

X ART 49  
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and b-882

**Report to GENERAL SYNOD NEERLANDIA 2001  
from the COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL WEB-SITE**

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit our report to General Synod Neerlandia 2001, as mandated by General Synod Fergus 1998.

**1. COMMITTEE MANDATE**

**A. Background**

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise reported to General Synod Fergus 1998:

"The requests we received for material taken from the *Book of Praise* in a format other than the paper format we currently have, leads us to suggest that Synod appoint a church to develop and maintain a formal web page of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches."

On the basis of this report, General Synod Fergus 1998 concluded:

"Synod concurs with the Committee to make available the Book of Praise in an electronic format and to develop and maintain a formal presence on the internet. Consideration must be directed to the matter of copyright and the matter of cost. Instead of appointing a particular church to maintain the web-page, several brothers who are competent in these matters can be appointed for this purpose."

**B. Mandate**

General Synod Fergus 1998 appointed this committee

"for the purpose of creating and maintaining an official web page for the Canadian Reformed Churches with the following mandate:

- a. to serve the churches by creating and maintaining an official web page which would contain official and semi-official materials that reflect the life of the churches, are of benefit to the membership, and of assistance to her witness in this world;
- b. to report to the next General Synod regarding the activities and noticeable benefits of this web page." (Acts, Art. 140)

**2. COMMITTEE FUNCTIONING**

**A. Communication**

The geographic distances between committee members have made it difficult for the committee to meet in person. In order to fulfil our mandate, the committee has met a few times in person, and has made use of conference calls by telephone. Most of our discussions, however, have been (appropriately) via email. On the whole this has proved to be an effective means of communication amongst committee members, although this can occasionally lengthen the decision making process.

**B. Distribution of tasks**

Two of the committee members possess a high level of technical expertise, and internally our committee agreed that these brothers would focus on the technical aspects, whereas the other two members of the committee focused more on the administrative and content aspects. The committee would have been more productive had there been more members with advanced technical ability, since much of the work needed to be done by the technical personnel.

The committee has also on occasion sought the advice and assistance of other individuals from among the federation to perform specific tasks for the committee. In this way the committee sought to utilize the talents of other members of our churches, and spread the work-load.

### 3. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

#### A. Technical Setup

##### 1. *Internet Service Provider*

The services of a local Internet Service Provider (ISP) called "BBS42" in Guelph have been used. This has proven to be reasonably priced and reliable.

However, because of the services we are using (mail redirects, cgi-bin scripts, etc) the existing service agreement we have with BBS42 is not adequate. Relatively frequent changes to email redirects, the lack of mailing list functionality (currently provided by one of the committee members), and use of a search engine require additional functionality. We have investigated other full service ISPs and are not able to obtain the levels of functionality we need at a reasonable cost. BBS42 has offered us a co-location service option whereby we operate a separate server on BBS42's premises. (See further details about cost under 3.F.2 & recommendation under 4.C.)

##### 2. *Domain name*

In order to have something short, memorable, and reflective of our church federation, our preferred choice for a domain name was [www.carc.org](http://www.carc.org) (an acronym for **C**anadian and **A**merican **R**eformed **C**hurches). Since this was unavailable, the committee registered the following domain name for the web-site: [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org).

##### 3. *Email*

As part of the arrangement with our ISP, the committee was able to offer "permanent" email addresses to all ministers in our federation, of the type: [ministername@canrc.org](mailto:ministername@canrc.org) (which redirects email to their existing personal email account). Feedback from the ministers about this arrangement has been positive.

##### 4. *Presentation*

The committee has endeavoured to maintain a standard format throughout the web-site, one that is aesthetically pleasing, functional, easy to navigate, and compatible with a wide range of web browsers.

#### B. General direction

##### 1. *Web-sites of local churches and organizations*

Many local churches and organizations in our federation have their own web-sites. In line with the principles of Reformed church polity, the committee felt that the official web-site should focus on content that is of common concern to the churches, and should not stifle local initiatives by seeking to replace them.

##### 2. *Target users*

In line with the mandate, the committee has endeavoured to provide information on the web-site that would especially serve the needs of three main target groups:

- a) Members of the Canadian and American Reformed churches
- b) Members of other Reformed churches
- c) People unfamiliar with our churches

##### 3. *Content*

The committee has focussed on presenting information with official and semi-official materials, rather than pointing to existing information on the Internet by means of links.

#### C. Current content

##### 1. *Introduction to the Canadian and American Reformed Churches*

An existing unofficial web-site for our federation (made previously by one of the committee members) was revised and integrated as part of the official web-site. This section introduces our federation by providing basic information about the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. The content is largely based on a booklet produced by the Reformed Evangelism Taskforce, and

includes information about our basis in Scripture and the Reformed confessions, Reformed church government, church history, mission work, and church life.

## **2. Online resources**

### **a) The Book of Praise**

The complete text of the creeds and confessions, complete with words of introduction, and links to all the Scripture proof-texts, is available online as part of the official web-site. The church order is also accessible in entirety. The committee is still working on making all the liturgical forms and prayers available online, as well as the complete text of the psalms and hymns. The committee regrets that at the time of writing it has not yet completed this part of its mandate, but has been hindered by various obstacles (see details below).

### **b) The Acts of Synod**

The site contains the complete text of the Acts of Synod Fergus 1998. The electronic text of the Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1995 has been obtained, but work needs to be done in formatting it before it can be placed online.

## **3. Church directory**

The site contains an online church directory arranged by geographical location. Every church of the federation is listed, along with the location and times of worship, the name and email address of the minister, and a link to the local church web-site where appropriate. This is one of the most popular parts of the existing web-site.

## **4. Church news**

Church news and events are listed as soon as they become available, such as announcements about the calling of ministers, results of classical exams, as well as special events and lectures at the Theological College. Site statistics confirm that this is the most frequently accessed part of the web-site. Feedback has confirmed that this is much appreciated by members throughout the bond of churches, in order to stay up to date be up to date with church news.

## **5. Theological College**

An existing web-site for the Theological College (made previously by one of the committee members) has been improved and integrated as part of the official web-site. The content is largely based on the official handbook for the Theological College, and has been reviewed and approved by the Senate of the Theological College. This portion of the web-site includes information about the history and operation of the Theological College, the Senate, programs of study, admissions information, and names of the current students, as well as contact information for the staff and faculty.

## **6. Search engine**

This facility enables visitors to the web-site to search the entire site (including the creeds and confessions) by key words.

## **D. Future Content**

The committee has given consideration to including content such as articles from various church magazines, lectures and speeches, press releases of the broader assemblies, past Acts of Synod, sermons, and links to official web-sites of Canadian Reformed organizations. These have not yet been included, since the committee wanted to give priority to completing its mandate concerning the online publication of the *Book of Praise*.

## **E. Obstacles**

The committee has had difficulty obtaining the complete and correct text of the *Book of Praise*. This has hindered our progress in completing this part of our mandate.

Given the revisions to the *Book of Praise* being proposed to this Synod by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, the committee also foresees that the material published on the web-site will soon need to be revised, to keep it in line with the officially adopted version of the *Book of Praise*.

## F. Other Considerations

### 1. Copyright

The committee has determined that the laws of copyright that apply to printed material apply also to material published on the internet. Any electronic reproduction of the *Book of Praise* legally requires permission from the copyright holders. The committee has obtained permission from the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise to publish the contents of the *Book of Praise* on the internet. Since the *Book of Praise* is copyrighted, all material from the *Book of Praise* is published online along with a copyright notice practically identical to the copyright notice in the printed editions of the *Book of Praise*, thus legally preventing unauthorized duplication of its contents. The committee has endeavoured to ensure that the online version of the *Book of Praise* is identical in all respects to the printed version most recently approved by General Synod.

### 2. Cost

Costs have been limited to some minimal travel expenses, and the cost of domain name registration and internet service. The cost of maintaining the current web-site is \$350 per year, since the existing content consists of only text and graphics. The committee has considered publishing audio versions of sermons and speeches, but this would increase the cost significantly (up to ten times the current amount) due to the extra resources required, and for this reason the committee has decided not to pursue this as yet. With the current arrangement, the cost of developing and maintaining the web-site has been minimal.

However, given the services we are currently using, the fees for maintaining the present site are expected to increase by at least \$200 in the next year. Furthermore, as noted under 3.A.1, the current arrangement with our Internet Service Provider does not adequately meet our needs. The best solution at this time appears to be that the committee purchase suitable hardware that will meet our needs, and enter into a co-location agreement with our Internet Service Provider where the systems will reside on their premises and the committee will provide all operations. The approximate costs are as follows:

Capital costs of hardware:

Server (includes disks) \$1800 (initial purchase)

Switched power supply \$300 (initial purchase)

Operating costs

Hydro and bandwidth \$600 (per year)

We can reasonably expect the hardware to last 2-3 years, so the capital costs of the hardware are about \$58-\$87 per month, and the operating costs are about \$50 per month. The total cost would be approximately in the range of \$1320 to \$1680 per year. These costs are only estimates, since they were obtained at the time of writing this report, and could be subject to change when they are actually incurred.

## G. Feedback

### 1. Site statistics

The total number of web pages viewed per month currently averages about 10,000. Visits to the news page account for approximately half of these page views.

### 2. Existing content

Feedback about the existing content has been almost exclusively positive. Aside from helpful comments identifying typographical errors, the committee has received much encouragement by word of mouth and by email from various members throughout the bond of churches.

Appreciation has especially been expressed for the regular church news, online church directory, and various parts of the *Book of Praise*.

### 3. Suggestions

The committee has received several requests to have the entire *Book of Praise* available, a project which we have been working on as part of our mandate anyway. The committee has also received several suggestions to include sermons on the web-site.

#### **4. Questions**

The committee has received a variety of questions by email from sources both within and outside our church federation. These questions have ranged from requests for further information about the *Book of Praise* to theological questions and requests for advice on pastoral issues. The committee has responded to such questions by answering them as best as possible, or by redirecting them to other committees or qualified individuals in our churches.

#### **H. Noticeable Benefits**

The committee has identified several noticeable benefits of the existing web-site:

##### **1. For members of our own churches**

The news page enables members to keep in touch with news and events throughout the bond of churches, fostering an interest and concern in the well-being of the entire federation. The church directory is especially useful to those who are looking for information for local churches, their places and times of worship, or contact information. Judging by the enormous interest in the Acts of Synod that were placed online at the time of General Synod Fergus, placing such information on the internet promotes an interest in the broader assemblies at the grass roots level, and enables the local churches to be well informed about the activities of Synod. The information about the Theological College serves to promote a greater awareness of our theological training, as well as provide detailed information for those considering pursuing the training for the ministry.

##### **2. For members of other Reformed churches**

There has especially been interest from people of the Reformed faith interested in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter and the contents of the *Book of Praise*. By placing this material on the web-site, an appreciation and understanding of the *Book of Praise* outside our federation is promoted. The web-site also serves to provide detailed information to people from other Reformed churches who are seeking to become aware of the activities and principles of the churches in our federation.

##### **3. For people unfamiliar with our churches**

The existing web-site has served to enable newcomers to our churches to find a local place of worship, and to answer basic questions that they have about our church life.

The committee is confident that the web-site serves well to distribute information about Reformed church life and doctrine and to foster interest in our church federation both within and outside of our bond of churches.

#### **4. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **A. Future direction**

The committee feels that the work done thus far has been profitable, and needs to be continued. Ongoing work is necessary to maintain the email addresses, as well as updating and revising the existing content, such as the church directory. This is especially the case with the impending revisions to the *Book of Praise*.

Despite the benefits of the content of the existing web-site, the committee is also of the opinion that there are also many opportunities for incorporating new material and content on the Internet. The internet is quickly becoming a powerful and popular medium of communication in our society, and we would do well to harness some of its possibilities in a manner that would serve our church community, and promote the doctrines and practices of our Reformed federation of churches in this world. *The committee recommends that General Synod continue the committee.*

##### **B. Committee composition**

*The committee recommends that General Synod appoint a committee consisting of two members who are ministers, one member associated with the Theological College, and four members with advanced technical abilities (two from Eastern Canada and two from Western Canada).*

Names of suitable and willing candidates will be sent to Synod in a separate letter. The committee endorses the recommendation from the Board of Governors that the librarian of the Theological College, Margaret VanderVelde, be appointed as a member of the committee.

### **C. Technical setup**

*The committee recommends that General Synod direct the committee to purchase suitable hardware that will meet its needs, as described under 3.A.1 & 3.F.2. Considering that the web-site serves the entire federation, these costs are quite reasonable. This will also overcome the limitations of the current service arrangement, which is proving inadequate for the effective functionality of the present web-site and its future development.*

### **D. Web page content**

*The committee recommends that the General Synod direct the committee to continue their present work on further developing the web-site, by completing the online publication of the Book of Praise and exploring the possibilities of adding new material such as sermons and speeches, articles, and the Acts/Press-Releases of ecclesiastical assemblies.*

### **E. Book of Praise**

*The committee recommends that General Synod mandate the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise to make an electronic edition of the Book of Praise as adopted by this Synod available to the Committee for the Official Web-Site as soon as possible.*

This ensures that the material published online is current and accurate.

### **F. Mandate**

*The committee recommends that General Synod give the committee the following mandate:*

1. To maintain the existing web-site, including:
  - a) its associated technical functions.
  - b) its existing content, revising this content whenever necessary.
2. To complete the online publication of the entire *Book of Praise*, using the text most recently adopted and revised by General Synod.
3. To incorporate any new official and semi-official material that would reflect the life of the churches, be of benefit to the membership, and of assistance to witness of the churches in this world. Consideration should especially be given to the inclusion of sermons, speeches and articles, as well as the Acts/Press-Releases of ecclesiastical assemblies.
4. To report to the next General Synod regarding the activities and noticeable benefits of this web page.

Respectfully submitted by your committee:

T.J. Flach

J.M. Hoogerdijk

R.E. Pot (secretary)

G.H. Visscher (convener)

**Letter to GENERAL SYNOD NEERLANDIA 2001  
from the COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL WEB-SITE**

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit the following letter as an attachment to our report.

**RE: Recommendation regarding committee composition**

In our recommendations regarding committee composition, we reported the following:

*The committee recommends that General Synod appoint a committee consisting of two members who are ministers, one member associated with the Theological College, and four members with advanced technical abilities (two from Eastern Canada and two from Western Canada).*

Names of suitable and willing candidates will be sent to Synod in a separate letter. The committee endorses the recommendation from the Board of Governors that the librarian of the Theological College, Margaret VanderVelde, be appointed as a member of the committee.

The committee recommends the following candidates with technical abilities to General Synod as both suitable and willing:

From Western Canada: John Hoogerdijk (Calgary) & Adam van den Hoven (Abbotsford)

From Eastern Canada: Theo Flach (Fergus) & Riese Heemskerk (Lincoln)

While we realize it is unusual to suggest names for appointees to Synod, we are following this course of action with respect to technical personnel because of the special skills required.

Respectfully submitted by your committee:

T.J. Flach

J.M. Hoogerdijk

R.E. Pot (secretary)

G.H. Visscher (convener)

