areas sending bodies will be approached with the suggestion to organize such mission meetings. The ICRC also decided to have an amount available to assist those who could not afford to attend or are unable to pay the full travel costs.

Topics Presented

Mission also received much attention in two of the papers which were presented. Rev. M.T. Bube (OPC) spoke on the topic of "*Principles of Reformed Missions*". In his presentation he stressed that it has pleased God to entrust to the church the effectual means necessary for His churchgathering work, namely the preaching of the Word. In His Word the elders are fully supplied with all that is necessary for them to carry out this task. He cautioned for becoming dependent on parachurch organizations which ultimately are not responsible to any particular church.

Rev. David John (Free Church of Central India) delivered a paper on "*The Ministry of the Word amongst Asian Religious People (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians)*". Rev. John gave much information on these false religions promoting different ways of achieving salvation over against the one way in Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scriptures. Since many of us throughout the world are confronted with these eastern religions a good discussion followed. Although we must seek to understand where people come from, there is no "special" approach for "special" people. The same full Gospel must be proclaimed to all with compassion and urgency.

Dr. Robert C. Beckett (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland) spoke on "*Biblical Principles for the Relation between Church and State*". He affirmed the total sovereignty of God over all the structures of authority in both secular and ecclesiastical realms. The New Testament does not give approval to any specific form of government. Both church and state are established by God under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and are distinct structures that should peaceably co-exist and support each other.

Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (OPC) spoke on the subject "*Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition*". He addressed two issues, namely the meaning of Pentecost (being baptized with the Holy Spirit) and the cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit. Pentecost has its significance in terms of the history of redemption (*historia salutis*) and not in the ongoing application of salvation (*ordo salutis*). It does not provide a repeatable paradigm event for individual Christian experience. New Testament prophecy does not continue today now that the Canon of the N.T. is complete. In the discussions the need of continuing to be filled with the Holy Spirit was brought up even though Pentecost itself was a once-for-all event.

Dr. Soon Gil Hur (Korean Presbyterian Church) spoke on "*Women in Office, with Particular Reference to 'Deaconesses'*". Eldership is clearly restricted to male members of the church because its task is to exercise authority over the congregation. (1 Timothy 2:12). However, the diaconal office does not involve the exercise of authority. He therefore saw room for female members to be appointed as deaconesses or assistant deacons without being ordained, seeing that women were positively involved in the life of the apostolic church and several of them also in a special category or capacity which could be that of deaconesses. This may be even more urgent in cultures where a strong separation of men and women is expected.

He warned us so that we would not be too shocked if upon visiting Korean churches the following Sunday we would see some women in robes, together with the deacons! Which was indeed the case. (See *Proceedings* for the full text of the speeches.)

Introductions

During the course of the conference observers of the following churches were given the opportunity to introduce their churches to the meeting: the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico, the Lanka Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Reformed Church of Japan, the Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Cardiff (UK), the Taiwan Reformed Presbyterian Church, Church of Christ in Sudan among TIV and the Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India Synod. Representatives of Christian Witness to Israel (London, England), the Institute of Reformed Theological Training (The Netherlands) and Missionary Training Institute (Korea) also received the opportunity to introduce their activity or institutes to the delegates.

The 2001 Conference

The treasurer, Mr. H. A. Berends presented a four-year budget, extending through the next ICRC meeting for a total amount of US\$ 119,000, or less than US\$ 30,000 per year. For our convenience the cost was neatly broken down, showing that for our Churches this would amount to \$ US\$ 4,180.00 for the four years or .082 cents per member per year. Certainly, not insurmountable considering the benefits for others and ourselves!

The next Conference, in 2001 the Lord willing, is to be hosted a little closer at home, namely in the U.S.A. by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Interim Committee in consultation with the hosting church will oversee the arrangements. Rev. M. VanBeveren, the corresponding secretary, and Mr. H.A. Berends, the treasurer were both reappointed.

Praise & Worship Night

Thursday evening we gathered together for the closing exercise. Special guests were the Seoul Shalom Ladies' Chorus whose singing, in Korean and English, delighted the audience. Rev. C. Graham, professor of the Free Church College in Scotland, delivered a message based on Psalm 100:1: "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth" dwelling on the reasons for this joy as given in this Psalm. All thanks and praise was given to the Lord.

Concluding Comments

In conclusion I will say that it was a great privilege to be part of this truly ecumenical event, to represent our churches there, to participate and contribute, and to flavour some of Korean life in the city of Seoul as well as in the Korean Presbyterian Church. It was exciting to be able to preach the Gospel in the downtown Seoul Youngcheon Presbyterian Church (with the help of a translator!) and to experience the communion of saints with so many of a totally different culture.

The Korean hospitality was fantastic. They took excellent care of us realizing that the typical Korean dishes are not everyone's favourite. But with all the variety they provided no one had to go hungry. One day they took us on a sightseeing tour stopping at the construction site of the new seminary (most impressive!), visiting the Independence Commemoration Centre as well as the reconstructed Korean Yong-In Folk Village.

For Dr. N.H. Gootjes it was a bit like returning "home". After all, he had taught at the Korean Seminary in Pusan for nearly 10 years. Once word got around that he was in the country he received frequent visits from past students who clearly were most delighted to see him again. It became very obvious that Dr. Gootjes was and is very much appreciated also in Korea and that they still benefit from the writings he left behind.

During these 11 days in Korea I again became more convinced that the whole exercise of the ICRC is a most valuable event in the promotion of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the gathering of His Church. It at the same time broadens our view on the Lord's work as it takes place throughout the world by many of his faithful servants and churches.

C. Van Spronsen
Surrey, BC, October 30,
1997

****1995** REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE **1995**
TO
STUDY AND DEFEND RCUS POLITY**

The Honorable Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States

Esteemed Fathers and Brothers,

At the 1993 Synod of the Reformed Church in the U.S. the following task was given to your servants: "That Synod form a special committee of five members to study and defend the view of the church and its form of government as held by the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)." (Abstract of the 247th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, page 129, item 13 of the Judicial report.) A preliminary report was presented to the 1994 Synod. Our final report follows:

I. Constitutional Principles of RCUS Church Government

A. THE CONGREGATION - Constitution Sec. 2, Arts. 7-14

1. Art. 7, definition: A congregation is both an organic union and an organization. A congregation is a "body of Christians" (organic) which is "organized agreeably to the provisions of the Constitution of the denomination."

That this is a biblical definition is seen from 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22; Acts 9:31, Acts 11:22. In the latter passage the word "church" is used to describe the organization at Jerusalem which by this time exceeded 8000 members led by 12 apostles, at least seven deacons and an unlisted number of elders. Undoubtedly this "church" seldom, if ever, met as one assembly but existed in local cell groups (Acts 2:46). (See Appendix Document 2, "The Doctrine of the Church," by Rev. Jonathan Merica).

2. Art. 8, congregational organization: The rules for the organization of congregations declares the nature of the congregation to be that of a group of believers organized with their elders and deacons (see Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5) as a member church of a classis. A congregation is united with the whole church through this classical membership.
3. That a Reformed congregation is not properly or permanently "independent" is further explained in subsequent articles of the Constitution by words which place the organization of a congregation under the "approval," "sanction," and "authority" of the classis.
4. Art. 83, classical authority: The proper authority of a classis over its member congregations is carefully stated in Article 83 to include acting as a court of appeal, organizing and determining boundaries of congregations, and resolving questions respecting their ministers.

B. MINISTERS

1. Arts. 27-35, ministers: Ministers are directly amenable to the classes of which their congregations are members. Ministers' credentials are given and held by classes, a pastor's call must be approved by classis before he can move into the charge, and ministers are ordained and installed by classical committees.
2. Biblical evidence for these practices is found in Acts 13:1-5; 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 8:14-17 and Acts 11:22-26. Historical support for classical approval is found in the Church Order of Dordt in Articles 4 and 5.

C. JUDICATORIES

1. Arts. 49-69, judicatories: The RCUS Constitution speaks of higher and lower judicatories. Ruling assemblies of the church are called "judicatories" because they also act as courts in adjudicating church discipline, either as original courts or as courts of appeal.

2. Biblical evidence for such authority in ruling assemblies is found in Acts 15 (note also the sending out of decrees and their submissive reception on the part of the local churches - Acts 16:4). The Church Order of Dordt also empowers ruling assemblies to act as church courts and speaks of major assemblies acting as courts of appeal which decide issues by majority vote (Arts. 30 and 31).

D. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

1. Art. 91, Executive Committee: This article of the RCUS Constitution provides for an "Executive Committee" of classis which facilitates the carrying out of certain limited kinds of classical business by common consent through a "circular letter" between classis meetings. This signifies that a classis as an organized body of churches continues to exist between classis meetings.

We note that the Church Order of Dordt also speaks of a classis functioning between meetings, for example in taking "care of the work which would otherwise be performed by the Consistory," in those places where a consistory has not yet been organized (Art. 40).

2. While provision for an "executive committee" is unique among Reformed and Presbyterian churches, we find other churches establishing "classical interim committees," etc. We also believe there is biblical basis for ruling assemblies continuing their work between meetings.
 - 1) The decrees of the Jerusalem assembly are personally delivered by Paul and Silas as representatives who by this action helped "establish in the faith" the churches they visited (Acts 16:5).
 - 2) The church in Jerusalem sends men to Samaria and later Antioch to establish groups of believers there into churches (Acts 8 and 11).
 - 3) Timothy and Titus are sent by Paul to ordain elders in various cities and churches, i.e., to do authoritative church work beyond the bounds of assembly meetings (Titus 1:5, see also the acts of Paul and Barnabas reported in Acts 14:23). In our view these men act as committees to teach, examine and ordain elders in exercise of the authority of the assemblies that sent them out.
3. In Article 11 of the RCUS Constitution there is also provision for a synodical "Executive Committee" which may present certain limited matters to the synodical delegates for decision by common consent through circular letter.

E. THE DENOMINATION AS CHURCH

1. Art. 95, the whole church: The wording of Article 95 clearly provides that the denomination is one church of which each congregation is an organic member as a local church. RCUS polity sees no conflict between using the word "church" to refer to either the local congregation or to the whole denomination. This contrasts on the one hand with some Presbyterians who say that the presbytery is the church (with local congregations as franchises), and on the other hand with some more congregationalist Reformed who declare that only the local congregation may be called a "church."
2. The scriptural basis for this usage is found in the Bible's use of "church" to refer to the Holy Catholic Church (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:47; 8:3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 12:28; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 1:22; 3:10; 5:23,24,25,27,29,32; Phil 3:6; Col 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 2:12, etc.) as well as to what are today called local congregations (Acts 14:23; 15:41; 16:1; 16:5; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 14:34; Col. 4:15; Rev. 1:4, etc.) Of note in this usage is the reference in Acts 9:31 to the "church (singular) ... throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (the textual variant "churches" has ^{very} weak support), and the parallel use of "church" and "churches" in 1 Cor. 10:32 and 1 Cor. 11:16 to refer to the same entity, the whole "church of God" on earth.

Indeed, the word "church" can be used in a variety of senses. With the exception of Acts 19:39,41 where it simply means a public assembly, the word "church" in Scripture

Some

always refers to a society of Christians or their assembly. It can refer to 1) a society of Christians which meets in a home (Col. 4:15); 2) a society of Christians in the same city (Acts 11:22); 3) a society of Christians in a same nation (Acts 7:38); 4) a society of Christians worldwide (Eph. 5:25); 5) a society of Christians ordained and assembled as an aggregate body of clergy (Acts 15); 6) a society of Christians gathered in the presence of God in their souls (Heb. 12:23) and; 7) a society of Christians gathered for worship (1 Cor. 14:19).

F. THE BINDING NATURE OF ECCLESIASTICAL DECISIONS

1. The Preamble to the Constitution of the RCUS declares that the Constitution itself has "binding authority on all its members, congregations and judicatories."
2. Article 104 of the Constitution of the RCUS declares that only Synod may bind the whole church to an important ordinance such as a creed or constitution. However, in accordance with the same Article, if more than one-third of the classes have rejected the ordinance or amendment, the same is rejected.
3. Support for such binding nature of ecclesiastical decisions is found in Acts 15, Acts 16:4-5 and 1 Cor. 5 (especially vss 4-5). Historical support is also found in Articles 31 and 36 of the Church Order of Dordt.

II. CHURCH POLITY ISSUES IN THE PRESENT DAY

A. INTRODUCTION: We live in an unsettled world of change, even among so-called "conservative" Reformed and Presbyterian churches. It is important to note that the same phenomena which accompanied such change in the past, have been going on again in a number of denominations. Rather than our being taken up by the reactionary forces that often arise when denominations become more liberal, we can and ought to stand firm on the ground of Reformed principles of doctrine and life, and especially church polity. The history of the RCUS itself before the Evangelical & Reformed merger is an excellent example of these phenomena. We should therefore be well aware of the following dangers to biblical church life:

B. **The "True Church."** The true church is properly delineated by the marks of the church as outlined in the Belgic Confession, Article 29. However, for any church or group of churches on earth, or in a nation, or in a locality to say that they alone may be called "true church" fails to understand the fallibility of human beings and of even their churchly organizations. No visible church can claim to exhibit the marks of the church perfectly. Therefore there are levels of purity in earthly churches (see Revelation 2 and 3, 1 Corinthians, and the Westminster Confession, Article 25, Section 4). This means that the church on earth is multiform. However, within this multiformity there is a true uniformity among true believers and their churches. Belgic Confession Article 27 says in part, "We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers.... this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world...."

Therefore making the claim that all "multiformity" is wrong is an error. "Multiformity" must of course be carefully defined. If what is meant is that it makes no difference what one believes as long as it is a sincere belief or makes a claim to be Christian, then the concept would be wrong. This is not the position we hold! Apparently John Calvin would agree. He signed, and encouraged others to sign, the Augsburg Confession, which is not the best expression of Reformed doctrine. For Calvin this was a first step to furthering unity.

In conclusion, it is neither necessary nor proper to deny or obscure the distinctions made between multiformity and uniformity, visible and invisible, and catholicity and unity, where these are properly understood. It is only problematic when one reads into these terms particular definitions which have grown out of a particular

historical ecclesiastical controversy. It is best simply to define the church as the "holy catholic church," which is exactly what the early church fathers did in the Apostles' Creed. The Belgic Confession is properly only giving further definition to this term and applying it to the visible church on earth as the body of Christ in light of the fact that there were many sects and denominations at that time. As Paul said, "There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (Eph. 4:4-5). This understanding of the true church also fits the teaching and usage of our Reformed fathers such as John Calvin and Zacharias Ursinus. (See appendix document #16, entitled, "The True Church," by Rev. Paul Treick, for more discussion of this matter.)

On this background it is legitimate to recognize that Reformed churches which have minor differences of doctrine and practice may exist side by side expressing their unity through sisterly relations while still unable to join in one organized visible body. Therefore we in the RCUS are not embarrassed that some of our pastors have come to us from other historically Reformed and Presbyterian bodies in the United States.

- C. **"Synodicalism."** The tendency of the broader assemblies and higher judicatories to arrogate to themselves more and more authority. This is supported by the more liberal element in the church because they see here an opportunity for their agenda to be put in control, a move seldom possible with grassroots support. Thus the church becomes more hierarchical in practice, even while remaining Presbyterian, Reformed or even Congregational in its theory of church government. However, abuse of a principle does not invalidate that principle. Thus we should not abandon the use of higher judicatories with their proper functions and authority just because they are sometimes abused.
- D. **"Independentism."** A common reaction to the above movement is the development of theoretical independentism among a denomination's conservatives, which may or may not be carried out in practice. Interestingly, the conservative remnant is sometimes more bent toward uniformitarianism because of multiformity in the body it has left, even while proclaiming an independentist polity. Certainly the pre-merger RCUS is a good example of a growing independentism as the General Synod and bureaucracy grew liberal in the early 20th century. By God's grace the whole Eureka Classis separated from the Evangelical & Reformed merger and did not alter its constitutional Reformed/Presbyterian polity.
- E. **"Retreat into Fundamentalism."** Doctrinally, the conservatives in a body becoming liberal often lapse into fundamentalism along with congregationalism. The phenomena of premillennialism and abstinence "piety," along with Arminian and anti-covenantal theology often characterize the more conservative congregations in liberal denominations. There are numbers of folks who have been immunized against the Calvinism taught in the Reformed creeds held by their denominations or former denominations.
- F. **"The seminary tail wags the denominational dog."** Historically, seminaries tend to lead the descent into a broader, less biblical theology. This is often accompanied by a tendency of the bureaucracy, of which seminaries sometimes are integral parts, to lead rather than serve the denomination. The agenda of the bureaucracy then tends to be imposed upon the denomination through the synod which supposedly controls that bureaucracy. While rejecting bureaucracy and centralized authority, we must not abandon good Reformed/Presbyterian polity and the need for an educated ministry.
- G. **The Role of Women in Church Government.** The role of women is clearly and biblically defined in our Constitution and practice. The Bible is not confused in its teaching that women are to be in submission to their own husbands (a principle violated when women vote in congregation meetings) and to the men of the church (1 Cor. 11:3). Discrimination of roles is not to the detriment of the either sex. Women are not only prevented by biblical teaching from holding office as ministers, elders and deacons, they are also protected from the evils of

societal competition, military service and destitution in old age (see 1 Timothy 2; 1 Cor. 14:34-35, and the fact that only the "widows indeed" are to be supported by the church, 1 Tim. 5). For further information on this subject, see appendix document #13, an article by Rev. R. Grossmann on women voting in congregation meetings.

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL GOVERNMENT IN THE RCUS

A. **MUTUAL SUBMISSION** - this principle is anti-hierarchical and is essential to biblical government. It prevents the evil results of both synodicalism and independentism, both of which tend to have an hierarchical view of authority.

1. The constitutional (and biblical) relationship among the congregation and ruling assemblies is one of mutual submission. The consistory has no more business usurping the function of the congregation in electing the biblically called for officers (of which none are elected by any judicatory) than the congregation has of deciding church discipline, or ordaining officers that have been elected, since these are the functions of the elders.
2. "Mutual submission" means that each assembly and class of officer in the church **submits** certain functions to other assemblies and classes of officer willingly while carrying out its own God-given function. The congregation submits local oversight to the consistory, general oversight to the classis, etc., while the classis and consistory submit the election of officers and certain other votes to the congregation.
3. "Mutual submission" means also what it says. I am in submission to you at the same time you are in submission to me. We function to watch over each other's faith, life and doctrine without either of us having an hierarchical authority. The biblical requirement for mutual submission is found in: 1 Cor. 16:15-16; Eph. 5:21; Deut. 17:18-20; 1 Pet. 5:5. It is expressed succinctly in Article 84 of the Church Order of Dordt: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons."
4. The danger in reactionary church government is that synods will act and be treated like popes ("Synod has spoken") and local churches which theoretically reject broader church government authority soon turn into miniature papacies of the local pastor or other leader. In both cases mutual submission is thrown to the winds. It is our conviction that not only individuals are required to join themselves to the true church (Belgic Confession Article 28) but that by the same principle congregations are obligated to join together for mutual oversight under a biblical form of broader church government.
5. In Reformed church government the fact that submission is mutual does not mean that the authority expressed (which comes from God) through spiritual councils, classes and synods is not real. The authority which operates at a synod, for instance, is the authority of the pastors and elders collectively exercised. This is exactly what happens in Acts 15 (see verse 2 - the matter was sent up not to the "delegates" but to the "apostles and elders," who then sent decrees of their decision to the churches).

B. SUBSCRIPTION TO THE CREEDS

1. The RCUS form of subscription for ministers requires them to "embrace without reservation" the creed of the church as "an exact summary of the system of truth of Holy Scripture" and to promise "to teach and defend the same in good faith and reject all doctrines conflicting therewith."
2. This contrasts somewhat with Presbyterian forms of subscription which speak of embracing "the system of doctrine contained in the Confession."
 - a. Historically this Presbyterian subscription is often taken in such a way as to allow "scruples," that is doubts about or differences from some of the points of teaching in

the Confession (these differences are required to be stated and then judged by the assembly ordaining the candidate).

- b. Such scruples are not allowed under the RCUS form of subscription which requires subscription to all the points of doctrine in the confession. (It needs to be noted that there are Presbyterians who would argue that their form of subscription also requires point by point agreement with the Confession.)
3. This point by point agreement required by the RCUS form of subscription (and other Reformed forms as well) does not place the Confession on the same level as Scripture. That the Confession is received as a subordinate standard, not on a par with the authority, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, is clear from Articles 177 and 178 of the Constitution of the RCUS.

C. COVENANT CONFIRMATION

1. The RCUS practices covenant "confirmation" as commended by John Calvin (Institutes Book 4, Chapter 19, Sections 4,12,13). This is done in carrying out the biblical responsibility of covenant family and church to bring up children as Christians by "feeding them with the discipline and admonition of God" (literal translation of Eph. 6:4).
2. Children of the covenant have the great advantage of growing up in the church and under the teaching and authority of Scripture (Acts 2:39; Rom. 3:1). Therefore confession of faith is for them not optional but is a God-given responsibility. (They are of course to be admonished that their confession must reflect the true faith of their hearts, and therefore that they must wait upon God to confirm His word to them.)
3. The Spiritual Council is charged with the examination of candidates for confirmation as to the reality of their confession and walk as Christians (RCUS Constitution Article 193).
4. In order to carry out this responsibility the RCUS jealously trains its children in the doctrines of the Bible and the Heidelberg Catechism, requiring memorization of the Catechism and knowledge of the history and meaning of God's redeeming work on earth. In the RCUS the task of teaching catechism classes is a required function of the Minister of the Word. (See RCUS Constitution Article 192 for these provisions.)

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Synod of the RCUS consider placing the Consistory outside of the list of judicatories in Article 49 of the Constitution since consistories include Deacons who are not empowered by Scripture or the Constitution to judge cases of discipline.
2. That the Synod of the RCUS consider placing in the Constitution of the RCUS a definition of voting members of a congregation as male members who have reached the age of twenty-one. / This would be in accordance with the 1978 decision of the Eureka Classis concerning the biblical teaching on women voting.
3. That the Synod of the RCUS consider requiring the same subscription to the Confession of the Church on the part of Licentiates, Elders and Deacons as is required of Ministers.
4. That Synod adopt this report.
5. That the Committee be dissolved.

*or male heads
of households*

Respectfully submitted,

H. Hart -Chairman, P. Treick, J. West, R. Grossmann-Secy, J. Merica, J. Heerema

[Papers mentioned in this report will be available from their authors at Synod meeting]

Minutes of the Meeting of the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee and the Canadian Reformed Churches Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, held October 18, 1995 in Spokane, WA.

1. **Opening:** Upon mutual agreement, Rev. Norman Hoeflinger was appointed moderator. It was agreed that one member from each Committee would make minutes, and they would be exchanged to ensure accuracy. Rev. Hoeflinger read from Ps. 48 and Ps. 87 and led in prayer.

2. **Attendance:**
Representing the RCUS:
 Rev. Norman C. Hoeflinger
 Rev. Norman Jones,
 Rev. Terry Jorgensen.
Representing the Canadian Reformed Churches :
 Rev. Eric Kampen
 br. Apko Nap
 Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen
 (Rev. Bob Hargrove, minister of a small independent Reformed Church in Spokane seeking possible affiliation with the RCUS, who had arranged the meeting place, was present as an auditor).

3. **Adoption of the Agenda**
 An agenda as previously suggested by the Can. Ref. brothers was adopted to serve as the basic guideline for the meeting.

4. **Becoming acquainted**
 Some personal histories and backgrounds were related.
 Rev. Kampen gave a survey to place the Canadian Reformed Churches in historic perspective. This survey began with the Synod of Dort (1618), touched on the reversal of Dort's principles in 1816, the Secession of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886, the Union of 1892, and the events leading up the Liberation of 1944. The doctrinal controversy concerning election and covenant and the meaning of baptism was highlighted. With respect to 1944 it was stressed that the key concern had been the hierarchical actions of a Synod. Brief explanation was also given as to the reason why the immigrants did not join the CRC in the early 1950's due to the CRC's sympathy for the "Synodical" churches, and why the early attempts to be part of the Protestant Reformed Church had to be abandoned due to their declaration in 1951 concerning the covenant and election.

 In discussing the events leading up the Liberation of 1944 it became apparent that the RCUS Synods makes various position statements about current issues, like women in the military, abortion, women's voting, six day creation. In the Can. Ref. Churches there are no such declarations. Churches live by the accepted Three Forms of Unity and see no need to make statements about matters that can clearly be deduced either from Scripture or the Confessions.

Rev. Hoeflinger gave a survey to place the Reformed Church in the United States in historic perspective. His survey began in the late 1600's, relating how the churches had been made up of German immigrants. In the early 1700's these churches had been under the supervision of Classis Amsterdam. After the Revolution of 1776, like many other church groups, they became independent from churches on the continent. The late 1800's was marked by an increase in liberalism. Only the Eureka Classis refused to join in a union in 1934 between the Reformed Church and the Evangelical Synod of North America (Lutheran). This small group of churches was shaped over the years by the influence of Kohlbrugge's views about justification and sanctification which became more balanced by Presbyterian influence from students who received their education at Westminster. There was also a strong continental Reformed influence via men like Van Til and Stonehouse. The fact that the RCUS does not have its own training for the ministry, but has ministers who have come from various backgrounds also has led to a greater diversity than is seen in the Can. Ref. Churches. The overview pictured clearly the struggle to grow in being a truly Reformed Church.

5. Specific points.

A. The Confessions

1. It was noted that upon re-adopting the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, some changes were made by the RCUS which the CanRC do not have. The following differences (taken from Abstract 94.19, already adopted by the 75th Session of the Eureka Classis 94.61) were discussed

a. *Belgic Confession*

XV Change "baptisms" to "regeneration" after "eradicated even by".

The motivation for change had been clarification. It was agreed though that apparently the context of the article had been overlooked, namely, a rejection of Rome's teaching. In effect there was no need for change. The change, however, does not teach something that is untrue.

XXIX & XXX change "punishing" to "chastening".

The motivation had again been clarification. It was felt that the term "punishing" was too negative. God chastises his children, but punishes the unbeliever. It was noted that the present Can.RC translation has "correcting and punishing" in art. 29 and "disciplined" in art. 30. Though there *appear* to be differences, in *essence* there is agreement.

b. *Canons of Dort*

I Para. 4, also III-IV, art. 6,7. Replace "the light of nature " with "his innate understanding" cf. III-IV, art. 4, replace "light" with "understanding".

III-IV art. 5 Replace ""in the same light are we to consider the law of the decalogue, delivered by God to His peculiar people, the Jews, by the hands of Moses" with "Neither can the decalogue delivered by God to His peculiar people, the Jews, by the hand of Moses, save men."

The motive again was clarification, especially in reaction to possible misunderstanding due to the ideas of the Enlightenment. It was agreed that in the historic context the original wording was understandable, since the Canons were written before the Enlightenment. The changes did not affect the essence of the articles.

c. *The RCUS Executive Committee proposed the following additional wording changes to the B.C.*

Art. XXIV. In the first sentence, replace "regenerates" with "sanctifies".

The motivation again had been clarification especially versus the Arminian concept where faith is seen as the cause of regeneration rather than the fruit of regeneration. The Confessions are not rigid in the use of terms like regeneration, conversion, repentance. The strict ordo salutis is a later development in theology. After some discussion, it was agreed that it was a questionable improvement.

In reviewing the various points, it became clear that there was not any substantial difference. The main concern in the changes had been clarification. It was not considered necessary that as sister federations we have exactly the same wording in the versions of the confessions that we use, as long as they agree in essence.

2. Questions of interpretation of the Confessions

- a. With respect to the question of Creation, the general stand of both churches is that we should accept the creation of the world in six days, as taught in Genesis 1.
- b. With respect to Sabbath Observance, it was noted that in the RCUS there is generally only one worship service per Sunday, while the Can. Ref. have two. The RCUS however also uses the Sunday for Sunday School activities. According to the Constitution of the RCUS those who profane the Sabbath are worthy of censure (Art. 113) and traditionally membes have not worked. It was acknowledged that some work due to economic pressure. Further, it is not uncommon for people to go out for dinner on Sunday. It was pointed out that in the Can. Ref. Churches censure would be applied to those who take jobs (besides the essential services like policing, health care) that would require them to work on Sundays.
- c. A discussion on the relationship between Covenant and Election revealed that there are various opinions in the RCUS. Though there may be widespread agreement in the Can. Ref. Churches on this matter, no one is bound beyond the confessions.

- d. The Can. Ref. brs. could express much appreciation for the document of the RCUS *Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity*. The comments re: the Church and Church government give good insight into the thinking in the RCUS about these matters. In response to the stereotype that the Can. Ref. believe they are the only true church, it was pointed out that bodies like the Free Reformed Church and the Independent Ref. Churches are considered as true churches. Concern was expressed by the Can. Ref. brs. about the lack of attention paid to the part about the "false church" in the aforementioned study. It appeared that the RCUS gives more leeway in considering which bodies should be considered as unfaithful.

B. The function of the Confession--subscription and discipline

1. *Confessional Membership*: both churches require its officers to subscribe to the confessions. As for the members, the form for profession in the CanRC asks if one believes the doctrine of the word of God as summarized in the confessions, while in the RCUS those who profess their faith are asked specifically if they believe the doctrines as taught in the Heidelberg Catechism. Since the B.C. and C.O.D. have only recently been readopted, this form may be revised to include them. As far as disagreement with the confessional documents, there did not seem to be any trouble with that in the RCUS.
2. *Discipline*: Both strive to apply discipline. The RCUS is growing in applying stricter discipline. As for confessional deviation, a RCUS minister was defrocked when he questioned a part of the Catechism. Practically, both churches apply discipline on its members more for unchristian lifestyle than unchristian doctrine at the present time.

C. Church Polity

1. *Hierarchy Autonomy*

With respect to the impression of hierarchy in RCUS church government, it was made clear that this is indeed an impression only. There is definitely a presbyterian element in the concept of the regional church. Many safe-guards are in place to prevent hierarchy. The RCUS did not seem to have a problem with hierarchy.

In response to RCUS concern that the Can. R.C. stress autonomy too much it was pointed out that the stress on autonomy was not meant to mean independentism, but as a reaction against hierarchy. It was pointed out that this was a principle since Dort, in reaction to Rome.

2. *Control of Pulpit*

In the RCUS, ministers are answerable to Classis. They are not members of the local congregation. The minister, however, must have consent of the consistory before another minister can be admitted to preach. In Canadian. Ref. churches, the minister is a member of the local congregation. The right to discipline belongs to the local consistory, with the concurring advice of classis and deputies regional Synod. Though on paper there may appear to be difference, when things are worked out in practice there is much similarity.

3. *Admission to the Lord's Supper.*

In the Can. Ref. Churches the consistory controls who goes to the Lord's Supper. Art. 61 specifies that only members who have confessed the Reformed faith are allowed to attend. It also uses the practice of travel attestations. The RCUS does guard the table, and all who attend must receive permission from the elders. More latitude is allowed in that confession of the Reformed faith is not necessarily required of visitors. It was noted though that this is more a *theoretical* problem rather than a *practical* one. There were cases in the RCUS where visitors were denied the Lord's Supper. Those who did not hold the Reformed faith would not very likely attend a reformed worship service nor seek to attend the table if they did happen to attend.

6. **Goal of contact**

It was agreed that the immediate goal of contact was that of ecclesiastical fellowship and not merger, although if opportunity ever presented itself, merger would certainly be desirable. The rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as used by the Can. Ref. Churches were briefly reviewed. There was not much need for discussion as these rules are essentially the same as those of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, with whom the RCUS already has a sister church relationship.

The RCUS at this time is considering working towards some sort of closer relationship with all NAPARC churches.

Concern was expressed about Can. Ref. contact with the OPC. A breaking off of ties with the OPC or making a declaration that it was a false church would have serious implications on a possible relationship with the RCUS.

7. **Miscellaneous**

A number of issues were briefly discussed, like: Theonomy, Evangelism procedures, attitude toward parachurch ministries like Bible leagues, use of alcoholic beverages, attitude toward smoking, amusements, TV/movies, eschatology, constitutions of local churches, apologetics, divorce/remarriage, and Bible versions. Some surprise was expressed about the fact that there was not a separate Chair of Apologetics at the Can. Ref. Seminary. It was explained that this topic was at present covered at other places in the curriculum, and that in future it might be added as a separate discipline. On the whole, no differences of sentiment were expressed that give reason for concern about the various issues.

It was agreed that it might be a good idea that we prepare articles for each other's publications so that the membership at large can become more informed about our respective churches.

8. **Closing**

All present expressed their joy at the good meeting we could have together. The atmosphere was cordial and brotherly. It was reason for marvel and gratitude that despite having separate existence and history since the time of the Reformation, we were still so similar, not only in our confessional position but also in our practices.

Rev. Van Spronsen read Ps. 133 and Ephesians 4:1-16 and led in thanksgiving prayer.

Prepared by:
Rev. E. Kampen

1. To prepare a Press Release of the meeting for Clarion
2. To send a delegate to the next Synod of the RCUS
3. To appoint someone to prepare an article for the Reformed Herald to acquaint RCUS members with the Can. Ref. Churches.

REPORT on VISIT TO 250th SYNOD OF THE RCUS, May 21 -23, 1996, Eureka, S.D.

By: Rev. C. Van Spronsen as observer on behalf of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad.

Introduction

After some consultation with other members of the sub-committee on the RCUS it was decided that I would attend their Synod for two of the three days, namely Wednesday and Thursday, May 22 and 23. It still meant an absence of four days since it took a full day travel both ways via Bellingham, Seattle, Denver, Bismarck and a two-hour drive to Eureka, SD. The first day I missed was mainly taken up by elections and other preliminaries as well as committee work. A special Worship Service, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the RCUS was held on Wednesday evening.

One was made to feel very welcome in their midst. They provided transportation from the airport in Bismarck (100 mi. from Eureka!), as well as accommodation with a family of the local congregation, and expressed their thankfulness and appreciation for our presence. An opportunity was given to address their assembly. It was a heartwarming experience to be in the midst of this brotherhood with whom we have so much in common in spite of having lived separate lives for several centuries! Allow me to highlight some of the items on the agenda.

Session Wednesday, May 22

Directory of Worship

It is the practice that each congregation sends two delegates, if at all possible. The result was that 66 delegates were present from 36 Churches. In this session there was a lively discussion on the revisions to the "Directory of Worship". Since the last Synod had (re)adopted the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as their doctrinal standards besides the Heidelberg Catechism this had consequences for the liturgical forms in the "Directory of Worship". They were now included in the Subscription Form for officebearers but were they also to be added to the "Form for Public Profession of Faith"? The majority felt this to be desirable since the move was to be a more confessional Church. There were striking similarities between the argumentation used for or against to those we are hearing in our own circles. The final result was that they will be included in order that the membership will also be properly instructed in all three forms of unity.

In the discussions Scriptures were frequently consulted and one noted the desire to be a stronger Church confessionally as well as more unified.

Women in the Military

A second topic discussed that day was "Women in the Military", especially with a view to conscription. The standing committee came out strong by stating that Scriptures do not warrant nor in any way authorize to conscript women in combat roles. Women are to be protected for the tasks assigned to them by Scriptures, such as 1 Tim. 2:15. A lengthy discussion developed about the difference between the military in the O.T. (mainly combatant) and that of today, including peacekeeping, nursing etc. Synod decided to state that women are not to be

conscripted in combat role.

Ecumenical Report

Not all of the reports were made available to the observers and visitors so that at times it was difficult to establish what they were voting on. It did appear that a request from the Christian Reformed Church to enter into discussions with them was turned down even though both are members of the NAPARC.

Rev. Jack Peterson addressed the body as fraternal delegate of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is interesting to note that within the framework of fraternal relations "essential theological issues which separate our denominations" will continue to be discussed. "These talks should determine 1) which differentiating issues are essential and which should be a matter of liberty of conscience, and 2) how those issues which are essential, scriptural disagreements might be resolved." At the same time it is evident that there is an enduring, living and historical relationship between the OPC and the RCUS and that therefore they are also very interested in the progress of our contacts with the OPC.

A congratulatory letter was received from our sister churches in the Netherlands. Due to their Synod meeting the same time it was impossible to send a delegation. Synod decided to send a delegate to Holland (if it would still be in time to visit the Dutch Synod.

That same afternoon I was given the opportunity to address the Synod. They decided to send one observer to the 1998 Canadian Reformed Synod in Fergus, ON. It was made clear that our contact and interest was much appreciated as also a positive report was given about the meeting of both Interchurch Committees in October 1995.

There appeared to be some frustration with the many contacts that are being established while very few were represented at this Synod. The Committee was asked to study the possibility of establishing relationships with various Reformed churches at differing levels of fellowship as well as formulate guidelines and a philosophy of ecumenical relationships with respect to when and how the RCUS will pursue contact with other denominations.

One certainly receives the impression that these contacts are taken seriously and that differences or questionable practices are certainly being discussed.

250th Anniversary

A special Worship Service was conducted on Wednesday evening commemorating and celebrating "250 Years of God's Covenant Mercies". The service was conducted by Rev. Chester Ploeger, a retired previous minister of Eureka while the Rev. Norman C. Hoeflinger, the oldest active pastor serving an RCUS congregation, delivered the sermon on Hebrews 13:8 under the theme: "RCUS: Church of Jesus Christ".

A commemorative book entitled, "You Shall Be My People" was for the first time available at this Synod. It is a hard-back 240 page volume filled with interesting and important information about the RCUS, edited by the Revs. R. Grossman and N. Hoeflinger.

There were serious concerns about Rev. Hoeflinger's health since he had been diagnosed as having lung and brain cancer and had just begun treatments.

SESSION THURSDAY, MAY 23

Appeal

A discussion concerning an appeal re: the jurisdiction of the Executive Committee (art. 91 Constitution) proved interesting in showing how this aspect of their Church Polity functions. This Executive Committee has a similar function to our Church Visitors. Clearly they are not to judge in judicial matters and were reprimanded for going beyond the powers mandated them by the Constitution when they did express their judgment in a conflict.

Financial Affairs

Theological Students receive financial assistance upto \$ 7,500.-- for tuition fees and books at seminaries recommended and supported by the Synod of the RCUS. Some discussion arose as to what choices such students have. Most appear to study at either of the Westminster Seminaries (Philadelphia or Escondido) or at M.A.R.S.

They do not maintain a separate Superannuation Fund but Synod itself holds a Ministerial Relief Fund granting benevolent assistance to retired ministers and their widows. Synod itself approves the varying amounts paid out to these individuals.

A fair amount of time is spent on financial matters since the full Synod approves every item of the assessments as well as all the traveling costs of the delegates.

The new Interchurch Relations Committee consists of: R. Potter (convener), F. Meidinger, T. Jorgensen, D. Stelpstra, N. Hoeflinger and E. Ochsner.

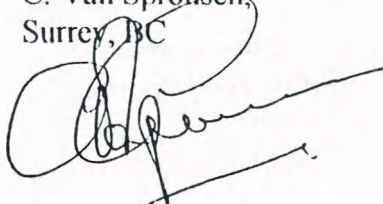
Closing

Around midnight the assembly came to a grinding halt with still 31 ministers and 28 elders present, apparently not an unusual time and that while the morning sessions begin at 8:00 a.m.! The 251st Synod is scheduled for May 19, 1997 in Sacramento, CA.

Although many more matters were dealt with which you will find in the Minutes of this gathering let the above suffice as a report from undersigned as an observer. (By the way, the RCUS has its own web page: <http://www.geocities.com/heartland/1136/rcus.htm>)

I was very much impressed by the Scriptural and reformed way of dealing with the matters that were on the agenda. Often Scriptures were consulted. There was a strong desire to implement reformed church polity. In spite of their crammed schedule they still took time for morning devotions and prayer as well as warm fellowship at the coffee and meal breaks. It is my impression that we are here dealing with a faithful Church of Jesus Christ cherishing the reformed heritage in much the same way as we do. May the Lord bless our contacts and grant that we may receive opportunities to express our unity in more intensive ways.

C. Van Spronsen,
Surrey, BC



REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

Inter-church Relations Committee

**Rev. Ron Potter, Chairman
47 South Church St.,
Carbondale, PA 18407
(717)282-6400**

October 20, 1997

The Committee On Relations With Churches Abroad,
The Canadian Reformed Churches,
Attention: Rev. Eric Kampen,
7949-202A St., Langley, B.C. V2Y 1W8

Dear Rev. Kampen:

Greetings in the name of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

It is a with great joy that I convey to you the formal action of the 251st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States with respect to the Canadian Reformed Churches namely, to invite you to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister-church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship with us.

As you are well aware, a series of several meetings have taken place between our Church and your Churches beginning in the Fall of 1987, together with the occasional exchange of observers at our respective Synods. It is the conviction of the Reformed Church in the United States, as a result of our discussions together and mutual observations, that there are no obstacles to our entering into a formal relationship of fraternal ecclesiastical fellowship. Therefore this invitations is extended with the hope and prayer that it will be accepted and that together, in the years remaining before our Lord's return, we may have the joy of fellowship and mutual service in our Lord's vineyard.

I have included, for your information, a copy of the 1997 report of the summary of actions taken by the 251st Synod of the RCUS as submitted to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and would draw your attention to the proposed action taken with respect to confessional church membership vows and the subscription vows for office bearers. It is expected that these will be ratified by the Classes in the Spring of 1998.

Also I have enclosed two Abstracts of the 251st Synod of the RCUS for your additional information as well as a current listing of RCUS Churches.

Yours in Christ's service,


Rev. Ron Potter



