

ACTS
OF THE
FIFTH SYNOD
OF THE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES
IN NORTH AMERICA

JUNE 15-18, 2004

held at
the Bethel United Reformed Church
Calgary, Alberta

FOREWORD

Synod 2001 of the United Reformed Churches meeting in Escondido, California commissioned the Stated Clerk to arrange for the publication of all synodical agendas and minutes in bound volumes (see article 35 of the Minutes of Synod 2001). The first two volumes were published in May 2004 and with the help of the outgoing Stated Clerk, Rev. Bill DeJong, this task has now been completed for the Acts of Synod 2004.

In the first bound volume you will find the Acts of Synods 1996 (Lynwood), 1997 (St. Catharines) and 1999 (Hudsonville) as well as historical documentation relevant to the formation of the URCNA, including the agenda and minutes of The Meeting of Independent Churches held on November 15-16, 1995 at the Christian Reformed Church (Independent) in Lynwood, Illinois. The second volume contains the Acts of Synod 2001 (Escondido). This third volume contains the Acts of Synod 2004 (Calgary) which was held June 15-18, 2004 at the Bethel United Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The 2004 Acts include a table of contents and an index for ease of study and referencing. These words on paper of course do not reflect the tone of the meeting and cannot represent the bond of fellowship that all delegates and observers enjoyed. It also does not reflect the hours of preparation and work done by the Bethel congregation in order to provide a venue for Synod 2004 for which we are very thankful.

It is our hope that these bound volumes will be readily accessible to all members of the churches and that their contents will hereby be preserved for future generations (Psalm 78:1-4).

For Christ and His Church,

Bill Konynenbelt,
Stated Clerk, URCNA

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ARTICLE 1

The chairman *pro tem*, Rev Joel Vander Kooi, pastor of the Bethel United Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta, the convening church, calls the assembly to order and invites Rev. Eric Fennema of Lethbridge, Alberta to lead in opening devotions. Rev. Fennema reads Psalm 8, invites the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 327 and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE 2

The chairman *pro tem* requests the stated clerk to call the roll of the delegates. Roll call indicates the following delegates:

Abbotsford, BC	Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. William Van der Woerd Mr. John Van Muyen
Alto, Michigan	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Peter Adams Mr. Duane Sneller
Alymer, Ontario	Bethel United Reformed Church	Rev. Al Korvemaker Mr. Jim Smit
Anaheim, California	Christ Reformed Church	Dr. Kim Riddlebarger Rev. Gary Matlack
Balmoral, Ontario	Covenant Reformed Church	Mr. Alan Bruining
Beecher, Illinois	Faith United Reformed Church	Rev. Todd Joling Mr. Randall Helmus
Belgrade, Montana	Belgrade United Reformed Church	Rev. Mark Stromberg Mr. Leroy Tinklenberg
Bellingham, Washington	Bellingham United Reformed Church	Rev. Kevin Efflandt Mr. Lawrence Silvis
Boise, Idaho	Cloverdale United Reformed Church	Rev. Daryl Kats Dr. Alexander Ramig
Brockville, Ontario	Ebenezer Orthodox Reformed Church	Rev. John Roke
Byron Center, Michigan	Covenant United Reformed Church	Mr. Mark DeJonge Mr. Doug Herrema

Caledonia, Michigan	Trinity United Reformed Church	Mr. Henry Gysen Mr. Claude Wierenga
Calgary, Alberta	Bethel United Reformed Ref. Church	Rev. Joel VanderKooi Mr. Jack Dykxhoorn
Cape Coral, Florida	Trinity Reformed Church	Rev. Allen VanderPol
Chino, California	First United Reformed Church	Rev. Ronald Scheuers Mr. Martin Verhoeven
Clinton, Ontario	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Peter J. Vellenga Mr. Jake Kikkert
Coopersville, Michigan	Eastmanville United Reformed Church	Rev. Stephen DeBoer Mr. Craig Vander Hulst
DeMotte, Indiana	Immanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Thomas Wetselaar Mr. William Kampenga
Doon, Iowa	United Reformed Church	Rev. Larry Johnson Mr. Jim DeKam
Dunnville, Ontario	Grace Reformed Church	Rev. Ed Korevaar Mr. Arthur Struyk
Dutton, Michigan	Dutton United Reformed Church	Rev. Richard. Miller
Edmonton, Alberta	Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton	Rev. William Pols Dr. Wayne Tinga
Escondido, California	Escondido United Reformed Church	Rev. Stephen Donovan Mr. Huibert den Boer
Fresno, California	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Paul Lindemulder
Grand Rapids, Michigan	Walker United Reformed Church	Mr. John Groenink
Grande Prairie, Alberta	Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. John Barach Mr. Dick Barendregt
Hamilton, Ontario	Rehoboth United Reformed Church	Mr. Ron van der Heiden Mr. Andrew Van Olst
Hills, Minnesota	Hills United Reformed Church	Mr. Leonard Bouma Mr. John Den Best
Holland, Michigan	Faith United Reformed Church	Rev. Edward Marcusse Mr. Ron Telman
Hudsonville, Michigan	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Mr. Ed Spoelma Mr. Al Veurink

Jenison, Michigan	Bethel United Reformed Church	Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen Mr. Evert Helms
Jordan, Ontario	Immanuel Orthodox Ref. Church of Niagara	Rev. John A Bouwers Mr. Herb W. Sinke
Kalamazoo, Michigan	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Wybren Oord Mr. Henry Visser
Kansas City, Missouri	Covenant Reformed Church	Mr. Wil Postma Mr. Mike Dykstra
Kennewick, Washington	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Craig Davis Mr. Gary De Winkle
Lansing, Illinois	Oak Glen United Reformed Church	Rev. John Vermeer Mr. Peter Smith
Leduc, Alberta	Grace Reformed Church	Rev. Tim Kolkman Mr. Douwe Spriensma
Lethbridge, Alberta	Trinity Reformed Church	Rev. Eric Fennema Mr. Peter Schalk
Listowel, Ontario	Immanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Fred Folkerts Mr. Neil Bakelaar
London, Ontario	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Rev. Dennis Royall Mr. Simon Beldman
Loveland, Colorado	Calvary United Reformed Church	Rev. David Bosch Mr. Arthur Nelson
Lynden, Washington	Lynden United Reformed Church	Mr. Henry Holleman Mr. Dale Van Kooten
Lynwood, Illinois	Lynwood United Reformed Church	Rev. Keith Davis Mr. Brian Yonkman
Nampa, Idaho	United Reformed Church of Nampa	Rev. Paul Ipema
Neerlandia, Alberta	Emmanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Theo Hoekstra Mr. Jake Strydhorst
New Haven, Vermont	New Haven United Reformed Church	Rev. Fritz Harms
Newton, New Jersey	Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Mark Stewart Mr. Don King
Oceanside, California	Oceanside United Reformed Church	Rev. Danny Hyde

Ontario, California	Ontario United Reformed Church	Rev. Randal Lankheet Rev. Adam Kaloostian
Orange City, Iowa	Redeemer United Reformed Church	Mr. John Van Dixhoorn Mr. John Van Vugt
Oro-Medonte, Ontario	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Ancel Merwin
Pantego, North Carolina	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Calvin Tuininga
Pasadena, California,	Pasadena United Reformed Church	Rev. Movses S. Janbazian Mr. David Cronkhite
Phoenix, Arizona	United Reformed Church	Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer Mr. Jim Vedders
Pompton Plains, New Jersey	Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church	Rev. Dale Van Dyke Mr. Peter Moen Sr.
Ponoka, Alberta	Parkland Reformed Church	Rev. Henry Van Olst Mr. Matthew Stolk
Ripon, California	Zion United Reformed Church	Rev. Alrick G. Headley Mr. Jake Sonke
St.Catharines, Ontario	Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church	Rev. Al Bezuyen Mr. Chuck Dykstra
Salem, Oregon	Immanuel's United Reformed Church	Rev. William Renkema Mr. John Ramak
Sanborn, Iowa	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Mr. Gerald Alons Mr. Alan Van Maanen
Schereville, Indiana	Community United Reformed Church	Rev. Jason Tuinstra Mr. Dan Zandstra
Sheffield, Ontario	Zion United Reformed Church	Rev. Christo Heiberg Mr. John Wubs
Smithers, BC	Bethel Reformed Church	Rev. Lou Slagter Mr. John Veerbeek
Strathroy, Ontario	Providence United Reformed Church	Rev. Harry Zekveld Mr. George Bork
Surrey, BC	Surrey Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Dick Moes Mr. Irik Mallie
Telkwa, BC	Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa	Mr. George Koopmans
Toronto, Ontario	Covenant Reformed Church	Mr. Charles (Chuck) Loopstra Mr. Arthur (Art) Miedema

Walnut Creek, California	Trinity United Reformed Church	Rev Joghinda Gangar Mr. Henry De Wit
Waupan, Wisconsin	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Peter Kloosterman Mr. Sid Soodsma
Wellandport, Ontario	Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church	Rev. Joel Dykstra Mr. Dick Baarda
Wellsburg, Iowa	United Reformed Church of Wellsburg	Rev. Harold Millar Mr. Steve Hook
West Sayville, New York	West Sayville Reformed Bible Church	Rev. Don Hoaglander Rev. Paul Murphy
Winnipeg, Manitoba	Providence Reformed Church	Mr. Henry Nagtegaal Mr. Alex Siepman
Woodstock, Ontario	Bethel United Reformed Church	Mr. Leo Miedema Mr. Ed Westerhof
Wyoming, Michigan	Bethany United Reformed Church	Rev. Casey Freswick Mr. Bruce Brink
Wyoming, Ontario	Covenant Christian Church	Rev. Richard Wynia Mr. James Korvemaker

ARTICLE 3

The chairman *pro tem* asks the stated clerk to read the form of subscription. The delegates assent to the Form of Subscription by standing. The chairman *pro tem* declares synod constituted.

ARTICLE 4

Mr. Bill Oostenbrink of the Bethel URC credentials committee reports that the credentials are in order and notes with regret that two churches did not send delegates (Wayne, New Jersey and Allendale, Michigan) and that nine churches sent only one delegate.

ARTICLE 5

Ratification of Provisional Acceptance of Churches into the URCNA (C.O. Article 32)

- A..
1. Motion is made and supported to ratify the provisional acceptance of the Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.
- Adopted*
2. Mr. Paul E. Vos and Mr. Norman Van Mersbergen assent to the form of subscription and indicate agreement with the church order.
- B.
1. Motion is made and supported to ratify the provisional acceptance of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma, Washington (represented by delegates Rev. Rich Hamlin and Mr. Troy Wisdom).

2. Motion is made and supported to commit the ratification of Tacoma to an advisory committee. *Adopted*
 3. The chairman assigns this matter to advisory committee number 3 (see Article 55).
- C.
1. Motion is made and supported to ratify the provisional acceptance of The United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay, Ontario. *Adopted*
 2. Rev. Barry Beukema and Mr. Peter Kaemingk assent to the Form of Subscription and indicate agreement with the church order.
- D.
1. Motion is made and supported to ratify the provisional acceptance of Grace Evangelical Church of Torrance, California. *Adopted*
 2. Dr. Gregory W. Bero assents to the Form of Subscription and indicates agreement with the church order.

ARTICLE 6

The chairman *pro tem* notes with joy that the following congregations have been organized since the last meeting of synod under Article 22 of the C.O..

United Reformed Church of Nampa (Nampa, ID; 3/02),
 Immanuel United Reformed Church (Listowel, ON; 02);
 Belgrade United Reformed Church (Belgrade, MT; 9/02),
 Oceanside United Reformed Church (Oceanside, CA; 9/02);
 Bellingham United Reformed Church (Bellingham, WA; 11/03)

ARTICLE 7

A. The chairman *pro tem* welcomes the following ecumenical observers and delegates.

Official Observers:

Independent Christian Reformed Church of Ancaster: Mr. Conrad Guichelaar
 Mr. Albert Zietsma.

Ecumenical Observers:

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated): Rev. Ruud Ter Beek
 Rev. Roelf C. “Karlo” Janssen

Reformed Churches in South Africa: Dr. Douwe G. Breed
 Prof. Andries du Plooy

Reformed Church in New Zealand: Rev. Jim Klazinga

Presbyterian Church in America: Rev. Frank Lanting

Fraternal Observers:

Orthodox Presbyterian Church: Dr. Richard Venema
 Reformed Church in the United States: Dr. C.W. “Bud” Powell
 Rev. Maynard Koerner

Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches: Rev. James Reaves

Free Reformed Churches in North America: Rev. Neil Pronk

Fraternal Delegates:

Canadian Reformed Churches:

Rev. Bill Slomp

Rev. Richard Aasman

- B. The chairman *pro tem* welcomes guests.

ARTICLE 8

- A. Motion is made and supported to adopt the time schedule as printed in the agenda.

Adopted

- B. Motion is made and supported to adopt the synodical agenda.

Adopted

ARTICLE 9

- A. The following officers are elected:

Chairman: Rev. Ron Scheuers.

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Chuck Dykstra

- B. Rev. Scheuers assumes the chair and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE 10

Report of the Convening Church (pp. 44-45)

- A. Mr. Bill Konynenbelt gives the report of the convening church.

- B. The chairman requests the stated clerk to send a letter of gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the URCNA to Rev. Julien for his faithful service to the federation.

- C. Motion is made and supported to keep the yearly remuneration of the stated clerk at US \$ 2,000.00

Adopted

- D. On behalf of synod, the chairman expresses gratitude to the stated clerk for his work.

ARTICLE 11

Report of the Convening Church (cont'd)

- A. Motion is made and supported to adopt recommendation # 6 of the convening church's report regarding committees of pre-advice.

Committee 1

Materials: *Overtures 1, 2, and 3; Report 1a. Church Order Committee of CERCU*

Chairman: Dr. Wayne Tinga; Reporter: Rev. Joghinda Gangar; Mr. Steve Hook; Rev. Peter Kloosterman; Rev. Ed Korevaar; Mr. Art Miedema; Rev. Richard Miller; Rev. John Roke; Rev. Dale Van Dyke; Mr. Alan Van Maanen; Mr. John Veerbeek; Rev. John Vermeer; Mr. Henry Visser, Rev. Harry Zekveld

Committee 2

Materials: *Overture 4; Report 1b (Song Book Committee)*

Chairman: Rev. Richard Wynia; Reporter: Rev. Dennis Royall; Rev. Dr. Gregory Bero; Mr. Leonard Bouma; Rev. Eric Fennema; Mr. Evert Helms; Rev. Daniel Hyde; Rev. Paul Ipema; Rev. Paul Lindemulder; Mr. Edwin Spoelma; Rev. Richard Stevens; Mr. Matthew Stolk; Mr. Ronald Telman; Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen

Committee 3

Materials: *Overture 7; Appeal #1 ; Appeal # 2; Appeal #3*

Chairman: Rev. Paul Murphy; Reporter: Rev. Kevin Efflandt; Rev. Peter Adams; Rev. John Barach; Mr. Mark De Jonge; Rev. Fred Folkerts; Mr. John Groenink; Mr. Donald King; Rev. Harold Miller; Mr. Henry Nagtegaal; Rev. Bradd Nymeyer; Mr. Peter Schalk; Rev. Henry Van Olst; Mr. John Wubs

Committee 4

Materials: *Overture 5, 6, 14; Report 3 (Co-operative Savings Fund); Report 6 (Health Care Committee); Agenda Item C; Treasurer's Report*

Chairman: Mr. Paul Vos; Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats; Rev. Craig Davis; Rev. Stephen Donovan; Rev. Rich Hamlin; Rev. Theo Hoekstra; Mr. George Koopmans; Rev. Ancel Merwin; Mr. Herb Sinke; Rev. Joel Vander Kooi; Rev. William Vander Woerd; Mr. James (Jim) Vedders, Mr. Martin Verhoeven

Committee 5

Materials: *Report 4 (URCNA Web Site); Report 5 (URCNA Corporation–Canada); Report of the Convening Church; Report of the Stated Clerk*

Chairman: Rev. Stephen De Boer; Reporter: Mr. Charles (Chuck) Loopstra; Mr. Huibert den Boer; Mr. Chuck Dykstra; Rev. Joel Dykstra; Mr. Jack Dykxhoorn; Rev. Larry Johnson; Mr. Peter Moen; Mr. Arthur Nelson; Dr. Alexander Ramig

Committee 6

Materials: *Overtures 8, 9 (Theological issues); Overtures 10, 11 (Ethical issues)*

Chairman: Rev. William Tuinstra; Reporter: Rev. John Bouwers; Mr. Dick Barendregt; Mr. Bruce Brink; Mr. George Bork; Rev. David Bosch; Rev. Donald Hoaglander; Mr. Jake Kikkert; Rev. Timothy Kolkman; Mr. Louis Provencher; Rev. Lou Slagter; Mr. Norman Van Mersbergen; Rev. Thomas Wetselaar; Mr. Claude Wierenga

Committee 7

Materials: *Overtures 12, 13*

Chairman: Rev. Randal Lankheet; Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga; Mr. Gary De Winkle; Rev. Casey Freswick; Rev. Todd Joling; Mr. James Korvemaker; Rev. Edward Marcusse; Rev. William Renkema; Rev. Ronald Scheuers; Mr. Tim Smit; Mr. Craig Vander Hulst; Rev. Allen VanderPol

Committee 8

Materials: *CECCA; Appeal # 4*

Chairman: Rev. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger; Reporter: Rev. Wybren Oord; Mr. Dick Baarda; Mr. Neil Bakelaar; Rev. Keith Davis; Rev. Alrick Headley; Rev. Christo Heiberg; Mr. Randall Helmus; Rev. Al Korvemaker; Rev. Dick Moes; Rev. Raymond Sikkema (Emeritus); Mr. John Van Vugt; Mr. Al Veurink

Committee 9

Materials: *Appeal # 5*

Chairman: Rev. Gary Matlack; Reporter: Rev. Al Bezuyen; Rev. Barry Beukema; Rev. Frederik (Fritz) Harms; Rev. Moses Janbazian; Rev. Mitchell Ramkissoon; Rev. William Pols; Rev. Mark Stewart; Mr. Leroy Tinklenberg; Mr. Ronald Vander Heiden; Rev. Peter Vellenga

B. Motion is made and supported to amend recommendation # 6 by removing from Committee # 9 the ministers from Classis Western Canada and to have the chairman replace them..

Defeated

C. Motion is made and supported to amend recommendation # 6 by assigning all synodical delegates, with the exception of the synodical officers, to one of 12 committees.

Defeated

- D. Motion is made and supported to amend recommendation # 6 by removing Rev. Oord from Committee 8 and appointing him to Committee 5. *Adopted*
- E. The chairman instructs committee 8 to appoint a reporter to replace Rev. Oord.
- F. Motion is made and supported to amend recommendation # 6 by removing Rev. John Barach from committee 3. *Adopted*
- G. Motion is made and supported to amend recommendation # 6 by having the synodical officers assign all unassigned delegates to committees of pre-advice. *Adopted*
- H. The main motion is: *Adopted*

ARTICLE 12

Report of the Convening Church (cont'd)

- A. The chairman assigns recommendation # 8 to the committee for pre-advice # 8.
- B. The chairman assigns recommendations # 9-10 to committee 5.
- C. Motion is made and supported to instruct the advisory committees addressing appeals to make recommendations on admissibility in plenary session before dealing with the merits of the appeals. *Adopted*
- D. Motion is made and supported to approve the work of the convening church. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 13

- A. Mr. Louis (Randy) Provencher of New Haven arrives and assents to the Form of Subscription.
- B. Rev. Stevens of Cape Coral arrives and assents to Form of Subscription.

ARTICLE 14

Report of the Stated Clerk (pp. 46-48)

- A. The stated clerk gives his report. Committee 5 will deal with the recommendations of the stated clerk.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the work of the stated clerk. *Adopted*
- C. Letter from the Trumpet (p. 50) is received for information. The churches are advised to take its requests into consideration.

ARTICLE 15

- A. Mr. Peter Moen, Sr. presents the U.S. Treasurer's report (pp. 64-68) on behalf of his son, Mr. Peter J. Moen. The issues raised in the report related to the song book fund are assigned to Committee 2.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the U.S. Treasurer's work. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 16

- A. Rev. Al Bezuyen presents the Canadian Treasurer's report (pp.62-63) on behalf of Mr. Wayne Kamminga. The report is assigned to Committee 5.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the Canadian Treasurer's work.

Adopted

ARTICLE 17

Rev. Mitchell Ramkissoon of Faith Reformed Church in Telkwa, BC. arrives and assents to the Form of Subscription.

ARTICLE 18

The chairman rules that the theological education committee report be assigned to Committee 1.

ARTICLE 19

The synodical officers assign the following (previously unassigned) delegates to committees of pre-advice.

Committee 1:	Mr. Gerald Alons; Mr. John Den Besten; Mr. Andrew Van Olst; Mr. Troy Wisdom
Committee 2:	Mr. Alan Bruining; Mr. Leo Miedema; Mr. Arthur Struyk; Mr. Ed Westerhof
Committee 3:	Mr. Simon Beldman; Mr. Michael Dykstra; Mr. Peter Kaemingk; Mr. Lawrence Silvis; Mr. Douwe Spriensma
Committee 4:	Mr. Peter Smith; Mr. Duane Sneller; Mr. Jake Sonke; Mr. Daniel Zandstra
Committee 5:	Mr. Henry Gysen; Mr. William Kampenga; Mr. John Van Muyen; Mr. Brian Yonkman
Committee 6:	Rev. Adam Kaloostian; Mr. John Ramak; Mr. Jacob Strydhorst; Mr. A. Van Dixhoorn
Committee 7:	Mr. Irik Mallie; Mr. Sandy Siepman; Mr. Sid Soodsma; Mr. Dale Van Kooten
Committee 8:	Rev. John Barach; Mr. Jim De Kam; Mr. Henry De Wit; Mr. Henry Holleman
Committee 9:	Mr. David Cronkhite; Mr. Doug Herrema; Mr. Wil Postma; Rev. Mark Stromberg

ARTICLE 20

The assembly recesses for supper. Mr. Simon Beldman from London, ON leads in devotions by reading Psalm 133, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 493 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 21

An evening inspiration service is hosted by the Bethel URC of Calgary at which Rev. Joel Vander Kooi gives an inspirational address based on Isaiah 52:7.

ARTICLE 22

Morning Session of June 16, 2004

The chairman calls the meeting to order. Rev. Calvin Tuininga of Pantego, North Carolina leads in opening devotions by reading Psalm 111, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 198 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 23

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 24

The chairman appoints Mr. Chuck Dykstra as the news media liaison.

ARTICLE 25

- A. The chairman recommends shortening the lunch hour.
- B. Motion is made and supported to recess at 12:00 PM and reconvene at 1:00 PM.

Adopted

ARTICLE 26

Advisory Committee 8

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker
Materials: *Appeal # 4* (pp.181-201)

- A. Admissibility. The committee advises Synod that the appeal is admissible noting that Synod does not have rules of admissibility or inadmissibility and Article 31 grants the appellant the right to take his concerns to the broader assemblies.

Adopted

- B. The committee advises that synod not sustain appeal # 4.

Grounds:

Theological grounds:

1. The brother is confused as to the difference between the inspiration of the original writings and the divine preservation of the text.
2. He assumes that providential preservation has ceased with the Received Text.
3. His arguments assume that all copyists of the Received Text are infallible and no other could be.
4. It renders all non Received Text based translations heretical.

Procedural grounds:

1. He does not provide Synod with the text of the decision of Classis SW US.
2. He does not demonstrate how he has been wronged by Classis.
3. He introduces new material the Classis has not dealt with (5-8). (This in itself could render the appeal inadmissible.)

Pastoral grounds:

To bring this matter to a resolution for Classis, the church and the appellant.

C. Motion is made and supported to amend the main motion by noting that items 5-8 were considered by synod.

Adopted

D. The main motion is:

Adopted

ARTICLE 27

Advisory Committee 9

Reporter: Rev. Al Bezuyen

Materials: *Appeal # 5 (pp.202-213)*

A. Recommendation: That appeal # 5 is properly before Synod 2004.

Grounds: URCNA Church Order Article 31 is clear that the appeal ought to be heard: "If any church member complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a narrower assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies. Until a decision is made upon such an appeal, the church member shall conform to the determination and judgment already passed."

Adopted

B. Recommendation: That synod declares that Mr. AAA's critique of Rev. BBB's sermon was not included in the official appeal as published of Classis Western Canada's official and approved agenda and therefore is improperly included the 2004 Synodical agenda (cf Art. 25).

Adopted

ARTICLE 28

Advisory Committee 5

Reporter: Mr. Charles Loopstra.

Materials: *The Report from the Canadian Corporation (URCNA) (p.146).*

A. Motion is made and supported to adopt recommendation # 1 of the Canadian corporation.

Adopted

B. The committee recommends that the recommendations of the Canadian corporation be approved by Synod with the following amendments:

1. a. Recommendation 2 be amended to read: *That henceforth....relating to the operation and function of the Canadian churches of the Federation.*

Defeated

b. Motion is made and supported to adopt recommendation # 2 of the Canadian Corporation.

Adopted

2. Recommendation 3 be amended as follows:

a. Delete clause 3.b.i.

i. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by having the entirety of 3 b deleted.

Adopted

ii. The motion as amended is:

Adopted

b. Change clause 3.c.iii to "accounting and auditing expenses"

Adopted

c. Motion is made and supported to adopt recommendation # 3 of the Canadian

Corporation as amended.

Adopted

3. Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 be deleted and the following be substituted:

That Synod confirm the appointment of the following persons as the sole members and directors of the corporation:

Mr. Stan Antonides
Mr. Gary DeGroot
Rev. Joel Dykstra
Rev. Raymond Sikkema
Rev. Richard Stienstra

That in the event of resignation or removal from office, the board of directors shall be entitled to fill the vacancy, to be subsequently ratified by the convening synod.

That the board of directors of the corporation develop a mandate and protocol for receiving and approving requests from the Canadian churches or individuals for funding from the corporation to be ratified by the next convening synod. All requests for interim funding before ratification by Synod shall be approved in accordance with the mandate and protocol to be developed by the board of directors.

That the board of directors shall be authorized to delegate the duties and responsibilities entrusted to it to an operational committee consisting of confessing members in good standing of Canadian URCNA churches, subject to the board's supervision.

That the board of directors shall submit a written annual report and audited financial statements to the Canadian URCNA churches and shall report the affairs of the corporation to each convening synod.

Adopted

ARTICLE 29

The assembly recesses for lunch. Rev. Movses Janbazian of Pasadena, California leads in prayer.

ARTICLE 30

Afternoon Session of June 16, 2004

Rev. Richard Millar of Dutton, Michigan leads in opening devotions by reading Philippians 4:4-9, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 166 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 31

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 32

The Chairman grants the privilege of the floor to Rev. Hans Uittenbosch, noting that the convening church had granted him special permission to do so, in view of the precedent set by Synod 1996. Rev. Hans Uittenbosch addresses synod and expresses gratitude to those congregations which have supported the seafarer's ministry and challenges the churches to initiate a seafarer's ministry in the port of Miami. (pp. 214-215).

ARTICLE 33

- A. Rev. Peter Vellenga introduces Dr. Bud Powell from the RCUS. Dr. Bud Powell addresses synod and reports on the RCUS's determination to study the doctrine of justification in light of current controversies and to produce related position papers. (pp. 215-216)
- B. Rev. Todd Joling responds to Dr. Powell.

ARTICLE 34

- A. Rev. Vellenga introduces Rev. Richard Aasman from the Canadian Reformed Churches. In addressing synod, Rev. Aasman introduces the Canadian Reformed Churches, reports on their ecumenical activity and expresses his desire for greater ecumenical relations with the URCNA. (pp. 217-218)
- B. Rev. Richard Stienstra responds to Rev. Richard Aasman.

ARTICLE 35

The chairman acknowledges and welcomes Dr. Jack Visscher from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

ARTICLE 36

Advisory Committee 3

Reporter: Rev. Kevin Efflandt

Materials: *Appeal 1* (pp.166-172), *Appeal 2* (pp.173-177), *Appeal 3* (pp.178-180)

- A. Recommendation: The Committee advises synod that appeal # 1 is properly before the body. *Adopted*
- B. Recommendation: The Committee advises synod that appeal # 2 is properly before the synod. *Adopted*
- C. Recommendation: The Committee advises synod that appeal # 3 is properly before the synod. *Adopted*
- D. 1. The committee advises that synod not receive the Evangelical Church of Tacoma as an organized congregation of the United Reformed Churches of North America.
Grounds: They are not in current compliance with the requirements of Church order article 37, which requires two services each Lord's Day.
- 2. Motion is made and supported to table until the issue of admission of young children to the Lord's Table is addressed (Cont'd in Article 55). *Adopted*

ARTICLE 37

The chairman acknowledges and welcomes Dr. Cornelis Van Dam of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

ARTICLE 38

Advisory Committee 6

Reporter: Rev. John Bouwers

Materials: *Overture 10* (p. 163); *Overture 11* (p.163)

A. Recommendation 1

1. Committee 6 advises synod not to accede to overture 10.

Grounds:

1. Scripture is clear with respect to the sinfulness of homosexuality: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Romans 1:26,27, Matthew 5:27,28.
2. Our Three Forms of Unity sufficiently address our federative beliefs about homosexuality (HC QA 108).
3. The status and authority of extra confessional synodical declarations is unclear, and should be defined before any such declaration is made.

2. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation by deleting ground # 3.

Adopted

3. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation by adding as ground # 3 that there is no compelling need to clarify or make a statement on this issue for the reason given in grounds number 1 and 2.

Defeated

4. The motion as amended is:

Adopted

B. Recommendation 2

1. Committee 6 advises synod not to accede to overture 11.

Grounds:

1. Scripture is clear with respect to the sinfulness of abortion: Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13; Psalm 106:31.
2. Our Three Forms of Unity sufficiently address our federative beliefs about abortion (HC QA 105).
3. The status and authority of extra confessional synodical declarations is unclear, and should be defined before any such declaration is made.

2. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation by deleting ground # 3.

Adopted

3. The motion as amended is:

Adopted

ARTICLE 39

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats

Materials: *Overture 5* (p.152-53)

- A. Motion made to amend the overture to appoint one church to do the above-mentioned work.

Grounds: Efficiency.

Adopted

- B. Recommendations in response to Overture 5:

1. Appointing 1 church with the following mandate;
 - Contact all synodically approved committees to discover how their budgets are set.
 - Evaluate whether there are concerns about their budgets.
 - Evaluate and address those concerns.
2. Once the information is gathered the appointed church should make recommendations based upon the information they have received.
3. Item 3 is retained.

- C. Motion is made and supported to recommit the wording of this recommendation to advisory committee # 4. Note: Cont'd in article 48

ARTICLE 40

Advisory Committee 5

Reporter: Mr. Charles Loopstra
Materials: *URCNA Web Site Report to Synod 2004* (pp.135-145).

The committee recommends as follows:

- A. That Synod maintain a federational web site with the following purposes:
1. to provide an introduction to and information regarding URCNA (history, confessional statements, church order, etc.);
 2. to act as a current directory for the churches;
 3. to publish minutes and/or reports of classis and synod;
 4. to act as an interactive communications tool for the federation, including the Stated Clerk, Convening Church and Synodical committees;
 5. to include such other information that is for the benefit of the churches and the federation;
1. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by deleting A.5. *Adopted*
2. Motion is made and supported to add as a new point A.5: to publish reading sermons. *Defeated*
3. The motion as amended is: *Adopted*
- B. That the oversight of the web site be assigned to a synodical committee consisting of a representative of each classis and the Stated Clerk of the federation, and that classis appoint such a representative at the next meeting of classis. That the Stated Clerk be the interim chairman of the committee and ensure implementation of this recommendation.

Adopted

Note: Cont'd in Article 84

ARTICLE 41

The assembly recesses for supper. Jim Vedders from Phoenix, Arizona leads in devotions by reading Psalm 133, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 278:1 and by leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 42

Evening Session of June 16, 2004.

Rev. Ancel Merwin from Oro-Medonte, Ontario leads in opening devotions by inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 193 and by leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 43

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
B. Motion is made and supported to approve the minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 44

Mr. Barendregt indicates that he cannot continue to serve on the Ethics Committee.

ARTICLE 45

Advisory Committee 6

Reporter: Rev. John Bouwers
Materials: *Overture 8* (pp.157-162); *Overture 9* (pp.162).

Committee 6 advises that the synod not accede to overtures 8 and 9.

Grounds

1. The overtures do not demonstrate that expanded statements are needed.
2. Where the churches believe the confessions are being violated they should be encouraged to address these matters in a church orderly manner (Cf. Church Order Articles 51-62).

Adopted

ARTICLE 46

Advisory Committee 5

Reporter: Mr. Charles Loopstra
Materials: *The Report of the Stated Clerk* (pp. 46-48)

The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. That in response to recommendation #1 of the Report of the Stated Clerk, Synod establish an *ad hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee.
Adopted
2. That the mandate of the committee is as recommended by the Report of the Stated Clerk, namely:
 - a. *a standard of parliamentary law should be adopted:*
 1. *to ensure that the business of the synod meeting is transacted in an orderly, practical way; and*
 2. *to assist the officers of synod in overseeing the proceedings and preserving order;*
 - b. *guidelines should be provided to assist prospective appellants prepare an appeal and be familiar with protocol, standards of admissibility and preferred verbiage;*
 - c. *the authority and responsibilities of the stated clerk and the convening church should be clearly distinguished and defined so as to address, for example, who determines the admissibility of overtures, appeals and reports and what the standards of admissibility are. In the process of drafting these rules, the committee should research comparable rules employed in other reformed denominations and federations.*
 - d. *that synod delineate the inter-synodical responsibilities of the stated clerk.*
Adopted
3. That the URCNA Synodical Rules Committee shall consist of Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp (currently also serving as the members of the URCNA Church Order Committee);

- Adopted*
4. That the URCNA Synodical Rules Committee deliver its report to be considered by the next Synod and made available to the churches at least 9 months before Synod for input from the churches;
- Adopted*
5. That recommendation #1 of this committee report sufficiently addresses recommendation #10 of the Report of the Convening Church;
- Adopted*
6. That in response to the first part of recommendation #2 and recommendation #3 of the Report of the Stated Clerk, Synod confirms that the inter-synodical responsibilities of the Stated Clerk shall include the preparation and distribution of the synod agenda, the preparation and distribution of the Acts of Synod, act as the point of contact for the federation, invite fraternal observers and delegates to synod on the recommendation of the synod appointed ecumenical committees, and such other responsibilities as may be delegated to him by synod.
- Adopted*
7. That synod accede to recommendation #4 of the Report of the Stated Clerk.
- Adopted*
8. That with respect to recommendation #5 of the Report of the Stated Clerk, the committee observes that Synod 2001 adopted the following recommendation:
...elect a stated clerk and alternate stated clerk to serve from the close of ...synod through the completion of the second synod following the current one.
 The committee recommends that synod elect a stated clerk and alternate stated clerk for the term as adopted by Synod 2001 from the following: Mr. Bill Konynenbelt and Rev. Dennis Royall. The committee notes that both men have agreed to let their names stand.
- Adopted*
9. Motion is made and supported that the nominee with the second most votes be appointed as the alternate stated clerk.
- Adopted*

ARTICLE 47

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats
 Materials: *Overture 6* (pp. 153-154)

- A. Recommendation: that Synod accede to **Overture 6** with the following amendments: Surrey, B.C. and Abbotsford, B.C. be allowed to remain in Classis Western Canada.
- Grounds:
1. The international border presents difficulties.
 - a. Financial matters relating to health insurance issues, pension funds, funds for needy churches, tax implications, etc.
 - b. Practical problems with security alerts, crossing delays, travel, visas, etc.
 2. Relations between the Canadian churches in Classis Western Canada are such that these churches (Surrey, B.C. and Abbotsford, B.C.) would prefer to continue working in cooperation (in terms of mission outreach, youth ministries, etc.).
 3. Financial considerations for Surrey, B.C. and Abbotsford, B.C.

Grounds for forming the Classis Northwest:

1. Ground 1: Since the meeting of Synod St. Catharines [1997] a number of congregations from the

- Pacific Northwest US have joined the federation.
2. The establishment of the new classis in the Pacific Northwest will help alleviate some of the formidable travel expenses for those congregations whose delegates must travel long distances to attend classis meetings.
 3. There is a strong desire among many of the congregations listed in this overture to create a classis that will allow them to work more closely together as members of a broader regional assembly.
 4. The proposed configuration is more conducive to ecclesiastical cooperation with congregations in geographic proximity to each other.
 5. The following eight churches can form a viable Classis.
Bellingham, WA, Boise, ID, Twin Falls, ID, Kennewick, WA, Lynden, WA, Nampa, ID, Salem, OR, Tacoma, WA

Adopted

- B. We recommend that Synod declare this to be the answer to Overture 14. (p. 165)

Adopted

NOTE: See Article 49

ARTICLE 48

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats
Materials: *Overture 5* (pp.152-153)

- A. Recommendation: Overture 5 be amended to read: “Synod Calgary 2004, appoint one church with the following mandate:
1. Contact all current synodically-appointed committees and the federation treasurers to discover how monies are gathered and authorized for disbursement.
 2. Determine whether there are concerns with how monies are gathered and authorized for disbursement.
 3. Determine ways that the concerns might best be addressed.
 4. Once the information is gathered the appointed church should make recommendations concerning the establishments of budgets, authorization, procedures and principles for disbursement based upon the information received.
 5. Report to the next synod.
- B. The Committee recommends that synod accede to the overture, as amended.
- C. Our committee recommends the Covenant URC of Pella, IA to be the church to gather this information.

Adopted

Adopted

ARTICLE 49

- A. Motion is made and supported to reconsider advisory committee # 4's recommendation regarding amended Overture 6 (Article 47).
- B. Motion is made and supported to table indefinitely.
- C. Chairman rules that this answers overture # 14. (p. 165)

Adopted

Adopted

ARTICLE 50

Advisory Committee 3

Reporter: Rev. Kevin Efflandt
Materials: *Overture 7* (pp.154-157)

The council of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton respectfully overtures Classis Western Canada to overture URCNA Synod Calgary to adopt the following statement:

“The Confessions to which the URCNA subscribe—the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—require that the Lord’s Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church.”

A. The committee advises that Synod accede to Overture 7.

Grounds:

1. The validity of this statement
 - a. In the Three Forms of Unity (particularly the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism), we confess the purpose, participants, and manner of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in such a way as to make clear that a personal and understanding faith is a prerequisite for coming to the Table of the Lord (BCF, Articles 33, 35; HC, Lord’s Days 25, 28, and 30).
 - b. The presence of such faith must become evident for admission to the Lord’s Supper by means of a public testimony or profession in the church (BCF, Article 35; HC, Lord’s Day 30).
2. The value of adopting this statement
 - a. A central point of debate over paedocommunion is whether the Confessions provide a definite standard on this issue.
 - b. Because this issue concerns the churches at large, it should be addressed by the collective wisdom of the federation’s broadest assembly.
 - c. The adoption of a statement clarifying this matter would uphold the Confessional basis for our Profession of Faith, thereby promoting unity in truth among the churches.

B. Motion is made and supported to recommit to the committee 3.

Defeated

C. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by substituting the initial phrase with “The confessions to which the URCNA subscribe (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort) accurately summarize the teaching of scripture for example, 1 Cor 11.24-25; 11:28.

Adopted

D. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by adding after “scripture.” “Thus our confessions, in harmony with scripture, require that the Lord’s Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith.”

Adopted

E. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by replacing “require” with “assume.”

Defeated

F. Motion is made and supported to amend Ground 1b by substituting “for the purpose of consistorial supervision of the Lord’s supper the church order applies our confessions by stipulating that those who partake must first express their faith via a public profession (C.O. 43-45).

Adopted

- G. Motion is made and supported to adopt a substitute motion. “The Three Forms of the Unity address participation in the Lord’s supper in that they do not countenance participation apart from those who are already regenerated and publicly profess their faith in Jesus Christ in the presence of God and His holy Church. The church order allows no other practice. If anyone has reservations about this teaching, he must refrain from teaching or practicing otherwise.”

Defeated
Adopted

- H. The motion as amended is:

Note: Mr. Dick Barendregt and Rev. John Barach register their negative votes.

- I. The adopted statement reads as follows:

“The confessions to which the URCNA subscribe (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort) accurately summarize the teaching of scripture in, for example, 1 Cor 11.24-25; 28. Thus our confessions, in harmony with the scripture, require that the Lord’s Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church.”

Grounds:

1. The validity of this statement
 - a. In the Three Forms of Unity (particularly the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism), we confess the purpose, participants, and manner of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in such a way as to make clear that a personal and understanding faith is a prerequisite for coming to the Table of the Lord (BC, Articles 33, 35; HC, Lord’s Days 25, 28, and 30).
 - b. For the purpose of consistorial supervision of the Lord’s supper the church order applies our confessions by stipulating that those who partake must first express their faith via a public profession Church Order 43-45).
2. The value of adopting this statement
 - a. A central point of debate over paedocommunion is whether the Confessions provide a definite standard on this issue.
 - b. Because this issue concerns the churches at large, it should be addressed by the collective wisdom of the federation’s broadest assembly.
 - c. The adoption of a statement clarifying this matter would uphold the Confessional basis for our Profession of Faith, thereby promoting unity in truth among the churches.

ARTICLE 51

Mr. Matthew Stolk of Ponoka, AB leads in closing devotions by reading Philippians.2:5-11, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 454 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 52

Morning Session of June 17, 2004

Mr. Ron van der Heiden of Hamilton, Ontario leads in opening devotions by reading 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 and Colossians 3:12-17, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 295 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 53

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
B. Motion and made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 54

Motion is made and supported to amend the adopted evening time schedule to 6:30PM - 9:30PM.

Adopted

ARTICLE 55

Advisory Committee 3

Reporter: Kevin Efflandt

Re: *Evangelical Church of Tacoma* (cont'd from Article 36)

- A. The chairman grants the privilege of the floor to the Tacoma, Washington delegates.
- B. Rev. Hamlin addresses synod.
- C. The committee advises that Synod not receive the Evangelical Church of Tacoma as an organized congregation of the United Reformed Churches of North America.
Grounds: They are not in current compliance with the requirements of Church Order Article 37, which requires 2 services each Lord's Day
- D. Motion is made and supported to set aside the recommendation of the advisory committee in order to receive to Tacoma congregation into our federation.
- E. Motion is made and supported to table until appeal # 1 has been addressed by synod (see article 77).

Adopted

ARTICLE 56

Advisory Committee 8

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker

Materials: *CECCA Report* (Regarding Terminology Document; p.118)

- A. The advisory committee recommends that the "Terminology Document" [p.118] be called "Guidelines for Ecumenical Contact and Ecumenical Fellowship with Churches Abroad."
Adopted
- B. The advisory committee recommends that Synod adopt the "Guidelines" first step [p.118] with the following amendments:
 - 1. [I.] Substitute: "The first step, *Ecumenical Contact*, will follow a period of initial exploration. Ecumenical Contact will focus..."
Adopted
 - 2. [I.b.1] Replace "view and place of the Scriptures with "authority and sufficiency of Scripture."
Adopted
 - 3. [I.b.4]. Add "and stands on ethical issues."
Adopted
 - 4. Add I.h: "Exchange of information regarding current ecumenical relations."
Adopted
 - 5. Motion is made and supported to amend I.a by adding, "such that one visit be made to one assembly/church per year." (See article 81.D.2)
Adopted

Adopted

Note: Cont'd in Article 58

ARTICLE 57

Following the morning recess, the chairman invites the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 121.

ARTICLE 58

Advisory Committee 8 (Cont'd from Article 56)

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker
Materials: *CECCA Report* (pp.112-131)

- A. Regarding Terminology Document (p.118).
1. Recommendation I of CECCA Proposal (p.118) as amended is: *Adopted*
 2. The advisory committee recommends that Synod adopt the “Guidelines” second step (p.118) with the following amendments:
 - a. [II.] Substitute: “The second step, *Ecumenical Fellowship*, will focus....”
Adopted
 - b. [II.c.] Strike “(Church)”
Adopted
 - c. [II.f.] Substitute: “Agreement that, as changes in polity, doctrine or practice are instituted, the churches will inform each other - understanding that the adoption of substantial changes may jeopardize the established ecumenical relationship.”
Adopted
 - d. [II.] Motion is made and supported to add the words to the sentence beginning with “This step will be implemented” with “according to church order article 36”
Adopted
 - e. [II.] Motion is made and supported to amend by deleting the words “where possible and desirable.”
Adopted
 3. Recommendation II of CECCA Proposal (p.118) as amended is: *Adopted*
- B. Regarding “Procedures/Protocol to be followed by the URCNA . . .” (p.128)
The advisory committee recommends that Synod adopt CECCA’s proposed “Procedures/Protocol to be followed re: Observers and Fraternal Delegates” (Appendix 5, p.128) with the following amendment:
[3] Add the word “if practical,” so that the first line reads in part, “to address the Synod at a time, *if practical*, which coincides with . . .”
Adopted
- C. Regarding the Status of the GKSA (Recommendation # 4 on p.115)
1. The advisory committee recommends that the URCNA continue in Phase One with the GKSA.
 2. The chairman rules that this matter be addressed after the South African delegates have had the opportunity to meet with the CECCA committee and Advisory Committee 8.

ARTICLE 59

- A. Rev. Sikkema introduces Rev. Karlo Janssen from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). Rev. Janssen provides information of GKN -V, its history and activity, reports on the

interest in the GKN-V in forming sister church relations with the URCNA and encourages the URCNA to be faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. (pp. 218-220)

In responding to Rev. Janssen, Rev. Gangar reads 2 Thessalonians 1:13-17 and expresses well wishes for the GKN-V.

- B. Rev. Sikkema introduces Dr. Douwe Breed from the Reformed Churches of South Africa. Dr. Breed provides historical and statistical information about the RCSA and reports on some of their activities, challenges and ecumenical endeavors. Dr. Breed also expresses interest on the part of the RCSA in forming closer ecumenical ties with the URCNA. (pp. 220-221)

In responding to Dr. Breed, Rev. Denis Royall expresses appreciation to Dr. Breed for his words and an interest on the part of the URCNA in assisting the RCSA respond to the challenges they face.

- C. Rev. Sikkema introduces Rev. Jim Klazinga from the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. Rev. Klazinga brings greetings from, and provides information about, the RCNZ. Rev. Klazinga expresses interest on the part of the RCNZ in forming closer ecumenical ties with the URCNA and passionately insists that ecumenical and frugal are not mutually exclusive terms. (pp. 222-223)

In responding to Rev. Klazinga, Rev. Allan Vander Pol expresses appreciation to Rev. Klazinga for his words and to the RCNZ for their loyalty to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

- D. Rev. Sikkema reads excerpts from a letter from the NKST (Church of Jesus Christ among the Tiv; in Nigeria) which indicate something of the history, activity, challenges and persecution of the NKST. The churches in Nigeria request our prayers for them and their country.

The chairman instructs the stated clerk to respond in writing to the Nigerian churches and to include the letter from the Nigerian churches in the synodical minutes. (pp. 53-55)

ARTICLE 60

The chairman decides to address recommendation # 9 of Committee 5 regarding the election of a new stated clerk and alternate. Ballots are handed out, marked and collected.

ARTICLE 61

The assembly recesses for lunch. Rev. Jason Tuinstra of Schererville, Indiana leads in devotions by reading Psalm 25 and by leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 62

Afternoon and Evening Session of June 17, 2004

Rev. Larry Johnson of Doon, Iowa leads in opening devotions by inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 228 and by leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 63

- A. The clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 64

The chairman announces that Mr. Bill Konynenbelt has been elected the new stated clerk and Rev. Dennis Royall, the alternate stated clerk.

ARTICLE 65

- A. Rev. Peter Vellenga introduces Rev. Frank Lanting of the PCA. Rev. Lanting expresses his sympathy for the doctrine and mission of the URCNA and his desire to see greater ecclesiastical fellowship between the PCA and the URCNA. (pp. 224-225)

Rev. Joel Vander Kooi thanks Rev. Lanting for his remarks and expresses appreciation for the integrity and fraternity of the PCA.

- B. Rev. Peter Vellenga introduces Dr. Richard Venema of the OPC. Dr. Venema communicates the interest on the part of the OPC in the emergence and the development of the URCNA. He also reports on some of the decisions of the recent general assembly of the OPC and acknowledges the affinity in doctrine between OPC and the URCNA. (pp. 225-227)

Rev. John Bouwers responds with words of appreciation for Dr. Venema's remarks and encouragement.

- C. Rev. Peter Vellenga introduces Rev. Neil Pronk of the Free Reformed Churches. Rev. Pronk provides statistical and historical information about the Free Reformed Churches, highlights some of the distinctive theological and homiletical emphases in the Free Reformed Churches and expresses appreciation for the allegiance of the URCNA to the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. (pp. 227-230)

Rev. Zekveld responds to Rev. Pronk and indicates his wish that the URCNA and FRCNA continue to work together for mutual instruction and edification.

ARTICLE 66

Advisory Committee 9

Reporter: Rev. Al Bezuyen
Materials: *Appeal # 5* (pp.202-213)

- A. Motion is made and supported to go to executive session.

Adopted

- B. Motion is made and supported to adopt the following:
 - 1. Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions (Heidelberg Q/A 59-62; Belgic Confession articles 20-23) teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith

- alone, based upon the active and passive obedience of Christ alone.
2. Synod declares that the sermon under consideration (The Lion Won't Bite the Innocent) is unclear and confusing on the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone.
 3. Synod advise the consistory of AAA to work pastorally with Rev. BBB to bring any divergent view that he may have on this issue into conformity with what Synod here affirms.
 4. That this be Synod's answer to the Mr. and Mrs. CCC's appeal.

Adopted

ARTICLE 67

- A. The chairman requests the vice-chair to lead the remainder of the evening session. The vice-chair assumes the chair and appoints Rev. Denis Royall as *ad hoc* vice-chairman.
- B. The acting chairman instructs the clerk to expunge from the record advisory committee # 7 majority and minority reports and dispose of all paper documents.
- C. The acting chairman declares executive session over.

ARTICLE 68

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga

Materials: *CERCU Guidelines, Recommendations 1-2, 10* (pp.105-106); *Overture 12* (pp.163-164)

- A. Motion is made and supported to grant the privilege of the floor to the secretaries of the CERCU and CECCA committees (as per recommendation 10, p.106) .

Adopted

- B. Recommendation (1)

Synod approve the following method for the selection of members of the 'Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity' (CERCU) and the 'Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad' (CECCA):

1. That nominations be given by the churches to their classis, which will appoint one member and an alternate member per classis to each committee.

- (a) Motion is made and supported to deal with CERCU first.

Adopted

- (b) The recommendation for CERCU is:

Adopted

2. That Synod appoint three members at large and one alternate.

Adopted

3. All committee members serve for a term of three years. Each member is eligible for reappointment for up to two more term of service (total of three terms).

Adopted

Note: In the past synod appointed both the chairman and clerk of the committees.

Grounds:

- a. This procedure will facilitate improved communications between the committees and the churches of each classis.

- b. This will broaden the representation of our federation in these committees.

- c. This procedure will also insure a measure of continuity in the make-up of the committees.

Note: Should Recommendation 1 pass, Pre-Advice Committee #7 is willing to prepare a retirement schedule and names for membership on these committees, and potential chairmen and secretaries on these committees.

The chairman assigns Committee # 7 this responsibility.

- C. Motion is made and supported to substitute the following guidelines for CECCA:
1. That nominations be made by synod on a as needed basis.
 2. All committee members serve for a term of service through two synods. Each member is eligible for reappointment for up to two more terms of service (total of three terms).
Defeated
- D. The recommendations of advisory committee # 7 are reconsidered as follows:
1. That nominations be given by the churches to their classis, which will appoint one member and an alternate member per classis to each committee.
Adopted
 2. That Synod appoint three members at large and one alternate.
Defeated
 3. All committee members serve for a term of three years. Each member is eligible for reappointment for up to two more term of service (total of three terms).
 4. Motion is made and supported to amend to read “All committee members serve for a term through two synods.”
Defeated
 5. The main motion is:
Adopted
 6. Motion is made and supported that synod retain the membership of two present members of the CECCA committee who are not from the same classis for two terms.
Adopted
- E. Recommendation (2)
That this be our answer to overture 12, and Recommendations 1, 2 of CERCU (report pp.105-106).
Adopted

ARTICLE 69

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga

Materials: *CERCU Guidelines, Recommendations 3-11 (pp.106) Overture 13 (p.164-165)*

Recommendations:

- A. That Synod amend Phase 3 –Church Union of the ‘Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity’ by adding the statement: ‘*Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories.*’
Adopted
- B. That Synod define majority in this situation as two thirds of the consistories.
Grounds for 1,2: See the three grounds given for overture 13 on pp.164-165.
- C. Motion is made and supported to table till tomorrow (see Article 82).
Adopted

ARTICLE 70

Mr. Al Veurink from Hudsonville, Michigan leads in closing devotions by reading Psalm 34:1-10, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 180:1 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 71

Morning session of June 18, 2004

Mr. Henry Nagtegaal of Winnipeg, Manitoba leads in opening devotions by reading Psalm 119:97-112, by inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 399 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 72

The chairman acknowledges that Rev. Russell St. John has replaced Rev. Craig Davis of Kennewick, Washington. Rev. St. John assents to the Form of Subscription.

ARTICLE 73

- A. The clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 74

- A. Rev. Peter Vellenga introduces Rev. Jim Reaves of the OCRC. Rev. Reaves greets the assembly on behalf of the OCRC and reports of their history and their desire to see the Lord bless the URCNA. (p. 230).
Rev. Richard Wynia thanks Rev. Reaves for his remarks and expresses appreciation for the fraternity of the OCRC.
- B. Rev. Peter Vellenga requests to read letters from a number of churches bringing greetings to synod. The chairman instructs that these letters be included in the synodical minutes. (pp. 52-53)

ARTICLE 75

It is noted that Rev. Alrick Headley of Ripon, California has to leave on account of scheduling conflicts.

ARTICLE 76

Advisory Committee 3

Reporter: Rev. Kevin Efflandt

Materials: *Appeal 1* (pp.166-172), *Appeal 2* (pp.173-177), *Appeal 3* (pp.178-180)

- A. The committee advises that Synod sustain Appeal # 1 (pp.166-172).
The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grand Prairie, Alberta, appeals to the URCNA Synod Calgary 2004 to declare the Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) erred in sustaining Mr. DDD's appeal against the consistory's decision to "interview children as young as ten for public profession of faith and thus admission to the Lord's Table" (Minutes, Article 42).

Grounds:

We refer to Ground 3 of the appeal: “By sustaining Mr. DDD’s appeal, Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) intruded upon the freedom of the elders of Covenant Reformed Church, Grand Prairie, to interview baptized members who desire to profess their faith (Church Order, Art. 43) and has imposed an age limit not found in the Church Order.

“Article 43 of the Church Order does not restrict admission to the Table to those who are older than ten. It speaks of ‘years of understanding,’ but does not define what those years are. Rather, it leaves the decision about whom to admit to the Table to the Consistory: ‘Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life.’ The Consistory must decide if the member interviewed is able to answer the questions in the liturgical form for Profession of Faith and come to the Table.”

1. Motion is made and supported to assign the issue of the age at which a child can be admitted to the Lord’s Supper to a synodically appointed study committee.
 2. Motion is made and supported to amend the amendment by making the appeal the issue to be studied. *Defeated*
 3. The motion as amended is: *Defeated*
 4. The main motion is: *Defeated*
- Note: Mr. Barendregt, Rev. Barach and Rev. Nymeyer register their contrary votes.

- B. The committee advises that Synod not sustain Appeal # 2 (pp.173-177).
The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta, appeals to Synod Calgary 2004 to declare that Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) erred in adopting its statement regarding the advice given to Mr. GGG (Minutes, Article 34) and that this statement is therefore not binding on the churches or officebearers.

Grounds:

Grounds 1 and 2 of the appeal are incorrect:

- a. We believe that the matter *was* properly before the body.
- b. The statement “The decision is not an “extra-confessional” statement that somehow has special status alongside of our Confessions. It is rather an affirmation of the Confessions themselves on a specific point of their teaching. Therefore, agreement with this teaching of our Confessions as recognized and affirmed by classis has a bearing on Confessional Subscription. Any candidates or officebearers who cannot affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity (Minutes, Article 34; see Appendix 1)” does clarify that status of the Classis 2000 (Lynden) decision.

Adopted

Note: Rev. Barach, Rev. Kolkman and Mr. Barendregt register their contrary votes.

- C. The committee advises that Synod not sustain Appeal # 3 (pp.178-180).

“We hereby appeal to Synod 2004 of the URCNA to judge that Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) erred in clarifying the status and function of the decision of Classis 2000 Lynden by adopting this statement: ‘the confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper’ and to declare it null and void...”

Grounds: The classis acted properly in addressing this appeal

Adopted

Note: Rev. Barach, Rev. Kolkman and Mr. Barendregt, Rev. Tim Kolkman register their contrary votes.

ARTICLE 77

Advisory Committee 3

Reporter: Rev. Kevin Efflandt
Re: *Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma*

- A. The following motion is re-tabled (see Article 55): Motion is made and supported to set aside the recommendation of the advisory committee in order to receive to Tacoma congregation into our federation.
- B. Motion is made and supported to table indefinitely.
- C. Synod advises the Tacoma congregation to apply for membership in Classis Southwest US.
- D. Motion is made and supported that synod reimburse the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma for their delegates' travel and lodging costs from the US treasury.
Grounds: They have been our invited guests, effectively.

Adopted

Adopted

ARTICLE 78

It is noted Doug Herrema and Mark DeJonge of Byron Center, Michigan and Dr. Alexander Ramig of Boise, Idaho have left synod on account of scheduling conflicts.

ARTICLE 79

Advisory Committee 8

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker
Materials: *CECCA Report* (pp. 112-131)

- A. The advisory committee recommends sending Revs. Sikkema and Royall as delegates to the next meeting of the ICRC (as per matter # 3, p.115).
- B. The advisory committee recommends that the URCNA continue in Phase One with the GKSA (as per matter # 4, p.115).
- C. The advisory committee recommends sending the attached letter to the GKSA (as per matter # 5, p.115).

Adopted

Adopted

Adopted

To: Synod 2006 of the GKSA
From: Synod Calgary 2004 of the URCNA
Date: June 18, 2004

Esteemed Brothers in the Lord:

It is our joy and privilege to greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord and King of the church. He, our Savior and Lord, feeds and nourishes His church by His Word and Spirit, ever leading and directing her into the truth—that she may be the pillar and foundation of the truth. The Word of the Lord is also “the sword of the Spirit: which the church is called to handle—to uphold, to defend, and to administer—in faithfulness and in truth.

Such, we confess, is the mandate of each and every congregation; such is also the task of a federation of churches and of the member churches of the ICRC vis a vis each other. It is, therefore, also the responsibility of churches and of federations of churches that they hold each other to their sacred task and calling, and that they admonish each other and call each other to repentance when they depart from the teaching of the Word.

That brings us to the reason for this fraternal letter to you, the 2006 Synod of the GSKA. It is our conviction that your most recent Synod, that of January 2003, made a decision which is in conflict with the clear teaching of the Lord of the church. We refer to your decision regarding "Women in Office," your opening of the office of deacon to women. It grieves us that you chose to take this divisive action. In the light of our newly adopted Guidelines for Ecumenical Contact and Ecumenical Fellowship with Churches Abroad, your present course on this matter may have adverse implications for our future relationship. (Please refer to our Guidelines attached.)

We understand that there are additional decisions/developments which are (also) disturbing the peace of the GKSA. Some of the unrest concerning these issues may be rooted in sentiment or tradition(alism) and some may be born of a genuine difference in understanding the witness of the Biblical text: What does the Lord say regarding these issues?

However, on the question of "Women in the Office of Deacon"—which, on the basis on which it was adopted, must and will lead the GKSA to "Women in the Office of Elder/Minister" (unless indeed you give a clear-cut interpretation of Article 38 of the CO of the GKSA that will prevent women who are appointed to serve as deacons in a congregation from functioning as office-bearers in the council) -- the witness of Scripture is clear and has never been refuted, as all faithful-to-the Word Reformed churches have upheld. The Bible clearly does not say that women may or ought to be holding ecclesiastical office. Such teaching of the Scriptures is indeed offensive to the "spirit of the age," but it is the calling of the church to answer that "spirit" with a witness that is faithful to the Word.

We want, therefore, both to admonish you and to encourage you to turn from this new, foreign-to-the-Scripture way, that you may experience the blessing of the Lord—which the Lord promises to all who walk with Him in faithfulness to His Word. Therefore it is our desire that our committee continue to work with your committee on this particular issue.

We have decided to maintain our present relationship with you at Phase 1: Ecumenical Contact—hoping, trusting, praying that in due time it can be moved to Phase 2: Ecumenical Fellowship. That, however, can only take place with churches that share with us "a like precious faith" in faithful obedience to the Word of the Lord.

Brothers, receive our hearty greetings, which we extend to you with our prayer that you submit yourself wholly, completely, joyfully to the Word of our God.

Fraternally in Christ,

Rev. Bill DeJong, Stated Clerk
On behalf of URCNA Synod Calgary 2004

- D. Having heard from our RCNZ and Dutch observers as well as from Rev. Sikkema, the advisory committee recommends that Synod at this time not recommend the URC in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC and that CECCA continue to investigate the URC in Myanmar for relations (as per matter # 6, p.115; see third last paragraph p.130).

Adopted

- E. The advisory committee recommends that Synod appoint Rev. Jacques Roets to the CECCA and

Rev. Christo Heiberg as an alternate committee member in case a committee member needs to retire (as per matter # 7, p.120). The chairman declares this immaterial given previous decisions.

ARTICLE 80

Advisory Committee # 8

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker
Materials: *CECCA Report* (pp. 112-131)

A. The advisory committee recommends that Synod look into entering step 1 with the GKN-V (The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Liberated]).

Adopted

B. The advisory committee recommends that Synod look into entering step 1 with the RCNZ (The Reformed Churches of New Zealand).

Adopted

C. The advisory committee recommends that Synod look into entering step 1 with the NKST (The Church of Jesus Christ Among the Tiv).

Adopted

ARTICLE 81

Advisory Committee 8

Reporter: Rev. Al Korvemaker
Materials: *The Report of the Convening Church (#8) (p.45); CECCA Report (p. 128)*

A. The advisory committee recommends that the host church seeks reimbursements from Synod for its costs incurred in hosting guests from churches abroad (cf. Procedures / Protocol, #6, p.128).

Adopted

B. Re: The Reformed Church in Sri Lanka (p.117). The advisory committee wishes to direct Synod's attention to the needs of the Lanka RC (see p.117) and recommends that Rev. Sikkema be granted the opportunity to give a brief report regarding these needs on the floor of Synod. The recommendation is granted. Rev. Sikkema addresses the assembly.

C. Re: Persecuted churches. The advisory committee recommends that Rev. Heiberg be granted the opportunity to briefly inform Synod about the persecution churches are enduring in Nigeria and Indonesia and to lead Synod in offering prayer for them. The committee further recommends that Synod ask the Stated Clerk send them letters of encouragement informing them that we have done so. The request is granted. Rev. Heiberg prays on behalf of synod. The chairman instructs the stated clerk to send such letters.

D. Motion is made and supported to reconsider CECCA guidelines (Appendix 2, p. 118)

Adopted

1. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation to read: "Contacts will be limited to one visit per year plus ICRC meetings and correspondence; however, additional visits (of official observers at major assemblies) can be made when at no cost to synod."

2. Motion is made and supported to adopt a substitute motion by adding after the amended Recommendation 1a (from Article 56.B.5): "Of churches with whom ecumenical relations are being established."

Adopted

ARTICLE 82

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga

Materials: *CERCU Guidelines, Recommendation 3* (p.106) *Overture 13* (pp.164-165)

- A. The following motion is re-tabled (69): That Synod define majority in this situation as two thirds of the consistories.

Grounds for 1,2: See the three grounds given for overture 13 on p.164-165.

The chairman rules that this motion is out of order for the following reasons:

1. The church order, article 36, define the matter of ecumenical relations as simple majority;
2. The chair ruled previously on this and was not overruled and
3. The recommendation is superfluous because 2/3 majority is needed to approve changes in the church order.

- B. That Synod declare that when Art. 36 of the Church Order and the ‘Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity’ refer to ‘*of the consistories*’ it shall mean *of the consistories voting in the ratification process*.

Ground: See CERCU report p. 71: “A considerable number of consistories did not vote in the 2001 ratification process for the Canadian Reformed Churches. In order to encourage all consistories to participate in such a significant activity, the committee recommends that synod determine that the wording of Art. 36 means *the majority of the consistories voting*. Should synod adopt this recommendation, consistories that fail to participate would not actively determine the potential outcome.”

Defeated

Note: The current practice as indicated on the p.71 remains in force.

- C. That Synod declare this to be its answer to Overture 13 and CERCU’s recommendation # 3 p. 106.
Adopted

ARTICLE 83

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga

Materials: *CERCU Guidelines, Recommendation 4-11* (pp.106)

Recommendations:

- A. Re: Recommendation # 4, p.106: That Synod establish phase 2 – Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Article 36 of the Church Order (see report p.73-80)

Note: Establishing Phase 2 with the RCUS does not necessarily entail the appointing of Phase 2 Committees at this time.

Adopted

Note: The chairman instructs the stated clerk to facilitate the ratification of this decision by the consistories no later than May 1, 2005.

- B. Re: Recommendation # 5 (p.106): That Synod establish Phase 1 – Corresponding Relations with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ) (see p.85, and the letter attached to Stated Clerk’s final report).
Adopted
- C. Re: Recommendation # 6 (p.106): That Synod establish Phase 1 – Corresponding Relations with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). (see report p.86)
Adopted
- D. Re: Recommendation # 7 (p.106): That Synod remove the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) from the federations with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations. (see report pp.84-85)
1. Motion is made and supported to amend the motion by adding the words “with regret.”
Adopted
 2. The motion as amended is:
Adopted
- E. Re: Recommendation # 8 (p.106): That Synod apply for membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) (see report p. 86-88).
Adopted
- F. Re: Recommendation # 11 (p.106): That synod approve the work of the CERCU without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.
Adopted
- G. That Synod thank all the members of CERCU for their many years of diligent work, both those who are retiring and those who will be continuing the work.
Done by order of the chair.

ARTICLE 84

Advisory Committee 5

Reporter: Mr. Charles Loopstra

Materials: *URCNA Web Site Report to Synod 2004* (pp.135-145); Cont’d from Article 40

Recommendations:

- A. That the oversight committee has the authority to delegate technical responsibility and updates of the web site to others, subject to guidelines developed by the committee. The committee shall ensure that the web site is secure, accurate and current.
Adopted
- B. That the initial funding of the web site be through equal contributions from each classis in the amount of \$500 (USD) by December 31, 2004 and \$500 (USD) annually thereafter payable on or before the calendar year end. The treasurers of the URCNA US and Canadian corporations shall set up and jointly manage this fund.
Adopted

- C. That the consistory of Covenant URC of Kalamazoo, Michigan and Gregory Rickmar be thanked for their efforts in maintaining the unofficial URCNA web site, and that their services be enlisted by the committee during the transition to an official federation website. *Adopted*
- D. That these recommendations serve as a satisfactory response to item 9 of the report of the Convening Church. *Adopted*
- E. That in response to the letter received from Reformed Believers United (p. 51) with respect to the publication of the directory of the United Reformed Churches, the committee be mandated to take over this responsibility as part of the development of the URCNA website including the ability to print a current directory from the website. That Reformed Believers United be thanked for the invaluable service they have provided to the churches in publishing a directory. *Adopted*
- F. The chairman instructs the stated clerk to communicate with the Kalamazoo church to act with haste in relation to the matter mentioned above and to write RBU a letter of gratitude for publishing the Directory. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 85

It is noted that Rev. Vander Pol of Cape Coral, Florida and Leo Miedema of Woodstock, Ontario must leave synod on account of scheduling conflicts.

ARTICLE 86

Advisory Committee 5

Reporter: Mr. Charles Loopstra
 Materials: *Report of the Stated Clerk, Recommendation # 2 (p.47)*

That in response to the balance of recommendation # 2 of the Report of the Stated Clerk, this recommendation has been sufficiently addressed by article 84.E

Adopted

ARTICLE 87

Advisory Committee 1

Reporter: Rev. Joghinda Gangar
 Materials: *Overtures 1 (p. 150), 2 (pp. 150-151), and 3 (p. 151), Report 1a. Church Order Committee of CERCUC, Theological-Education Report (pp.104-105)*

Overture #1

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2004 of the URCNA to add words “help him” to Article 3 of the Church Order such that the revised article will read as follows:

Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to

exhort, and to assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should **help him** ensure that the financial needs are met.

A. We recommend that Synod accede to Overture #1 with the following amendments.

1. The last sentence read “The council of his church should **help him** ensure that **his** financial needs are met.

Ground: The amendment clarifies what the grounds express while preserving the intent of the overture.

Adopted by two-thirds majority (as per CO, article 66)

Note: The stated clerk is instructed to facilitate this by May 1, 2005.

2. Delete the last sentence of ground 1 of the overture.

Adopted

3. Delete first sentence of ground 2.

Adopted

4. Delete last sentence of ground 2 because the sentence is too prescriptive.

Adopted

B. We recommend that Synod accede to Overture #2 with the following amendment.

Adopt overture #2 (last paragraph of the overture should be labeled as # 4)

Adopted by two-thirds majority (as per CO, article 66)

Note: The stated clerk is instructed to facilitate this by May 1, 2005.

C. We recommend that Synod not accede to Overture # 3.

Ground :

- a. Church Order articles 6-8 address these concerns.
- b. Though the overture raises a perceived issue, it does not offer a solution.

Adopted

ARTICLE 88

The chairman instructs the stated clerk to write separate letters to the Canadian and US Treasurers to establish separate funds for the URCNA website and to remind them to establish a separate songbook fund.

ARTICLE 89

The assembly recesses for lunch. Rev. Don Hoaglander of West Sayville, New York leads in devotions by reading Romans 11:33-36, inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 488 and leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 90

The Afternoon Session of June 18, 2004.

Rev. Richard Stevens of Cape Coral, Florida leads in opening devotions by inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal 217, by reading Philippians 3:10-16 and by leading in prayer.

ARTICLE 91

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 92

Advisory Committee 1

Reporter: Rev. Joghinda Gangar
Materials: *Church Order Committee Report* (p. 88-99).

Recommendations:

- A. That Synod adopt point 1. *Adopted*
- B. That Synod adopt point 2. *Adopted*
- C. That Synod add **URCNA** before “Synodical Procedure” in point 3. *Withdrawn*
- D. That Synod Change “for final adoption by Synod” to “**for presentation to the next Synod**” in point 3. *Withdrawn*
- E. That Synod adopt amended point 3. *Withdrawn*
- F. That Synod adopt point 4. *Adopted*
- G. That Synod adopt point 5. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 93

Advisory Committee # 1

Reporter: Rev. Joghinda Gangar
Materials: *Theological Education Committee Report* (page 104-105)

Recommendations:

- A. That Synod receive this report with gratitude. *Adopted*
- B. That Synod encourage this committee to continue to fulfill its assigned mandate. *Adopted*
- C. That Synod grant to Rev. Vander Hart the privilege of the floor to answer any questions. *Declared Immaterial*

ARTICLE 94

Advisory Committee 2

Reporter: Rev. Dennis Royall
Materials: *Overture # 4 (p. 152)*

Recommendations:

1. That synod accede to overture #4, “to approve the republication of the 1976 edition of the Psalter Hymnal, with a layout similar to that of its previous republication for the URC”.
 Grounds:
 1. It has been almost 5 years since the last republication took place. Since then, several of our churches have grown, and several new churches have been organized, thereby increasing the number of books needed.
 2. It appears that our own hymnal is still several years away from completion.
 3. The 1976 edition of the Psalter Hymnal is known among us and is satisfactory.

Adopted
2. That synod instruct the Psalter Hymnal Committee to contact CRC Publications, and to implement Overture 4.

Adopted
3. That this be our answer to Overture #4.

Adopted

ARTICLE 95

Advisory Committee 2

Reporter: Rev. Dennis Royall
Materials: *Suggestions from Oral Report of URCNA-US Treasurer*

Recommendation: That the suggestions made in the oral report of the URCNA-US Treasurer to synod, regarding the mandate of the Psalter Hymnal Committee, be ruled inadmissible.

- Grounds:
1. For the sake of proper deliberation by synod, such matters should be placed on synod’s agenda in the proper manner.
 2. Proper procedure requires that such suggestions be placed on synod’s agenda by way of overtures and/or appeals and/or committee reports, so that councils and delegates have adequate opportunity to consider them beforehand.
 3. Proper procedure in such matters also includes correspondence with the committee.
- Adopted*

ARTICLE 96

Advisory Committee 2

Reporter: Rev. Dennis Royall

Materials: *Report of the Song Book Committee* (pp. 100-104.):

Recommendations:

1. That synod accede to Recommendation 1 of the committee, with Guideline #9 amended as follows: "The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Use is to be made of the music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage."

Note: it should be noted that, as stated in the grounds for the Psalter Hymnal Committee's Recommendation 1, that the Canadian Reformed Churches, at Synod Chatham in February 2004, approved the "Principles and Guidelines" as they appear in the Psalter Hymnal Committee's report.

Adopted

2. That synod substitute the following for Recommendation 2 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee report: "That synod recommend that our churches familiarize themselves with the Book of Praise (Anglo-Genevan Psalter)."

Adopted

3. That synod accede to Recommendation 3 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee report.

Adopted

4. That synod appoint no more than five members to the committee assigned the "non-musical section" of the new book.

Adopted

5. That synod consider the following nominees for membership on the committee assigned the "non-musical section" of the new book,. (Synod is free, of course, to nominate others as it desires.)

Dr. Robert Godfrey

Dr. Michael Horton

Rev. Paul Ipema

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman

Dr. Kim Riddlebarger

Rev. Dick Stevens

Note: We recommend that the chairman appoint the convenor of this committee once its members have been appointed.

Adopted

- a. Motion is made and supported to appoint Dr. Kloosterman the alternate.

Adopted

- b. The chairman appoints Dr. Kim Riddlebarger as the chairman of this committee.

6. That synod accede to Recommendation 4 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee report, and appoint 4-6 new members to the Psalter Hymnal Committee ("musical section").

Adopted

7. That synod consider the following nominees for appointment to the "musical section" of the Psalter Hymnal Committee (Synod is free, of course, to nominate others as it sees fit.)

Rev. David Bosch – Loveland, CO

Gaylord Haan –Jenison, MI

Daphne Jasperse – Escondido, CA

Emelie Lund – Escondido, CA

Rev. Alan VanderPol, or, Mrs. Marcia VanderPol – Cape Coral, FL

Adopted

8. That synod approve the work of the Psalter Hymnal Committee.

Adopted

ARTICLE 97

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga
Materials: CERCU (pp.69-111)

We recommend the following, for this transitional period:

- A. All the members of CERCU be retained until appointments are made by each Classis (Including those listed as retiring in 2004). *Adopted*
- B. For Classis Ontario that Rev. John Bouwers be appointed, and for Classis Central US that Rev. Todd Joling be appointed. *Adopted*
- C. Members at Large : Mr. Chuck Dykstra Eligible for this term only
Rev. Harry Zekveld Eligible for one more term
Rev. Ralph Pontier Eligible for two more terms. *Adopted*
- D. Motion is made and supported to appoint Rev. Dick Wynia as an alternate. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 98

Advisory Committee 7

Reporter: Rev. Calvin Tuininga
Re: CECCA (pp.112-131)

Recommendations:

- A. Classis Eastern US -
Michigan -
Central US -
Southwest US - Rev. Joghinda Gangar
Western Canada -
Southern Ontario - Rev. Dennis Royall *Adopted*
 - B. Retained Members
Rev. Richard Sikkema – eligible for one more term
Rev. Christo Heiberg – eligible for two more terms *Adopted*
- Note: Previously synod appointed both the chairman and secretary for each of these synodically appointed committee.
- C. Motion is made and supported to have the committee appoint its own chairman and secretary. *Adopted*

ARTICLE 99

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats
Materials: *Co-operative Savings Fund Report* (pp. 132-134).

The Pre-advice committee recommends that Synod adopt the following recommendations and recommended guidelines, with regard to the establishment of a Classical Ministers Assistance Fund, as gleaned from Report # 3.

A. Each Classis be responsible for overseeing that each church in the Classis is contributing to their pastor's retirement plan.

Grounds:

1. Because each Classis meets at least every 12 months it will allow Classis to respond better to the needs of a local church.
2. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each others needs.
3. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs of a particular church.

Recommended Guidelines:

1. The church visitors be instructed to ask the following questions.
 - a. As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister, are you including an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 5% to 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or equivalent value thereof? This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
 - b. Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration? (Including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof.)
 - c. Does your church need assistance?
2. If there is a financial need in the local congregation to meet requirements A1 or A2 the Council should request the assistance from Classis.

Adopted

B. Each Classis establish their own Ministers Assistance Fund as necessary.

Grounds:

1. The need to assist pastors and/or their widows who have left other denominations who may have lost part of their pensions.
2. The need to assist retired pastors and churches where a special need has arisen.
3. Free-will offerings may be stronger due to the closer relationship between the churches of Classis
4. Because each Classis meets at least every 12 months it will allow Classis to respond better to the needs of a local church.
5. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each others needs.
6. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs.

Recommended Guidelines:

1. The Church visitors should be instructed to ask the following questions: Does your church need assistance from the Ministers Assistance Fund:
 1. To support a retired pastor or a widow of a former pastor of a URCNA?
 2. To help pastors who have left other denominations, to join the URC federation, who may have lost part of their pensions?

3. To assist widows or retired pastors in need who left other denominations to join the URC Federation?
2. If the local congregation is unable to meet the needs, as described in grounds 1 and 2 of recommendation B, their Council may petition their Classis for assistance from the Ministers Assistance Fund.
3. Classis should appoint a church in the Classis to administer the Ministers Assistance Fund.

Adopted

- C. Our committee recommends that Synod commends the Lynden, Washington and Abbotsford, British Columbia churches for their diligent fulfillment of the mandate of Synod 2001.
- D. The chair instructs the stated clerk to write letters of appreciation to these churches.

ARTICLE 100

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats

Materials: *Report 6 – Health Care* (pp.147-149)

- A. We commend the work of the Health Care Committee appointed by 2001
The chair instructs the stated clerk to write a letter of appreciation to this committee.
- B. We recommend that synod adopt the recommendation of the committee on p. 159.
- C. We recommend that synod appoint the Covenant URC of Toronto, Ontario to implement these recommendations.
- D. Motion is made and supported to appoint Bethany URC of Wyoming, Michigan to fulfill with haste the assignments of the US Health Care Committee previously assigned by synod 2001.

Adopted

Adopted

Adopted

ARTICLE 101

Rev. Sikkema addresses a letter from the URC church in Myanmar. (pp.56-61). The chairman instructs the clerk to respond to the letter reporting on the decisions made by synod relative to the church in Myanmar.

ARTICLE 102

- A. The chairman rules that appeals be published on the basis of precedent.
- B. Motion is made and supported to excise personal names, both of those who made appeals and those mentioned in the appeals.

Adopted

ARTICLE 103

- A. Motion is made and supported to accept Community URC in Schereville's invitation to be the next convening church.
- B. Motion is made and supported for synod to meet the second week in July, 2007 (9-13).

Adopted

Adopted

ARTICLE 104

- A. The stated clerk reads the concept minutes.
- B. Motion is made and supported approve the concept minutes.

Adopted

ARTICLE 105

Motion is move and supported to adjourn.

Adopted

ARTICLE 106

- A. The chairman reads from Acts 11, on the basis of which he exhorts the assembly to be faithful in our callings to be missionaries. The chairman then thanks Rev. Vander Kooi, chairman *pro tem*; the Bethel consistory and organizing committee for all their work; the support ladies for the meals and organization; the organist, pianist and flutist; the chairmen and reporters of various committees; the stated clerk, vice-chair and delegates. He concludes by expressing gratitude to the Lord.
- B. The vice-chairman thanks the chairman for his grace, charity and wisdom and the delegates for their labors.

ARTICLE 107

Rev. Bill DeJong leads in closing prayer and invites the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal # 400.

**REPORT OF THE CONSISTORY OF
BETHEL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH OF CALGARY
TO SYNOD 2004 OF THE URCNA**

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ;

June 15, 2004

As the convening church of the 2004 URCNA Synod we submit this report:

1. The work of the Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America,, Rev. Jerome Julien, was under the supervision of the Consistory of the Bethel United Reformed Church of Calgary until October 15, 2003 at which time the synodically appointed alternate, Rev Bill DeJong, was requested to take on the work.
2. Rev. Julien was provided advice on replacements for vacancies on committees and was also given advice on how to interpret the meaning of Article 36 of the Church Order regarding the ratification of entering into a Phase 2 Ecumenical relationship with the Canadian Reformed Church. Rev Julien also requested advice on how to bind the printed volumes of the Proceedings of previous Synods but was unable to complete this task before it became apparent to him that his employment as a Christian School teacher was preventing him from fulfilling his duties as Stated Clerk. We would like to thank him for his years of dedication and service to the Federation.
3. We want to thank the new Stated Clerk, Rev. Bill DeJong, for the help he has given the Bethel URC Synodical Committee. He had to assume Stated Clerk responsibilities on short notice and his willingness to help and give advice was appreciated. We also enjoyed his support for enabling much of the communications and publication of Synodical materials to be done using the Internet, which has saved the federation over \$5000. Mr. Chairman we recommend that the yearly remuneration for the stated clerk position be maintained at \$2,000 US.
4. Rev. Bill DeJong was provided with a policy to help him determine what literature and materials could be on display at the 2004 Synod of the United Reformed Church in North America. We also have assisted with the preparation of the Agenda for Synod 2004 and helped produce the bound Proceedings of Previous Synods.
5. We have asked the Rev. Joel Alan VanderKooi to present a message this evening at 7:30 p.m. as part of an inspirational service.
6. As a committee, we have proposed that delegates be placed on nine different committees of pre-advice for the overtures, appeals and reports before synod and we also informed proposed committee members in advance so that they could become familiar with the materials. (See Appendix 'A' – included) Mr. Chairman, we recommend these committees be adopted by Synod.
7. We have provided free meals for Ecumenical observers and Fraternal Delegates as well as retired ministers.
8. Mr. Chairman we would recommend that a policy be established with respect to the Federation covering the hotel and meal costs of guests of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches

Abroad. Although the Committee requested that the convening church should provide this, we could not find any previous approval for this and so have provided no-cost billets and free meals for those delegates from abroad.

9. We would also ask that Synod 2004 instruct the Stated Clerk and the next convening consistory to provide oversight over the work of the next church appointed to maintain the URCNA web page. Although the Stated Clerk requested that we were to provide direction and encouragement to the Covenant URC of Kalamazoo to fulfill the mandate that they had outlined at Synod 2001, they felt that only Synod could provide direction to them. Few enhancements or upgrades were completed.
10. As noted in the Stated Clerk's report, we also found that there is a clear lack of guidelines covering the delineation of responsibilities between the convening church and the Stated Clerk. It would be beneficial for Synod 2004 to provide at a minimum, preliminary guidelines for the next convening consistory.
11. We also noted that there are no guidelines covering the admissibility of appeals. We have several concerns with the appeals that are before us. Therefore it is our recommendation that each committee considering appeals first determine the admissibility of the appeal(s), and then seeks the advice of the body before proceeding further if there are concerns on this point. Without this first taking place, we may be establishing a precedent that could be applied inappropriately in the future.

On behalf of the Consistory;

Bill Konynenbelt,
Synod 2004 Coordinator
Bethel United Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta

STATED CLERK'S REPORT FOR SYNOD 2004

June 4, 2004

Esteemed Brothers:

I began my labors as Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) on October 15, 2003 when Rev. Julien, my predecessor, concluded that he could not fulfill his clerical responsibilities in a timely manner given his increased workload as an instructor at a Christian high school. His resignation was accepted by his supervising consistory (Bethel URC in Calgary, AB) and I, as the synodically appointed alternate, was commissioned to resume Rev. Julien's work.

I wish at this point to reiterate what I wrote in my November 13, 2003 letter to the federation. Rev. Julien performed a faithful service for our churches, giving of his time and energy to ensure that the business of the federation was transacted decently and in order. The Lord had uniquely blessed him with a willingness and an aptitude for the work that I clearly lack. We ought to be grateful to the Lord for Rev. Julien's years of service (1996-2003).

Since the last synod, Rev. Julien published the minutes of synod Escondido 2001, handled federational correspondence and superintended the 2002 and 2003 annual directories of the URCNA published by Reformed Believer's United.

My workload since assuming the clerical responsibilities has never been anything but heavy. Already in October, the synod 2004 committee of the Calgary church and I began work on preparing the previous synodical agendas and minutes for publication in bound volumes, as per article 35 of the Minutes of Synod 2001. This work was tedious and I quickly enlisted the assistance of the Calgary church's secretary, Carla DeBruyn, who proved invaluable for this assignment.

On November 13, 2003 I sent a letter to all the churches in the federation indicating, among other things, that I had replaced Rev. Julien as stated clerk and had reset the deadline for submissions to the synodical agenda to March 31, 2004.

In December, 2003 I began work on the 2004 directory of the URCNA with Mr. Wayne Martin of Reformed Believer's United. I electronically mailed forms to each of the churches and was happy to receive most of them back the same way. I think this represents a major improvement to the way things were done previously since it is so cost, time and paper efficient.

Much of my time in 2004 has been spent handling denominational correspondence and answering questions about the federation from both insiders and outsiders. I've also spent countless hours preparing the agenda for synod 2004 and have had regular contact with the convening church of Calgary about this.

Delinquent Churches

A number of churches have failed to comply with article 28 of the church order which stipulates that “each consistory shall delegate two of its members” to synod meetings. The churches of Allendale, MI and Preakness Valley, NJ have informed us that they will not be sending any delegates to this year’s synod meeting. A number of churches are sending only one delegate, some expressing regret about doing so.

New Churches

The acceptance of following churches into the federation requires synodical ratification (per article 32 of the church order).

1. Covenant Reformed Church (Pella, IA; 3/02)
Grace Evangelical Church (Torrance, CA; 3/02)
Evangelical Reformed Church (Tacoma, WA; 6/02)
United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay (Thunder Bay, ON; 6/02)

2. The United Reformed Church of Nampa (Nampa, ID; 3/02), Immanuel United Reformed Church (Listowel, ON; 02); the Belgrade United Reformed Church (Belgrade, MT; 9/02), the Oceanside United Reformed Church (Oceanside, CA; 9/02); the Bellingham United Reformed Church (Bellingham, WA; 11/03) and the Emmanuel United Reformed Church (Lemoore, CA; 3/04) have been organized as churches within the federation (per article 22 of the church order) since synod 2001 in Escondido, CA. Synod Hudsonville, 1999 decided that “churches admitted under Article 22 of the Church order do not require synodical ratification (Minutes, Article 42.e.ii)

Recommendations

1. That synod appoint a committee to draft synodical rules of procedure. In these rules:
 - a. a standard of parliamentary law should be adopted
 - i. to ensure that the business of the synod meeting is transacted in an orderly, practical way and
 - ii. to assist the officers of synod in overseeing the proceedings and preserving order;
 - b. guidelines should be provided to assist prospective appellants prepare an appeal and be familiar with protocol, standards of admissibility and preferred verbiage;
 - c. the authority and responsibilities of the stated clerk and the convening church should be clearly distinguished and defined so as to address, for example, who determines the admissibility of overtures, appeals and reports and what the standards of admissibility are. In the process of drafting these rules, the committee should research comparable rules employed in other Reformed denominations and federations.

2. That synod delineate the inter-synodical responsibilities of the stated clerk. Much time was spent this past year soliciting and collating information from the churches for the annual URCNA directory published by Reformed Believers United without a specific mandate from synod to do so. Synod should determine whether this belongs properly to the task of the stated clerk. The advantage to having the stated clerk contribute to this work is it ensures a better response from the churches than a private outfit with no official ties to the federation.

3. That synod clarify whose responsibility it is to invite fraternal observers and delegates to the meetings of synod. Is it that of the respective ecumenical committees, both foreign and domestic, or that of the stated clerk?
4. That synod grant non-voting privilege of the floor to the stated clerk if he is not delegated to synod by his consistory. It would make good sense for a consistory not to delegate the stated clerk to synod since it would be disadvantaged by having one of their delegates unable to contribute meaningfully to the deliberations of synod. In that scenario, the clerk should be given the privilege of the floor without voting rights.
5. That synod appoint a new stated clerk and a new alternate to begin work in August of 2004. As per Article 64 of the Minutes of the 1999 synod the term of office for the Stated Clerk would be three (3) years with eligibility for no more than two (2) consecutive terms. Since this work presents a substantial distraction from the ministry, I would strongly recommend that the new stated clerk and alternate not be in full-time ministry. A semi-retired pastor, a retired pastor or an elder with spare time each would be fitting candidates for the task. It is also essential that the new clerk and his alternate be computer literate.

I recommend Mr. Bill Konynenbelt of the Bethel United Reformed Church in Calgary, Alberta as a fitting candidate for this position. Mr. Konynenbelt is a problem manager with Canadian Pacific Railway, has served as an elder in the Bethel church for many years and was the chairman of the synod 2004 organizing committee. He convincingly displays the ability and aptitude for this kind of work.

In his mercy and grace, the Lord has greatly blessed the United Reformed Churches in North America such that we now have 89 churches (including 7 church plants) in 4 Canadian provinces and 19 American states and approximately 20,000 souls under our care.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Bill DeJong

**LIST OF ECUMENICAL OBSERVERS, FRATERNAL OBSERVERS
AND FRATERNAL DELEGATES**

Official Observers

Independent Christian Reformed Church of Ancaster: Conrad Guichelaar
Albert Zietsma.

Ecumenical Observers

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated): Rev. Ruud Ter Beek
Rev. Roelf C. "Karlo" Janssen
Reformed Churches in South Africa: Dr. Douwe G. Breed
Prof. Andries du Plooy
Reformed Church in New Zealand: Rev. Jim Klazinga
Presbyterian Church in America: Rev. Frank Lanting
NKST Church of Nigeria (did not attend) Rev. Dr. Mbanongon Kurugh Antiev
Rev. Jacob Teghtegh Orkuma

Fraternal Observers

Orthodox Presbyterian Church: Dr. Richard Venema
Reformed Church in the United States: Dr. C.W. "Bud" Powell
Rev. Maynard Koerner
Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches: Rev. James Reaves
Free Reformed Churches in North America Rev. Neil Pronk

Fraternal Delegates

Canadian Reformed Churches: Rev. Bill Slomp
Rev. Richard Aasman

Guests (some with displays):

Mr. A. Michael Kiledjian, Director of Donor Relations & Planned Giving at Westminster Theological Seminary in California
Rev. Carl Klompier, Dordt College
Mrs. Glenda Mathes, *Christian Renewal*
Rev. Paul Murphy, Messiah's Fellowship (New York City)
Reformed Fellowship (publishes *Outlook*)
Rev. Hans Uittenbosch, Ministry to Seafarers
Rev. Mark Vander Hart, Mid-America Reformed Seminary
Mr. Bruce Vrieling, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

CORRESPONDENCE

Cornerstone United Reformed Church Hudsonville, Michigan

THE TRUMPET

Dear brothers in Christ;

Synod 2001 adopted the proposal to publish a denominational semiannual missions update. In adopting the proposal Synod asked Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Hudsonville to publish the newsletter.

The elders of Cornerstone and its Evangelism Committee appointed 2 members to implement the request. The newsletter was given the name THE TRUMPET. Though no reports from Joint Venture Committees were available the committee felt that a newsletter was still important so the churches could pray and support URC mission efforts. With this in mind it was decided to go ahead and publish the 1st issue.

In contacting our missionaries we found more than enough material for a semi-annual newsletter and decided to publish it quarterly, which we have done the last 3 years with one exception. The winter issue 2004 was combined with the spring issue.

We pray that the effort has been fruitful in bringing awareness of the work of our missionaries and Evangelism committees to every member of the United Reformed Churches.

The majority of the churches receive a 'master copy' in color via e-mail. If you wish to copy them in black and white, please let us know, we can also e-mail them in a black and white format. Some churches without e-mail capabilities are mailed a master copy and still other churches without the ability to make copies are mailed sufficient copies for their congregations. 120 copies are copied and mailed to churches requesting them.

As we begin our 4th year we are asking for the cooperation of each church in our federation. Please send us news on your local efforts doing evangelism, see that each member receives the newsletter and pray for these efforts. Please contact Don at donvandyke@juno.com with information or comments

We have one more request. Volunteers do all the labor involved. Cornerstone has paid the majority of the expenses including postage, provided the use of the copier and is furnishing the toner and paper for 120 copies of each issue. A financial contribution would be appreciated.

Yours in Christ

Don Van Dyke
Elaine Keyzer

Reformed Believers United

Esteemed Brothers in Christ,

By way of introduction, Reformed Believers United (RBU) is an organization that was started in 1990 for the express purpose of informing the Christian Reformed Church's membership of the doctrinal decline that she was experiencing. This was accomplished through local meetings, a local newsletter (sent to every CRC member), and a denomination-wide newsletter that was entitled *The Reformed Witness*.

Eventually, as our individual members left the CRC, we looked to other ways in which we could be of service to the now-independent churches. One way that presented itself was in the publication of the *Directory of the Alliance of Reformed Churches*. Such a directory served as a handy reference for churches that were no longer officially bound together. As many of the churches of the alliance eventually joined the *United Reformed Churches* (as well as all of RBU's members), it was a naturally progression to assist our new federation in a similar manner. Thus we have continued in this effort for some eight years now.

As to the stated clerk's question as to where the task for this publication properly lies, we believe that such an endeavor properly lies under the responsibility of the stated clerk. Consequently, RBU will gladly accede to the decision of synod as to who will publish the directory. However, let it be known that it is our wish is to set aside this work that we have started and place it into the capable hands of the URC's stated clerk.

Finally, Mr. Brian Yonkman, one of our members, is a delegate to synod this year and will be happy to answer any further questions that you may have.

May God bless you, brothers, in the work our Lord has set before you.

In His Service,

Reformed Believers United

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CHURCHES UNABLE TO SEND DELEGATES

**Inter-church Committee of
the Église réformée du Québec**
Rev. Bernard Westerveld, President
844, rue de Contrecoeur
Ste-Foy (Québec) g1x 2x8

May 28, 2004

United Reformed Churches in North America
c/o Rev. Bill DeJong, Stated Clerk

Dear brothers in Christ,

On behalf of your French-speaking brothers and sisters in Christ of the Église réformée du Québec (ERQ -- Reformed Church of Quebec, Canada), we extend to you our heartfelt Christian greetings.

We thank you for the invitation to attend and observe your synodical proceedings. However, because of distance, we have decided not to send an observer. We pray that the Lord and Head of the Church may lead and guide your deliberations and decisions so that His will may be accomplished in your federation.

We thank the Lord for the few meetings which have already been held between the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA and the Inter-church Committee of the ERQ, as well as the opportunity to meet individual URCNA pastors. These initial contacts have led the ERQ synod to mandate our committee to pursue corresponding relations with your federation. (ERQ synod, September 20-21, 2002; Minutes 8.4.2.2).

We are pleased to hear that the CERCU is recommending that the URCNA also enter into corresponding relations with the ERQ. We would encourage your synod to approve this mandate so that our dialogue may prove fruitful and lead to full fraternal fellowship.

As well, we look forward to working cooperatively with you in such mission projects as the broadcasting of the radio ministry *Reformed Faith and Life*, hosted by the Rev. Eric Kayayan, to the French-speaking population of Quebec.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your prayers on our behalf, as well as the financial support given by several of your local churches. Your faithfulness and generosity to strengthen the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the full counsel of God are greatly appreciated. Through the blessing of the Spirit, the Word of God is bearing fruit in our midst.

May the Lord remember your faithfulness and bless you abundantly.

In His service,
Rev. Bernard Westerveld
for the Inter-church Committee of the Église réformée du Québec
cc. Yves Bergeron, Philippe DeBlois

Letter from Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

We deeply regret that we will not have an Observer present at the meeting of your Synod. Since all of our ministers are delegates to our Synod which meets this week, we could not find someone who was able to come to Calgary the same week.

Please convey our Greetings to your Synod and our prayers for the blessings of our Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ upon your deliberations. We rejoice in your firm stand upon the Scriptures and the historic Reformed faith. We trust that God will lead us in working together more effectively for His kingdom and glory. To that end we are proposing to our Synod the following recommendation: That Synod approve entering into a Corresponding Relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America.

We are thankful that the Rev. Todd Joling will be representing the United Reformed Churches as an Observer at our meeting of Synod.

Cordially in Christ,
Bruce C. Stewart, Secretary
Interchurch Relations Committee, RPCNA

Letter from the NKST (The Church of Jesus Christ Among the Tiv.)

The Chairman, the General Secretary of the Synod, the Delegates, the General Assembly, Calvary greetings in the name of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I give thanks and praises to the Lord God Almighty for His wonderful providence to me in particular and the NKST in general. I thank the Lord for creating every necessary chance that I send my reports to this Conference or Synod.

I owe much thanks to the Home Board Church, Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) for many things that is:- Keeping NKST Consciously in mind, providing numerous support to NKST in various areas; assisting us for the gospel proclamation tirelessly, inviting NKST to your annual Synod every year, keeping us in your prayers always.

I wish to express that NKST's inability to attend the Synods in the immediate past was because of some economic difficulties in our Country, Nigeria and the policy of US Embassy on Visas. Many a times we struggled for funds and when we finally got some, then we be denied Visas. So NKST consecutive absence from the previous Synod was not by design. The US Consular is so hard on NKST for Visas, we do not know why.

NKST is purely a Reformed Church in Africa and we are proud to associate ourselves with the SUM/CRC in North America as our parents in this reformed faith. We are however, considering seriously the issues of women Ordination and homosexuals. These issues are evoked a lot of thinking. The Church wants to clearly understand what the Bible says about the matter.

The NKST Church began by DRCM of South Africa by 1911. Nursed and Nurtured by SUM/CRCNA in growing daily in the blessing of the Lord. The Church Headquarters is at Mkar Benue State, Nigeria.

The General Secretary is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Church and is mandated to carry out the daily activities and business of the Church. He is assisted by the Assistant General Secretary. The NKST Executive Committee meets once every month and is headed by the NKST President who presides the Synod and Executive Committee meetings. Our New General Secretary is Rev. Dr. Kurugh Antiev, JP.

The Church carries the heritage of Missionary work on Church planting. We have Mission Stations all over Nigeria. Many of the Mission Stations grew up to Organized Congregations. The Mission Services carry out cross-cultural Missions. There are Pastors that have come as a result of the Missionary work. We thank God for your financial and prayer support to the Missionary Services. Rev. Samuel Aliough is the Director of

NKST Missions. Edo Project is a new Mission project began by Mission department, in Edo State, another new Station in Ogun State and Imo State as well - all in English Language and Yoruba.

The education department carries out evangelism by education of the Youth. There are Secondary (High) Schools, one Theological Seminary, one Bible College, one Liberal School of higher learning, three medical Schools - NKST College of Health Technology, NKST Lens Gabriels School of Medical Laboratory Sciences, and NKST School of Nursing and Midwifery.

The Church carries out Health Care evangelism. There are 9 Hospitals and many Comprehensive Health Centres/Clinics under Primary Health Care. These Primary Health Care Services are spread over all Nigeria. Other programs carried out by Health Care Services are Family Planning, HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign, Reproductive Health Care Program. NKST Rehabilitation Hospital (Former Lep. And Rehab. Hospital) Mkar. Chaplaincy department is attached to every Hospital and Clinic. NKST Community Based Rehabilitation Programme sponsored by Christophel Blinden Mission (CBM) from Germany is doing much to help people with permanent disabilities to be self-sustaining. NKST Eye Care Project is also sponsored by (CBM). There are other health care services and Health talks and awareness campaign going on for an awareness of HIV/AIDS. NKST has combined with Center for Development and Population Agencies for this Project.

Three (3) higher Institutions of higher Learning are: RTS (RTCN) Focus on the trainings of Ministers. It is producing Ministers for the Gospel across the country (Nigeria). We give Diplomas, 1st Degree and have started a Masters Program. Students come from Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Nassarawa, Enugu, Akwa Ibom States, etc. and are from various Church denominations. The year 2002, we graduated a student from the Republic of Cameroon. We also trained Andrew Woja and ordained him from Sudan to work with his people. He is now studying in U.S to go back to Sudan and serve.

BBC (BBI) is going on well. The Institution prepares lay teachers, evangelists and those called to be Ordained in Ministerial work. Many of those graduated from RBC find chances into RTS. The Institution graduates people with Diplomas and Certificates in Religious Education.

ICMS (Mkar Univeristy). The young institution is growing fast. It is meant for liberal studies. The Institution is producing people with certificates and diplomas in various fields of studies. Students come from Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa, Plateau, Cross River and Enugu States. We are making efforts to make it into a full University. With your prayers and material supports, we shall start the University soon, Lord willing.

The National University Commission is ready to permit the starting of the University. We have submitted an academic brief, University law and are working on the master plan. We are also yet to meet their requirement of 200million Naira, but trusting God will supply.

There are Secondary (High) Schools across the country. The Schools are competitive in admissions and academic works. These schools have being feeding the nation with good and behaved people. Those alumni of (these) NKST Schools are proud of their almanata where ever they found themselves. Their performances are always excelling. Thank God for promoting His kingdom through NKST. Primary (Grade) Schools numbered across Nigeria. The dense number is found in Benue, Taraba, and Nassarawa States. In all NKST Institutions and schools, Reformed faith and moral instructions is taught daily.

As far as other arms of evangelism are concerned, the NKST Media Services department cares for the infants whose mothers, in one way or another, could not take care of them, either as a result of death of mother or dumped and picked kids. Many children are raised from orphanage. We nurse them and teach them the love of Christ and give them out to people to adopt. The department is headed by Rev. G.O. Uva.

The NKST Media Services department circulates information necessary for Church members. It is responsible for Radio Evangelism. It produces pamphlets and Journals, newspapers carrying current information about the Church activities and programs; we are requesting prayers for this department for we need our own Radio Station.

The Lamp and Word Books (Literature) department is working fine. It makes Christian literature available for Christians, both NKST family and other Church families. We sell Bibles to our members and other Christians. Sunday School (MIM) Youth Ministry, Choir, Diaconal and other Ministries are also

carrying out evangelism on a wider scope. Many widows and orphans have been reached through diaconal Ministry.

Projects: Abuja Project:- The Mission Project at Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria still occupies a great space in our mind. We hope to develop the center for Christian fellowship. God's helping us. We so much appreciate the financial support that we have been getting from home board for this project. NKST Secretariat:- We want to undertake a construction of new Secretariat. The work has started and it is on foundation level. We need your prayers that we can get volunteered, experienced builders for this enormous project.

Deaths. We wish to sent our heartfelt condolences to you for our beloved Missionaries who labored in our land and we heard are now gone to be with the Lord. Please, accept our sympathy. We wish to announce to you the deaths of Reverends A.V. Ayaka one of the first NKST Ordained Pastors, S.K. Alumunku, Rev. J.I. Ugba, Atese Hanmeza, Rev. J.N. Abeva, Rev. I.I. Adaaku, Rev. J.I. Tyohuna, Atese Lydia M. Ityogyer, Rev. G.A. Iortile, Rev. A.I. Yina, Atese N. Nevkar, Rev. D.N. Agbatse, Atese E. Tser, JP, Rev. J.K. Mnda, Rev.Hanmo Shawon, Rev. Idyege, P.I. We request consolation prayers for the bereaved.

Crisis: The Church has been drastically affected by both political and religious crisis. The religious crisis started in Plateau State and claimed so may lives. This escalated and reached Kano and other places. A total of 3,000 people mainly Christians have been killed, out of which 26 are NKST members. Ministers of the gospel are now harassed and insulted through public media by the ruling government. This crisis led to the suspension of the Governor of Plateau who is a Christian. The political aspect of the crisis has devastated Kwande local government, Gwer local government and Makurdi. Thousands of people have been killed, lots of Churches burnt down and members of our Church are on the run. The village and house of Rev. Dr. J.Y. Akpem has been totally demolished.

Prayer Request: Pray for stability in Nigeria, Benue State and NKST Church in particular. Pray for the successful take-off of the proposed Mkar University. The Government of Nigeria is ready to grant permit, but the Church is yet to meet up the N200million naira requirement by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Pray for building of the secretariat. This project has started but since the crisis situation has affected the Church, finances are no longer coming from congregations because members themselves need rehabilitation.

We look forward to meeting with you Lord willing, in a near future and we wish to consider seriously our relationship with you as we continue to relate together. We hope next time the Lord will open our way to meet with you. Do keep us on your mailing list. My God grant you spiritual wisdom as you deliberate on sensitive and serious issues for the advancement of His kingdom on earth. Thank you.

Letter from United Reformed Churches in Myanmar

From Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang
Chairman, Contact Committee, URCM
35/1277-78 Kanthayar St.
N. Dagon, 11421 ,Yangon, Myanmar
Email: mosesurcm@mail4u.com.mm
Tel: 95-1-584217

Date: June 15, 2005

Dear Rev. Bill DeJong,

Warmest greetings from the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar (Burma).

I was indebted to Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Secretary, CECCA who informed URCM that your Synod meeting would be held in June 2005. And we are happy to receive the Agenda for the fifth Synod of United Reformed Churches in North America, from Paul Mang Hoe Thang today.

I would be grateful if you could kindly convey the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar's greetings to the meeting of the fifth Synod of URC in North America which is in progress now. It is our wish that God bless the Synod's proceedings and deliberations.

The ICRC Secretary Rev. C. Van Spronsen informed us that we need to have two letters of sponsorship by present member-churches, and the procedure followed is that our completed application must be in one year in advance (by October 2004) in order to be placed on the agenda for the 2005 meeting in October in S. Africa.

We, therefore earnestly request and pray that your Synod endorses the application of URC in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC.

We have been looking for ICRC member churches that would recommend us for our sponsorship. We come across that URC in North America and Reformed Presbyterian Church (North East India Synod), Peace lane, Luoia Road, Churachandpur, Manipur 795 128, India are the only two churches that will have their Synod meetings before this coming October. We, therefore sent our two delegates to RPC (N. East India Synod) for this matter. RPC India also sent their delegate to Myanmar to survey us. We take it as positive response for our sponsorship and fellowship.

We, therefore earnestly pray that the URC in North America and the RPC North East India Synods will endorse the application of URC in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC.

Yours in the fellowship of the Reformed faith,

[signed]

Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang
Chairman, Contact Committee
United Reformed Churches in Myanmar

Please convey this letter to Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema and Rev. Cornelis P. Venema for their kind endorsements.

I also attach here Rev. Bruce Hoyt's report on his Missions trip to Myanmar.

Report on Missions trip to Myanmar (Burma): 14 Feb - 26 Feb 2003

By Rev. Bruce Hoyt
To all sessions of the RCNZ

Invitation

In early December I was invited by the Synodical Interim Committee of the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar to be the guest preacher at their third triennial Synod and Assembly to be held at the end of February 2003 and to give a series of lectures to their office—bearers who would be coming for a four-day pre-synod training conference. I was asked to preach on the theme “Christ, the Seed of Abraham” from Gal. 3 and to lecture on the topic “Reformed Church Government”.

Work done

During my 12 days in Myanmar, I was able to visit 9 different churches (the buildings and the pastors’ homes) in two classis: Yangon and Kale. This gave me a good overview of the situation in which the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar are working. I had opportunity to talk with many of the office—bearers (some through an interpreter and a few in English) I was able to eat lunch and/or dinner in several homes of pastors and elders in the Kale area.

Yangon is the capital and the largest city (5 million) in Myanmar. Kale (40 – 60,000??) is a collection of contiguous villages to the northwest of Mandalay near the border of Chin State. The third classis of the URCM is located in the Chin State, which is closed to foreigners.

As requested, I lectured for 5 hours a day for 4 days to 50 pastors, elders and deacons and one Burmese woman (the Burmese wife of a Burmese man who came from one of the URCM mission posts) The lectures were well received by all who attended.

Many comments of appreciation were made to me in English by those who could speak English and many through my translator by those who couldn’t. The questions asked during the question times at the end of each subtopic also showed that the men had understood the material and were applying it to their church situation. I was asked questions on several occasions about how we do things in NZ.

One of the more significant decisions made by their synod after the pre-synod conference, was the abolishing of the position of “President and Founder” with the agreement of their very well respected President and Founder, Pastor Moses Ngunlei Thang. They had clearly understood that Christ is the only head of the church and that the office—bearers have only local authority. In order to expedite decisions which might need to be made in the interim between synods they set up a committee of 9 men and took my suggestion that significant matters should be referred to the churches for concurrence before implementation. They often need to make decisions between synods since their churches are growing rapidly and they are still learning to function as Reformed Churches.

I was also asked to preach 8 times including the 5 requested sermons from Gal 3 on “Christ, the Seed of Abraham,” the theme of their assembly worship services. The preaching was very well received and there were many expressions of appreciation.

These assembly meetings were advertised by word of mouth. Some 200 or so members of the URCM in the Kale area attended these services. Also an additional 250 folk came from other denominations in the area for the opening Assembly service. By the fourth service there were nearly 550 who came from other denominations to listen, a total, audience of 750. I received many positive comments from both URCM folk and people from other denominations: e.g. “We have never had such clear Bible teaching.”

Potential for Future Mission Work

It is my initial assessment that a wide open door for mission work has been opened to us by invitation from the Synod of the URCM. Although they are very poor (average working man’s income is about \$20—\$40 USD per month), their primary concern is for the growth of the church of Christ and the advance of the Reformed faith in Myanmar.

I certainly detected no subterfuge or attempts merely to get western money so that they are better off. I am quite confident that no individual is seeking to profit from the contact the URCM has made with us. Several things give me this confidence:

1. I talked with many of the pastors privately asking them about their work and their vision. All without exception spoke of their desire to be better equipped for ministry. Several spoke of the teaching they are already giving their congregations and in some cases the Reformed teaching they are giving to villagers from other denominations. All also spoke of the poverty of their people who nevertheless were giving sacrificially to help others more needy than themselves as well as to send some of their children to boarding schools in the area in order that they might receive a decent education and so be able to help the church.
2. I see their extensive mission work. They presently have 5 full—time mission workers in 5 locations around Myanmar who are partially supported by the churches. In each location there are converts being added to the group and they pray that churches may quickly be instituted in each location. This current level of mission work is indicative of their practice since the URCM was instituted in 1993 with a starting group of five families. Their current membership is about 2000 in 25 congregations and/or mission posts.
3. They told me that they are committed to supporting their own full-time pastors and mission workers without outside help.
4. I see their commitment to Reformed doctrine and practice despite being labeled a cult by leaders in other denominations because of their Calvinistic teaching and their anti-dispensational doctrinal position.
5. Pastor Moses their “President and Founder” has willingly stepped down from this position when the synod abolished it, although such a thing has apparently never happened in other denominations, Furthermore no one I spoke to made any criticism, of Pastor Moses and they testify that he has never spent any money he received from overseas churches on himself or his family. He does not have a car and lives in a modest wooden house in a village in North Dagon among other wooden and bamboo houses.

6. Dr. Richard Bacon, pastor of the First Reformation Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas, who has been to Myanmar 5 times in the last 2 1/2 years, has informed me that he thinks the URCM is the most Reformed in its doctrine and practice of all the 11 Reformed/Presbyterian denominations in Myanmar of which he is aware. He has worked with several of the URCM.

The mission work that we have been requested to do in Myanmar would be in the form of short—term teaching and training of their leaders, potential pastors and mission workers. (The government will only give a tourist visa for a maximum stay of 4 weeks.) The URCM have requested that we send ministers every 6 months to give teaching on various topics. During the winter (mid—Nov to mid—Feb) a minister could go to Kale for 3 to 4 weeks which would enable some from the Chin State and from Mandalay as well as from the out—lying villages around Kale to attend. I was told that leaders from other denominations would also be invited and that some would probably attend, so our influence would be wider than the URCM. There would also be opportunity to preach regularly in the local churches giving the pastors a break and also providing a model for their own preaching.

During the rainy season or the summer (perhaps in Aug—Sept) a minister could teach in Yangon (where the climate is somewhat moderated by nearness to the sea) There he could stay in an air—conditioned hotel (Ruby Inn) located in north Yangon, and teach in an air —conditioned room in the School for the Blind (an almost unused government building). In Yangon the teaching would be for the students training in the URCM Evangelical Reformed Seminary (recently opened by Rev. Goris, functioning at about our High School level) who are training to be pastors. The teaching would also be open to church leaders in the Yangon area including leaders from other Reformed denominations.

Because of the poverty of the people, there is a need for support for the students at the Evangelical Reformed Seminary and also for the three young men they hope to send to the Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) in Dehra Dun, India. There would also be a need for financial assistance for travel costs for the URCM church leaders who attend these training courses.

Lecture room / dormitory building for the Ministerial Training Institute Pastor Moses has stressed with me that their most urgent need, for which they are praying earnestly, is for a building to function as a lecture hall and dormitory space for the students who will be trained in the Evangelical Reformed Seminary beginning in June 2003. Such a building would cost around \$6,000 USD. He said they also need support for the students, which would cost about \$30 USD per month. Perhaps individual families in the RCNZ would like to support a student. They presently have 17 men who would like to begin this training. At present Pastor Moses and Siang Hope would be teaching full time. A couple other pastors would be teaching part time. There is also a need for support for the faculty.

Reformed Literature

There is a great need for Reformed literature in the language of the people, e.g. the Heidelberg Catechism (already translated), devotional booklets, doctrinal books, and Bibles. Some of the men are able to translate but they have no money to publish such material. Even photocopies are too expensive for them to afford. Any assistance we can give in this area will greatly advance the Reformed faith in Myanmar.

...people are too poor to pay for medicine the deacons assist where they are able. Surgery is out of the question even though basic abdominal surgery and a hospital stay costs less than \$200 USD in Kale. The people in all the URCM churches give regularly to support their pastors (whose stipend covers only a little more than the monthly cost of food) They also give regularly to the deacons for support of the poor.

There is potential for assistance from us when surgery is needed. Perhaps, this could be organized directly with the deacons in each classis by our National Diaconate Committee (NDC).

As mentioned above there is an on—going need for support for men in training. They have no income during their time of training and the congregations can hardly support their own ministers let alone those who are in training.

There is also a need for transport costs for those who attend conferences such as I gave in Kale and Rev. Goris gave in Yangon, The conference in Kale together with the Synod/Assembly cost a total of \$2000 USD for the 50 men who attended, including transport, meals, and temporary bamboo church building erected to hold the 500-750 who came to their Assembly services. The deacons told me they only had \$1000 USD so their short—fall is \$1000 USD. They did not know whether some of the men would be able to get back home until they got some more money. Hearing this, I paid for a charter bus and a jeep for the men going back to Chin State (\$75 USD) In addition I left the deacons with \$60 USD which I had converted to Kyats but did not use. I told them to use the money as they saw fit.

There is potential for providing starting capital for women who would like to set up a small business to supplement their income. I understood that every church has a ladies society which is active in diaconal assistance (working for a day in the fields, helping a sick family, etc.) and they would be able to organize a small business themselves if they had starting capital. Many of the women have skills in sewing and embroidery, others can do various crafts, which could be sold in a market stall — but they need money for the stall, for treadle sewing machines, for cloth, etc.

Youth training

There is a great need among the youth for, skills training and English. Many of the young people have some knowledge of English, which they obtained at boarding school. But they need a lot of practice and help with pronunciation and sentence formation. A marketable skill like computer use (MS Word, Excel, Outlook), or computer repair, together with English would enable the young people to get (relatively) good jobs which would enable them to provide for their families and begin to lift themselves out of complete poverty. Here is an opportunity for some of our youth, especially if they would have a certificate or diploma for teaching English for speakers of other languages. (Any kind of certificate would be accepted by the Myanmar government, for example, a certificate from a short 4—6 week course.)

...aspects: The teaching will be done in English, an official language of Myanmar.

It will provide opportunities for many of our ministers to teach one or two intensive courses over a few weeks as well as preach in the local churches.

It will provide many opportunities for diaconal assistance to these needy Reformed believers.

It will provide opportunities for individuals and families to support a young man training for the ministry.

There is a possibility of our ladies societies assisting the Myanmar women with starting capital to help them improve their financial situation.

There is a possibility for some of our youth to provide skills and English training for the young people in Myanmar

Ecumenical

The URCM Synod has officially requested an on—going ecumenical relationship with the RCNZ. In particular they

- a. want our support for their membership application to join the ICRC in 2005
- b. want to become sister churches with the RCNZ

Further information Please see the attached email from Siang Hope, which details some of the highest priority requests made by the Synod of the URCM for our assistance.

I will be happy to answer questions about the URCM and the various requests they have made for mission and diaconal assistance. You can contact me at home: 06—876-4353, or in my office: 06—876—4351, or by email:

<http://webmail.mail4u.com.mm/src/compose.php?send to=bhoyt%40globe.net.nz>

I would also be happy to speak to your congregation or missions committee about the URCM and the potential for mission work in Myanmar.

In any case please be in prayer for brothers and sisters in the Lord who are zealous to advance the Reformed faith and the cause of Christ in their own land despite their poverty.

In Christ,

Rev. Bruce Hoyt

Reformed Church of Hastings

TREASURERS REPORTS



99 Scott Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2N 1G8, 905-935-8322

March 2, 2004

Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
C/o Rev. Bill DeJong, Stated Clerk

Dear Brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Please find attached a statement from the Canadian Finance Committee for your information. Up until now this committee has been under the supervision of the council of Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church. The United Reformed Church is now incorporated in Canada and we are told that a new committee will be set up by Synod to handle the finances of the corporation. We look forward to hearing from the new committee and we are prepared to help in the transition of work to this committee.

The Canadian Finance Committee looks after a fund which primarily covers federation expenses such as travel costs for Canadian members of synodical committees and travel costs for synodical representatives to other churches and organizations. The funds come to the committee from the churches as agreed upon at Synod 1996 where each church was asked to contribute "at least \$3 per family" to this fund.

Our council would like to share some concerns and suggestions about the Canadian Finance Committee fund:

- a. Appointment of Synodical Committee Members – Is it prudent for Synod to appoint representatives to committees from across North America? It would be more cost effective if synodical committees were appointed regionally.
- b. Sufficiency of Funds – (i) The Canadian fund is at times close to being depleted; should the synodical committee members, or delegates who receive reimbursement from the fund, forecast in advance their expenses for the year? This would allow the finance committee to prepare a budget and solicit the churches for additional funds if needed. (ii) Are there extra monies in the American fund that could be used to help with the Canadian expenses? Are there different tasks that could be handled by our American brothers?
- c. Accountability - Committee members or delegates who seek reimbursement for expenses submit receipts and are then sent a cheque. At the end of each year a summary statement is sent to all the Canadian Churches. Is this sufficient accountability? Are the statements reviewed at classis meetings? How best can the churches be held accountable for contributing to this fund while also recognizing that some smaller churches may have difficulty contributing to the fund?

Our delegates are prepared to speak further to this matter if called upon.

Yours in Christ,
Tyler Meijaard, clerk

Canadian Finance Committee - URCNA
Report to Synod 2004

The following is a report of activity since the previous synod:

Beginning Balance (December 31, 2000):		\$7,543.52
 2001 Credits:		
"Askings" Receipts	3,545.74	
Dividends	2.76	
	Total Credits:	\$3,548.50 3,548.50
 2001 Expenses:		
Federation Expenses	2,914.94	
Office Expenses	15.73	
Synod Expenses	630.60	
Stated Clerk Remuneration	1,365.00	
Bank Charges	11.25	
	Total Expenses:	\$4,937.52 4,937.52
 Balance (December 31, 2001):		 \$6,154.50
 2002 Credits:		
"Askings" Receipts	3,127.84	
Dividends	1.81	
	Total Credits:	\$3,129.65 3,129.65
 2002 Expenses:		
Federation Expenses	5,202.83	
Office Expenses	16.10	
Legal Expenses (Corporation)	600.00	
Stated Clerk Remuneration & ICRC Dues	2,012.32	
	Total Expenses:	\$7,831.25 7,831.25
 Balance (December 31, 2002):		 \$1,452.90
 2003 Credits:		
"Askings" Receipts	5,519.34	
Dividends	1.24	
Interest	0.12	
	Total Credits:	\$5,520.70 5,520.70
 2003 Expenses:		
Federation Expenses	4,911.88	
Office Expenses	20.24	
Stated Clerk Remuneration & ICRC Dues	1,641.20	
	Total Expenses:	\$6,573.32 6,573.32
 Ending Balance (December 31, 2003):		 \$400.28

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

February, 2004

To: Pastors, Elders, and Deacons of URCNA member churches
From: US URCNA Treasurer

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The purpose of this letter is to provide some observations and information relative to the finances of URCNA as well as summarize the US URCNA's finances for last year.

OBSERVATIONS

1. Almost all the checks are now made out to URCNA.
2. Almost all the checks are sent to the US URCNA Treasurer's address.
3. Thirty-nine out of Forty-seven of the member churches provided "askings" during 2003. (Participation is up from 2002!)
4. Only six churches have provided collections for the Psalter Hymnal fund.
5. We had a lot of travel from various committees in anticipation of Synod 2004.

ASKINGS

URCNA "askings" equals "Suggested Donation". The Synodically approved formula for a suggested donation is \$3.00 per family. This money is used for the ongoing activity of URCNA. Some churches choose to take a free-will offering instead of using the formula. Each member church has a responsibility to participate, in whatever way, in the overall ministry of URCNA.

It has been suggested that many member churches do not remember about the "askings" from year to year because of the yearly changes in the council. Even my own church admits that they would forget about the "askings" if I were not around to remind them. Last year I mailed out a reminder to all churches, about the "askings" for URCNA. The reminder seems to have helped so I will do it again this year. This reminder will then allow the deacons to "tie the check to the request" – a wonderful thing when it comes time to audit the church books at the end of the fiscal year.

PSALTER HYMNAL FUND

The first resolution from Report 3, from the Psalter Hymnal committee, that was adopted by Synod 2001 was **"That synod establish a fund to finance the cost of producing the new Psalter Hymnal."** The second resolution that was adopted from the Psalter Hymnal committee states **"That synod request churches to contribute to that fund by suggesting that free-will offerings be collected for this cause until the new Psalter Hymnal is completed."** The local churches are still not following through with the resolutions their Synod 2001 representatives approved.

ENCLOSURES

A budget has been developed in order to provide information on the ongoing activities. A comparison between last year's budget and last year's actuals is also provided.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2003, a budget for 2004, and guidelines for reimbursement. **Please note that this year is a Synod year and that there will be more expenses than normal this year.** The reimbursement guidelines are intended to adhere to the guidelines defined by the U.S. Government.

INCOMING MAIL

All mail for the US Treasurer should be sent to the address at the bottom of the letter. This is the best method for a timely response.

CHECKS

Please make all checks payable to “URCNA”.

Reimbursement Guidelines

1. When possible, provide actual receipts. (Fax copies are acceptable. Just make sure the information being faxed is legible.)
2. For airline travel, provide the last portion of the ticket, which contains the entire round-trip information. For those who get E-tickets, the cost of the ticket will not be printed. In addition to that ticket, please provide some sort of receipt from the travel agency or, as a last resort, a photocopy of the bankcard statement with the ticket charge circled. Please do not send boarding passes. You may keep them as a souvenir of your trip.
3. If a receipt has items that are personal, send a photocopy of the receipt and circle the reimbursable items.
4. Mileage will be reimbursed at the IRS rate, which, for 2004, is currently **37.5** cents per mile (up from 1.5 cents from last year).
5. Meals will be reimbursed.
6. It is not necessary to submit receipts for meals unless the total exceeds \$36.00 per day.
7. If somebody pays for a group meal, that receipt must be submitted.
8. When meeting with members from Canada, support as much of their bill as possible, they have a poor exchange rate.
9. When staying at a hotel, sharing a room is not a requirement.
10. Please indicate which URCNA committee is being represented when requesting a reimbursement so that it can be properly documented.

The goal is to get a reimbursement check out as soon as possible, so if additional information is needed, it will be requested when the reimbursement check is sent. The process is working well and will continue to be modified, as needed.

Thank for your attention to these financial items. May the Lord continue to bless you in your ministry in 2004.

Serving the Lord together.

Peter J. Moen, U.S. Treasurer, URCNA
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey 07444-1840
Work: 973-284-3092, Fax: 973-284-3394, Home: 973-831-7661

E-Mail: Peter.Moen@ITT.com

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

2003 End Of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2002	21,395.74
INCOME	
Askings	12,260.24
Interest	201.26
Reimbursements ¹	1,234.02
TOTAL INCOME	13,695.52
EXPENSES	
Bank Charges ²	25.00
Clerk ³	3,000.01
Dues ⁴	1,580.00
Incorporation ⁵	20.00
Internet ⁶	415.00
Postage	130.86
Supplies	202.51
Telephone	935.14
Travel	7,808.72
TOTAL EXPENSES	14,117.34
NET TOTAL	(421.82)
BALANCE 12/31/2003	20,973.92

- Note 1: Good faith estimate by CFC URCNA covering 35% Clerk and 35% ICRC Dues
Note 2: Banks are now passing along the fee to process out-of-country checks.
Note 3: Rev. Julien stepped down as clerk and Rev. DeJong took over. Honorariums are now issued on a monthly basis instead of at the end of the year's service. The partial year that Rev. Julien worked accounts for the increase this year.
Note 4: International Conference of Reformed Churches Year 2003 Dues
Note 5: Yearly fee to the State of Michigan for incorporation renewal
Note 6: Fee to establish Internet domain names for the URC

Hymnal Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2002	3,356.55
INCOME	
Collections	3,566.17
Interest	9.20
TOTAL INCOME	3,575.37
EXPENSES	
None	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	3,575.37
BALANCE 12/31/2003	6,931.92

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

2003 Budget Comparison

Line Item	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Bank Charges	\$ 0	\$ 25.00
Clerk	\$ 2,000	\$ 3,000.01
Dues	\$ 1,600	\$ 1,580.00
Incorporation	\$ 0	\$ 20.00
Internet	\$ 0	\$ 415.00
Postage	\$ 350	\$ 130.86
Supplies	\$ 100	\$ 202.51
Telephone	\$ 500	\$ 935.24
Travel	\$ <u>7,000</u>	\$ <u>7,808.72</u>
Total	\$11,550	\$14,117.34

2004 Budget
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Bank Fee	\$ 25
Clerk ¹	\$2,000
Dues	\$1,600
Internet	\$ 100
Postage	\$ 200
Supplies	\$ 200
Synod Materials ²	\$1,600
Synod Postage ²	\$1,800
Synod Support Personal ²	\$1,100
Synod Travel ²	\$ 800
Telephone	\$1,000
Travel	<u>\$8,000</u>
Total	\$18,425

Note 1: Established by URCNA Synod.

Note 2: Extrapolated from Synod fees from 2001. Please note that each church is responsible for the cost of sending their delegates. These costs are for non-delegate persons required to attend the Synod.

COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND CHURCH UNITY REPORT

Esteemed brothers in Christ,

It is with gratitude to our covenant God for His faithfulness and the blessing He granted to the churches in the pursuit of ecumenicity, that the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity reports to synod and to the churches. The committee has taken to heart the reminder of Synod Escondido 2001, *to remain faithful to the mandate of the committee 'to correspond and dialogue on significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology.* In all of the ecumenical relations we have pursued on behalf of synod and all the United Reformed Churches with the ten assigned federations or denominations, the committee has sought to follow explicitly synod's mandate and its guidelines for our work.

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

Each year in February we have sent a report of the committee's work for synod and the churches to all councils. The last two years we have included in that mailing the full annual reports of the Phase 2 committees, as instructed by Synod Escondido. In the committee's report we have urged the councils to communicate any concern they may have or any information they may wish in the realm of ecumenicity to the committee secretary. This year in particular and in light of the ongoing work of the three Phase 2 committees we have urged the churches to become better acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Churches and to participate in whatever measure possible in ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches. For your convenience we reproduce the mandate and guidelines as adopted by Synod Hudsonville 1999 and emended somewhat by Synod Escondido 2001.

Mandate

With a view toward complete church unity, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order. The Committee shall execute its task and carry out its mandate by following synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The committee shall keep the churches regularly informed of its work and the progress made, and shall publish its reports to synod in the agenda.

Guidelines For Ecumenicity And Church Unity

Phase One - Corresponding Relations

The first phase of ecumenicity is one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the two churches' lives:

- a. View and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. Creeds and confessions
- c. Formula of subscription to the confessions
- d. Significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
- e. Church order and polity
- f. Liturgy and liturgical forms
- g. Preaching, sacraments, and discipline
- h. Theological education for ministers

Ecumenical observers are to be invited to all broader assemblies with a regular exchange of the minutes of these assemblies and of other publications that may facilitate ecumenical relations.

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship

The second phase of ecumenicity is one of recognition and is entered into only when the broadest assemblies of both federations agree this is desirable. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship entailing the following:

- a. The churches shall assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline
- b. The churches shall consult each other when entering into ecumenical relations with other federations
- c. The churches shall accept each other's certificates of membership, admitting such members to the Lord's Table
- d. The churches shall open the pulpits to each other's ministers, observing the rules of the respective churches
- e. The churches shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted
- f. The churches shall invite and receive each other's ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies with an advisory voice

Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order, Art.36.

Phase Three - Church Union

The third phase of ecumenicity is one of integration with the intent that the two federations, being *united in true faith*, and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union. This final phase shall only be embarked upon when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of union, which shall outline the timing, coordination, and/or integration of the following:

- a. The broader assemblies
- b. The liturgies and liturgical forms
- c. The translations of the Bible and the confessions
- d. The song books for worship
- e. The church polity and order
- f. The missions abroad

Synod St. Catharines 1997 selected ten federations and assigned them to the committee for the pursuit of ecumenicity. For ease of visualization and as an index in this report, we present them here in the ecumenical relationship Synod Escondido 2001 determined for these churches. The committee notes that the official name of the CanRC is Canadian Reformed Churches, as used in their Acts of Synod, but in their Yearbook as well as on their website the name used is "Canadian and American Reformed Churches." That federation does have a number of churches in the United States and therefore the more informal designation is helpful. In this report we add "and American" when it is pertinent and useful, and employ the official name when appropriate or the reporting pertains exclusively to the Canadian setting, thus using the designations interchangeably.

- A. Churches in Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship***
Canadian Reformed and American Churches (CanRC)
- B. Churches in Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations***
 1. Free Reformed Churches (FRC)
 2. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
 3. Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)
 4. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

C. Churches in *Ecumenical Relations*

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
2. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
3. Protestant Reformed Church in America (PRC)
4. Reformed Church of Quebec / L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)
5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

When reporting on these churches, and following the sequence presented above, we plan to recommend these three matters: 1. That synod enter into Phase 2 with the RCUS. 2. That synod enter into Phase 1 with the ERQ and with the RPCNA. 3. That synod discontinue Ecumenical Relations with the PRC.

The committee also recommends that synod provide the churches with a clear interpretation of Art.36 of the Church Order. We raise the matter now in connection with the recommendation to enter into Phase 2 with the RCUS. The precedent has been set with the interpretation of the Stated Clerk with the concurrence of the convening consistory, that *a majority of the consistories* means the majority of all the eligible consistories in the federation. A considerable number of consistories did not vote in the 2001 ratification process for the Canadian Reformed Churches. In order to encourage all consistories to participate in such a significant activity, the committee recommends that synod determine that the wording of Art.36 means **the majority of the consistories voting**. Should synod adopt this recommendation, consistories that fail to participate would not actively determine the potential outcome.

Finally, in the last recommendation the committee requests synod to approve its ecumenical pursuit with the churches assigned to us. We have added the clause *without adopting every formulation in its dialogue* since it is neither feasible nor desirable that synod should adopt the committee's working papers or its reported exchanges. In recommending this defining clause the committee follows the precise decisions of Synod Hudsonville 1999 and Synod Escondido 2001.

2. COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

The committee continues to function well. The recording clerk Rev. Pontier drafts detailed minutes of the committee meetings, which are kept in the committee archives. The method of communication is mainly by email. The opportunity has availed itself to have online meetings, when one of the churches offered its website for this purpose. We are grateful for the offer and are considering the many advantages of such meetings. Although the clustering of committee members remains helpful when dealing with concentrations of other federations in the same geographical area, in general disparate locations of members are not a hindrance to the effective pursuit of ecumenical relations.

Most of the committee members have served synod in this capacity now for the maximum two three-year terms, a pattern adopted by Synod Hudsonville 1999. Two of the present members have served three years beyond that terminus as an exception adopted by Synod Escondido 2001. The result is that every member is scheduled to retire at Synod Calgary 2004. Rev. Bill De Jong has replaced Rev. Julien as Stated Clerk, and in this capacity he serves as *ex officio* committee member. His years of tenure are not listed below since the synodically appointed Stated Clerk functions separately from the committee. We note that Rev. T. Joling has replaced the originally elected Rev. D. Piers who had moved to New Zealand.

The experience we have gained in the pursuit of ecumenicity with the committees of various assigned federations is that it generally takes a three-year term of office to become sufficiently conversant with other federations' practices in order to participate in productive dialogue with them. We have also

noticed that most of the other committees retain their personnel longer than is our synod's practice. The committee believes that for the good progress we have experienced to date to continue, synod should consider altering the present retirement schedule.

Having observed that Synod Escondido employed a different format in assigning the added term of service of the stated clerk, as well as those of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad, we present recommendations continuing that altered and improved approach. The first recommendation is that synod discontinues the past practice of limiting service on the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity to two terms. The second recommendation is that synod decide that one term of service constitutes the time period between three consecutive synods, at which time the retiring member is eligible for further service at synod's pleasure. If the projected date of the sixth synod is 2007, and of the seventh synod 2010, one full term of service for a member, beginning at Synod Calgary in 2004 would mean that he retires in 2010. Should synod adopt these recommendations we present the following staggered schedule of retirement.

<i>Names</i>	<i>First Elected</i>	<i>Scheduled Date</i>	<i>Proposed Date</i>
Elder R. Clausing	1996	2003	5 th Synod 2004
Rev. R. Stienstra	1996	2004	5 th Synod 2004
Rev. P. Vellenga	1996	2003	5 th Synod 2004
Elder C. Dykstra	1999	2004	6 th Synod 2007
Rev. R. Pontier	1996	2004	6 th Synod 2007
Rev. J. Bouwers	1997	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. T. Joling	2001	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. H. Zekveld	1997	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. B. De Jong, Stated Clerk			

3. CANADIAN AND AMERICAN REFORMED CHURCHES (CANRC)

In the three years since Synod Escondido entered into Phase 2 or *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, a good beginning has been made in the functioning of the relationship. In reality, little more than two years have past since the majority of churches ratified Synod Escondido's decision. Many churches have experienced the proclamation of each other's ministers, and consistories have had joint meetings to discuss some pertinent facets of the differences and commonalities between the two churches. These exchanges have occurred much more frequently in Canada than in the United States, due to the location of the churches. We add that in some regions unity meetings were organized, at which speakers from both federations set forth related issues for the audience's interaction. The classes of both federations in Canada continue to send fraternal delegates to each other's meetings.

The committee also reports that in some localities, the consistories regretfully have not had the freedom to engage in 'pulpit exchanges', or in mutual dialogue. If in any way the committee could provide assistance, we would gladly do so if requested. The committee also reports that in a number of churches in both federations local opposition, initially rather vocal, is subsiding especially when consistories give wise leadership in these matters. The challenge in many URC churches in the United States is to overcome unfamiliarity with the Canadian Reformed history and practices, so that this does not impede the development of closer relations.

General Synod Chatham 2004 of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches met in February and Rev. H. Zekveld addressed them, representing the committee on behalf of the United Reformed Churches. In his very well received speech our delegate spoke sensitively, directly, and pertinently. We include here a few of his paragraphs.

Brothers, it may be that our welcome to you is not as warm and wholehearted as yours. You know very well that the ratification vote among our consistories was far from unanimous. We might suggest some reasons for this – we are very young and still uneasy about our own identity, many if not most in our 80 congregations have never met someone who belongs to a Canadian Reformed Church, offenses and misconceptions have created barriers, other issues vie for our attention – but the fact remains the same: there is some opposition within our churches and the pathway of fellowship will have to be traveled slowly.

We ask for your patience and understanding in this matter. It is our hope that under God's blessing ecumenism that is given time to develop organically will build greater trust between our churches and develop a stronger, lasting bond. Even as we look ahead to the goal of ever-increasing unity, may the Lord Jesus give us grace to be grateful for and enjoy the fellowship we have already attained between the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches.

The committee alerts the churches that much may be learned about the Canadian Reformed Synod and their churches from their website <http://www.canrc.org/resources/govdocs/gs2004/index.html>. The entire address of Rev. Zekveld is appended there to the Acts of Synod. Since the work of the three Phase 2 committees also has a broader application than in this section, their reports are presented later.

4. FREE REFORMED CHURCHES (FRC)

Some four years ago the synod of the Free Reformed Churches entered into *Limited Contact* with the United Reformed Churches, the first level of what they call *Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship*. The External Relations Committee subsequently wrote that *Limited Contact* is primarily a *communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner*. The committee notes that Synod Hudsonville 1999 had entered into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Free Reformed Churches.

The committee reports that the United Reformed Churches were represented at every Free Reformed Synod, with our representatives bringing greetings, but also updating the synod on the developments in the United Reformed Churches. The delegations have continually pointed out our common heritage and the desirability to seek continued and further ecumenical relations. The addresses by the delegates are available from the committee secretary. The committee requested Rev. B. Schouwstra to represent us at a special October 2003 Synod, called by five churches who appealed their June 2003 decision to give the churches the freedom to choose between the KJV or the NKJV of the Bible for congregational use. A committee was appointed to study the matter further.

The committee reports with regret that in spite of continued efforts on our part no dialogue has taken place with the External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches since 2001. We are grateful to note that a lack of official committee interaction notwithstanding, considerable local and regional cooperation in Christian schools involving United and Free Reformed members is experienced. The Lord is also using some ministerial interactions as a means of furthering ecumenical relations at an informal level.

5. REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS)

In 1995 the first correspondence was exchanged between the committee and the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS. Since then numerous issues have been discussed in many meetings with delegated representatives. Gratefully we recall for synod that the RCUS sponsored the URC application to join the ICRC. In reviewing all these matters prayerfully and carefully the committee decided at its November 2003 meeting to recommend to Synod Calgary that the United Reformed Churches enter into Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Reformed Church in the United

States. The ingredients of Phase 2 are clearly set forth in the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.

Should synod adopt the committee's recommendation, provision will need to be made for the process of ratification according to Church Order Art.36. The committee is aware that in the ratification process for Synod Escondido's decision to enter into Phase 2 with the Canadian Reformed Churches a considerable number of consistories did not vote. In order to prevent a recurrence of those dynamics the committee recommends that synod determine the interpretation of Art.36, *Such decision must be ratified by a majority of the Consistories*, to mean the majority of the consistories who voted, in order to encourage all to participate actively.

The RCUS ecumenical relationship comparable to the URC Phase 2 is called *Fraternal Relations*. At present the RCUS is in this relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The RCUS describes this relationship in the following ingredients.

1. Agree to take heed to one another's doctrine, liturgy and church government, that there be no deviations from the Holy Scriptures or from the Reformed confessions
2. Will exchange delegates at one another's assemblies or general synods and invite them to participate as advisors
3. Will inform one another of the decisions taken at their assemblies or general synods by exchanging minutes or at least by forwarding decisions, which are relevant to the churches concerned
4. Will inform one another in case of changes in or additions to confessions, church order or liturgical forms, if these are of a doctrinal nature. The denomination concerned will notify the other denomination of these changes so that consultations can take place if considered necessary
5. Will inform one another regarding new relationships with third parties and membership in ecumenical organizations

The committee reports to synod that the RCUS understands that entering into *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the United Reformed Churches implies a commitment to work toward organic union. They are committed to the principle of organic union with like-minded, faithful Reformed federations as evidenced by their membership in NAPARC and the ICRC, both of whose constitutions speak of the need for church union. The RCUS (as yet unsuccessful) negotiations over several years with the OPC again demonstrate a willingness to work toward organic union with other like-minded Reformed bodies.

The path to eventual organic union or merger will not be speedy or easy. Though the URC is relatively young, both the URC and the RCUS have long histories and deeply entrenched traditions that will make organic union a major emotional hurdle as well as the hurdle of negotiating any differences in polity or practice. Another difficult obstacle will be the fact that the RCUS owes its very existence to resisting a church union in which it saw many former sister congregations ruined by unbiblical compromise. It is clear that many United Reformed churches do not know much if anything about the RCUS, nor are their churches in Canada. We note that as a bi-national federation there are many challenges to overcome in obedience to the Lord's mandate for church unity.

However, by the grace of God we must make every effort *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . till we all come to the unity of the faith* (Eph. 4:4,13). Even as Jesus prayed, *that they all*

may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me (John 17:21).

For the benefit of synod in considering the committee's recommendation we present some information gathered in the meetings with their Interchurch Relations Committee, noting that such interaction was done by a delegation of the committee. We list the eight subjects of Phase 1 and record the RCUS views and practices, and report the RCUS Sunday worship services as an added point. In order to provide complete information the committee appends Rev. Pontier's report of the 2003 RCUS Synod.

a. View and place of the Holy Scriptures – In addition to their creedal subscription to Articles 2,3,5, and 7 of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21, the RCUS declares in its Constitution, *Art.176, The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are called canonical, being recognized as genuine and inspired, are received as the true and proper Word of God, infallible and inerrant, and the ultimate rule and measure of the whole Christian faith and doctrine.* The ordination vow for all officers also includes the question, *Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are infallible and inerrant, and the only and perfect rule of our Christian faith and life?* (The Directory for Worship, p. 30).

Recent evidence of their high view of Scripture is their special report, *The Days of Creation*, adopted in 1999 and upholding an historical view of Genesis 1 and six day creation. The majority of RCUS congregations use the NKJV translation of the Scriptures. A few use the KJV, the NASB, or the NIV. There is no officially approved translation for use in public worship.

b. Creeds and confessions – The RCUS holds to the Three Forms of Unity as its confessional basis. It seeks to be a confessionally Reformed federation of churches. They have their own translation of the Heidelberg Catechism made from the German. The latest edition was approved in 1978. In 1994 the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort were officially adopted, however 15 changes were made. All of the changes can be considered editorial in nature such as adding Lamentations to the list of canonical books, not attributing Hebrews to Pauline authorship and substituting “chastening” for “punishing” and “innate understanding” for “light of nature.” However two changes appear to be an attempt to avoid a possible wrong inference, which the original words might imply. The committee intends to continue the discussion on these changes, should synod enter in the Phase 2 relationship.

Catechism preaching is not a regular feature in most RCUS congregations although some ministers will occasionally preach a series on the Heidelberg. However, it is the practice in many churches for the minister to read and comment on a portion of the Heidelberg Catechism in addition to the sermon. Catechetical instruction is emphasized in preparing the youth of the church for confirmation. Art.192 of the Constitution states, *Every pastor shall carefully prepare the youth in his pastoral charge for communicant membership in the Church by diligently instructing them in the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion. The period of instruction shall, if possible, be so extended that the pupils memorize and are able to recite the entire Heidelberg Catechism before confirmation. The course of instruction shall include catechetical explanation and memorization, Bible history, Bible reading and memorizations, and the study of the books and contents of the Bible, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, church history, also the singing and memorization of Psalms, hymns, and Scripture song.*

c. Formula of subscription to the confessions – Subscription to the Three Forms of Unity is made orally by all officers of the RCUS as part of their ordination vows. The vow is repeated at each subsequent installation of a minister in a new charge. The vows includes the question, *Do you*

honestly and in good conscience before the Lord declare that you believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the confession of this Church, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, are in complete and accurate agreement with the Word of God; and do you promise to teach (deacons 'promote') and defend the same in good faith and reject all doctrines conflicting with them (Directory of Worship, p. 30-31). Applicants for licensure must vow, 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 (Constitution, Art. 22, p. 7).

d. Significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology – The RCUS finds its roots in the large number of German immigrants coming to the American colonies in the early 1700's and the formation among those immigrants of Reformed congregations, most without pastors. In 1747 several of those congregations in the Philadelphia area were organized into a synod, called a "Coetus" with help from a minister sent to America by the Synods of North and South Holland of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. The Dutch supplied the churches with many ministers and with financial assistance. From 1748-1791 the German Reformed Church was under the authority of the Synod of Holland, which had to approve the reception and ordination of all new ministers, an inconvenient and irksome situation because of the great distance. In 1791 the German ministers declared themselves independent of the Synod of Holland and drew up a constitution which was adopted April 27, 1793 under the name of "Synod of the High German Reformed Church in the United States of North America," later changed to the Reformed Church in the United States. At that time the confessional basis of the RCUS were the Three Forms of Unity. In 1793 there were 22 ministers, 178 congregations and 15,000 members. In 1800 there were 31 ministers and in 1820 there were 60 ministers.

At some point in the early history of the denomination the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort were dropped from the confessional basis of the churches for reasons that are not clearly known today. However, the two confessions were re-adopted in 1994 so that again, the Three Forms of Unity form the confessional basis of the churches.

Throughout the 19th century the number of congregations grew rapidly through new waves of German immigration. However, the church was subject to several unhealthy theological influences of its American context resulting in many theological and liturgical controversies and the founding of alternative seminaries. By 1900 the leadership of the RCUS had become quite liberal and had begun to push for union with other denominations. In 1934 a plan of union with the Evangelical Synod of North America (an immigrant church from the united Lutheran and Reformed Church of Germany) was approved. The new constitution stated that there was to be "liberty of conscience" concerning doctrine and the doctrinal statements (confessions) were advisory, not binding statements. One classis, the Eureka Classis, which had been formed in 1911 in South Dakota of primarily German Russian immigrants of the previous 30 years, declined to participate in the merger with its confessional compromise, and continues to this day as the Reformed Church in the United States. It has since divided into four classes covering the United States. The RCUS counted 4,369 members in 48 congregations in AD 2003.

The experience of seeing a once large and prospering church ruined by compromise and merger has created a mindset in the RCUS generally (with some exceptions) opposed to all thought of organic union with other denominations. Rather, for the last 60 years the majority has been content to live with "fraternal relations" and not attempt organic union with sister denominations. However a recent position paper, "The Biblical Principles of Church Unity" (1999) states, Organic union with other denominations is desirable if the denominations are separated by unessential differences, and when

unity may be accomplished without surrendering biblical creedal convictions.

e. Church Government - RCUS church government is presbyterial (the church is ruled by presbyters/elders) with local, regional, and national assemblies. A comprehensive and detailed constitution sets forth this polity, which is the result of several historical events and influences, including association with the Church Order of the Synod of Dort. RCUS polity might be described as a hybrid of Reformed and Presbyterian polities, with the addition or substitution of several unique elements.

In RCUS polity, the local congregations are “churches,” and the broader communion is viewed as a single “church” (the Reformed *Church* in the U.S.). Three offices are recognized in the local church: minister, elder, and deacon. The duties assigned to each office (Art 44, 45) are similar to the duties assigned in the URC CO. “A person once ordained,” in the RCUS, “whether as a minister of the Gospel, an elder, or a deacon, is set apart to that particular office for life . . .” (Art. 194); however their “term of office” or length of active status is determined by the local congregation (Art. 46). Thus, ordination occurs only once, but once an elder or deacon has completed his active term, he has to stand for re-election. A few churches hold strictly to lifetime eldership, never requiring re-election.

The office of minister and elder function at every level of government in the RCUS. Ministers are members of classis (Art. 31), (but are not precluded from also having membership in the local church). Classis meetings are opened with religious services, including preaching, but Classis does not celebrate the sacraments. In the case of a church closure, Classis has jurisdiction over the members and transfers them to a church they select (Art. 14).

Five ecclesiastical assemblies may be noted, although there are distinguishing categories or groupings among these five. The congregational meeting is different from the other four assemblies in that it is not one of the church’s “judicatories.” It is, however, a ruling assembly of the church and therefore women are not permitted to vote. The congregational meeting does not have the power to discipline, but does decide matters submitted to it, including the election of officers and property matters.

The RCUS Constitution refers to the other four ecclesiastical assemblies (Consistory, Spiritual Council, Classis, and Synod) as “judicatories” (Art. 49). Each judicatory has specific functions and authority limited by the constitution. “Cases over which a lower judicatory has original jurisdiction can be brought before a higher judicatory only by reference, complaint, or appeal” (Art. 50).

Judicatories:

(1) “*The Consistory* is composed of the pastor or pastors, and elders and deacons, and has oversight and government of the congregation and of all its organizations.” However, Consistories are distinguished from the other three Judicatories in that they “do not adjudicate or have a judicial capacity” (Art. 49), meaning that they do not exercise discipline.

(2) The *Spiritual Council*, consisting of the pastor and active elders of a congregation, has duties equivalent to those assigned our Consistory in the URC. The Spiritual Council “has original jurisdiction in matters of discipline except in the case of a Minister of the Word” (Art. 70). In regard to ministers, however, it should be noted that they are amenable to both local elders and their classis (Art. 30 & 121).

(3) “A *Classis* consists of the ministers residing within a district designated by the Synod and of the elders delegated by the pastoral charges situated within these limits, and has jurisdiction over said ministers and pastoral charges” (Art. 76). In the RCUS, the Classis is more involved and possesses more authority over local congregations than in the URCNA. For example, the consent of Classis is required when a minister accepts a call (Art. 28), or when he wishes to serve a vacant congregation as

regular supply (Art. 31). Classis has authority to license and ordain to the ministry, to dissolve pastoral relations, and to depose “a member of its own body” (Art. 82). Each congregation must submit its local constitution and by-laws to Classis for approval (Art. 10).

(4) The *Synod* is made up of all the denomination’s ministers and one elder from each congregation. “It is the highest judicatory and the last resort in all cases respecting the government of the Church” (Art. 95). Although we have much in common with the RCUS in the area of church polity, noteworthy differences exist. This area may prove to be one of the more difficult to negotiate as we attempt to move toward Phase Three, Church Union.

f. Liturgy and liturgical forms – The RCUS seeks to adhere to the regulative principle of worship. The order of worship reflects the dialogical nature of worship and the centrality of the Word. The RCUS *Directory of Worship* presents a “Suggested Order of Public Worship” which is generally followed: Call to Worship, Salutation, Invocation, Psalm or Hymn, Scripture, Prayer, Psalm or Hymn, Sermon, Prayer, Offering, Psalm or Hymn, Benediction, and Doxology. Although a congregation might vary this order, these elements are essential parts of public worship to be used in the regular Lord’s Day service, according to the Constitution (Art. 178). In addition, *The Directory of Worship* says the following may also be used “when desired”: the reading of the Law, the Apostles’ Creed, reading from the Heidelberg Catechism, the Lord’s Prayer, the Gloria Patri and congregational readings from the Holy Scriptures.

The RCUS does not have a standard songbook, although the Constitution allows Synod to choose one (Art. 104), and a committee was appointed recently to investigate the availability of songbooks and publishing possibilities. The Trinity Hymnal is used fairly pervasively in the churches. Some use the blue Psalter Hymnal, and a few supplement the Trinity with the “Psalms from the Bible” of the RPCNA, since the Trinity Hymnal is weak in the area of the Psalms. *The Directory of Worship* insists that Psalms “ought to be used frequently in public worship,” and that all songs which are sung must be in complete agreement with Scripture (p.18).

The RCUS has liturgical forms for baptism (infant and adult), the Lord’s Supper, the ordination and installation of ministers, elders and deacons, confirmation (of catechumens), public profession of faith (of new members received), excommunication, restoration, marriage, the burial of the dead and thanksgiving for a church building. The forms reflect a mature, Reformed understanding of each subject. In the preface to *The Directory of Worship*, the RCUS acknowledges its gratefulness in borrowing liturgical language and forms from the OPC, CanRC, and CRC.

g. Preaching, the sacraments and discipline – Preaching, the sacraments, and discipline hold the same level of importance in the RCUS as in the URC. Their understanding of each, like ours, is shaped by the Three Forms of Unity.

Preaching is carefully guarded as to who may preach. RCUS preaching may be characterized generally as expository and redemptive historical (or biblical theological). The Constitution insists that, “Every sermon based upon Scripture must necessarily conform to the spiritual meaning of the Lord’s Supper” (Art. 188). Some catechism preaching is performed in the RCUS, but it is not required and is rarely a regular practice (although the catechism is often read in worship services).

The RCUS Constitution requires that the Lord’s Supper be administered at least twice a year (Art. 187); but presently every congregation celebrates the sacrament more frequently, anywhere from four to twelve times a year, according to statistics reported. Most RCUS congregations have the worshippers come forward to the table. In addition to RCUS members, the table is open to faithful members of denominations holding “the essential doctrines of the Gospel” (Art. 189). Prior to being

admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, visitors to RCUS worship services are usually interviewed by the elders.

A section of 64 articles in the RCUS constitution provides detailed rules for discipline. The provisions, processes, and language of a court system are present, including higher and lower judicatories, charges, right to counsel, trials, appeals, etc. Special stipulations are included for erring or accused office-bearers.

When a member is living in sin, he is admonished by the Spiritual Council (or the judiciary that found him guilty). If he rejects this admonition, or if he has committed a public act of scandal, he is suspended. If repentance is not produced through this suspension and subsequent admonitions, the member is excommunicated. "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 announced" (Art. 118). If a person continues in sin after having been suspended for neglect of the Lord's Supper, or public worship, or giving, his name is erased (Art. 119).

h. Theological education for ministers – Students for the ministry are taken under the care of Classis, which exercises supervision of their studies and deportment. The approved list of seminaries includes four schools: Greenville, Mid-America, New Geneva (Colorado Springs), and Westminster East. Only students attending these seminaries are eligible for classical financial aid; students may attend a non-approved seminary only by exception (Art. 17). Two additional seminaries are closely connected to the RCUS and are applying for approved status; they are, City Seminary in Sacramento, CA, and Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Vermillion, SD.

The ministers of the RCUS are generally graduates of Reformed seminaries. Westminster Seminary has trained a number of their ministers in the past; in recent years, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has trained several of their younger ministers with a few also coming from Westminster in California. There are also some ministers who graduated from non-Reformed seminaries and came to the Reformed faith later.

Licensure requires a rigorous exam by the Classis. The RCUS constitution states that the applicant "is to be examined by the Classis in English Bible, theology, ecclesiastical history, hermeneutics, the original languages of the Scriptures, historical philosophy, apologetics, all matters relevant to our standards and his personal ability to serve the Church as a pastor" (Art. 20). The applicant also must preach a sermon before Classis, and present a written sermon and theological papers.

Before being ordained, a licentiate must submit to "trials." Trials include testimony about the man's gifts, a re-examination of areas of weakness, and, at the discretion of Classis, an examination "in the Confession and Constitution of the Church and the presentation of written discourses" (Art. 24). The RCUS will, "for good reasons," license a man who does not have a seminary degree (Art 21). A minister coming from another denomination must be examined "as to his orthodoxy and the purity of his intentions" (Art. 35).

i. Lord's Day Observance and the RCUS – It is generally known among those who are familiar with the RCUS that a number of their churches have only one worship service on the Lord's Day. Regarding this aspect of their church life we note the following:

There is diversity among the members and pastors, varying from the more strict sabbatarian view of the Westminster Confession to a more relaxed view. Though some churches have an afternoon or evening service, having only one service per Sunday has been a long-standing tradition within the

RCUS and is not the result of any recent liberalizing trend. All churches have activities besides worship on Sundays, such as Sunday school and Bible study. Since the Bible does not explicitly demand two worship services on the Lord's Day, it is difficult for those who recognize the advantages of two worship services to bring about a change that goes against their history.

The RCUS has an article against the profanation of the Lord's Day in its constitution. Art.180 reads: "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..." The newer churches in the RCUS tend to be stricter in the observance of the Lord's Day than the older, more established congregations. In the newer churches the emphasis is that the whole day should be kept holy. The day should be reserved for ecclesiastical worship and for family worship, with only a modest amount of recreation. In the older churches there would be more of a tendency to do other things on Sunday, e.g. going out for a meal. However, a number of RCUS ministers discourage, for example, watching TV and shopping on Sundays. Art.113 of the RCUS constitution lists "profanation of the Lord's Day" among the sins that "especially merit discipline."

There is a strong and growing awareness in the RCUS that there cannot be complacency concerning the observance of the Lord's Day. Overall the RCUS is less strict on this point than the United Reformed Churches, but in teaching and preaching the matters of worship and rest are strongly emphasized. Therefore this issue should not be allowed to hinder our recognition of the RCUS as a federation of true churches of Christ. Since the RCUS entered into Fraternal Relations with the CanRC, our Canadian brethren have encouraged the RCUS to a more consistent and faithful observance of the Lord's Day.

In response to concerns raised by the CanRC, the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee recommended to their 2003 synod, *That Synod erect a committee to study and report on the application of Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 103, i.e., the Lord's Day and how it should be observed in our churches.* However, the 2003 synod rejected this proposal. Several delegates expressed fear that regardless of what the report might recommend, it would prove divisive. Patient pastoral instruction at the local level was seen as a more effective way to bring people into conformity with the constitution.

6. ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

The pursuit of ecumenical relations with the OCRC has not progressed much beyond the committee's report to Synod Escondido. The October 1999 OCRC Synod responded to the invitation of Synod Hudsonville 1999 *to unite with the URCNA in federative union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity* in this way:

We wholeheartedly express the unity which we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your office bearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six-day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation.

Committee member Rev. Bouwers represented the committee at the OCRC Synod in Everson WA November 1-2, 2001. In his address to the synod he conveyed: *We share your desire and prayer for federational unity.* He also noted, *Given that at your Synod Cambridge 1999 your churches expressed the conviction that they were not of a mind to unite with us federationally at that time, we are especially encouraged in the efforts that are being made on your part to continue working together at*

our ecumenical responsibilities. Rev. Bouwers further urged the synod for more productive ecumenicity and consider appointing a consistory or a committee with which our committee could communicate between synods.

The committee reports that although the 2001 OCRC Synod did appoint a consistory to arrange for an ecumenical committee, no progress can be noted since we have not yet been able to arrange any correspondence or dialogue with the OCRC. We note that the same synod also recorded the following statement about Synod Escondido's position on creation: *The statement made at the URCNA 2001 Synod fails to address the Framework Hypothesis as publicly expressed by certain members of the URCNA.* The OCRC further adopted, *"In view of our expressed desire and goal of federative unity with the URCNA, the OCR churches need an explicit statement from the URCNA of affirmation of six literal days of creation and rejection of the Framework Hypothesis.*

On our part we continue to contact the appointed OCRC consistory, noting however that progress is very slow. We also seek to have an observer at their classes, and at the OCRC synod. The committee intends to carry out synod's mandate to us to pursue ecumenical relations with this federation that is in Phase 1 with the United Reformed Churches, in the expectation that the King of the Church will bless the work done in His name.

7. ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (OPC)

After Synod Escondido referred the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report to the churches for further study, and to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity for fulfilling its mandate, the committee had three substantive and productive meetings with the OPC ecumenical committee.

The first meeting with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) took place at their offices on April 4, 2002. Rev. Bouwers had prepared a nine-page *Working Paper for Discussion* providing some background, dealing with items a-d of Phase 1, and interacting with the points raised in Part I of the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, *A Comparison of the Confessional Standards*, received by synod Escondido 2001. The daylong discussion was fraternal and productive, and both committees agreed that the resultant encouraging conclusions of our dialogue should be articulated in four Statements of Agreement. We reproduce them here.

1. The Holy Scriptures

The Bible is God's Word received by His people for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of their faith. We agree that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, that they are infallible and inerrant, and that no one may add to or detract from the Word of God. We further agree that in the Bible the LORD reveals the whole counsel of God for His glory, our salvation, and a life of service for believers that comprises both preservation and propagation of the truth.

2. The Confessions

The Church's confessions and catechisms are its approved formulations of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) display a broad, reflective, and pastoral quality. The Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism) depict a careful and more detailed articulation of the same Reformed faith. We agree that while each confession reflects its own era, the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity both express a faithful outworking and application of God's Word, are in substantial agreement, and do not conflict on basic tenets.

3. *Subscription to the Confessions*

The Church's requirement to subscribe to its confessions seeks to preserve its purity. While the United Reformed Churches insist on a recorded signature to a prescribed Form of Subscription by all office bearers, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church registers a verbal consent upon ordination, and does not allow exceptions by office bearers. We agree that both fellowships require strict confessional adherence and that both approaches to subscription prohibit deviations from the confessions.

4. *Church History*

God's gathering of His holy catholic Church from and in the midst of a sinful humanity also entails reformations. We agree that the secessions of the 1930s and the 1990s in producing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Churches were reformations used by the Lord of the Church to retain for Himself a faithful people. We confess that while both secessions were imperfect and defiled by sin, the resultant Churches give evidence of being true and faithful Churches of the Lord in striving for the pure preaching of His Word, for the pure celebration of the sacraments, and for the faithful application of discipline.

The two committees met again, first in Ontario on April 16, 2003, and later in Pittsburgh on November 13, 2003. In both meetings the focus of discussion was on the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, referred to *the CERCUC* for use in fulfilling its mandate by Synod Escondido 2001. The committees dealt with Part II, *A Comparison of the Polities*. Rev. Bouwers had produced a paper entitled, *An Introductory Discussion of Ecclesiastical Polities*. Ruling Elder Mark Bube of the OPC had provided all members with his paper, *Discussion Notes on Presbyterian Church Polity*, a compilation of the significant decisions taken by past Presbyterian bodies. The discussion at both meetings was helpful in understanding more clearly the differences between Presbyterian and Continental Reformed church polity. Rev. G.I. Williamson had prepared a guideline for discussing some of the features of the Study Committee Report.

The committee was encouraged to work out for the two sides articulations of the unity in the subjects in which apparent agreement had been reached. We were able to produce two Statements of Agreement that were sent to the OPC brothers. They are entitled *Church Designations and Distinctions* and *Church Offices and Authority*. The CEIR is still considering the statements. We are grateful to our heavenly Father that He has given as much church unity as was achieved at the meetings of the past years.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church holds annual General Assemblies, and for the past several years the committee has had a representative of the URC federation present. In 2002 Rev. Bouwers attended the 69th Assembly when it was held near Boston Mass. In his address to the body he stated:

We have always appreciated the desire we have seen in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to be more than merely fundamentalistic, or broadly evangelical but to be Reformed. We have appreciated learning that your office bearers subscribe to the Westminster Standards not because they contain the system of doctrine taught in Scripture in some Barthian sense, but because these standards are the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. We are also impressed and intrigued with your emphasis on missions, both at home and abroad. It is an emphasis you appear to have taken with you from your earliest days when struggles over missions were part of the impetus for your formation. We believe there is much we can learn from you in that regard and look forward to more and more fruitful interchange with you.

Rev. Bouwers noted that the OPC has a history of seeking to *meld the best of American and Scottish*

Presbyterianism with a healthy dose of influence from the Continental and Dutch Reformed tradition. He painted clearly the great challenge in the area of church government, as the 2001 URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report is discussed in subsequent committee meetings.

The committee asked Rev. Pontier to attend the 70th General Assembly of the OPC at Dordt College in June 2003. Although he could not attend all of the Assembly meetings, he did have opportunity to bring the greetings and best wishes of the United Reformed Churches. In his address he sketched the process of the pursuit of ecumenical relations with the OPC and with other soundly Reformed churches as well as objective of such ecumenicity. He said: *We have as our goal church union—and not just with you. That is our goal wherever contiguous geography permits. We have that as our goal with the Canadian Reformed and the RCUS as well.* Rev. Pontier also noted:

We can also note that in Australia, the Dutch Reformed and Presbyterians have successfully melded their traditions. Its not easy but it can be done. It takes a will to ecumenicity—a will that does not exist universally among us, including among the URC. But this will can be formed and strengthened by an awareness of, and by obedience to, the ecumenical imperatives of Scripture. It will also take the kind of humility, gentleness, longsuffering and bearing with one another spoken of in the opening sermon of this assembly—virtues which were powerfully evident in a man like Dr. Cornelius Van Til.

The committee is planning to continue the dialogue that has been very productive up to this point some time later this fall. May the King of the Church grant His blessing to this pursuit.

8. ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (ARP)

The committee had opportunity to meet with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church following the NAPARC meeting in Pittsburgh on November 12, 2003. This was the first meeting of the committees following some intermittent correspondence. Four ARP brothers were present while our committee representation was eight members. The two committees exchanged an account of their churches' history. We learned that the ARP was founded in 1782 as a combination of the American portions of two Scottish presbyteries, the Associate Presbytery and the Reformed Presbytery both of which had left the Church of Scotland because they were “pro-marrow men.”

Most of the ARP churches are located in the Southeast of the United States, with some newer congregations organized in Canada. They also have a Korean Presbytery in California. The ARP committee had previously provided the committee with a ten-page description of their history and their distinctives as a denomination for NAPARC, of which it is a member. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Catechisms. In 1991 the ARP noted that the Three Forms of Unity are a good expression of the Reformed Faith.

The first meeting proved to be a good beginning for further dialogue, and the committee intends to pursue this in a suitable manner. We commit this labor to the Head of the Church.

9. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (PCA)

Communication with the PCA has been limited to some correspondence over the years. In 2000 Rev. Vander Pol represented us at the General Assembly held in Tampa FL. In 2001 the committee sent several letters to the Interchurch Relations Committee of the PCA, enclosing the URC “Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.” The PCA committee graciously responded and sent a copy of their 1978 “Report of the Ad Interim Committee to Study the Biblical Basis of Church Union,” and the 1989 “Guiding Principles for Ecumenical Relations.”

The doctrinal standards of the PCA are The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechism. The denomination has two categories of ecumenical relations, their Stated Clerk wrote, ***Fraternal Relations** with other Presbyterian/Reformed denominations that are voting members of NAPARC and other churches with whom the General Assembly wishes to establish fraternal relations unilaterally, and **Corresponding Relations** with other evangelical churches in North America and other continents.*

The Stated Clerk Rev. De Jong has invited the PCA to send an observer to Synod Calgary 2004. The committee notes that the PCA 32nd General Assembly will be in Pittsburgh for June 15-18, 2004, DV. We intend to send them a letter of greetings. It is the intention of the committee to continue the correspondence with the PCA Interchurch Relations Committee in the hope that the King of the Church will add His indispensable blessing to such pursuit.

10. PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA (PRC)

On April 24, 2002 the committee met for the last time with the Committee for Contact with Other Churches of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Professor Dykstra read the paper, *Unity, the Truth, and the Confessions*. Rev. Pontier read his paper, *Unity in Christ*. The reason for the meeting was our request to have one more dialogue following the notice from the PRC committee earlier in the year that they would recommend to the 2002 PRC Synod to discontinue contact with the United Reformed Churches. A brotherly, candid, and clear dialogue engaged the two committees the entire morning.

In August of 2002 the committee received the notice from the PRC committee that their synod had decided to discontinue discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URC. While the committee does not necessarily subscribe to all that is assigned to us in the formulation of the grounds, we reproduce the decision and its grounds as adopted by the PRC Synod 2002.

That synod approve the recommendation of the Contact Committee to discontinue discussions with the CERCU of the URC. Grounds:

- a. The actions of the URC synod in 1999 effectively stopped the process toward unity.
 - 1) The purpose of the meetings is to work toward church unity in the way of the two committees resolving differences and submitting the agreements of the committees to the major assemblies for approval.
 - 2) Although the CERCU came to a basic agreement with the PRC position on common grace and the well-meant offer, when the CERCU presented its work to the synod of the URC in 1999, the URC synod endorsed the work of the CERCU, but not the doctrinal positions taken by the committee.
- b. Discussions between the Contact Committee and the CERCU have come to an impasse on such matters as the extent of the teaching and authority of the creeds, the binding character of ecclesiastical decisions, and the proper viewpoint of church unity.
 - 1) As regards the creeds, the PRC are convinced that the creeds address such matters as common grace, the well-meant offer, and a conditional covenant, and in fact that the creeds condemn these errors. The CERCU insists that these matters are not confessional, and thus one may maintain or condemn them and still be within the bounds of the Reformed confessions. For the PRC to accept that position would not only be a compromising of all that we stand for, but would also deny the work of the Spirit of truth who has continued to guide Christ's church into the truth. This we are emphatically unwilling to do.
 - 2) With regard to church unity, their position is that if they consider a church to be a true church, then they are obligated to seek unity with that church, regardless of the differences in doctrine and practice, and even regardless of whether the two churches are moving in opposite directions. This means that the CERCU is willing to continue discussions with our committee on any number of topics for the foreseeable future.

However, whatever agreement we may or may not arrive at as committee is of no official consequence for the URC, for the positions remain merely the views of the men on the committee. Therefore, continued discussions will not reach the goal of ecclesiastical unity, which is the mandate of the Contact Committee (cf. Constitution, V, A).

- c. Since discussions began in 1999, the URC has moved farther away from the PRC. Specifically, the URC:
- 1) Approved of divorce and remarriage, by accepting into their denomination a minister who was known to be divorced and remarried.
 - 2) Showed that they are willing to tolerate the error of the framework theory, by not disciplining URC men who came out publicly in favor of it, and by refusing to condemn it in the decision on creation and evolution passed by the synod of 2001.
 - 3) Proved that they are willing to tolerate, if not officially approve, the error of the conditional covenant, by the decision to move towards full ecclesiastical union with the Canadian Reformed Churches (synod 2001).
 - 4) Showed its willingness to tolerate the teaching of postmillennialism and theonomy, by admitting into their denomination a minister holding to these convictions. Carried."

On December 12, 2002 the committee sent the PRC brothers a final communication once more indicating the call to further church unity. We included the following.

As we have indicated a number of times, it is our committee's conviction that the Scripture and the Reformed Confessions direct our two federations with such a similar history and with a great many Reformed doctrinal conformities, to benefit from continued mutual dialogue. Thus we regret that you have found it necessary to discontinue our discussions. Our committee members have profited from interacting with you, and we too are thankful to have had opportunity to bear witness of the great truths of God's revelation and the Church's Confessions. We again thank you for your hospitality.

On the basis of the decision of the Protestant Reformed Churches to discontinue contact with the URC, the committee recommends that synod remove the Protestant Reformed Churches from the churches with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations.

11. REFORMED CHURCH OF QUEBEC / L'EGLISE REFORMEE DU QUEBEC (ERQ)

The ministry of the ERQ is rather unique in that it takes place in the predominantly Roman Catholic province of Quebec where French is the official language. The six small churches totaling some 400 members are seeking to be faithful to the Reformed faith. Their history is colorful and quite different from the typical Canadian and Reformed federations. Seemingly they are unique in their confessional stance also. The ERQ accept beside the ecumenical creeds, the Confession de la Rochelle, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. However, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession *constitute the official expression of our beliefs, which all office bearers must adhere to.* The *Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline of the Reformed Churches of Quebec* resembles the Church Order of Dort somewhat and has a multitude of Scriptural references.

The committee has met twice with the ERQ representatives since Synod Escondido. Because of their small size each minister bears a heavy responsibility, and progress in ecumenical relations proceeds slowly. The ERQ Synod 2002 mandated their Interchurch Relations Committee to *pursue correspondence relations with the United Reformed Churches.* The committee met with their delegates to NAPARC of which the ERQ is a member. We had a fraternal dialogue and informative luncheon with the two members. Later the committee decided that because of their synod's decision, and the eagerness to pursue dialogue, to recommend that synod entered into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).

12. REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA (RPCNA)

For a number of years representatives of the United Reformed Churches have attended the synods of the RPCNA as observers. In 2001 the secretary of the committee was delegated to go, and reported that their Interchurch Relations Committee provided him with a copy of “The Book of Psalms for Singing” and “The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian and Reformed Church of North America.” The latter contains The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Testimony the RPCNA in parallel columns, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism. All are referred to as “Subordinate Standards.” The constitution is also comprised of the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, the Directory for the Worship of God, and the official vows and forms.

In 2003 the RPCNA, consisting of 75 congregations and some 6,156 members, convened its 172nd Synod. The URC had been invited to send representatives. This time Rev. Bouwers and Rev. Stienstra attended. In his address Rev. Bouwers noted: *We thank God for the way you have also sought to stand beside us and for how you have encouraged us in word and example in our stand for the inerrancy of Scripture, the gospel of grace and confessional integrity. It is in that sense that we share with you a common commitment and parallel, though not at all identical history that is old and venerable yet true and relevant for today.*

He noted that whereas the URCNA could not be characterized as *exclusive* psalmodists, we could be called *dominant* psalmodists, since Church Order Article 39 states *The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches.* Our observer said: *What is remarkable to us, noteworthy, is the devotional character of this assembly with its attention to preaching and prayer. Your meeting is clearly more than a business meeting and your fellowship and concern for one another as members of the family of faith are evident and commendable. We also appreciate, from the reports of the churches, that there is in the midst of your churches a strong and timely emphasis on the importance of the covenant family, and on the prayerful development of strong fathers and leaders.*

The committee representatives met over lunch with their Interchurch Relations Committee. We distributed the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, and discussed with the IRC the possibility of entering into the first Phase with the RPCNA. The brothers were eager to engage us in informative dialogue and welcome the more formal relationship. Thus it is that the committee recommends to Synod Calgary that synod enters into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Because of this and the informative nature of the report, Rev. Bouwers’ Report of the RPCNA 172nd Synod is appended.

13. NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL (NAPARC)

On November 11-13 the entire committee with the exception of the URC Stated Clerk, its *ex officio* member, attended the NAPARC meeting and was able to have several meetings with some of the member churches afterward. It was also at that time that we were able to have our annual committee meeting.

From Tuesday noon until Wednesday noon the committee members observed NAPARC in order to evaluate its purpose and functioning. NAPARC is a group of conservative, confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America whose stated purpose is to promote communication and cooperation between member denominations in promoting the Reformed faith and to *hold before one another the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.* Several member churches of NAPARC are among those that CERCU has been mandated to contact and being present at NAPARC allowed the committee to have both formal and informal meetings with them.

Current member churches are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). The RPCNA served as host for this year's meeting. In addition to the member churches, observers were present from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, and the URCNA. Up until a few years ago the Christian Reformed Church had also been a member denomination. They were one of the charter members who helped organize NAPARC in 1975. However their membership was first suspended and then terminated because of their endorsement of women elders and ministers on the basis that the Biblical prohibitions against women rulers no longer apply.

Rev. Pontier addressed the assembly reminding the body of their original intention to *hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice*. He also stressed the need for seeking such unity in the present fractured ecclesiastical world, and noted the need to observe the distinction between confessions and theology. We reproduce some of the speaker's words.

As you are well aware, our respective confessions are not exhaustive. They do not address every theological issue. And there is within the family of confessionally Reformed denominations a good deal of theological diversity even though confessionally, the theology of the Westminster standards and the Three Forms of Unity are nearly identical. This theological diversity is perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to organic union between our several groups. We each want to guard and protect our distinctives and fear they would be lost if we united organically even though we are confessionally the same.

Where such fear exists, we must make an honest evaluation of our own respective communions. Is there complete theological unity within our own houses in those areas not covered by the confessions? Is every theological issue that comes up at our respective synods or general assemblies always decided quickly, easily and unanimously? Is there never any heated debate? Obviously, we have all learned to live with theological diversity within our own fellowships in those areas not covered directly by the confessions. If we can do that in our respective denominations, should we not be more open to greater expression of unity than that which has characterized this body for the 28 years of its existence?

We must affirm that it is Christ who makes us one, and that it is through the confessions that we recognize our spiritual unity. In the context and the boundaries of those confessions, we must dialogue as full brothers regarding that about which we may yet disagree. If we are indeed one in Christ and committed to living by His Word, as summarized in our confessions, we should not fear such dialogue but welcome it as our duty to encourage and admonish one another.

The committee decided to recommend to Synod Calgary 2004 that the United Reformed Churches apply for membership in NAPARC. The procedure entails a two-year process requiring approval at one of their annual meetings followed by approval of the major assemblies of the member churches. The grounds or reasons that convinced the committee in recommending that the URCNA should join NAPARC are three-fold:

1. There is renewed interest and effort in NAPARC to work for organic union among churches of like faith and practice.
2. Although NAPARC itself may not be the vehicle to unit member churches, it provides an

opportunity for meaningful communication. It holds before the members the need to work for unity and helps motivate member churches to engage in dialogue, one on one, with other denominations.

3. The URCNA can make a meaningful contribution to NAPARC discussion, better representing the continental Reformed traditions and distinctives than is presently done in a group that is predominantly Presbyterian.

14. PHASE 2 COMMITTEE REPORT

Synod Escondido decided that the committee should produce a joint report with the Canadian Reformed committee about the work of the three Phase 2 committees. We report that this was impossible when the committee convener, Dr. J. De Jong, became seriously ill and retired from his committee. It also happened that the Canadian Reformed Synod met in February 2004. The result was that each committee presented its report to its own synod. For the sake of clarity we note Synod Escondido's decision recorded in the 2001 Minutes, page 24.

Recommended that the three committees should report annually to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity, which will in turn make full annual reports to the churches concerning this work. The CERCU shall produce a single comprehensive report jointly with the Canadian Reformed Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. This report will be presented to the next synods of the two federations by public distribution.
Adopted

Below the committee presents the three Phase 2 committee reports in the order Synod Escondido listed them in the Minutes. The committee recommends that when each of these reports is presented for discussion or information, a member of that committee be given the privilege of the floor to respond.

A. CHURCH ORDER COMMITTEE REPORT

Esteemed Brothers,

In accordance with the requirement set forth in Article XLV.B.4, which stipulates that, the URCNA Church Order Committee “report annually to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity”, (cf. Minutes of the 4th Synod of the URCNA, p.24) we present this “progress” report. It is our understanding that you will forward this report as received to Synod Calgary. Since this report will then in effect also be our report to Synod, we will begin with a brief review of the work of the committee to date.

The Preparatory Work of the Committee

The members of the URCNA Church Order Committee – Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Elder Harry Van Gorp – met for the first time at Mid America Reformed Seminary, in Dyer, Indiana on May 30, 2002. At this meeting Dr. Kloosterman was elected to serve as the chairman of our committee and Rev. Sikkema as its secretary. We discussed at some length the Mandate assigned to our committee as recorded on p.24 of the Minutes of Synod Escondido, as follows:

- a. That the current Church Orders of the two federations be evaluated in the light of the scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Dort CO. (and)

- b. That the CO committee work together with a Canadian Reformed CO committee to develop suitable and agreeable adaptations of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure and essential provisions.

We paid careful attention to the exegesis of point a., noting that one could understand it either as requiring that we do three things *vis-a-vis* the current Church Orders of the two federations, namely: that we evaluate them, a) in light of Scriptural principles, b) in light of confessional principles, and c) in light of the CO of Dort; or that we, having taken careful note of the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of the CO of Dort, evaluate how and to what extent our current Church Orders reflect Dort's pattern. We left the matter unresolved.

We noted that point b, though requiring that the "principles, structure and essential provisions" of the CO of Dort are to be maintained, does not in fact require a slavish copying of Dort. We understand our mandate to require of us that we develop a CO that can effectively serve the church of the 21st Century.

The committee gave careful attention to the 17 Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government, (cf. pp. 33-35 of the second edition of the URCNA-CO). We confirmed that those Foundational Principles, though they could and should in some instances be reformulated, are non-negotiable and we affirmed that these Principles must constitute the basis on which we will conduct our discussions with the members of the CanRC CO committee.

Dr. Kloosterman had requested, several months before our May 30 meeting date, that each member of the CO committee compare and contrast an assigned portion of the two Church Orders. At our May meeting we not only reviewed that work, we also produced a complete re-write of our (the URCNA) Church Order, as well as a "mapping" of the three church orders, that of Dort, that of the CanRC and that of the URCNA.

The Joint Work of the Two CO Committees

To date the two CO committees have met four times: in December of 2002, and in February, August, and November of 2003. Dr Kloosterman was asked to serve the JCO (Joint Church Order) committee as chairman, Rev. Sikkema as secretary and Mr. Nordeman as the writer of a Press Release of each meeting – the four thus far published are available from the committee. Though at times our discussions were intense, we have had a most wonderful working relationship with the brothers of the CanRC CO committee: Dr Jack de Jong, Mr. Gerard Nordeman, Rev. John Van Woudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten. (Because his health had deteriorated to a point that he could no longer function on the committee, Dr. De Jong requested that he be relieved of committee responsibilities. With sadness the committee acquiesced with his request; Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen was subsequently appointed by the CanRC to take his place on the JCO committee. Dr. De Jong was heartily thanked for his interest in and contributions to the work of the JCO committee and commended to the love and care of our heavenly Father by the chairman.)

At our first meeting the joint committee reviewed the mandates assigned by our respective churches. It soon became clear that the two mandates were very similar. Both require that the differences between the current church orders of the federations be examined in light of the Scriptural and confessional principles, and that a common church order be proposed which maintains the principles, structure, and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort. Significantly, both committees – in their preparatory work – had done extensive work in "mapping" the three Church Orders to facilitate this evaluation. Additionally, both committees had prepared a draft proposal for a common church order. We agreed to use the 1914 CRC edition of the CO of Dort as our basis; therefore, the draft

proposals of the two committees are being evaluated against that template. It was, however, also agreed that though our respective mandates speak of “maintaining the principles, structure and essential provisions of the CO of Dort”, this must not be interpreted to mean a slavish following of either the wording or of the sequence of the Dort articles in the new JCO.

Considerable time was spent on the need for and the place of an Introduction in the new JCO. In the CanRC CO the Introduction provides an overview of the history of its Church Order. The Introduction to the URCNA CO, on the other hand, focuses on the function of and the need for a church order. Moreover, it includes 17 “Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government” which, we made clear to the Can RC brothers, are fundamental. That is, while specific wording could indeed be revised/improved, the Principles must remain. We eventually agreed to an Introduction with four components: 1) Biblical and Confessional Basis, 2) Historical Background, 3) Foundational Principles and 4) Broad Divisions.

After having come to agreement on the wording of Article 1: “Purpose of the Church Order” and Article 2: “The Three Offices” we agreed that all subsequent articles would remain unnumbered until such a time that all articles for the new JCO have been formulated. Once the work of writing the various CO articles is completed the committee will discuss, and propose for adoption to the churches, the proper order of the articles in the new JCO.

Since the work thus far completed by the committee – all of a provisional nature, to be sure – will be included as a separate part of this report, we will not comment on all of the discussions engaged in by the JCO committee in coming to our present wording of the articles completed to date. We will, however, comment on matters, which occasioned lengthy discussions because of differences in the history and/or practice of our federations.

Questions relating to the calling to and the preparation for the ministry received much attention. We agreed that a man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and that he must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory. Articles have been formulated which stipulate that it is the responsibility of the *consistory* to ensure that a student receives a thoroughly reformed education and that his financial needs are met, and that it is the responsibility of the *classis* to examine a student who requests licensure to exhort (or to speak an edifying word) in the churches – since such licensure permits the student to function beyond the local congregation and affects all the churches of the federation. We also decided to send the JCO article entitled: “Preparation for the Ministry” to the Committee on Theological Education for its input and reaction.

We debated at length the question: Whose responsibility is it to declare a man a candidate for the ministry? Does that responsibility rest upon a consistory, as practiced by the URCNA, or is that the responsibility of the classis, as practiced by the CanRC? Considering the fact that the office of the minister extends beyond the local congregation and that he is eligible for call among all the churches of the federation we agreed that the responsibility to declare a man a candidate for the ministry more properly belongs to the classis.

Much time was also devoted to the question of jurisdiction. We agree that Christ rules the church via authority, which He gives to the office bearers of the local church. The question that we discussed at length, however, was: What is the authority of the “broader” assemblies *vis-a-vis* the authority of the consistory? There are distinct differences of opinion on that question between the two federations, no doubt colored by our traditions as well as by our recent histories. The matter was resolved with the adoption of a simple statement, as follows: “The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction only and exclusively relating to matters properly before them.”

We decided that an article re “Exceptional Gifts” (cf. Art.8 CO Dort) not be included in the new JCO. Though it is recognized that in times of calamity or distress such an article could be helpful, we also agreed that at this time in the history of our churches, considering the agreed upon requirement that every minister be thoroughly trained for the ministry – a training that is readily available – and in view of the fact that such an article all too easily is/can be abused, the churches will be better served if such an article is omitted. We also agreed that “The Office of Teachers of Theology” (cf. Art.2 CO Dort) not be recognized as one of the offices in the church of Christ.

Several articles dealing with the calling and task of ministers of the Word, as well as articles stipulating their relationship to the church (es) and the churches responsibility for the care and retirement of ministers have been formulated. The Dort provision for “recent converts wishing to enter the ministry” is, we believe, adequately covered in the article entitled: “An Ordained Minister Without a Congregation Entering the Federation” wherein the requirement of an examination by classis and “an adequate period of consistorial supervision” is stipulated. The article entitled: “Exceptional Release of a Minister” (cf. our present Art.11 as well as CanRC Art.11: “Dismissal”) gave rise to much discussion and agonizing. How could we formulate such an article so that it would not (automatically?) put the onus on the minister? We trust that the article we propose will not lend itself to such interpretation.

Our proposed articles re the calling, task and function of elders and deacons begin with the *proviso* that “the council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office,” something not heretofore stipulated in our church orders, but a matter we deem to be very important for a proper functioning of elders and deacons in the government and care of the church of Jesus Christ.

Our proposed “Ecclesiastical Assemblies” article delineates a number of specific points re the make-up and function(ing) of the broader assemblies. In agreement with the CO of Dort, (cf. Art.29) as well as with the current practice of the CanRC, the new JCO will call for the recognition of four assemblies, to wit: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod and the general synod. It is to be understood that the terms *classis* and *synod* designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions; as *assemblies* these bodies exist only for the duration of their meetings. Moreover, since they are deliberative in nature, the delegates to these bodies must not be seen, nor are they to conduct themselves as representatives of their churches. Rather, they are members of the body/assembly to which they were delegated.

Appropriate articles were formulated which prescribe that the classes shall choose the delegates to both the regional and the general synod – thereby assuring a better distribution of delegates from among the churches; that those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body – thereby assigning them authority to deal with all matters properly placed before that assembly; and that in all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Moreover, the broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. All matters must originate with a consistory and must be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod. Only those matters may be acted upon by a broader assembly that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies. Each broader assembly will be required to approve for publication a press release of its proceedings.

Proposed wording of articles relating to the specific function and make-up of the broader assemblies is also included. We propose that the classes be required to meet once every four months unless the convening church of a classis, in consultation with a neighboring church, concludes that no matters

have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of classis. However, the cancellation of a meeting of a classis may not occur twice in succession. Each classis must appoint some of its most experienced and competent ministers and elders to visit all the churches of the classis. The task and function of the church visitors is also spelled out.

We propose that a regional synod, consisting of three or more classes in a region, shall ordinarily meet once per year. A regional synod may deal only with such matters as are placed on its agenda by the member classes, and with appeals from consistories or church members who have previously processed their appeals through their consistory and classis. The task and function of Deputies of Regional Synod is also delineated.

The general synod is to meet once every three years. It was noted that our churches, though typically making use of “Rules for Classical Procedure”, do not have any “Guidelines (or Rules) for General Synod” as do the CanRC. We respectfully inform Synod that it is our considered opinion that Synod will be well served with the adoption of such Guidelines and request that Synod mandate our committee to write an appropriate “Guidelines for Synodical Procedure” document. Moreover, the question of the number of men to be delegated to the general synod cannot be finalized until the question of Rules for Synodical Procedure is settled since such Guidelines ipso facto proceed from a certain understanding of what a synod is, and how this body will/must conduct its business.

The Work on the JCO Accomplished to Date

What follows below is the Introduction to the new JCO with its four parts: Biblical and Confessional Basis, Historical Background, Foundational Principles and Broad Divisions, and the articles for the new JCO thus far – provisionally – adopted by our committee. We want to underscore that the reason for including this accounting of the work thus far accomplished by the JCO committee is not to invite a discussion or debate on the floor of Synod this year re either the wording or the pros and cons of any item. Rather, we include this section in order to inform Synod of the progress and direction of our work, and to request of Synod that it encourages the churches to study and respond – positively and negatively – to our work to us. We will then seek to incorporate, as much as possible, the concerns raised, and the suggestions made for approval. When our draft of the new JCO is completed we plan to present it to Synod, with a proposal that Synod give it to the churches for two years of study, reaction, discussion – before we present our final product to Synod for adoption.

Introduction

Biblical and Confessional Basis

We Reformed believers maintain that the standard for personal, public, and ecclesiastical life is God's Word, the inspired, infallible, and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. As a federation of churches we declare our complete subjection and obedience to that Word of God. We also declare that we are confessional churches, in that we believe and are fully persuaded that the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, summarize and do fully agree with the Word of God. Therefore, we unitedly subscribe to these Reformed Confessions.

Both the Word of God and these Reformed Confessions demand that in our ecclesiastical structure and rule we openly acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the church. Christ exercises His headship in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life and order in the churches. The churches of our federation, although distinct, willingly display their unity and accountability, both to each other and especially to Christ, by means of our common Confessions and this Church Order. Congregations manifest this unity when their delegates meet together in the broader assemblies.

Historical Background.

Our Church Order has its roots in the continental European background of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformed churches desired to be faithful to God's Word in practice and life as well as in doctrine. Therefore, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and even in the midst of persecution, the Reformed churches set down the foundation of the Church Order at various synods beginning in 1563, including those in Wezel, the Netherlands (1568), and in Emden, Germany (1571). For the most part, the decisions of the assemblies in this period leaned heavily on the church orders already in place and used by the Reformed churches in France and Geneva.

The Church Order adopted at Emden was revised at the Synods of Dordrecht (1574 and 1578), Middelburg (1581), and the Hague (1586), before being adopted by the well-known Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). Our Church Order follows the principles and structure of the Church Order of Dordrecht.

Foundational Principles

The following list of foundational principles, though not exhaustive, provides a clear Biblical foundation for, and source of our Church Order.

1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant.
Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27
2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church.
Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18
3. Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are determined not by human preference, but by biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18, II Timothy 3:16, 17
4. The catholic or universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.
Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9
5. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The offices of minister, elder and deacon are local in authority and function. Therefore, a broader assembly governs the church only by way of delegation, and exists only when it is in session.
Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5
6. In its subjection to its Heavenly Head, the church is governed by Christ from heaven by means of His Word and Spirit with the keys of the kingdom, which He has given to the local church for that purpose. Therefore, no church may lord it over another church, nor may one office bearer lord it over another office bearer.
Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22, 23; Acts 20:28-32; Titus 1:5
7. Although churches exist in certain circumstances without formal federative relationships, the well-being of the church requires that such relationships be entered wherever possible. Entering into or remaining in such relationships should be voluntary; there is however a spiritual obligation to seek and maintain the federative unity of the churches by formal bonds of fellowship and cooperation.
Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16: 1-3; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20
8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.
I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17
9. Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity, to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies derive their authority from their conformity to the Word of God.
Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17

10. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, churches should seek contact with other faithful, confessionally Reformed churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.
John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6
11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth.
Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; II Corinthians 5:18-21
12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office bearers, whom He chooses through the congregation.
Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; I Timothy 3:1,8; 5:17
13. The Scriptures require that ministers, elders and deacons be thoroughly equipped for the suitable discharge of their respective offices.
I Timothy 3:2-9; 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5
14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the Consistory, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship.
Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; I Peter 2:9
15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through its teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith.
Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17
16. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, to maintain the unity and the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby to bring honor and glory to God's name.
I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11
17. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the Consistory of the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted.
Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

Broad Divisions

Since we desire to honor the apostolic command that in the churches all things are to be done decently and in good order (I Corinthians 14:40), we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

- I. Offices (Articles 1-)
- II. Assemblies (Articles -)
- III. Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies (Articles -)
- IV. Discipline (Articles -)

Article 1 JCO: Purpose of the Church Order

For the purpose of maintaining good order in the Church of Christ, it is necessary that there be: Offices; Assemblies; Supervision of Doctrine, Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies; and Christian Discipline.

ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES

Article 2 JCO: The Three Offices

Christ has instituted three distinct offices in the church: the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it.
The Minister of the Word

Article re: The Duties of the Minister

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, catechizing the youth, watching over his fellow office bearers, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article re: The Calling of an Ordained Minister Within the Federation

A minister already ordained within the federation who is called to another congregation shall be called in the lawful manner by the council. The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process, including the issuance of written testimonies of his good standing and of his release from the church and classis he last served.

Upon receipt of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the appropriate liturgical form and he shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

The approval of classis shall be required for a second call to the same minister regarding the same vacancy.

Article re: An Ordained Minister Without a Congregation Entering the Federation

A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after sustaining an examination conducted to the satisfaction of classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article re: Bound to a Particular Church

No one shall serve in the ministry of the Word unless he is bound to a particular church, either as a minister of the congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task. All ministers shall remain subject to the Church Order.

Article re: Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation. He may leave this vocation only for weighty reasons, upon the approval of his council and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article re: The Support and Emeritation of Ministers

- A. Each church shall provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and shall contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its

minister. In the event of the minister's death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his surviving dependents.

- B. A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness or otherwise, shall retain the honor and title of a minister, and shall retain his official bond with the church which he served last, which shall provide honorably for his support.
- C. The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the council, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article re: The Calling of a Candidate

The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:

First, the election by the council of one who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed herein, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.

Second, the examination necessary for ordination, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the federation as set forth in Appendix "X".

Finally, the public ordination before the congregation, which shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, prayers and subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, followed by the laying on of hands by the ministers who are present and by the elders of the congregation, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Article re: Preparation for the Ministry

- A. Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met.
- B. Anyone aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained a licensure examination conducted by his classis as required by Appendix "X". Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his theological training. All the work of the licentiate shall be conducted under consistorial supervision.
- C. At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct a candidacy examination, as required in Appendix "X". Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall declare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.

Article re: Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a minister may be released from his duties in the congregation only under the following conditions:

- a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. This release shall take place only when attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;
- c. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the

deputies of regional synod, which approval shall include provisions for the proper support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

- d. The council from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, where after he shall be honorably discharged from office.

B. The Offices of Elder and Deacon

Article re: Nomination and Eligibility for Office

The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the council shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the council may invite the congregation to direct attention to suitable men. The number of nominees shall be at least equal to, or at most twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the regulations adopted for that purpose to a term specified by the consistory.

Third, the council shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation two weeks prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory. They shall be publicly ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form, and shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

Article re: Term and Installation of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a term specified by the consistory, and having been appointed by the council, shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, and shall be ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form before entering upon their work.

Article re: The Duties of Elders

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow-elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth in the congregation, and promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels. Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in family visiting, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

II. ASSEMBLIES

Article re Ecclesiastical Assemblies

- A. Among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms *classis* and *synod* designate either

ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. As assemblies, classes and synods are deliberative in nature, and exist only for the duration of their meetings.

- B. Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body as required in Appendix “X”, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them.
- C. In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Matters once decided on may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. All such matters must originate with a consistory and must first be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod.
- D. The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, assisted by a vice-chairman. It is the chairman’s duty to state and explain clearly the business to be transacted, to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed, and to ensure that every member observes due order and decorum. In all broader assemblies these functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.
- E. In every assembly a clerk shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings. Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.
- F. At the close of broader assemblies, admonition shall be given to those who demonstrated unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.
- G. Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.

Article re: The Classis

A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose consistories shall delegate two members, ordinarily a minister and an elder, with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis. Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between eight and twelve churches.

A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

The churches shall take turns providing a chairman from their delegation, and convening classis. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession.

The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistory, council and diaconal meetings are regularly held, the Word of God is purely preached, the sacraments are faithfully administered, church discipline is diligently exercised, the poor are adequately cared for and confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.

The last classis before regional synod shall choose delegates to that synod. If the regional synod consists of three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. If the regional synod consists of four or more classes, each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

The second last classis before general synod shall choose delegates to that synod.

Article re: Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its most experienced and competent men to visit all the churches of the classis once during that period. At each church visit at least one of the visitors shall be a minister. These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers perform their duties in harmony with the Word of God, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the Church Order, and properly promote, by word and deed, the edification of the whole congregation. Moreover, they shall fraternally encourage the office-bearers to fulfill their offices faithfully that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things unto the peace, edification and profit of the churches.

The church visitors shall submit a written report of their work to the next classis.

Article re: Archives

The consistories and the broader assemblies shall ensure the proper care of their archives.

Article re: Counselors

The consistory of a vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counselor the minister it requests. His task is to assist the consistory in maintaining good order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the council members, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article re: The Regional Synod

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis.

The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and with lawful appeals of decisions of a classis.

The chairman, vice chairman and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

In addition to hearing and acting on the reports of its deputies, it shall determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

Article re: Deputies of Regional Synod

Each regional synod shall appoint two deputies, along with an alternate, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of the classes, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the regional synod and, if so required, they shall further explain those actions. The deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

Article re: The General Synod

A general synod shall consist of delegates chosen by the classes. A general synod shall meet at least once every three years at a time and place set by the previous synod, which shall also designate a convening church. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

The chairman, vice chairman and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

In addition to acting on reports, which were mandated by the previous synod, a general synod

shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and the regional synods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We wish to express our gratitude to the Lord for the wonderful spirit of harmony and brotherly affection, which we were privileged to experience as we worked with the members of the CanRC committee. It is our prayer that our work may contribute to a greater awareness of and understanding between our churches and federations – so that, under the blessing of the Lord, we may in due time become one federation of churches in a sin-torn world that needs so much to see and to experience concretely “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” To God be the glory.

We recommend that Synod Calgary 2004

1. Receive this report as a progress report; that therefore the details of this JCO not be opened for discussion or debate on the floor of Synod, but that all concerns from the churches be sent in writing to the JCO CO committee (in care of its secretary, Rev. R.J. Sikkema) for its consideration; (and that Synod)
2. Decide to forward the draft of the new JCO, once it is completed, to the churches for two years of study, reaction and discussion whereupon the committee is to present a final JCO draft to Synod for adoption.

Additionally, we request

3. That Synod authorize the URCNA members of the JCO committee to write Guidelines for Synodical Procedure, for final adoption by Synod,
4. That Synod encourage our committee to fulfill its assigned mandate, and
5. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of the URCNA CO committee to answer Synod’s questions re the report: Rev. Wm Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers and Rev. Raymond Sikkema.

Humbly submitted,

Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Chairman
Rev. William Pols
Rev. Ronald Scheuers
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Secretary
Mr. Harry Van Gorp

B. SONGBOOK (PSALTER HYMNAL) COMMITTEE REPORT

Synod 1997 (St. Catharines, ON) appointed a Psalter Hymnal committee "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." The grounds for this mandate were:

1. A common Psalter Hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation;
2. The *Psalter Hymnal* used in the majority of our churches is presently out of print;
3. Because the process of producing a Psalter Hymnal is lengthy it would be wise to begin the process as soon as possible.

(Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C. [pp.33-34])

This committee explored the options of producing, reproducing, or obtaining a Psalter Hymnal and

reported its finding to Synod 1999 (Hudsonville, MI). Synod Hudsonville approved the republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal, added members to the committee, and gave us the following mandate:

1. "...To begin the work of producing for publication a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal." (Minutes, Article XLI.b)
2. To provide "a recommendation of songs to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal" (Article XLI.c. (a))
3. To provide "a recommendation of other materials (Liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal." (Article XLI.c.(b))
4. "That the committee consult with those churches with whom we have entered into corresponding relations." (Article XLI.c.(c).i.(d))
5. "That the Psalter Hymnal Committee report to the next meeting of synod with a proposal for funding the new songbook." (Article XLIX.C)

Having begun this work, our committee reported our progress to Synod 2001 (Escondido, CA). Synod Escondido approved entering into "Phase Two" of ecumenicity with the Canadian Reformed Churches (which has since been ratified by a majority of URC churches), and made the following decisions regarding our committee:

1. Approved the establishment of a fund to finance the cost of the new Psalter Hymnal and requested the churches to collect free-will offerings for this cause. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,2,3)
2. Reaffirmed our mandate of Synod 1999 and requested that we present the guiding principles for study by the churches and for adoption by the next synod. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,4)
3. Added the following to our mandate: "That the present 'Psalter Hymnal Committee' work together with the Canadian Reformed 'Book of Praise Committee' to consider for inclusion in this song book the 150 Psalms in metrical settings (one note for each syllable) from an English translation of the Genevan Psalter, as well as other non-Genevan settings for the Psalms, and also hymns that meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The two song books primarily in use need not be included in their totality." (Minutes, Article XLV,B,2,c)

Since our last Synod the Psalter Hymnal committee has met on eight occasions, three of which were with the CanRC Book of Praise committee. Also, in keeping with Synod Escondido's instruction, we have presented annual reports to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (Minutes, Article XLV.B.4).

Most of our labors involved developing a common set of principles to be submitted to the churches of each federation for approval and evaluating hymns based on these principles and guidelines. While we have made good progress, there is much yet to be done.

As a result of this work, we humbly present to Synod 2004 the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1 - That Synod 2004 approve the "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church" (*appended to the Report*).

Grounds:

- A. This will provide direction for our committee(s) in the selection of music;
- B. The CanRC Synod 2004 has approved these "Principles and Guidelines";
- C. Synod 2001 instructed our committee to "present the principles listed for the churches to study, and adoption by the next synod." (Minutes: Article XXXV.D.4.)

Recommendation #2 - That Synod 2004 recommend the Book of Praise for use in our churches.
Ground: this will familiarize our churches with the Anglo-Genevan Psalter.

Recommendation #3 - That Synod 2004 relieve our committee of the non-musical section (liturgical forms, creeds and confessions, prayers, etc.) of the new book and appoint another committee to accomplish this task.

Grounds:

- A. We make this recommendation in view of the particular skills which are required to responsibly prepare such recommendations;
- B. We make this recommendation in view of the time that will be required to responsibly prepare such recommendations.

Note: If this recommendation is adopted, Dr. Michael Horton has requested to serve on this new committee rather than on our present committee.

Recommendation #4 - That Synod 2004 add members to our committee who are theologically and musically qualified and available to serve.

Grounds:

- A. More members will allow us to delegate work to subcommittees and expedite our work;
- B. Some present members are not always available for meetings;
- C. Dr. Rob Watson was requested to serve as an adjunct member of our committee since he has transferred his membership to a PCA congregation. Dr. Horton wishes to serve on the “prose” section of the new book. Mr. Glen De Jong has requested to be excused from our committee.

Respectfully submitted,

The Psalter Hymnal Committee:

Dr. Michael Horton
Rev. Ed Knott, Chairman
Rev. Rand Lankheet
Mr. Henry Nuiver
Rev. Dennis Royall
Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Reporter
Dr. Rob Watson, adjunct member
Rev. Dick Wynia

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches entered into “Phase Two” of ecumenical relations, effective January 1, 2002, with the goal of eventual federative unity. The synods of those two federations mandated their respective committees to labor together to recommend to the churches a common songbook, which would be faithful to the Scriptures and our Reformed confessions.

PREFACE

The Bible is filled with references to singing. From the very beginning God’s people have responded to His grace, almighty power and presence with song. The songs of the Church are, essentially, prayers

to God. They are filled with praise and thanksgiving, sorrow for sin and petition for forgiveness, and prayers for intercession on behalf of others in Christ. They also include instruction and exhortation. Thus the songs of the Church express the entire spectrum of the Christian's experience. While every believer may find personal expression of praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and repentance in song, and while we encourage the families of our churches to make use of the songbook in family devotions, the principle purpose for which this songbook is being developed is for congregational singing. The Psalms and hymns are being selected with the prayer that they may express and enrich our congregational worship of God.

Psalm 66:2 - "Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious."

Ephesians 5:19 - "...Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

PRINCIPLES

THE SONG OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP TO THE GLORY OF GOD

1. *The songs of the Church are to be Scriptural*
In content, form, and spirit the Church's songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

Augustine, referring to the singing of Psalms, said, "No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him . . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth."

2. *The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise¹*
Singing is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, "Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty."

3. *The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing*
The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God-honoring poetry and music.²

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SONGS:

1. The songs of the Church must be thoroughly biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook

¹ Hebrews 13:15

² Psalm 92:1-4

³ Psalm 147:1

3. When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text.⁴
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture⁵ as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible⁶ and edifying to the body of Christ.⁷
6. The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends.⁸
7. In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality, sentimentality, and individualism.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).
10. The music of the Church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God.⁹
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Dear members of the CERCU,

At the request of the Rev. Richard Stienstra, our committee is sending to you a progress report on our work as the URCNA's committee dealing with theological education as mandated by the URCNA's Synod that met in Escondido, California, in June 2001.

Since our last report to you (19 December 2002), our committee met by conference call again on 26 June 2003. We had received from the Theological Education Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches a 12-plus-page document entitled, "Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own seminary?" The document was divided into two parts, the first part dealing with exegetical arguments, and the second part tracing the history of church control of ministerial training. Our committee discussed this document but came to the conclusion that synodically controlled seminary education was not the only kind of education that has existed historically among Reformed churches. In other words, the argumentation provided in the Canadian Reformed document was not conclusive to us.

Our position paper that set forth our committee's point of view was sent to the Canadian Reformed committee.

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁵ Proverbs 30:6

⁶ I Corinthians 14:15

⁷ Colossians 3:16

⁸ Romans 12:2a

⁹ Ephesians 5:18-21

Furthermore, our respective committees were able to arrange a joint meeting on 13 January 2004, at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. All the Canadian Reformed committee members were present, except for Rev. Clarence Stam. Three of our committee members were unable to attend this meeting. Present for the URCNA were Rev. Bradd Nymeyer, Rev. Calvin Tuininga, and Rev. Mark Vander Hart. Rev. Nymeyer formally chaired this meeting. The URCNA committee was warmly and graciously received by the members of the Canadian Reformed committee. The meeting was cordial and brotherly in tone throughout.

Both committees reported on their respective activities. Both position papers were discussed, with areas of agreement and disagreement noted. Specifically, it has to be recognized that the Canadian Reformed Churches came into existence before they decided in the 1960s to establish their theological college. The history that led to the formation of the URC includes the fact that at least two seminaries, Mid-America Reformed Seminary and Westminster Seminary in California, existed prior to the URC's formation. Both denominations have thus a different history and relationship with these theological schools. The Canadian Reformed Churches enjoy a close relationship with college in Hamilton, and therefore have few immediate concerns about having a Synodical-controlled seminary. On the other hand, many in the URC are very wary of synodically controlled seminaries, given their earlier history in the CRC.

The discussion was fairly wide-ranging, giving consideration to the education programs at the several seminaries under review, and how a united church might exercise some representation on the respective boards of the several schools, if there were not outright synodical control. Both denominations' methods of preparing men for the ordained ministry have certain strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the Canadian Reformed arrangement the church assemblies have a strong voice in the control of the theological college, while the United Reformed arrangement stresses much local church and local office-bearers' involvement in a theological student's education and training.

At the conclusion of the meeting those present agreed on the following points:

- It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
- Ministers of the churches must receive sound reformed theological training;
- As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
- Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;
- It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training; and
- The churches, i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC, should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

Our URCNA committee discussed these points during a telephone conference call on 23 January 2004 and approved them. We anticipate further discussion in April (after the Canadian Reformed synod has met). It is also our intention to meet with the Canadian Reformed committee again on 15 June 2004 in Calgary, Alberta, just prior to the meeting of the URCNA Synod.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Vander Hart, Secretary
Theological Education Committee

15. **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That synod alter its existent practice of a three year term and decide that one term of service for a committee member constitutes the time period between three consecutive synods, at which time the retiring member is eligible for further service at that synod's pleasure.
2. That synod consider the committee's proposed schedule of retirement in establishing its continuing membership.
3. That when Art.36 of the Church Order needs implementing in the establishing of an ecumenical relationship, synod declares that *ratified by a majority of the churches* is to be interpreted as meaning the majority of the churches that voted in the particular ratification process.
4. That synod establish Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Art.36 of the Church Order.
5. That synod establish Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).
6. That synod establish Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA).
7. That synod remove the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) from the federations with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations.
8. That synod apply for membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).
9. That synod consider Phase 2 committee reports and recommendations, and request those committees to provide representatives to answer questions.
10. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the secretary when committee matters are being considered.
11. That synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. P. Vellenga, chairman
Rev. R. Stienstra, secretary

APPENDIX

1. **Report of RCUS Synod, June 2003**

The 257th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) was held May 19-22, 2003 at the Eureka Reformed Church in Eureka, South Dakota. The RCUS finds its roots in the German Reformed Church in the United States (later called Reformed Church in the United States) that merged with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1934, in what was known as the Evangelical and Reformed merger. One classis, the Eureka Classis, declined to participate in the merger with its confessional compromise, and continues to this day as the Reformed Church in the United States. Her doctrinal standards are the Three Forms of Unity. The RCUS counted 4,369 members in 48 congregations this year.

The Synod began with a worship service on Monday evening and also included a worship service on Wednesday evening. Business began on Tuesday morning with the election of officers: President - Rev. Vernon Pollema; Vice-President - Rev. Robert Grossmann; Stated Clerk - Rev. Paul Treick, and Treasurer - Elder Ted Griess. The Synod welcomed three new ministers: Rev. Michael McGee, Rev. Kyle Sorensen, and Rev. Guillermo Baloy. Two new congregations were received: Covenant RCUS in

Chico, CA and Providence RCUS in Vermillion, SD. The roll call on Tuesday morning showed 42 ministers and 31 elder delegates present.

Many visitors to the Synod were acknowledged. Among those given permission to address the synod briefly were: Dr. Carl Zylstra of Dordt College, Keith LeMahieu, Director of Development from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dr. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, Marlow Van Ginkel of Hope Haven and the undersigned from the URCNA.

Missions: The RCUS supports home mission works in: Watertown, SD; Minneapolis, MN; Chico, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Greeley, CO; Vermillion, SD, San Ramon CA, Calhan CO and Bentonville Ark. Their foreign mission efforts include support for the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo and the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. They also support the Reformed Radio Administration, which seeks to reach French-speaking Africa with the gospel.

The RCUS approved their first foreign missionary since 1934. Although they have helped support two OPC foreign missionaries in recent history, they have never had one of their own ministers serve as a foreign missionary. The missionary candidate is Mr. Kurt Schimke presently an elder in the Blue Cliff, Colorado RCUS congregation. His appointment is contingent on passing his licensure and ordination exams. The cost of sending him is estimated at \$60,000 per year of which the RCUS has committed to raise half. He is scheduled to go before the OPC Foreign Missions Committee this fall to seek the other half of his support since the position he seeks to fill is under their administration. If approved, it is planned that he will teach in a seminary in Uganda and spend four months each year helping establish local congregations in Kenya. One URC congregation has also indicated a desire to support Mr. Schimke at the rate of \$5,000 per year.

Interchurch Relations: The RCUS is presently in fraternal relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands - Liberated (GKN-Lib). In 1999 the RCUS suspended relations with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) because of a lack of communication from them. Synod decided this year to finalized the termination of relations with the IPCM. The RCUS is also a member of NAPARC and the ICRC. Fraternal delegates from three sister churches were present, the CanRC, the GKN-Lib. and the OPC.

The synod ratified the action of NAPARC to receive into its membership the L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (Reformed Church of Quebec) a small, French speaking denomination in Canada. The NAPARC constitution requires member denominations to ratify in their respective synods or general assemblies any membership changes.

The Permanent Inter-Church Relations Committee of the RCUS (IRC) recommended to the synod the formation of a special committee "to study and report on the application of Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 103, i.e., the Lord's Day and how it should be observed in our churches." The IRC made the request as a result of meetings with representatives of the CanRC who expressed their synod's desire for ongoing discussions "about different practices relative to the observance of the Lord's Day." The proposal sparked heated debate and was defeated on a vote of 26 "Yes" and 42 "No." Some who spoke against the proposal said that the catechism was clear enough and needed no further study. Some thought that if the RCUS asked for the position of the CanRC on the Lord's Day, they would respond by pointing only to the confessions. Perhaps the most persuasive argument was the thought that regardless of which side of the issue the committee report might come down on (the continental view verses the Westminster or Puritan view) there will be an uproar in the RCUS since there is no unanimity on the Lord's Day issue in the RCUS.

Another recommendation from the IRC, again sparked by discussions with the CanRC, concerned the paper, “Biblical Principles of Church Unity” adopted by the RCUS in 1999. The paper contained five principles that were adopted as the position of the RCUS on church unity. However, the body of the paper was not adopted. The IRC recommended that the body of the report, which acts as unofficial groups for the five enumerated principles be edited so that its language be brought more in line with the language of the Three Forms of Unity. It was said that currently the language reflects more the language of the Westminster standards. Although there was some opposition voiced, the proposal passed by a clear majority and the task of bringing the language of the paper more in line with the Three Forms of Unity was given to the IRC.

The synod also “recommended to the churches the desirability of fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, via pulpit exchange, visiting Can Ref Churches and invitations to youth camps/conferences held by the various Classes.” In 2000, groundwork was laid to form a classis of deaf congregations. Three congregations are necessary for the formation of a classis but presently there are only two deaf congregations. They presently participate in an existing classis (Covenant East) with signing provided for the deaf delegates. Signing translation was also provided at synod.

Publications and Christian Education: The RCUS is in the midst of an ambitious project to produce Sunday School material for use in their churches. Rev. Howard Hart and Elder Harvey De Groot have been working on the project for several years and the first year of all four levels (spanning pre-school to junior high) will soon be available. The material is based on, and to be used in conjunction with, *Promise and Deliverance* by S. G. De Graaf. Approval was given to first produce it on a CD in pdf format and sell it for about \$49.00 so that churches can produce as many copies as they need, although not for resale or distribution to other churches since the material and the CD are copyrighted. The price includes an answer key and teachers’ manual. For the present, sale of the CD is limited to RCUS congregations.

Rev. Paul Treick was re-elected editor of the denominational magazine, the *Reformed Herald*. The Web Site Committee of the RCUS was instructed to research, establish, and implement guidelines for participation on the RCUS Internet discussion group.

In 2000 a great deal of attention was given to whether the RCUS should continue to provide financial support to RCUS students at Westminster Theological Seminary in California (WTSCA). At that time WTSCA was taken off the list of approved seminaries but the issue came up again this year with a majority and minority committee report from a committee appointed by last year’s synod to investigate the matter again. The majority recommended the reinstatement of WTSCA to the list of approved seminaries and the minority the continuation of the current policy of not recommending it. The minority report was rejected because it implied that WTSCA was a “heterodox” institution, language that the majority of delegates thought was far too strong even among those who didn’t want to reinstate the seminary. The objections to WTSCA focused especially on the teaching of the Framework Hypothesis with regard to the creation days of Genesis 1. WTSCA does not endorse any one interpretation of Genesis 1 but presents several different interpretations as possibly correct interpretations although some professors have strongly advocated the Framework Hypothesis.

In favor of reinstating the seminary to the approved list was the fact the two professors who had strongly advocated the Framework Hypotheses are no longer teaching there (Futato and Kline) and therefore the influence of that view is less than what it used to be. Those in favor of not reinstating argued that creation in six normal days is the official position of the RCUS and is an extremely important matter dealing with hermeneutics and how the rest of the Bible will be interpreted. Therefore, it was argued, RCUS students should only be educated at schools, which teach six normal

day creation as the correct interpretation of Genesis 1. The matter was not resolved at this synod. After lengthy and heated debate the majority report of the special committee was referred to the Permanent Christian Education Committee, which is charged to report periodically on all the approved seminaries. That committee is now charged to visit WTSCA and evaluate them using the same criteria used to evaluate other seminaries. It appeared that the delegates were happy to hear that there have been good changes at WTSCA but wanted a more thorough report from another committee before reinstating the seminary to the list approved for student financial support.

The synod confirmed and recommended for use in all the churches a special committee report warning against the theological errors of Mr. Harold Camping of Family Radio. In response to an overture, the synod formed a special committee to study the doctrine of justification by faith in light of the current controversy surrounding the relationship of good works to justification. Appointed to the committee were Revs. Tracy Grugett, Norman Jones, David Faygrey and C.W. Powell and Elder David McPherson.

The RCUS currently supports its retired ministers and their widows with benevolent (thus non taxable) grants. Each grant is individually approved by the whole synod each year. There has been some discussion over the years of setting up a pension plan through a paid provider. This year the synod voted to investigate setting up a pension plan for its ministers.

In response to an appeal regarding a church that asked its classis to dissolve the pastoral relationship between it and its pastor, the synod upheld the right of the classis to ask for the reasons for the separation prior to approving it. The synod appointed a committee to study the matter of biennial synods. To finance all RCUS ministries, the synod asked the churches for an average contribution of \$193.25 per communicant member. Part of that money is used to reimburse the delegates for their travel expenses to synod, which amounted to about \$22,116 this year for about 75 delegates. All requests for reimbursement are approved individually, by name, by the whole synod.

Late Thursday evening as the synod was winding down and moving toward adjournment a motion was made to limit the speeches of visitors and fraternal delegates to 10 minutes. The motion was then amended to 5 minutes. The amendment to limit speeches to 5 minutes was rejected and the 10 minutes rule was passed. In the course of the debate the idea of limiting fraternal delegates received more attention and opposition than limiting visitors. It was noted that one of the fraternal delegates (who had left earlier in the day – from the GKN-Lib) had traveled all the way from the Netherlands to be at this synod. It was asked, “Should we tell him he can only speak for five minutes?” Another delegate speaking against limiting the fraternal delegates warned his brothers, “These men take fraternal relations seriously.” Indeed we do.

Respectfully submitted,
Ralph A. Pontier

2. *Report of RPCNA 172nd Synod, July 2003.*

On June 30 and July 1, Rev. Richard Stienstra and I attended the annual synod of the RPCNA, their 172nd. It was hosted, as it usually is, at their denominationally affiliated Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. The agenda for this synod was relatively light. There was ample opportunity for our delegates to get to know a number of our Reformed Presbyterian brethren and to enjoy their fellowship.

One of the remarkable features, in our estimation, of their synodical assembly is the attention to devotion and piety. At the beginning of each new day, the deliberations are preceded by a full-length sermon as a portion of their devotional exercises. As well, before each meal there is a significant time

of prayer, conducted in various ways (sometimes with silent individual portions, sometimes lead by a team of assigned persons who prayed, and at other times with the assembly pairing up two by two for a time of “one on one” intercession). Always these times of prayer would be followed with the singing of a psalm sung a cappella. This is for them, of course, a principled matter of their interpretation of the regulative principle of worship. The singing of the body, comprised of some 120 or so men, was also a beautiful highlight of the synod. A good number of the tunes were also familiar to us,

During our time there, the majority of the synod’s time was spent going over the Worship Committee Study Report. This was a report that had been written over the course of a couple of years in response to a letter written to the synod by one of the pastors having some difficulty with the RPCNA positions on the Regulative Principle of Worship. This synod has now adopted this paper not only as an answer to this pastor’s concerns but also with the intention of having it published as an official position paper of the synod.

What was also notable about the process of this paper’s adoption, as became evident in the synods dealings with other matters as well, is the amount of responsibility entrusted to their standing committees. Matters such as the reports when on the floor were open to comment from the body, and only somewhat open to revision from the floor. The preferred method was always to hear the concerns of the body, recommit the matter for the committee’s further consideration, and then wait for the committee to come back with its revisions (during the same synod), because it was the committee’s report.

On Tuesday, July 1st the court recessed for a period of about one and a half hours for the purposes of having the brother ministers (teaching elders) addressed by a Christian financial management consultant and motivational speaker. This was in our minds a somewhat strange insertion into the context of a much more devotional setting. Apparently the reason for this kind of thing finding its place had to do with the recent closing down of the denominational pension fund.

From our discussions with many delegates, we determined that this old and established denomination had for many years, almost a century been quite isolationist and was a church in constant decline. Providentially that began to change in the latter part of the twentieth century and the recent years have seen quite a revival of biblical and reformed Christianity in their midst. They are actively planting churches in many locales, and yet, in God’s providence there are not many locations where the RPCNA witness overlaps significantly with ours in the URCNA. The most recent statistics available listed their denomination at 75 churches with 6,156 souls. In comparison the URC are comprised of about 85 churches made up of a little over 19,300 souls.

Despite their relatively small size the RPCNA has a disproportionately large influence through its institutions. Geneva College, which is a liberal arts Christian college which could be described as broadly evangelical and no longer in every way thoroughly or distinctively Reformed, is still loosely connected governmentally to the RPCNA. Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Pittsburgh, on the other hand is under the strict control of the denomination remains quite distinctively Reformed Presbyterian. The seminary has about 100 students, only fifteen of which are RPCNA men. In both institutions the influence extended is far beyond the reaches of the small federation.

Their Church is currently in *ecclesiastical fellowship* (full intercommunion) with other RP churches in Australia, Ireland, Scotland, and Cyprus. They have *fraternal relations* with the American Presbyterian Church, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Free Church of Scotland (Synod of N. America), the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Reformed Church in the United States. All of these are for

the most part being churches of NAPARC (the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council).

In all we appreciated our time among the RPCNA brethren very much. They are a warm fellowship with obvious desire to be faithful to their inheritance and covenants. In our face-to-face discussions with their IRC (Interchurch Relations Committee) we informed them of our willingness to recommend to our committee that we propose to our Synod 2004 that we enter into Phase 1, corresponding relations with this body. They were pleased with this development, as they themselves had in fact already at their previous synod been encouraged to *take steps toward establishing fraternal relations with the URCNA*. Fraternal relations, which may be as far as we can come with them for quite some time, humanly speaking, because of their unique commitments concerning worship, would be more parallel with our phase 2 (*Ecclesiastical Fellowship*). Their committee was pleased, as a result of our contact to inform the body that we are establishing corresponding relations and are happy to keep working together in the way of getting to know one another in the context of our phase 1.

Following our address to the body, one brother on the floor of synod spoke of wishing to maintain what he considered a very important “Dutch connection” and spoke of how it was the Dutch already more than three hundred years ago that helped to provide for their survival as churches in Scotland in the early years. This denomination also once had a strong connection with the CRC but that came to an end officially in 2001. It was the sense of many that our federation ought to fill the void left by the CRC.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. John A. Bouwers

COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL CONTACT WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (CECCA) REPORT

February, 2004

Esteemed Brothers,

Since reporting to Synod Escondido in June of 2001, your committee met per telephone conferencing on three occasions; additionally, we met once at a face-to-face meeting – in January of 2004. Herewith a brief summary of those meetings – and request for action on recommendations proposed.

The September 27, 2001 meeting of CECCA

At our September 27, 2001 meeting the first order of business was the re-organizing of our committee. Dr. M. Horton assumed the chairmanship and Rev. R.J. Sikkema the duties of secretary. The chairman confirmed that contact with most of the churches referred to in the July 9, 2001 ICRC report, (cf. Appendix 1), is dependant on such churches contacting us. To date, some of those churches have contacted us – (as will become evident) – while others have not. Two such contacts – with Mr. Prabhath De Silva of the Lanka Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, and with Rev. L. Kiemlo Pulamte of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North India – were discussed. The correspondence with Br. De Silva, who was primarily interested in obtaining financial support/sponsorship of a school being planned and of outreach ministries being contemplated by this very small federation, eventually stopped when the brother – (no doubt disappointed by the fact that the deacons of the Trinity ORC of St Catharines, whom we had contacted, decided that they would not/could not support this request for lack of accountability) – discontinued responding to our letters. The correspondence with Rev. Pulamte, after an initial letter from this brother wherein he inquired about “closer and better relationships” with us and requesting information re magazines/newsletters/brochures – to which we had duly responded – also had no further follow up. At this meeting of the committee we also briefly discussed the question of funding for our – and other URCNA – committees, a matter that was raised again at a subsequent meeting of the committee.

The February 22, 2002 meeting of CECCA

At our February 2002 meeting we adopted, what proved to a first draft of, our Terminology/Mandate paper. The final draft, which we present to Synod for adoption, is attached, (cf. Appendix 2). It should be noted that, in our correspondence with churches to date, it was that first draft which was sent to them. Upon the approval/adoption of a (final ?) Terminology Document, your committee will correspond with the churches with whom we have contact, informing them of the fact and explaining the meaning/significance of the decision of Synod. It is also the understanding of the committee that this document spells out the mandate of the CECCA in pursuing ecumenical relations with churches abroad.

We discussed the contact we have with Dr. Acheniku of the NKST whom we met at the ICRC meeting in Philadelphia. Dr. Acheniku is eager to have the NKST establish ecumenical relations with the URCNA – in lieu of such relations with the CRCNA. However, to date his efforts to have the NKST pursue such a relationship with us have been thwarted by the General Secretary of the NKST who favors maintaining/retaining their present relationship with the CRC – a relationship he believes will be threatened should the NKST pursue a relationship with the URCNA. Your committee has asked our Stated Clerk to send an invitation to the NKST, encouraging them to send (an) Observer(s) to our synod – with a copy to Br. Acheniku.

In regard to the Synod of the GKSA and our expectation that an invitation to attend its meetings

would be forthcoming, we discussed a letter of invitation received by our chairman from a businessman in So. Africa who funds speakers who are asked to address various audiences in So. Africa. Dr. Horton was indeed invited, however, the dates of the meetings where he would be speaking did not mesh with the dates of the GKSA Synod. Since an invitation was received that we send (an) Observer(s) to attend, it was decided that Rev. Sikkema be delegated to attend all the meetings, and that Dr. Horton attend the closing session(s), if possible. This decision was subsequently acted upon. We received word from Rev. Van Spronsen of the Canadian Reformed Churches that he had become the new secretary of the ICRC, replacing Rev. Van Beveren. He requested that we send updated information to him for the new ICRC Directory. The requested information was sent, noting that the URCNA has appointed two committees for Interchurch Relations, to wit: our CERCU and CECCA committees.

We discussed (again) the funding for CECCA – and other URCNA committees. We discussed at some length the question, Is there not a need for an established/agreed upon budget for such committees? This question was discussed in the context of such questions as: What determines how (the limited) funds are presently distributed? Is it first come, first served? Who decides? On what basis? How may/must a committee decide whether expenditures expected can be/will be authorized? Is the present URCNA modus operandi vis a vis the distribution of funds for committee expenses not (potentially ?) a serious hindrance to the work of our committees? We decided that this concern should, if at all possible, be placed before the Churches. Since that is, however, a matter that should be placed before Synod via a Church/Classis, we requested, and found the URC of Walnut Creek willing to process an Overture re this matter to Synod.

The April 3, 2003 meeting of CECCA

Rev. Sikkema reported on his attendance at the GKSA. (Since the Synod finished its business one day earlier than anticipated, Dr. Horton arrive too late to attend the closing sessions). Rev. Sikkema submitted a copy of both his address to that Synod, (cf. Appendix 3) and a report on the meetings of the Synod, (cf. Appendix 4). It was decided that, if we were to have a meaningful discussion on that Synod report, a face-to-face meeting of our committee would be most beneficial. We discussed also the Protocol followed by the GKSA re the hosting of foreign Delegates/Observers. We found that the protocol of the GKSA was good, worthy of imitation. We have, therefore, written a similar Protocol document which we request Synod to discuss/adopt, (cf. Appendix 5).

In response to a letter from Dr. Leen Joosse, Secretary of the ICRC Missions Committee, who informed us that the Missions Committee would be asked to meet in Zwolle, the Netherlands in June of 2003, it was decided that we encourage/mandate Rev. Sikkema to attend, since he was elected by the ICRC to membership on that committee. It was, however, also decided that we should request that the ICRC fund the expenses re this (such) meeting(s), since it is (a committee of) the ICRC that is calling the meeting. The Missions Committee agreed with our request; the travel expenses were funded by the ICRC. A brief report of this meeting is also included with this report, (cf. Appendix 6). We discussed which “foreign” churches should be invited to send Observers to Synod Calgary, recognizing that there would be some expenses involved – as per our proposed Protocol document. This matter was finalized at our January 2004 meeting. It was decided to invite, on behalf of Synod via the Stated Clerk, delegates from four federations, to wit: the GKSA of So. Africa, the RCN-L of the Netherlands, the RCNZ of New Zealand and the NKST of Nigeria. A letter was sent to the convening church of Synod requesting that it – pro-actively – act on the Protocol document (which our committee is placing before Synod for adoption) by assuring that the hospitality it proposes be extended to such delegates.

We briefly discussed the question: Do we propose to Synod that it send (a) delegate(s) to the next ICRC meeting, scheduled for 2005? At our January 2004 meeting we decided as follows: With a view to the importance of establishing a familiar, informed presence at the ICRC, and in consideration of the fact that the members of the ICRC Missions Committee are expected to conduct committee

meetings at the venue of the ICRC meeting, we propose to Synod Calgary that Rev. R.J. Sikkema serve as the regular delegate of the URCNA to the meetings of the ICRC, and that, additionally, one other member of the CECCA, the Rev. Dennis Royall, be delegated to attend the next meeting of the ICRC in So. Africa in 2005.

The January 20, 2004 meeting of CECCA

In addition to finalizing some matters initiated at earlier meetings of the committee (reported on above), the committee spent considerable time at its face-to-face meeting in January discussing the GKSA Synod meeting report. Especially troubling was the decision of that Synod to open the office of deacon to women. What, if any, consequence will/must that decision have on the future of our relationship? In the context of that discussion we reviewed and revised our position paper re: Terminology to be used by/Mandate of the CECCA, (cf. Appendix 2). We agreed that we propose to Synod that the GKSA remain in phase one as per the revised formulation proposed. We also decided that – upon the approval of Synod – a letter be addressed to the GKSA which expresses the concern of the URCNA on the women in the diaconate issue as well as concerns re the Sabbath/Sunday issue. A draft of such a letter will be prepared by the committee for approval by Synod, should Synod agree to the sending of a letter.

In response to a request from Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois that our committee “pursue a relationship with the Independent Church of Mexico (IPC)” and its question, “Is the IPC a member of the ICRC? we explained that the modus operandi of the committee is twofold. We pursue contact with a number of churches who are members of the ICRC; and we respond to/correspond with churches, not members of the ICRC, who seek contact with us. Since the IPC falls in neither of those two categories, responsibility for initiating contact, with a view to possibly engaging in mission work in Mexico, is the responsibility of the local church – which may indeed encourage that a church (the IPC, in this case) take up contact with us, (CECCA).

We received and responded to several letters from the Chairman of the Contact Committee, the Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, of the URC in Myanmar, (cf. Appendix 7). Rev. Thang requests that we (the URCNA) endorse the application of the URC in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC. We decided to lay this matter before Synod, advising Synod to endorse this request once Synod is satisfied that it has sufficient information on hand to make a decision. The secretary of CECCA has been instructed to contact the RCNZ, the other church asked to endorse the Myanmar request, inquiring of them concerning their proposed course of action re this matter. We trust that we will be able to provide additional information at the meeting of Synod. (NOTE: Two information documents, to wit: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR, and THE CHURCH ORDER OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR have been submitted to the Stated Clerk).

A request from Dr. C.E. Mbayi-Kabamba requesting financial support for Relief Work in the Republic of Congo was denied by the CECCA since such a request is beyond the mandate of our committee. We informed the brother of relief agencies that may be in a position to offer the help he seeks.

An initial contact with the Indonesian Reformed Churches will be pursued.

We discussed the need for one additional member on the CECCA committee, possibly someone from the Mid-West. It was decided to recommend to Synod that one additional member be elected to serve on CECCA. We have not, to date, discussed the terms of office of the presently serving committee members. We have, however, agreed with Dr. Horton that he, because of the press of other commitments – both at home, to support his wife in the nurture and care of the triplets with which the Lord blessed the Horton family, and responsibilities at the Seminary – he be relieved of his responsibilities as chairman of CECCA. Rev. Royall will assume the responsibilities of the chairmanship.

Matters requiring Synodical action

1. Approval/adoption of the Terminology/Mandate paper, (cf. Appendix 2).
2. Adoption of the Protocol Document, (cf. Appendix 5).
3. Electing delegates, one regular and one additional, to the next meeting of the ICRC in So. Africa.
4. The status of the GKSA, that it remain in phase 1.
5. Letter of concern to the GKSA, a draft to be provided by CECCA.
6. Action re the URC in Myanmar, additional info to be provided by CECCA.
7. Election of one additional member for the CECCA committee.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Joghinda S. Gangar, member
Dr. Michael S. Horton, member
Rev. Dennis W. Royall, chairman
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, secretary of CECCA

APPENDIX 1: July 9,2001

SUBJECT: REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL CONTACT WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (CECCA) RE CONTACTS MADE AT THE RECENT ICRC MEETING:

While in attendance at the meetings of the ICRC in Philadelphia, June20- 27,2001, we (Dr. M. S. Horton and Rev. R. J. Sikkema) availed ourselves of the opportunity to meet with delegations from a number of churches. The daily schedule, 9 am - 9 pm, included specific time slots for such “interchurch meetings” of which we made thankful use and which allowed us to establish initial contact with various Reformed and Presbyterian churches worldwide.

It became apparent that such contact(s) serve—and are sought—primarily for one of two reasons. Some churches, e.g. The GKNV, look for ecumenical relations because they are eager to serve others with their “products”, e.g. mission methods/tools/preparation. Other churches seek ecumenical relations because they are “needy”. They look for churches that can/will support them in their ministry on their home front. Their “need” may be occasioned because of small numbers, financial poverty, limited gifts, persecutions, etc. Our own position is such that we may be requiring help in some areas, whereas we can offer assistance/support in others.

The churches with which we had contact include the following:

- A. The GKNV—the “Liberated” churches in the Netherlands). The delegates of this church, Rev. A. de Jager and Rev. Dr. L. J. Joosse, informed us.
 - a. That they had a mandate to pursue ecumenical relations with us;
 - b. That they had waited with contacting us until such a time that the Canadian Reformed Church/United Reformed Church relation would be more clearly defined;
 - c. That they are looking for a “sister church” relationship with us; and
 - d. That they have only one level/step in their ecumenical relations with “churches abroad”—the sister church relationship.

- B. The GKSA—the “Dopper Kerk” of South Africa). We spoke at some length with the Rev. Dr. Neels Smit and Rev. Ben Fourie re the “breakdown” in communication with the Rev. Dr. M. J. (Thinus) Du Plessis who was a fraternal delegate of the GKSA at Synod Escondido. We apologized for any misunderstanding and assured the brothers that we surely did not intend to offend and asked that no offence be taken.

Brothers Smit and Fourie in turn assured us that it was/is their desire to establish ecumenical relations with us of the “inner circle” variety.

NOTE: They differentiate three types of relationships, to wit:

- Ecumenical contact, “for contact in a broad spectre for the sake of study or contacts in international organisations on matters of general concern.”
- Ecumenical ties, “for more specific contacts and collaboration with unity in view.
- Ecumenical unity, “for the relationships where churches are one beyond geographical boundaries (also known as correspondence).

The brothers also assured us that an invitation will be sent to us requesting that (a) delegate(s) attend their 2003 Synod.

3. The RCNZ—the Free Reformed Churches of new Zealand). Rev. John Goris and Rev. Bruce Hoyt informed us that they are looking for some form of ecumenical relations with us—especially with a view to opening the way for them to call pastors from the URCNA and to send their students to study with “us” at MARS. We may expect to hear from them in the near future re such a relationship.
4. The CRCN—the Free Reformed Church of the Netherlands). Professor Dr. Mans and the Revs. De Graaf and Kater were more cautious, less forthcoming in expressing a desire for ecumenical~relations with the URC. We were informed that, at present, the CRCN has “not finalized” its position vis a vis the URCNA—whether it should be “closer” or “more distant.” Once they have determined that, we may expect them to inform us of their decision.
5. The GGRM—the Reformed Pilgrim Churches of Indonesia in Timor). Rev. Yonson Dethan and his “partner”, Rev. Madah Biha of the GSRI (the Reformed Churches in Indonesia) pleaded with the body (the ICRC) in general and with us in particular to remember them in our prayers and support them in their struggles against the onslaught of Islam and the terrible persecution their churches experience.

In addition to the above—contact with member churches of the ICRC—we also had contact with a number of observers/visitors at the ICRC meeting.

6. The NKST—the Church of Jesus Christ Among the Tiv.) The Rev. Dr. I. Achineku, who had just recently received his doctorate and was waiting for the proper paper work before returning to Nigeria, expressed the hope and desire that Dr. Horton
1. teach a two week course at RTCN,
 2. speak at the graduation of RTCN,
 3. attend the Synod of the NKST.
- We may expect some communication from the NKST re this matter and re a possible ecumenical relationship with the NKST.
7. PCU—the Presbyterian Church of Uganda). Edward Kasaija, a visitor representing the PCU,

spoke of the great need for workers in Uganda. “The Bible doesn’t speak of retirement”, he said. If, therefore, you have the energy and look for a place to minister, come over and help us.

8. The IRCK—(the Independent Reformed Church of Korea). This small federation of three churches was represented at the ICRC by Rev. Keon-Soo Kim. He spoke to us about his work of translating the Heidelberg Catechism and of their struggle to maintain purity of doctrine. The IRCK is looking for churches that will offer help/support in their efforts to remain a faithful church.
9. The RCEA—(the Reformed Church in East Africa). Rev. Mathayo (Matthew) Koech, a Visitor, spoke for the RCEA. He explained the history of the RCEA—going back to 1944 “when the consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church at Eldoret, a church of South African origin, in obedience to the Word of God and mindful of the needs of the African Labourers on the farms of its members, established a mission committee to organize a Christian Mission among the workers. The name of the mission was ‘Bwana Loubser Sending Mission’.” Brother Keoch provided the ICRC delegates a glimpse into the life and wellbeing of this Reformed Church in Kenya from 1944 on, explaining the “Ministry Focus” of the RCEA for the next five years.
10. The Lanka RC—(the Reformed Church in Sri Lanka). The Lanka RC, represented by Prabhath de Silva, its non-ordained leader, is surely the smallest “federation.” It consists of one congregation made up of 20 confession members and 7 baptized members. The GKNV supports the ministry of brother de Silva by sending him tapes of sermons, which he translates and reads, and by periodically sending a pastor to administer the sacraments. It also sponsored brother de Silva’s trip to Philadelphia.
11. The MYEPC—(the Compassion of Jesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Eritrea). Rev. Zecharias Abraham gave a brief sketch of this young church in a young nation (recently independent from Ethiopia with whom a lengthy civil war had been fought).
12. The RPCCEE—(The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Easter Europe). Brother Imre Szoke provided a brief, informative look into the origin of this Reformed Presbyterian Church ministering “in the Hungarian lands of Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine.” He expressed the desire “to have spiritual connection with an organization abroad which is very faithful to the Word of God and to the Reformed Confessions. We are alone in Hungary”, he said, “and need encouragement. We hope that in the future we can be a part of this bigger Reformed family. Please pray for us.”

We should also report on extensive discussions with the Rev. Dr. L. J. Joosse, Mr. Ben v.d.Lugt and Rev. C. Haak, all of whom are involved with the mission outreach of the GKNV. Ben and Cees are personnel of the IRTT (Institute of Reformed Theological Training). They are eager to help others (us) gain insight into Reformed Mission work in the 21st century. A conference to that end is planned for August 16-18 in Toronto—sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. They also provided us with info re how they came to have a mission committee (deputation)—after first attempting to have the work of missions done solely under the auspices of a local consistory.

In closing, it should be stated that several churches (delegates) said to us that they had (attempted to) contact us—whether via our chairman, our secretary, or the Stated Clerk. We, however, had no knowledge of such communication and, in some cases, were met with incredulous stares. As committee we need to have more contact with each other than the one conference call we had since being appointed.

-----Humbly submitted, Rev. R. J. Sikkema

APPENDIX 2: Terminology Document (Mandate of the CECCA)

The CECCA committee proposes to Synod Calgary a Terminology document – which at the same time spells out the Mandate of the committee. We recommend a two step/two phase approach, as follows:

- I. The first step, Ecumenical Contact, will focus on studying matters of general concern between the URCNA and the “foreign” federation. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, by:
 - a. Exchange of official observers at major assemblies.
 - b. Consultation on issues of joint concern, including:
 1. view and place of the Scriptures;
 2. creeds and confessions;
 3. formula of subscription to the confessions;
 4. significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology and ecclesiology;
 5. church order and polity;
 6. liturgy and liturgical forms;
 7. preaching, sacraments and discipline;
 8. theological education for ministers.
 - c. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.
 - d. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks).
 - e. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards.
 - f. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order.
 - g. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals.

- II. The second step, Ecumenical Recognition, will focus on the oneness of the URCNA with the “foreign” federation, even though we are separated by geographical boundaries. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, (in addition to the points listed under step one above) by:
 - a. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option).
 - b. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other’s members at the Lord’s Supper – but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership – as regulated by each consistory (session).
 - c. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian (Church) unity.
 - d. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another.
 - e. Joint action in areas of common responsibility.
 - f. Agreement that, before changes in polity, doctrine or practice are instituted, the churches will consult with each other – understanding that the adoption of such changes may jeopardise the established ecumenical relationship.

APPENDIX 3: Rev. R.J. Sikkema's address to the GKSA

Greetings:

Thank you, Mr Chairman
Beloved Brothers,

It is indeed a wonderful privilege to meet with you here in Potchefstroom. It is my privilege also (and my joy) to greet you in the name of our risen Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. I invite you to listen to these words — written by John in addressing the seven Churches: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

We thank you for the letter of invitation — sent to the URCNA, inviting us to send observers to attend your Synod. However, dr. Michael Horton, the Chairman of our Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad, will (I'm afraid) be arriving too late! He had hoped to attend your sessions next Friday and Saturday.

Now the responsibility falls on me to extend to you the greetings of the URCNA and our prayer for the blessing of the Lord on your churches and on the important work of this Synod.

When I look at your Agenda — which I have sought diligently to read, but have not as yet finished reading — I am struck by the many important issues that fill that Agenda. I find it significant that many issues on your Agenda have been and are being discussed also by Reformed Churches in NA. You indeed require the blessing of the Lord — which you may only expect when you yield yourself in humble obedience to His Word. Of that Word, we confess, that it is the lamp for our feet, the light upon our path. Its attributes include that it is perspicuous, doorzichtig.

CRCNA History

Allow me to say just a few words about the URCNA. Our federation, made up as it is primarily of Churches which at one time were members of the CRC, was born in 1995 — after having met for several years as the ARC, the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

We left, (some would say: we were removed from the CRC) because of a growing rift between Churches and Church members on questions relating to:

- a) the issue of women in office
- b) the question of origins — and how to read and understand the opening chapters of Genesis
- c) the question of inclusive language, expressing itself also in how one may address the Lord
- d) and the concern that the New Hermeneutic, which underlies many of the above mentioned issues, would continue to undermine the integrity and the faithfulness to the Word of the Churches' confession — as can now be seen in the expressed desire of at least one congregation of the CRC that it means to ordain to office practicing homosexuals because it wants to be an “inclusive congregation”.

Because of such concerns, Mr Chairman, and because the CRC steadfastly and ever more vehemently refused to heed the warning cries expressed in countless Overtures calling her back to the Word, the URCNA was born — I may say: under the blessing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the King of the Church.

We presently number approximately 80 congregations — 30 in Canada, 50 in the US and we number upwards of 18 000 souls! No doubt, small as man counts, but not necessarily small as the Lord counts.

Contact with the GKSA

Our official contact with the GKSA goes back to June of 2000. Your delegates to the CRC, the brothers Du Plessis and Du Plooy, requested a meeting with members of our committee.

Our Minutes state that “the discussion was friendly and frank ...” Let me quote: “The brothers from the GKSA were clear and absolute in the declaration of the supreme authority of scripture. “Inspired by the Holy Spirit;” “to disobey scripture is to disobey God.” Their expressed view of the Truth as summarized in our Three Forms of Unity was uncompromised and unqualified. Throughout our wide-ranging discussions we as delegates found ourselves experiencing a wonderful sense of unity and fraternity in the faith with these brothers. In our discussions on topics such as worship, catechising, evangelism, missions, the view of the Church, the nature of the Covenant and preaching we were encouraged and heartened by the brothers’ responses which are clearly in line with the views commonly held among us in the URC. We discovered that the GKSA requires “Attestation” for admittance to the Lord’s Supper in the manner practised by the brothers of the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken and the Canadian Reformed Churches. This is not a “contentious” issue with them, however. Rev’s. Sikkema and Royal expressed concern about the reinstatement of ecumenical relations with the CRC on the part of the GKSA. We were assured that while the GKSA passionately pursues unity in the Church, they would not ignore serious declension of the faith in any federation. The brothers pleaded with us as delegates and representatives of our federation: “Please don’t put pressure on us to first break ties with the CRC” as a prerequisite to seeking ecumenical relations with the GKSA.”

It should also be noted that brothers Du Plessis and Du Plooy assured us that the GKSA did not and would not consider ordaining women to Ecclesiastical Office matter of great importance to us, a matter also that, should the GKSA move in that direction, would effectively put an end to our relationship.

Because of some breakdown in communication, no meaningful contact took place, thereafter, until the meeting of our Synod in June of 2001, a full year after our initial meeting.

That Synod, Synod Escondido, had before it only the report of the June 2000 meeting — and the person of dr Du Plessis — with whom we then met and consulted on several occasions. Synod Escondido “voted to enter into “corresponding relations” with your churches” — as we happily announced to your Ecum. Rel. Corn. per letter dated July 4, 2001.

We have also communicated to your Ecum. Rel. Corn. a decision of our Committee that we will propose to our Synod, 2004, that we use a two-step or two phase approach in relating to churches beyond the boundaries of NA.

1. the first (what you speak of as “the widest”) we will speak of as “Ecumenical Contact”. It will include:
 - (a) exchange of official representatives at major assemblies;
 - (b) joint action in areas of common responsibility;
 - (c) consultation on issues of joint concern;(plus five more)

1. the second (what you speak of as “the narrowest”) we will speak of as “Ecumenical Unity” — which in addition to everything done under “Ecumenical Contact” will also include:
 - (1) pulpit fellowship;
 - (2) intercommunion;
 - (3) the exercise of mutual concern and admonition; and
 - (4) an agreement to respect each other’s procedures of discipline and pastoral concern.

Concerns

Mr Chairman, you hear it, we are very much concerned that clear expression be given to matters of

mutual concern. I would, therefore, be remiss in my duties, were I not to relate to you our concern on some matters presently before this Synod. Let me single out two.

First of all the question of Women in Ecclesiastical Office: On Monday evening, in a beautiful message, we heard that God is light. The Scripture says that; we must confess that! The Scriptures also say — not only that Jesus is the light of the world, but also that we, “we are the light of the world!” (Matth 5:14)

Brother Neels Smit has pointed out in his book: *Die nuwe ouderling* that we live in a post modern world. Post-modernism is characterized by a desire to relativize everything — also the truth of the Word. Let me quote: (you will excuse my Suid-Afrikaans) Die post-modernisme, wat deur die loop van die twintigste eeu sy momentum verkry, waarin die mens al hoe meer absolute (vasstaande) stelsels en waardes bevraagteken ten gunste van ‘n algemene gees van relativisme (betreklikheid). You hear it: relativism is the battle cry of the age. In the mouth of the world it says: what is true for you is not necessarily true for me. In the mouth of the Church it says: I am led by the Spirit, who are you to question that? But it is the same spirit — and it means to lead the church away from the Word. Remember, the Church has confessed with Calvin — against the errors of Rome and of Pentacostalism - that the Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word which He breathed out. The claim of the individual — (man or woman) — of being led by the Spirit must always be tested by the Word of the Spirit, a task uniquely assigned to the Church. For the Scripture is not of private interpretation! Therefore, I urge you, disregard all emotion - (which so easily leads to emotionalism) — and listen only to the words — spoke by people — and test those words — (of people) — by the Word of God!

It is significant that the CRC — in deciding to open all Ecclesiastical Offices to women — did not then, and does not now say of that decision: “Thus says the Lord”. It chose rather - having claimed that the testimony of Scripture is unclear - simple to change its Church Order!

We would encourage you, therefore, to distinguish clearly between questions of life style — where often the Scriptures leave room for a variety of responses! — and questions of doctrine I of the teachings of the Word, and the expression thereof in the practice of the Church. Here the Scriptures require obedience to the teaching once for all delivered to the saints.

My second concern focusses on matters raised in the report: “Jeug en nderwys”. If I have understood correctly, the State means not only to remove the teaching of Bible and the Confessions from the schools, it means also to remove the foundation of Scripture and Confession from the schools. Once that succeeds, you understand, the spirit of Post-modernism will become the driving force for all education! And it cannot be denied: as the youth are taught, so the church will go! What you must fight for is Christian Schools that are governed and directed by the Christian Community.

In closing, let me read with you these words from Paul’s prayer for the church (Eph 1:18 & 19): “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” Such is my prayer for you. May God with you!

Humbly submitted,
Rev Raymond J Sikkema
10 January 2003

APPENDIX 4: Report – Meetings of the National Synod of the GKSA; January 6-16, 2003 at Potchefstroom, SA

The Synod Constituted

Bright and early on the morning of January 6 the Rev. H.S. Coetzee, minister of the Gereformeerde Kerk Noord of Potchefstroom, the calling church, welcomed the delegates, many of whom had arrived the previous afternoon/evening, led in opening devotions, and chaired the opening business of Synod – the election of the moderamen.

Thereupon the newly elected chairman, the Rev. P.J.Vander Walt, heartily welcomed various visitors, and fraternal delegates – from Australia, Botswana, New Zealand, the Netherlands, South Africa – and observers – from Canada, South Africa – inviting them to participate in the discussions on the floor of Synod as well as in the meetings of the many committees of pre-advice. He then read the Form of Subscription, requesting all delegates, including the fraternal delegates and observers, to signify their assent by rising, whereupon he declared the 48th session of the GKSA Synod constituted.

The Program Committee

A reporter for the Program Committee explained in detail the procedures Synod would follow in working through an Agenda of nearly 700 pages. The first part of that Agenda, pp. 1-324, had been mailed to the delegates. The second part – die Aanvullende, i.e. the Supplementary Agenda, pp. 325-650, plus many more pages handed out subsequently – was not in the hands of the delegates until the opening day of Synod. (Can you imagine that happening here?) It should be noted, however, that the GKSA has a remarkable work ethic. Its sessions were as follows:

Morning session – 8:00am – 12:45pm, with a 15 minute coffee break (morgen tee) at 10:30.

Noon mealtime – 12:45pm – 2:30pm.

Afternoon session – 2:30pm – 5:45pm with a 15 minute middag tee at 4:00pm.

Suppertime – 5:45pm – 7:00pm.

Evening session – 7:00pm – 9:00pm with no break. After 9:00pm the committees met till ???

I attended all the sessions –(English translations were provided). At first I made diligent use of those services, but as time went on I found that I could follow most of the discussions without that service, which enabled me to catch more of the flavor of what was being discussed and therefore preferable. I also attended meetings of both the pre-advice committee on Ecumenical Relations, and the pre-advice committee on Woman in Ecclesiastical Office.

The *Modus Operandi* of Synod

All of the Reports and the Supplementary Reports, a sum total of 38 – on Bible Distribution; on Diaconal Matters; on the Care of the Retirees; on Finances; on Youth and Education – both re Catechism and the (Christian) School; on Church Order; on Doctrinal Matters – including on: “He descended into hell”, and on: Women in Ecclesiastical Office”; on Publications and the Media; on Liturgy – including a new translation of the Psalter and new Hymns (Skrifberymings); on the Theological School; on Social Issues – including a Testimony re HIV- Aids, and a Testimony contra Swearing; on the Archives of the GKSA and its Museums; -- plus all the Appeals (9); all the Protests (43); all the Communications – Beskryvingspunte – (56); the Gravamena (3); the Requests for Advice (3); everything is presented to Synod before being accepted and sent on to a Committee of Pre-advice.

At this first “hearing” the writers (of all of the above) are given opportunity to present their document(s). Questions, for information only, may then be raised from the floor. It must then be decided, (re the Appeals, the Protests, the Gravamena) whether the matter is properly before Synod

and, if so, is referred to the proper committee – the chairman usually simply ruling that such be done without bothering to call for a motion and a vote. (Goedgekuer Broeders? A mumbling of some Ja’s settles it.) Delegates who have any thoughts/concerns/proposals re any matter thus referred are expected to meet with the proper committee and present/defend the same there.

The committee writes its report which usually includes the following points: a reference to the Mandate given, including both its page(s) in the Agenda and the page in the Minutes of the Synod’s first hearing; matters Synod must take note of; argumentation(s) re the issue at hand; findings of the committee and the grounds supporting them; and recommendations – not motions! – for dealing with the issue. When the matter is then brought on to the floor of Synod again, the reporter presents the report and, if no other motion is proposed – which is often the case – the recommendation of the committee becomes the motion that is voted on.

For the issues which the delegates will discuss/debate the Clerks write down the names of those who wish to speak. Usually those, and only those, whose names appear on the list of speakers are given opportunity to speak. Any speaker may, while he has the floor, propose a motion. However, the Chairman will not place that motion on the floor for action until every speaker on his list has spoken. He will then go back to the speaker(s) who proposed a motion – (first come, first served) – call for a second, and ask for a vote, usually without further discussion. It may appear that in some ways the GKSA has a cumbersome process, since every item on the Agenda is handled twice on the floor of Synod. However, it was remarkable that on many matters – other than on the weighty/touchy issues – no one seemed concerned with issues of “proper procedure” which so often afflict us. Remarkably, there were very few Points of Order raised, and the Chairman was never challenged.

The Fraternal Delegates and Observers at Synod

On Friday morning, January 10, time was set aside for Greetings (Speeches?) from the Fraternal Delegates and the Observers. It should be noted that the GKSA carries on ecumenical relations – in one of three categories – with many churches worldwide. Ten of those churches had representatives present, each of whom spoke for 10 to 15 minutes. Present were Prof. Peels, CGKN, the Netherlands; Rev. Groenenboom, CRCA, Australia; Rev. Wessels, RCB, Botswana; Rev. Busstra, Ned. GK, the Netherlands; Rev. Rogers, RCNZ, New Zealand; Rev. Sethlare, Sinode Middellande, South Africa; Rev. Magaba, South Africa; Rev. Ten Brinke, GKN(V), the Netherlands; Rev. Nell, VGKSA, South Africa; and yours truly representing the URCNA. (My speech is attached).

The Synod expressed genuine thanks and appreciation for the greetings given and for the words of admonition and concern expressed, and asked that the speakers convey those sentiments to their respective churches – which I hereby do. Ecumenical relations are clearly and evidently of great importance to the GKSA. It looks for meaningful dialogue on matters on its Agenda with its various ecumenical “relatives”.

To that end I spoke at some length with the pre-advice committee on Ecumenical Relations re developments in the CRCNA. The committee was very receptive to proposals I suggested – after initial proposals presented on the floor of Synod which called for a stepping down of relations with the CRCNA were referred back to committee. I proposed the following:

Recommendation

1. That the GKSA continue to investigate developments in the CRC by
 - a. requesting that official documents underlying previous (specified) decisions made by the Synod of the CRC be sent to the GKSA;
 - b. conferring (per communications) with people – pastors/elders/professors – in the CRC, requesting them to reflect on developments in the CRC and their reactions to the same;
 - c. contacting former members of the CRC – pastors/elders/professors – requesting them to communicate their reasons for leaving the CRC, and to provide documentation in

support of their decision.

2. That the GKSA in order to underscore the seriousness with which it takes its own concerns, ... , do not send delegates to the Synodical meetings of the CRC – until satisfactory answers are received to the above.

It was essentially those proposals that were eventually adopted by the Synod. I trust that that decision will encourage the URCNA to continue its relationship with the GKSA.

Appeals, Protests, Gravamina, and Communications

As noted earlier, there were many such documents before the Synod, on a great variety of concerns – some on matters of such incidental significance that they should never have made it to Synod; (e.g. May a pastor speak a word of personal greeting before the service?) Needless to say, I found some of the Appeals and Protests very troubling. Over and again the expression: “My reg is gekrenk”, that is: “My rights were violated” were spoken. I must have heard it a hundred times. It must be said to the credit of the Synod, however, that it listened with great patience. The procedure was as follows:

1. the appellant presents his (written) case, highlighting the parts he chooses;
- A. the “illucidator” – someone representing the Particular Synod which had heard and rejected the case
- A. highlights where, in his view, the appellant’s case has flaws, and therefore fails;
1. questions – for information only – are allowed from the floor;
1. opportunity is given to both the appellant and the illucidator to respond to the questions raised;
1. the matter is referred to a Pre-advice Committee which recommends a proposed course of action;
- the recommended course of action is presented to the Synod;
- the delegates are given opportunity to express agreement/disagreement/alternative resolutions;
- the appellant is given opportunity to give a final statement;
- a vote by the Synod decides the issue.

The Communications covered a wide range of subjects. In addition to many expressions of concern re the care of retired pastors, support for those who for medical reasons are (temporarily) incapacitated, and proper insurance provisions for the pastors – all in a real mess, it was said – there were Communications (Proposals/Overtures ?) re the high incidence of swearing in public, the alarming increase in violence, pursuing contact/communication with the Government, alternative Lord’s Supper Formularies, re-writing the Formularies, principles and criteria governing the writing of hymns, the use of Information Technology by the church, moral standards and the Aids problem, moral standards and sexuality, the conferring of an honorary degree on Bishop Tutu by the PU for CHO, the financial situation of the GKSA as well as the importance of financial planning for the church, the training of pastors, the teaching of prayer, and the preparations for the 150th anniversary of the GKSA. Clearly, a wide range of subjects and concerns.

Press Releases were issued re some of the above – significantly one re the responsibility of the Government to take an active role in combating Aids – “don’t ignore it”; “there is no such thing as ‘safe sex’!”, and one re the high incidence of swearing in public.

Doctrinal Matters

As noted above, a number of doctrinal issues filled the Agenda of the synod. I mention the following:

1. The Sunday/Sabbath Issue

A well-written, carefully researched report – covering among others the question of the origin of the

Sabbath, the Sabbath in the O.T., Christ and the Sabbath, Hebrews on the Sabbath, the celebration of Sabbath/Sunday in the church, and the Creeds on the Sabbath/Sunday – concluded with a nine point Summary and an eleven point Guidelines (Riglyne) for the Church, both of which were adopted. The Summary statements included the following:

- God gave the Sabbath-law with the intent that the Sabbath be a day of rest for Israel.
- The Sabbath originates at Sinai, not at the creation.
- The Sabbath receives its true meaning in Christ.
- Since the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, the Sunday is not to be kept as the O.T. Sabbath. Paul nowhere prescribes that the Sunday be kept as the O.T. Sabbath.
- There is no N.T. evidence that shows that Sabbath and Sunday are alike, are the same. The early Christian church's celebration of Sunday shows that it had an altogether different character than the celebration of the Sabbath by the O.T. people of God. The reason for coming together on the 1st day of the week was not rooted in a desire to keep the Sabbath-law; rather, it was rooted in a need to come together for mutual encouragement and prayer.
- Starting with the 4th Century, the Sunday became more and more like the O.T. Sabbath again.
- With the Reformation of the 16th Century, under the leadership of Luther and Calvin the church confessed again that the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, that therefore the Sabbath (law) cannot be carried over to the Sunday.
- According to the English Puritans, the Sabbath is a creation ordinance which holds for all people. Their views re the Sabbath (which ought not to be embraced by the Reformed Churches) occasioned much debate in the Netherlands, debates which also influenced the understanding of the Sabbath/Sunday question in South Africa – (as indeed it has its influence among us in North America to this very day).

The eleven point Guidelines for the Church conclude with this quote from the RES 1976 Report on the same matter: “Lastly, the RES 1976 calls upon Reformed Churches to reinstate the note of joy to the keeping of the Lord’ day. Fellowship with the risen Christ and worship of the God who ‘on the first day’ gave the light and His Spirit, do not call for wearisome austerity but for a spirit of ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory’ as we draw water from the wells of salvation. Then shall the Sabbath be a day of delight in His presence, a foretaste of that eternal Sabbath that awaits the people of God.” This is a report worthy of reading and careful reflection.

2. Women in Ecclesiastical Office

The GKSA Synod had before it the following :

- a. Protest/Appeal (Beswaarskrif) against a decision of Die Sinode 1988 – Die Vrou in Die Besondere Ampte, i.e. The Woman in Special Office. The authors presented four arguments (grounds). 1. That Synod was guilty of using an unbiblical starting point, viz. that all men have authority over all women; 2. that Synod was guilty of using an “unequal” and inconsequent hermeneutic, referring here to Synod’s appeal to 1 Tim 2:11 which in the South African translation adds the words “in die erediens”, i.e. in the worship service; 3. that Synod was guilty of using the Bible in a casuistic manner; and 4. that Synod was guilty of using the Bible in an a-historic manner. Each of those grounds was carefully weighed – and found wanting! (Die beswaar slaag nie op beswaargrond ## nie). So far so good!
- b. The Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Matters – the Woman in the Church.
- c. The Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Matters, Alternative Partial Report – the Woman in the Church, (essentially a Minority Report)
- d. A Minority Report re part of the report mentioned under b. above re the place of the woman in the church.

The committee of pre-advice (re b.c.d. above) met for many hours and heard from many people – both delegates to Synod and individuals (men and women) who requested an audience, and indeed from

me. (One night, in a severe thunderstorm, the hydro went off. No one was perturbed. We met in pitch darkness for another hour, listening to the testimony of Rev. Eric Kayayan and to a woman who advocated opening all offices to women.) The committee discussed at length questions relating to Phoebe, and to the correct understanding of I Tim. 3:11 – “the women likewise...” Who are those women? Are they the wives of the deacons or is it possible that they themselves were engaged in some form of diaconal ministry? If yes, then are we to understand that they are in the same office as the male Deacons in the congregation, or is the Apostle simply signaling that women too can engage in the work of service (diakonia) in the church without thereby saying that they are (to be installed) in office?

The pre-advice committee struggled long and hard to come with one report – rather than with a majority and a minority report. In that they succeeded, but in so doing those who thought that Synod would reject the recommendations proposed by the pre-advice committee were disappointed/fooled. Synod, to the utter dismay and disappointment of those in principle opposed to Women in Ecclesiastical Office, voted to open the Office of Deacon to women – on the following grounds (in summary statements, my translation):

- With the coming of Christ, the woman is restored to her place of equality with the man.
- The woman, as the man, is entrusted with gifts by the Holy Spirit. The church must, in submission, make use of these gifts.
- The woman is not inferior to the man. However, as in the home, so in the church a woman must recognize the headship of her husband.
- Texts, such as Rom.16:1,2 and I Tim 3:11; 5:9-15, are difficult; it is clear, however, that they point in the direction of women serving as deacons. Then comes this sentence: “Die Sinode keur in die lig van die Skrif goed dat vroue wat die nodige gawes het as diakens in die GKSA verkies en bevestig kan word.” (Synod, in or guided by the light of Scripture, approves that the office of deacon in the GKSA be opened to qualified women) Later on, this amplification was added: the texts (referred to) have for a long time already played an important supportive role for women in office in Reformed churches. On the one hand, there is no clarity, on the other hand, there is no command forbidding that women be placed in the office of deacon.
- The Church Order of the GKSA differentiates between the office(s) of the minister and the elder and that of the deacons. That differentiation means that there is no hindrance to ordaining women to the office of deacon. (However, Art. 38 of the GKSA Church Order may become the wedge that will lead to the opening of all offices to women.)

Synod decided, moreover, that

- It is clear that in N.T. times women used their gifts of prophesying and teaching. (Cf. I Tim.2:12 and I Cor.14:34). Synod must study how women may use such gifts in the church today.
- Synod appoint a committee which must study what implications a possible move to ordain women as elders/pastors will have – this in consultation with churches with which the GKSA has ecumenical unity.
- The relationship between man and woman (in marriage) is used in Scripture as a metaphor for what ought to be in the ‘household of God.’ (Cf. e.g. I Tim3:4; Titus 1:6,7) If elders are ‘the rulers of God’s household’ how can the relationship between husband and wife in the home function in the church? To be studied by the committee.
- The offices in the church are not meant to confer status; rather they are means (ministries) by which the Lord cares for His church, (cf. Eph.4:12). Synod encourages the churches to abolish the notion of status in re the offices.
- The special offices are not for all members of the church. Since they are of a ministering character, (I Tim. 3:1-7; I Tim.5:9-15), the Synod urges the churches to be sure that only such people are chosen to office who have the necessary serving/ministering gifts for office.

- The committee (to be appointed) is given the mandate to make the necessary changes in the Church Order and in the Form for the Installation of Deacons. Article 38 of the CO (re the place of Deacons in the Consistory when that body has few members —as in a small congregation) will require special attention.
- Synod recognizes that there may be congregations in the GKSA where special circumstances which require special regulations
- Synod mandates the committee to find a gifted writer who can present the Reports of 1988 and 2003 to the churches. Practical directions re how the churches can make use of the gifts of God given to women (and men) are to be included in such a publication.
- The conscience of believers may not be bound if they are not convinced by the Word, (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 32). Previous studies done by the GKSA show that there are a number of issues that require further study. The committee is to study each and report back to Synod. (Eight such issues are listed.)

Needless to say, I found this a very disturbing development – as did many of the delegates with whom I spoke. The expectation is that there will be many Protests – Beswaarskrifte – forthcoming. The brothers who opposed these developments pleaded with me that I do all in my power to persuade the URCNA not to leave the GKSA in the lurch, but to help them to battle these developments. I assured them that I would do my best. Brothers, it is indeed my conviction that this is not the time for the URCNA to relinquish its relationship with the GKSA. I believe that we should clearly communicate to our South African brothers what our stand is, and why. We should plead with them to re-examine their position – warning them of the dangerous consequences the hermeneutic underlying their position holds. By God’s grace we may be instrumental in calling this Church of the Lord back to the Word of the Lord on an issue that continues to disturb/plague the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide.

3. “He descended into hell”

The GKSA Synod 2000 had appointed a Study Committee to propose new wording re the words in the Apostles Creed: “He descended into hell”, (and similar wording as found in the Athanasian Creed) since that wording is both incorrect and misleading. After much debate and twice referring the matter back to the committee of pre-advice, Synod adopted a new reading, as follows: “... wat die angste van die hel tot in die dood toe ondergaan het,..” That is, “...who suffered the terrors of hell unto death,...” (Similar re-wording of the Athanasian Creed was adopted.) Synod further instructed its Ecumenical Relations Committee to discuss this change of wording with the churches with whom ecumenical relations are pursued, and to report back to the next Synod. In the meantime the churches of the GKSA are encouraged to use the new wording, with a view to an eventual adopting of a final (re-worded ?) version.

4. The use of Individual Cups (Kelkies) in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper

On the last day of Synod, Synod – once again – debated the issue of the use of the individual cup when celebrating the Lord’s Supper. A heated debate it was. Comments such as: Are we going to stick with the Word of God? Christ clearly spoke of a cup, not of cups. The cup is very significant in Scripture, think e.g. of the cup of God’s wrath, dominated the discussion. The issue came to the floor of Synod by way of a Protest/ Appeal against the Synod 2000 decision which allowed churches, in exceptional circumstances, to use Kelkies. For some that was anathema. Synod sustained the appellants, but its attempt to re-word the 2000 decision may still not satisfy all. It says that when there are circumstances where the common cup cannot be used, the consistory must act responsibly before the Lord.

Concluding Remarks

Many other items of interest could be reported on, including issues relating to education and the youth. Remarkably, there are virtually no Christian Schools in SA. Up until recently, the schools of the land permitted the teaching of Bible and teaching from a Christian perspective. All of that, however, is in the process of being changed by the government of Mbeki. Only a secular, God-denying perspective will be permitted in the schools – including in the (few) Christian schools. It will require much wisdom and courage to challenge these developments.

Let me, in closing, thank you brothers for giving me the opportunity to serve the church of Jesus Christ in this capacity – as your delegate. It has been a very rewarding experience for me. It is my prayer that the Lord may bless this work and our continuing contact with the GKSA.

To Him be the glory!

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Observer
January 31, 2003

APPENDIX 5: CECCA Proposal to Synod Calgary re: Procedures /Protocol to be followed by the URCNA when Observers/Fraternal Delegates are in attendance at Synod.

1. The chairman shall identify and welcome each of the visitors, indicating whether a person is in attendance as an Observer or as a Fraternal Delegate.
2. The Observers and Fraternal Delegates shall be encouraged to attend the various pre-advice committee meetings, as well as be accorded the privilege of the floor – though they cannot vote.
3. The Observers and Fraternal Delegates shall be requested to address the Synod at a time which coincides with the time the CECCA report is on the floor of Synod. The chairman shall appoint a synodical delegate or a member of the CECCA committee to respond to the Observer/Fraternal Delegate.
4. The addresses of the Observers and the Fraternal Delegates shall be included in the Acts of Synod.
5. A copy of the Acts - as well as a copy of the Agenda - shall be sent to the Observers and the Fraternal Delegates.
6. Hospitality, both accommodations and meals, shall be offered to Observers and Fraternal Delegates – while transportation to and from the venue of Synod are the responsibility of the sending church.

APPENDIX 6: ICRC MISSIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Synod Calgary, 2004
From: Delegate ICRC Missions Committee
Re: The Work of the ICRC MC

Esteemed Brothers,

It is with a bit of a sense of uncertainty that I address the Synod with this report since I am not at all sure whether this is expected or required of me. Allow me a few lines of Background Information. Synod Escondido, 2001 elected me to serve as one of the URCNA delegates to the ICRC which was scheduled to meet later that same year in Philadelphia. The ICRC in turn chose me to membership on

its Missions Committee, a committee that reports on its work to the ICRC. To the best of my knowledge, the members of the ICRC MC do not serve on this committee as *representatives* of their federations. However, the ICRC made an effort to have the membership of its Missions Committee chosen from member federations from various parts of the globe so as to have input that would truly be ecumenical as this committee seeks to implement its mandate.

Apparently, the Mandate given to the Missions Committee has been amended and revised at both meetings of the ICRC since its founding in Zwolle, the Netherlands, in 1993 and will no doubt be revised again when next it meets in South Africa, DV in 2005. However, whereas in the past the Missions Committee met only on the occasion of the meeting date and place of the ICRC quad-annual meeting (which for all practical purposes meant that proposals for change could not be thought through with care and requisite deliberation) the Missions Committee has met for a two day conference in Zwolle last year (2003) and plans a follow-up meeting in June of this year (2004), just prior to the scheduled date for the meeting of Synod Calgary, as well as having scheduled a “regular” meeting at the time and place of the next scheduled meeting date of the ICRC. At the Zwolle meeting (2003), as well as at the planned June meeting (2004), the committee is engaged in a careful reflection of its most recently assigned Mandate. We will endeavor to present to the next ICRC meeting a Mandate that is both durable and feasible – a Mandate, moreover, that will require more of the Missions Committee members than only a once-per-four-years meeting. It is the conviction of the members presently serving on the ICRC MC that the work of missions must not, yea may not be treated as a stepchild of the church; rather, it belongs to the very essence of the church’s work and well-being. Therefore, the ICRC must be diligent not only in the task of encouraging and promoting the work of missions, it must also do whatever it can to ensure that the member churches of the ICRC are faithful in performing this task – assigned to the church by the Lord of the church at His glorious ascension. Regretfully, it is not possible for me to report on work thus far accomplished, since at this stage our work is very much a “work in progress”. Since I plan, however, to be present, DV, at Synod it may be possible, should Synod so desire, that I report briefly then.

Brothers, I am sure I speak for all the members of the ICRC MC when I say, Ora Pro Nobis. May the Lord richly bless you in your very important work.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, member ICRC MC

APPENDIX 7: Letter from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, URC in Myanmar

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR
HEAD QUARTERS 35/1277 - 1278 KANTHAYAR STREET (1),
NORTH DAGON 11421, YANGON, MYNAMAR

To: Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Secretary,
Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad,
The United Reformed Churches.
3578 King St. Box 105, Vineland ON LOR 2(A), Canada,

From: Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, Chairman,
Contact Committee, United Reformed Churches in Myanmar
35/1093, Kantbayar St. 2, N. Dagon, 11421, Yangon, Myanmar
Date: October 1 2003

Dear brother,

Most cordially greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. the Lord of the Church.

I was overjoyed to receive your email and letter telling me that my request will be considered and presented to the members of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) when next you meet.

I was indebted to Rev. C. Van Spronsen, Secretary ICRC, who sent you via surface mail my letter and the documents explaining the History and Church Order of the URC Myanmar, and also gave me your name and address. May I take this opportunity to introduce myself and the URC in Myanmar. I am Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang Chairman of the contact committee and pastor of Grace United Reformed Church in Yangon, Myanmar. Five Reformed families, in brief instituted the URCM, on 31 October 1993 on Reformation Sunday. To date the URCM has 25 local churches with members numbering about 2000. We have 21 ordained pastors, 6 pro-pastors, 34 elders and 57 deacons. The five ordained pastors and four elders are serving as cross-cultural missionaries in the mission fields. It is divided into three Classes and held her Constituent Synod on March 1995. The Synod enormously voted and changed the name of the church as United Reformed Churches in Myanmar. This Synod had adopted the Church Constitution and used it till they adopted the Church Order in 2002.

The URCM stands in the historic Reformed faith, and subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity (namely: the Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561; the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563; and the Canons of Dort, 1618-19), along with the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1617. When we called ourselves as United Reformed Churches in Myanmar, we firmly stand on the Three Forms of Unity. Our form of government is the Reformed Church government. When we started our Church as Reformed Presbyterian Church in October 1993 the basis of our Church was the Three Forms of Unity and along with the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Three Ecumenical Creeds. When we became United Reformed Churches in Myanmar as a Reformed Church, we could just have the Three Forms of Unity but we respected our Church decision and we therefore included the Westminster Confession of Faith (1561) as our basis.

Second Letter from the URC – Myanmar; Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang October 20/2003

The sixth General Assembly of URCM meeting held on 61 April 2000 has passed the resolution no. 32/2002 to seek two ICRC member churches to support URCM's membership application for ICRC. Again in our special Assembly meeting held on 29-31 March 2002 no 22/2002 passed resolution to seek sister church relationship with the ICRC member churches. We also passed to request Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the United Reformed Churches in North America to recommend us for ICRC membership and to have sister church relationship with both churches.

To answer your questions about our relationship with both CRC in Myanmar and CRC in North America. we are separated from both of them because some of CRC in North America recognize women ordination, the URCM stands firm against women ordination. We also have some ecclesiastical differences with the Christian Reformed Churches in North America. We therefore, cannot establish ecumenical relations with the CRC in North America. Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar has sister church relationship with Christian Reformed Churches in North America and they are also full member of Reformed Ecumenical Council We have some ecclesiastical differences with the CRC in Myanmar. Because of the above reasons we. the URCM are separated from both the CRC in Myanmar and CRC in North America.

The United Reformed Churches in Myanmar have great interest to have international Christian Fellowship. So far we do not have such fellowship with any one yet as we do not want to compromise our faith, the URCM is not a member of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), which is a part of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Neither does the URCM have any fellowship of contract with

the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and the Christian Reformed Churches in North America.

As we are from a poor third world country, we have many difficulties and needs. May I ask your prayer support and response to my request that you be sponsors of our application to become a member of the ICRC, and indeed that we establish sister church relations.

I strongly believe that God will show you to extend your mission to Myanmar to meet the felt needs with us. May I say "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes." (Isa. 54:2). May this letter be "The voice of the call of Myanmar" to invite you to participate in our ministry for the Glory of God. May the Lord give you the heart for souls in Myanmar.

Please convey my warm greetings to your family and CECCA. We are looking forward to seeing your reply soon.

In the care of His grace,
Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang
Chairman, Contact Coinmittee, URCM
Copy to: Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen,
Secretary. ICRC

GUIDELINES FOR THE CO-OPERATIVE SAVINGS FUND REPORT

Introduction

The Synod of 2001 assigned the churches of Lynden United Reformed Church and Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church of Abbotsford BC the task of setting up a Co-operative Savings Plan, supported by free will offerings, and establishing guidelines to administer the plan

Both Lynden and Abbotsford councils would like to recognize the previous work performed by the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan in putting together the surveys and for the recommendations presented at Synod 2001.

The following was adopted by Synod 2001, article XXXVI, B. That the recommendations of the two committees (Covenant and Walker) be harmonized in to the following recommendations to synod to be adopted as a uniform standard of practice by the churches:

1. All churches should as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister, include an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent amount ranging from 5% to 10% of the gross remuneration, including any housing allowance of the equivalent thereof. This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
2. That the churches establish a Co-operative Savings Fund (two separate funds for Canada and the USA, if necessary) to assist the churches in supporting retiring ministers in need. Such a fund should be established through regular free-will offerings by the churches. Guidelines should be established to assist the churches in determining the amount of the Fund from time to time.
3. That an American and Canadian church be appointed to implement recommendation #2, who in turn should appoint trustees to administer the Fund. The committee recommends the appointment of Lynden United Reformed Church, WA (failing which First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA.) and Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church Of Abbotsford, BC (Failing which Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, AB).
4. That all churches be encouraged to contract for disability insurance for their ministers, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration (including any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof.)
5. That the church visitors, as part of their duties, inquire concerning the visited church's response to recommendations 1 and 4.

Having reviewed the mandate assigned by Synod to look at a Co-operative Savings Plan for churches that are not financially able to contribute towards the minister's retirement, the Lynden and Abbotsford Councils arrived at the following conclusion:

A Co-operative Savings Plan for the entire Federation is not recommended for the following reasons:

- A. Administering and managing such a program would be a large task for the church to undertake by itself. To seek professional and financial advice would present a high expense to the church.
- B. While Synod only meets every three years it may not be able to respond fast enough or have the flexibility required to meet the changing needs.
- C. While churches in different Classis may not know each other and/or understand the need of every church, it may result in few churches contributing to the fund through free-will offerings.
- D. Setting guidelines for the entire federation may not address each needy church financial need.

We do however see a definite need to set standards for all churches to follow to help resolve the pastors pensions. After reading the surveys, conducting research and having many discussions we found several areas to address. They are as follows:

1. Establishing one plan to support both US and Canadian churches.
2. Getting all churches to contribute to their pastor's pension
3. Helping pastors who left other denominations who may have lost part of their pensions
4. Assisting widows of retired pastors in need who left other denominations to join the URC Federation
5. Helping churches in need contribute to the cost of paying for their pastor's retirement needs.

Recommendation

Recognizing the mandate that Synod assigned, we recommend as Councils that each Classis be responsible for overseeing that each church is contributing to their pastor's retirement plan. Furthermore, we recommend that each individual Classis establish their own Co-operative Savings Plan for the following reasons:

- A. Because each Classis meets every 12 months it will allow to better respond to the needs of the needy church.
- B. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each others needs.
- C. Free-will offerings may be stronger due to the closer relationship between churches
- D. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs of the church
- E. Church visitors would act as a liaison between Classis and the church in need.

Recommended Guidelines:

1. That church visitors ask the following questions beginning in the year 2005 during church visitations.
 1. As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister, are you including an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 5% to 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof? This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
 2. Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration? (including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof.)
 3. Does your church need assistance to support a retired pastor or widow of a formal pastor who was financially penalized for leaving their federation to join the URC?
2. If there is a financial need in the local congregation to meet mandates 1 or 2, the Council must petition the help of the most recent church visitors to facilitate a request to Classis for assistance. If travel is an issue for the church visitors, the church visitors may appoint a local Council to assist. Request for assistance must be reviewed on a yearly basis.
3. If the local congregation is unable to meet the needs of retired pastors and widows of retired pastors their Council may petition to their Classis for assistance. (Council would petition every five years) This would only apply to Pastors who retired within 10 years of joining the URC. This would not include mismanagement of retirement accounts.
4. To fund such a program at the Classis level (if needed), that each Classis set up a needy church fund with its only task to make sure the needs of the pastors and/or widows of former pastors pension plan be met. Classis shall determine the amount of Funds needed to the frequency of free will offering suggested to meet the upcoming need.

5. Classis should appoint a council to administer the Ministers Assistance Fund as per the above mandates for a minimum of 5 years.
6. That all churches in the URC Federation who have been organized for less than 3 years be excluded from the above-mentioned recommendations.

Summary

- A. These guidelines would represent some healthy uniformity to the conditions under which our pastors labor.
- B. This amount invested carefully would yield a handsome supplement to other personal savings and assets for retirement.
- C. These general guidelines do not place an undo hardship on the churches.
- D. The guidelines give clarification to the wording of C.O. Article 10 which states: Each church is to provide adequately for the minister for the work and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability of its minister.
- E. The general principle that the strong ought to help the weak is a wonderful tenet of our Christian faith.

The councils strongly feel that each church is responsible for its own pastor and pension, but we recognize that there are some churches and former pastors who are having financial hardships. We feel that if the above mention guidelines are followed, it will lessen the load for those needy churches and/or former pastors and possibly their widows. We recognize that no proposal is perfect but we feel this is a big step forward.

Yours in Christ Service,

President of Council
Lynden URC

President of Council
Immanuel Covenant Reformed

URCNA WEB SITE REPORT TO SYNOD 2004

Submitted by the Consistory of Covenant URC, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Introduction

The June 2001 synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America asked the Consistory of Covenant URC of Kalamazoo, Michigan to administer and maintain an Internet Web site for the United Reformed federation. That Web site is to use the previously registered domain (address) of www.urchna.org, currently being used to direct Web users to the main United Reformed page of Covenant – Kalamazoo’s own Web site, www.covenant-urc.org. This report summarizes the progress that Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory has made in developing this Web site, presents several alternative budgets, and asks synod for guidance and funds.

In an effort to learn what needs could be met by this proposed Web site; a survey was conducted of members on the CO-URC e-mail discussion group, composed of over three hundred members of United Reformed churches and other Reformed churches. Among the many responses were numerous requests to provide electronic means for members of synodical committees and classes (regional assemblies) to communicate and collaborate on committee and classis business. It was also suggested that each classis be provided one or more pages to post whatever information they desire for the public. While synod has never authorized denominational publications, the new www.urchna.org site may eventually be called upon to provide electronic commerce (sales of printed materials, such as hymnals) features and news of events in URCNA churches and missions.

Any Web site with the amount of changeable content that www.urchna.org may be called upon to provide could exceed the ability of one person to maintain. Thus, the new Web server (the computer hosting the Web site) should permit several different people to update different sections of the site.

Suggested Features for a URCNA Web Site

History of www.urchna.org

After representatives of the founding churches met as the first synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America in October 1996, it was widely recognized that the new church federation needed a presence on the World Wide Web. Several individuals and churches made attempts to provide information about the URCNA on the Web. The first attempt was made shortly after the first URCNA synod by a member of the Beverly (now Bethany) URC of Wyoming, Michigan. That first site, which no longer exists, was funded and maintained by that individual. In the autumn of 1997, Beverly URC’s Web site appeared and all URCNA-related content on that individual’s site was transferred to Beverly’s. Beverly (now Bethany) URC’s United Reformed Web site can be viewed at <http://www.iserv.net/~bethany/URC.htm>.

Covenant URC of Kalamazoo’s Web site (<http://www.covenant-urc.org>) appeared on the Web in December 1997. Covenant – Kalamazoo’s site was originally intended for posting transcripts of one of our former pastors’ sermons as a missions project. From its beginning, however, Covenant – Kalamazoo’s site included pages providing general information about Covenant URC, our classis, the URCNA, Reformed literature, and suggestions for finding further information about the Reformed faith on the Internet.

In January 1998, Mr. Talman Wagenmaker recognized that the URCNA would need a Web presence. At that time, the Internet domain (address) of [urchna.org](http://www.urchna.org) (the most logical and easy to remember domain name for a URCNA Web site) was unused and had never been registered (claimed) by any individual nor organization. To prevent other parties, some which might be hostile to the URCNA, from claiming that domain, Mr. Wagenmaker registered that domain in his own name and

arranged that anyone aiming their Web browser (a computer program used for navigating and viewing Web pages) at www.urncna.org would be sent to the main URCNA page on Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Web site.

After Bethany – Wyoming’s and Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Web sites appeared, the URCNA-specific pages of both churches’ sites functioned as *de facto* denominational sites. Other URCNA churches that developed their own Web sites often directed their visitors to either Bethany’s or Covenant’s pages for information about the URCNA.

Mr. Wagenmaker made no secret of his desire to transfer his urncna.org domain to this federation. Consequently, the June 2001 URCNA synod accepted Mr. Wagenmaker’s offer and requested Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory to develop and maintain a URCNA Web site. Covenant’s Consistory subsequently voted to accept that responsibility, and arranged with Mr. Wagenmaker to transfer the urncna.org domain to Covenant – Kalamazoo. That transfer has been completed and that domain is now registered with Covenant URC of Kalamazoo. Covenant – Kalamazoo has also registered the additional domains of urncna.com and urncna.net for future URCNA use.

Expectations for a URCNA Web Site

Synod has not given any explicit guidance for what kind of content should be present on an official URCNA Web site, nor how that site should be managed. The only explicit instructions appeared in Article XLVII of the 2001 synod’s minutes:

2. That the consistory of Covenant URC of Kalamazoo be requested to administer and maintain the web site URCNA.org. (Failing which Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI or Bethany URC, Wyoming, MI.)
 - a. Motion to amend the list of alternates by placing Allendale URC, Allendale, MI first. *Adopted*
 - b. The motion including the three alternates is *adopted*.
 - c. Motion that synod authorize up to \$1,000 for costs, to be used by the consistory. *Adopted*

Several things are evident from this decision. First, the synod of 2001 determined that a denominational Web site is in the best interest of the churches and their mission. One can also infer that the Consistory administering this site is accountable to synod for the site’s performance and content, and that therefore decisions about this site’s content and administration are to be made by that Consistory on behalf of the federation. Also, synod recognized that the federation has a responsibility to assume at least part of the cost of this site’s operation.

However, there are many unanswered questions about this proposed site’s content and management. For example:

- a. What are the goals and purposes of this site?
- b. What should be included on this site?
 - a. News and press releases about the URCNA?
 - b. Doctrinal and educational material?
 - c. Sermons and essays by URCNA ministers?
 - d. A question/answer feature, whereby people can send in questions and one or more URCNA ministers can post answers?
- c. Synod directed that a Consistory “administer and maintain” this Web site. How should that Consistory decide how proposed content is rejected or approved? What policies should apply?
- d. Synod has already directed that work proceed on developing a new hymnal. Will this site eventually be used for sales of hymnals and other publications?
- e. Synod’s decision made mention of “the *web site* [emphasis added] URCNA.org.” How can this site and other Internet technology (e-mail, long-distance audio conferencing and

- videoconferencing, Internet telephony) that can share the urcna.org Internet domain (and the urcna.com and urcna.net domains) aid synod, synodical committees, classes and churches?
- f. Many Web site design and usability experts recommend including an emblem or logo of the represented organization on organizational Web sites as an aid to site navigation. Clicking on the emblem, often located in the upper left corner of every page of that organization's Web site, brings the Web site visitor back to the Web site's home page ("Ten Good Deeds in Web Design", *Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox*, October 3, 1999, <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/991003.html>). Such an emblem also provides a common visual identity to every page on the site. Should this site include such an emblem? If so, how would the emblem be developed and selected? Would this emblem be limited in use to Web site use or would it eventually represent the federation and all its churches and activities? Can Covenant's Consistory choose an emblem or should this matter be referred to synod?

Past Guidance from URCNA Leaders and Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Past decisions of URCNA synods, as well as decisions of URCNA classes, and letters and articles printed in various periodicals widely read by URCNA officebearers, provide some clues as to what the 2001 synod may have intended. While this method is not infallible in discerning the intentions of the 2001 synod, and future synods may specify a different direction, enough clues exist to provide some guidance for the URCNA Web site's near-term goals and policies. Future synods will have to provide further guidance, as necessary.

A major, overriding belief and practice of many members and leaders of URCNA churches appears to be, what might be called, *antibureaucratism*. Many of us came out of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), and many of us trace our difficulties with that denomination to the power and influence exercised by that denomination's agencies and boards. Many of us saw the CRCNA synod as nothing more than a "rubber stamp" for whatever policies had already been decided by the CRCNA denominational boards, bureaucracies, and publishing activities. Dr. Cornel Venema, himself a CRCNA minister, wrote in the August 12, 2002 issue of *Christian Renewal* (p. 11) that the CRCNA is heavily influenced by a "main-line-leaning left" that "is not as numerous or broad-based as the evangelical right. However, due to its inordinate representations in positions of leadership and on denominational boards (not to mention more aggressive posturing and pushing for its agenda), this group has considerable influence within this denomination."

Dr. John Elliott, a Presbyterian elder and an American correspondent for Dutch television, spoke in a similar manner in an address he gave at a Reformed Fellowship meeting in 1992. In that speech, he spoke of the problems then present in the CRCNA and the responses that many conservatives were then proposing. Some, he said, planned to stay within the CRCNA to serve as a Reformed witness, and (hopefully) to recapture control of that denomination. But, as Dr. Elliott continued, churches are to be governed strictly in accordance with the pattern laid down in Scripture – what Dr. Elliott called the "regulative principle of church government" – that lawfully installed officebearers are to exercise all the functions of their office and that they *may not* delegate those functions to others. In other words, consistories, classes and synods may not delegate their powers and responsibilities to boards and bureaucracies. Furthermore, if this principle that Dr. Elliott spoke about is indeed valid, then why should confessional Reformed people strive to regain control of a denomination whose decision-making boards and bureaucracies violate this principle by their very existence?

This antibureaucratic principle appears to have expressed itself in the URCNA in several ways. A few years ago, there were proposals brought to URCNA ecclesiastical assemblies to create a denominational magazine and to create a ministers' health insurance program; but such proposals have been consistently voted down. For example, the former Classis Midwest, at its second meeting, defeated an overture that would have asked synod to adopt *The Reformed Trumpet* as the official

URCNA denominational magazine. Likewise, the 1999 synod defeated an overture to create a denominational health insurance plan for ministers. In the July 12, 1999 *Christian Renewal*, one minister was quoted as recommending that individual churches set up their own insurance plans, instead of relying on a plan established by synod, by saying "There's no doubt of the need. We just need to do it in line with our principles." And those principles appear to be antibureaucratic.

United Reformed churches, individually and as a federation, will discover and implement new forms of missions and ministry. Even today, United Reformed churches are carrying out foreign and home missions work, even though there are no denominational agencies supervising and funding such work. "We wish to maintain the local church and its consistory as the calling, sending and administrating body for the mission effort. This, however, needs to be done in cooperation, coordination, and with the encouragement of other churches." (Report 4, Biblical and Confessional View of Missions, in the *Minutes* of the June 2001 synod, p. 108. This is the "Joint Venture Model" adopted by that synod.) This is in harmony with the Belgic Confession's teachings about the roles of ecclesiastical assemblies and their elected members (Articles 30 and 31).

The needs and opportunities for missions, as well as for educational and support activities among URCNA churches, will continue and could well accelerate. But how can officebearers – not boards and bureaucracies – govern and supervise such work? How can such work be carried out without the emergence of a URCNA bureaucracy? How can such work be carried out under the direct control of designated ministers, elders and deacons?

A *Christian Renewal* article from 1997 (Gregory Rickmar, "Coordination of Christian Ministries", September 8, 1997, page 16) suggested a solution. Quoting from a revised version of that article, available on the Web at <http://www.covenant-urc.org/literatr/grccm.html>:

Christian organizations often have their people dispersed in widely separated geographic areas. Their work often requires that their people travel to widely scattered regions of the earth. This is the way it should be. When Christ commanded His people to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," He expected His church to send representatives to distant lands. Unfortunately, this wide dispersal of Christian workers only adds to the difficulty of their work. When Christian workers are dispersed, they have trouble keeping in touch with their fellow workers and supporters. They have trouble communicating their joys and sorrows with their co-workers. And they often have trouble communicating their needs and coordinating their work with others. . . .

Many business firms recently have been using their own computer networks to permit and improve communication within their own organizations. The software that these firms use to aid communication between their workers often includes electronic mail, scheduling, group conferencing, electronic bulletin boards and other features. Such software especially designed to improve group communication is called "groupware." The demand for groupware is increasing, and a number of software manufacturers offer groupware products. . . .

Groupware can thus be of great value to many Christian organizations. However, the groupware products that are currently available were first developed before the Internet's World Wide Web came into wide use. And groupware products are often expensive. Many businesses are now catching on that there is a low-cost alternative to groupware. And that is Internet technology.

An increasing number of organizations are using Internet newsgroups, electronic mail and Web sites to improve communication within their own organizations. Departments, project teams, and even individuals are setting up their own Web sites. Some organizations require every employee to set up his or her own Web page containing certain job and personal information. These personal Web sites allow the organization to gain a comprehensive personnel, telephone, E-mail and location directory. . . .

Officebearers should be able to effectively monitor and supervise missions

and other activities of the churches, even across wide distances, if they have at their disposal the necessary means of communications. With the proper means of communications, they will be able to monitor the works being done, receive direct feedback from those affected by the works as well as from those performing those activities, and will be able to communicate with other officebearers supervising those activities; even across vast distances.

Current Internet technology has not only made all this possible, but much of this can already be carried out very inexpensively. E-mail and message boards are already inexpensive and in wide use. Committees and teams can collaborate across wide distances using those tools as well as Web-based team calendars and Web pages that allow team or committee members to post and share electronic documents. Internet telephony allows people to conduct long distance phone calls – even conference calls – at costs much less than those charged by telephone companies. And Internet-based videoconferencing is coming into wide use by corporations. The cost of Internet videoconferencing is currently prohibitive, but is expected to become both affordable and practical within a few years.

Some corporations are already using such systems for formal and informal meetings of their boards of directors (George Anders, “... Run a Board Meeting.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Vol. CCXLII No. 53, September 15, 2003).

This new technology may appear mysterious and unconventional, but its application has the potential of allowing URCNA churches to administer and expand their mission activities while avoiding the bureaucratization that may have adversely affected other groups. This new URCNA Web site could thus become a major influence on the URCNA’s character and ministries.

Suggestions from the Public

Interestingly, many people have echoed these same proposals. After we accepted the previous synod’s request to develop and administer this Web site, one member of our church asked the over three hundred members of the CO-URC e-mail discussion group for ideas for this Web site. One suggestion that was repeatedly expressed was to provide ways for synodical committees and regional assemblies to conduct business over wide distances, by collaborating and working together over the Internet. Here are some sample comments:

- A. “Are we able to set up ‘chat’ capabilities in our site? What I have in mind is the ability to use ‘chat rooms’ discretely set up for various committees of the URCNA to hold on-line meetings. This would be a great asset in my opinion.” (From a URCNA minister who is a member of a synodical committee.)
- 1. “While CO-URC and other e-mail groups are tremendously useful, some sort of private real-time ‘chat-type’ forums could be very useful for some of the URCNA’s geographically diverse committees. While no replacement for periodic face-to-face meetings, such an online collaborative system should make it much easier for committee members to hash out particular issues from time to time.” (From a URCNA elder.)
- 1. “Recently I had a discussion with Rev. [] regarding the issues that face us as a federation and our organizational preparedness to facilitate the sharing of information quickly. . . . There is no centralized database of church addresses to create mailing lists, and although the URCNA website does list information about churches, there does not seem to be a process to ensure that information is up-to-date. The committees certainly have no place to upload ‘work in progress’ to be able to work in a collaborative manner, nor is there any way for them to share information with the churches of the federation in a secure fashion. I also act as the [] for Classis [], and regularly receive written versions of all classis minutes, but have no vehicle to share these with other churches in our classis.” (From another URCNA elder.)
- I. “We are working on setting up a web site for our classis, and hope to include a few committee

addresses like CIC@Classis[_____].org which would redirect all mail to the three members of the classical interim committee. If there is, for example, a task force mandated to negotiate the next step of union with [another federation], a link which would open one's e-mailer with an address going to every member of that task force would facilitate communication.” (From another minister.)

Initially, such workgroup and conferencing features could be inexpensively introduced by providing pages on the URCNA Web site, closed to all but committee members with the proper passwords. These passwords would allow committee members to share documents, schedule activities on a joint calendar and conduct discussions by e-mail or on Web-based message boards. Eventually, additional features might be introduced, including audio conferencing and even videoconferencing that would allow committee members and perhaps classis delegates to conduct face-to-face meetings while reducing expenditures of time and money for travel.

Some organizations are already relying on videoconferencing for business meetings, and are saving far more money by reducing travel expenses than what the videoconferencing systems cost. For an overview of some videoconferencing products and services already in wide use, see Leon Erlanger, “Take a Meeting Online”, *PC Magazine*, Vol. 23 No. 1 (January 20, 2004) pages 118-127. This article is available on the Web at <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,1418394,00.asp>.

We do not believe that audio conferencing nor videoconferencing is yet advisable for widespread URCNA use, since many officebearers still lack the high-speed broadband Internet connections that these features require. However, they may become feasible within the next few years. Nevertheless, most of the other text-based workgroup and conferencing features mentioned above *are* feasible now.

Other features that have been suggested for urcna.org (or the other urcna.com and urcna.net domains that we registered) include:

1. Providing pages for each classis to post whatever material they wish. Some of these pages may require passwords to access; for example, a classis may want to post its minutes for use by officebearers of its member churches, but not for use by others.
1. Providing pages for URCNA churches to post their own information.
1. E-mail addresses for officebearers, missionaries, etc. in the form of “anyone@urcna.org” (or .com or .net). As individuals’ e-mail addresses have limited lives and tend to change over the years, this would provide a more permanent address, making it considerably easier for people to send mail to church officebearers.
 - A Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) minister described to us his experiences with such a system, and its advantages: “Again, that is some-thing we do and has proved a tremendous benefit. Our syntax for the ministers' email addresses is simple: Christian-name+surname@fccontinuing.org. Likewise the congregation's name@fccontinuing.org will work. Forwarding tables are cheap and easy to use and certainly get round the problem of changing email addresses very neatly. They can also include committee addresses so that mail addressed to a committee goes automatically to the Clerk to that committee. It's worked very well for us – hope it works equally well for the URC.”
- A. Move all URCNA-specific content off of www.covenant-urc.org onto www.urcna.org. This would include the URCNA directory, Church Order, and synod minutes and agendas.
- B. Include evangelistic, doctrinal and educational materials for the general public, including materials for children.
- C. Include sermons (transcripts and/or audio) by URCNA ministers.
- D. Provide continuing education features for ministers and others in the URCNA.
 - For example, on-line, Web-based educational conferences could be offered. In such on-line conferences, three groups of people might participate: Presenters, Commentators and Audience. The Presenters might be three to six authors who would present papers.

The Commentators would be a second group made up of people who are knowledgeable about the topic being discussed and are there to offer their opinions and comments. The third group, the Audience, would be composed of the rest of the people who registered for the conference. When registering on-line for the conference, all participants (Presenters, Commentators and Audience) might provide a list of keywords with which to describe themselves.

Each conference might consist of Audience members going to the conference Web site, registering for the conference and reading each paper presented. Each participant in the conference – Presenters, Commentators and Audience – would simultaneously be added to an on-line e-mail group or a live chat session. Participants are thus enabled to ask questions and participate in the subsequent discussions.

At any time, Audience members can also perform name or keyword searches and start private conversations with other participants by e-mail or by live chat. Enough information about other participants would be provided to allow them to strike up conversations. Participants might opt to be assigned at random others to converse with.

By including both e-mail and live chat, the conference is both timely and time-insensitive. A scheduled time is published for each presentation, so that Presenters and Commentators are available for live chat with Audience members. Audience members can thus participate in the live chat at the scheduled group discussion time, or can participate at some other time through e-mail or by reading the group chat's transcript. (Adapted from "The Whiteboard Challenge" by Rosalyn Lum and David Caiati that appeared in *Software Development* magazine, Vol. 12 No. 3, March 2004, pp. 20, 21.)

- A. Permit on-line registration for synod and classis meetings, and provide information about available lodging.
- B. Literature and hymnal sales, should the URCNA ever engage in publishing activities.
- C. Include news of activities in URCNA churches and missions, as well as press releases of synodical activities whenever synod meets – although this might fly in the face of past ecclesiastical assembly decisions not to publish a denominational magazine.
- D. Provide data streams that would allow other Web sites to provide information from www.urncna.org. For example, such data streams would allow URCNA churches to provide information (such as URCNA directory information) on their own Web sites that feeds directly off of the information stored on the URCNA Web server. Another example would be another denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship being able to draw church directory information off of our Web site and combine it in one large directory that would include churches from multiple Reformed denominations.
- E. The site should be designed so that different people can update and add content to different sections of the site. This would prevent any one person from shouldering all the work and would give different people and groups a sense of ownership.
- F. The site should be designed so that it will be easy for people to administer and so that others will find it easy to learn how to write computer programs to add new features to it. In other words, any technology that is difficult for people of average intelligence to learn should be avoided. Otherwise, it could prove difficult to recruit volunteers to perform the administrative and programming tasks.
- G. The site should use technology that does not require users and those responsible for the site's maintenance to use a specific vendor's products on their own personal computers.

Estimated Costs

If one were to open any computer-oriented magazine today, one will probably see many advertisements offering Web hosting services. Some advertisements will publicize Web hosting plans that will allow someone to have his or her own Web site for \$19.95 per month or \$24.95 per month. And if one doesn't mind letting someone else place "banner" advertisements on every page on the site, there are companies that will host one's Web site for free.

Yet, strangely enough, that same magazine may contain articles mentioning the hundreds of thousands of dollars that some large corporations spend *every month* on hosting their own Web sites. How can it be that some organizations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every month on Web hosting, when \$19.95 per month and even free Web hosting plans are available?

The answer is, different people – and different organizations – have different requirements for Web hosting. An individual creating a Web site devoted to his stamp-collecting hobby has far different Web hosting needs than do corporations with large commercial Web sites, such as sears.com and amazon.com.

Shared Hosting

The Web hosting industry offers three broad categories of Web hosting services. At the low end, the industry offers *shared hosting*. Shared hosting is where dozens – or even hundreds – of individual Web sites are operated – or hosted – on a single server computer. A stamp collector might sign up for a shared hosting plan for hosting a Web site devoted to his hobby. \$19.95 per month Web hosting plans are generally of the shared hosting variety. Many small informational sites – including most church Web sites – are run on shared servers. Shared Web hosting plans spread the cost of running a Web server and keeping it connected to the Internet over many Web sites, keeping the cost of hosting each Web site low. Shared hosting plans generally cost between US\$20 and US\$100 per month.

Why the broad range of prices? As hosting plans increase in price, they tend to offer more features. The more expensive hosting plans may provide, for example, more disk storage capacity and additional e-mail accounts. The more expensive plans also generally provide a greater monthly *bandwidth allowance* – the volume of Web site traffic permitted each month without extra fees. A high bandwidth allowance is especially important for sites that offer downloadable audio files – such as music or sermons. Audio files tend to be large, and any Web site that features audio files can be expected to need a high bandwidth allowance.

Shared Web hosting plans are good choices for small Web sites that are mainly informational in nature. They are not good, however, for sites requiring high security. If someone were to "crack" into one site on that server, chances are that he or she would gain access to not just that one site on that server, but to *all* the sites on that server. If one of the sites on that server contained confidential information – such as credit card numbers – unauthorized people could gain access to sensitive information.

Shared Web hosting plans have other disadvantages. To make them economical, Web hosting providers generally set up every site on the server with the same, limited set of features. If our stamp collector friend wanted to set up a discussion board on his Web site to allow visitors to exchange news and opinions about stamps, his Web hosting provider might tell him that their server cannot provide such a feature. And if this stamp collector's site were to attract a large volume of visitors, many potential visitors will find that they cannot connect to this site: either the number of visitors has overwhelmed the server's capacity, or the number of visitors has exceeded the capacity of that Web server's connection to the Internet.

Dedicated Hosting

Because of the limitations of shared hosting, many organizations opt for a different type of Web hosting: *dedicated hosting*. Dedicated hosting does not rely on shared servers. Dedicated hosting

allows a Web site owner to have complete control over one or more server computers. Web sites using dedicated hosting use at least one entire computer. Some of the larger Web sites using dedicated hosting use more than one computer.

In a typical dedicated hosting arrangement, the organization needing a Web site will purchase or lease the server computer(s). The computer(s) will then be physically located within a Web hosting company's *data center* – a guarded, secure building designed for computer use that has fire suppression systems, backup power supplies, and multiple, redundant high-speed connections to the Internet. The Web site owner can then remotely administer and update his or her Web server by connecting to it over the Internet and gaining administrative access to the server with the proper passwords.

Dedicated hosting is ideal for large Web sites, for sites attracting high volumes of visitors (such as cnn.com and foxnews.com), or for sites requiring high levels of security and resistance to unauthorized access (such as e-commerce sites). Dedicated Web hosting generally costs at least US\$300 per month and can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per month for the largest and most heavily trafficked sites.

The server that is currently (and temporarily) hosting the www.urncna.org Web pages is a shared server. The current, temporary www.urncna.org site currently includes directories of United Reformed churches and ministers, minutes of past synods, our Church Order, and little else. In other words, the current www.urncna.org site is a purely informational site. It does not include any of the collaboration features that some have requested (such as committee conferencing) or that we anticipate may be expected of this site in the future (such as literature sales). Indeed, *few or none of the additional features that have been requested for the new URCNA Web site can be provided on a shared server. In other words, we do not believe that any of these additional requested features can be provided on a \$19.95 per month Web hosting plan.*

Virtual Private Hosting

Some Web sites may be too large, too feature-rich, or require too much security to be hosted on a shared server. Yet these same sites would not require the full resources of a dedicated server. To serve this middle ground between shared hosting and dedicated hosting, a third type of Web hosting has recently emerged: *virtual private hosting*. Virtual private hosting is a variant of shared hosting, but with enough different characteristics to qualify it as an entirely different type.

In virtual private hosting, one server computer will host multiple Web sites. Three things make this different from traditional shared hosting, however. First, a virtual private server will typically host only a handful of separate Web sites – unlike the dozens or hundreds of sites that a traditional shared server might host.

Second, higher quality software and techniques are used to “partition off” each Web site from the other sites sharing that server. This reduces the likelihood that someone gaining unauthorized access to one site on that server can gain access to the other sites hosted on that same server.

Third, because higher quality software and techniques are used to partition off each Web site sharing the same server, the Web hosting companies can provide the Web site owners greater administrative control of their sites. Web site owners are thus able to install additional software on the Web server to perform specialized tasks, such as e-mail messaging, discussion boards, and specialized search capabilities.

Virtual private hosting costs vary, but generally cost between US\$50 and US\$150 per month. As previously mention regarding shared hosting plans, the more expensive plans tend to provide more features. Over a three year period (the typical length of time between United Reformed synods), the total cost for virtual private hosting could vary between US\$1800 and US\$5400.

Consistory's Recommendations

Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory recognizes the need for additional Internet-related services to aid United Reformed churches in their mission. These services cannot be provided by using a shared Web hosting server, yet might not require the full resources of a dedicated server between now and the next synod. Consistory thus recommends that a virtual private server Web hosting service be secured at this time. Virtual private servers are capable of handling the types of e-commerce and committee collaboration features, with the exception of audio conferencing and videoconferencing, that some have requested for the URCNA Web site. If synod indicates that it wants a site with features that will require a virtual private server, but experience shows that even a virtual private server is inadequate to meet the demands placed upon it, Consistory may ask subsequent synods for funds for a dedicated server. Consistory may also ask future synods for funds for one or more dedicated servers should a future synod request audio conferencing or videoconferencing features.

Synod Escondido (2001) approved reimbursing Covenant – Kalamazoo up to US\$1000 in Web site-related expenses. US\$1000 spread over a three-year period averages out to approximately US\$25 per month – sufficient only to pay for shared Web hosting – and insufficient to pay for the collaborative Web hosting features that some have requested.

Should synod desire a site with the committee collaboration features and other features that have been suggested, that will require, at minimum, a virtual private server that could cost US\$150 per month (US\$5400 over a three year period). We have found Web hosting companies that offer very good virtual private server plans for US\$100 per month, but we anticipate that additional charges (for example, a higher bandwidth allowance, additional database connections to serve multiple committee discussion boards) and possible future price increases could raise the cost to approximately US\$150 per month.

On the other hand, a shared server, that will be capable of hosting only a simple informational site, may cost between US\$20 and US\$100 per month (between US\$720 and US\$3600 over a three year period). The more expensive shared server plans would be appropriate for a simple informational site that includes audio files of sermons. If audio files are not included on an informational site, such a site could be hosted for US\$50 per month (US\$1800 over three years).

We need to mention that most of the new, proposed features for this site that have been suggested will require customized programming. A member of our church is willing to do this work, but it will require time. These proposed features cannot be implemented immediately. Should synod indicate that it wants specific, additional features implemented, we anticipate that these features will be rolled out, one by one, over the next several years.

Additional e-mail mailboxes with a Web interface that will allow reading and composing messages in a Web browser, or sending and receiving messages using e-mail client software (such as Outlook Express or Eudora) will cost about US\$1 per month per account. This is an additional cost, over and above the cost for Web site hosting. Such a feature could be used to provide additional e-mail addresses in the form someone@urcna.org (or .com or .net).

Consistory’s Requests of Synod

1. That synod will provide direction to Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory, informing Consistory what type of Web site synod desires, what features synod wants implemented soon, and what features synod would like to see added later.
2. If synod wishes to include certain types of content designed for public consumption (such as a question-answer board allowing the public to post doctrinal questions to be answered by URCNA officebearers, essays and sermons by URCNA ministers, news concerning URCNA churches and missions, and children’s pages); that synod will either authorize Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory to recruit qualified personnel, or synod itself will appoint other officebearers, to supervise the selection and editing of such content.
3. That synod will provide sufficient funds for the Web site type and features it wants to see

implemented.

4. As our report has indicated, it is considered good practice to include an emblem or logo on organizational Web sites as an aid to site navigation. Clicking on the emblem, often located in the upper left corner of every page on that organization's Web site, brings the Web site visitor back to the site's home page. Any emblem adopted for Web site use may eventually through its Web site use become a *de facto*, unofficial, emblem of this federation and will thus affect peoples' perceptions of this federation. Consistory would appreciate guidance from synod as to whether Consistory is free to select an emblem for Web site use. Synod, if it desires adoption of such an emblem, may desire that Consistory select a temporary emblem for Web site use, and that a subsequent synod select a more permanent emblem for general URCNA use.

REPORT OF THE CORPORATION OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA (CANADA)

Since the last Synod (Escondido) the Corporation for the URCNA has been recognized by the Government of Canada (Business Number 86469 1480 RR0001) and has been granted Charitable Status. At the time of this writing the Corporation continues to pursue establishing a Joint Venture Agreement with the Corporation of the United Reformed Churches in North America (USA). The Corporation (Canada) has also opened a bank account. The Corporation (Canada) has not received or dispersed monies as Synod has yet to instruct the Corporation (Canada) in this regard. In order to make use of the Corporation we wish to recommend to the Synod (Calgary) the following:

1. That the monies currently held in trust by the Canadian Finance Committee be transferred to the Corporation.
2. That henceforth the Corporation will be the receiving agency for the financial support of Canadian Finances relating to the operation and function of the Federation.
3. That the Corporation use such monies as are received for the reimbursement of expenses incurred by members or churches in instances where:
 - a. such expenses are required for the fulfilling of a Synodically directed responsibility.
 - b. such expenses are for needy churches in their Federative responsibilities such as,
 - i. sending delegates to Synod.
 - ii. reimbursing members of such congregations in the fulfillment of their Synodical responsibilities.
 - iii. fulfilling Synodically directed responsibilities.
 - c. such expenses as are required for the operation of the Corporation such as
 - i. legal fees.
 - ii. government fees
 - iii. accounting fees
4. That a committee be established to oversee the distributions of these funds.
 - a. This committee would report regularly to the Corporation.
 - b. This committee's activities would be reported through the Corporation's minutes to the Federation at Synodical meetings.
5. That said committee be constituted of members in good standing of URCNA churches appointed to this position by Synodical concurrence.
6. That said Committee develop a mandate and protocol for receiving and administering requests to this fund.
 - a. such mandate and protocol would be implemented immediately.
 - b. such mandate and protocol would be subject to Synodical approval at the next Synodical meeting.

Furthermore we recommend that the Synod instruct the Directors of the Corporation (Canada) to fulfill this recommendation pending final approval of the next Synod of the URCNA. This would allow the Finance Committee to take up its responsibilities and continue operation of the work of the Federation without delay.

Submitted on behalf of the Corporation,
Rev. J. Dykstra (Secretary)

REPORT FROM COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH OF TORONTO ON BASIC AND EXTENDED HEALTH CARE BENEFITS (FROM A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE)

Mandate:

Synod Escondido 2001 appointed Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto to report to Synod (from a Canadian perspective) on the following:

- a. To investigate what existing national group health plans (profit and non-profit) are available to the churches;
- b. To investigate the feasibility of forming a denominational plan and determine from the churches the likelihood of participation in such a plan, taking into consideration cross-border portability;
- c. to complete a preliminary survey of the churches within 6 months of the end of this synod to determine:
 - i. The health benefits being provided to their pastors;
 - ii. The various health benefits for which the churches require coverage through a health plan; and
 - iii. The willingness of the churches to participate in various health plans.

Background:

The mandate clearly recognizes the disparity in health care benefits available between Canada and the USA. Canada has a universal health care system that provides basic health care benefits to all permanent residents, at little or no cost. Some governmental support is also available for long term disability. Given the substantive differences in basic health care benefits between the two countries, it is not feasible to examine any cross-border plan, other than to recognize that URC ministers who accept a call to Canada, should not be prevented from participating in basic and extended health care benefits as a result of such relocation.

Article 10 of the Church Order

The obligations imposed by article 10 of the Church Order on the local congregation make it clear that providing adequately for the minister of the Word and his family is mandatory. As a result, if special health care needs arise in the ministerial family, this obligation could impose a serious financial burden on the congregation.

Basic Health Care:

The Canadian government has prescribed a national health care system which is administered by the provinces. Although there are some differences in the application of this plan, no permanent Canadian resident is denied basic health care services at little or no cost. The Ontario plan (OHIP) provides eligibility on the basis of:

- a. Citizenship or immigration status; and
- b. Permanent residency; and
- c. Minimum residency of 153 days per year; and
- d. A three month waiting period for new residents.

If you meet the above eligibility requirements, you are issued a health card which entitles you to all essential health services, including hospitalization. It does not include dental, drugs (except for those

who are seniors or on a government support plan) and medical services that are not necessary.

Conclusion: There is no need for a Canadian national health group plan to provide for basic health care services. The only exception is when a minister and his family relocates to Canada from the USA or abroad. In that case, the calling church should make provision for a temporary health care policy to cover the minimum waiting period that is required for eligibility.

Extended Health Care:

All Canadians require extended health care of some kind on a regular basis, whether it be dental, drugs, vision products, or medical devices. However, these requirements for healthy families are often equivalent to the premiums paid for such benefits. The reason for contracting for private insurance coverage is to provide added protection should there be a major illness which results in significant long-term financial outlay, which could become a burden on the churches.

Lack of Uniform practice:

An informal survey of the URCNA churches in Canada would suggest that there is no uniform practice in the churches with respect to extended health care benefits. There is no shortage of product available for a young healthy family. However, there appears to be a lack of recognition in the churches that inadequate coverage for life insurance, long term disability, major illness, and expensive drug dependency can result in significant long term financial burden.

Private Insurance vs. Group Insurance

There are numerous private extended health care benefit plans available for purchase if you meet the minimum qualifications. Thus if a relatively young healthy ministerial family requires extended health care benefits, cost and insurability is not an issue. For example a basic Blue Cross plan that provides core health benefits, prescription drugs, dental coverage, vision care, special services (e.g. physiotherapy) and up to 15 days of coverage for world wide travel (all with some restrictions and limits) costs as follows in monthly premiums in Canadian dollars:

a. Family with oldest person 50 years old:	\$292.26
b. Single person age 50:	122.97
c. Family with oldest person 35 years old:	236.31
d. Couple both aged 50:	168.77

The foregoing examples are indicative of benefits available at a reasonable cost where eligibility is not an issue. The advantage of a group plan is that it allows a group to be tailored to whatever eligibility criteria the group wishes to establish. For example if there is no medical restriction on eligibility, the cost of the group plan may be higher, but the entire group is covered at all times. If the group experiences a high demand for benefits, the annual premiums will rise to reflect this cost. As a result, private groups often pay higher premiums than what is available in the open market for young healthy families.

Conclusion: There is a strong and compelling reason to form a group plan for URC ministers and their families to ensure full coverage for all, regardless of need. This would distribute the burden of extended health care coverage to all churches equally, regardless of demand.

Profit vs. Non-Profit Group Plans:

To establish a group plan, whether it be profit or non-profit, requires a considerable amount of administrative work. The advantage of a profit making plan is that effectively you have a large insurance carrier to backstop large claims should they arise (without the risk of depleting the fund) and the experience to effectively administer claims. The URCNA federation does not have enough churches in Canada to support a private non-profit group plan. Moreover, it is doubtful that the federation would realize any significant savings, and could potentially face excessive claims in one year that would bankrupt the plan.

Conclusion: If a group plan was established for the Canadian churches, it would be advisable to do so through a existing extended health care group plan provider.

Recommendations:

1. That Synod appoint a Canadian URCNA church to investigate the establishment of a group insurance plan to provide extended health care benefits (and other benefits if deemed advisable) for Canadian ministers and their families with an existing private group plan insurance provider;
2. That the churches be provided with this information and requested to respond as their willingness to participate in such a plan;
3. That the plan be established if a sufficient number of churches indicate a willingness to participate; and
4. That all Canadian churches be encouraged to participate, if the plan is established.

Submitted with Christian greetings and in brotherly love on behalf of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto.

Charles M. K. Loopstra, Q.C.
Arthur Miedema, B.Com.

OVERTURES

Overture 1: Revise Church Order Article 3

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2004 of the URCNA to add the words “help him” to Article 3 of the Church Order such that the revised article will read as follows:

Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to exhort, and to assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should **help him** ensure that financial needs are met.

Grounds:

1. The sentence in question currently states that “The council of his church should ensure that his financial needs are met.” This sentence can be interpreted to mean that a man who aspires to the ministry of the word can expect that the responsibility to provide financially for his education and family’s needs will be solely that of the council who supervises his training. This interpretation is not consistent with the cooperative covenantal nature that was intended when this last sentence was included in article 3.
2. As with any covenantal relationship, there are two parties with certain obligations. The council of his church is responsible to help ensure the financial needs of the student are met by assisting the student in arranging financial support through various sources, including, but not limited to, home church support, federative financial assistance, scholarships, free will offerings, personal savings, family members and the like. His church should also assist him with financial planning and budgeting where necessary. The student is responsible to ensure that his needs are made known to his church and that plans for his financial well-being are sound and sustainable. As much as possible, financial plans should be in place prior to the student beginning his training.

Rev. Bill DeJong, clerk
Classis Western Canada

Overture 2: Amend Church Order Appendix 1

Classis Southwest U.S. of the URCNA overtures Synod Calgary 2004 to amend Appendix 1 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America as follows:

“2. PROCEDURE

- a. The prospective licentiate must apply to his Consistory for the exam, securing the required credentials. At least thirty days before the exam, the ~~council~~ Consistory is to announce publicly its intention to examine the prospective licentiate, providing opportunity for other ~~councils~~ Consistories to render observation and/or objections.
- b. The prospective licentiate must be examined by his ~~council~~ Consistory, and the successful completion of the exam will be certified to other ~~councils~~ Consistories within the federation.”

Grounds:

1. The present language of the Appendix seems to call for the material participation of the Deacons in examining prospective licentiates, a work that is properly restricted to Ministers of the Word and Elders.
2. All other examinations of men who aspire to serve as Ministers of the Word in the URCNA are conducted by Ministers and Elders.
 - a. Articles 4 and 5 and Appendix 2: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Candidacy examinations.
 - b. Article 6 and Appendix 3: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Ordination examinations.
 - c. Article 8 and Appendix 4: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Colloquia Docta.
 - d. Article 25: Only Ministers of the Word and Elders may be delegated to classis where all other examinations take place. All business conducted by classis originates with a Consistory (without Deacons) rather than the Council.
 - e. Article 26: The Consistory, not the Council, is answerable to the Classis with regard to whether “the Word of God is faithfully preached”.
3. The practices alluded to in ground 1 are properly the work of Ministers and Elders, but not of deacons.
 - a. Article 2: “The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word” include “assisting the elders in the shepherding and discipline of the congregation”.
 - b. Article 14: “The duties belonging to the office of elder” include maintaining “the purity of the Word and Sacraments” and exercising” discipline in the congregation.”
 - c. Article 15: “The duties belonging to the office of deacon” do not include duties mentioned above (a. and b.).

Should the prospective licentiate be licensed and “certified” to other congregations, it is the responsibility of the Consistories of these other congregations, not the Councils, to oversee his exhortation in their midst.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture 3: Recommend Standardized Calling Procedure

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2004 Synod of the URCNA to recommend a standardized calling procedure

Grounds:

1. A standardized calling procedure will protect the relationship between the Minister and his council.
2. We believe that the office of Minister of the Word is a calling. The questionnaires that are now used by calling committees resemble secular job applications.
3. We believe that the initial contact by a calling committee should not be directed to the Minister.

Rev. Bill DeJong, clerk
Classis Western Canada

Overture 4: Approve Republication of 1976 CRC Psalter Hymnal

Background: The singing of psalms and hymns has a long history in the church. In 1999, at the Synod of Hudsonville, Michigan, a synodical committee was formed to begin working on a songbook for the United Reformed Churches, and that committee began their work. However, because the need for a songbook was so pressing, that same synod found it necessary to approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal. Among other reasons, this was because of the scarcity of the Psalter Hymnal and the worn condition of the books in use.

Since that time, the federation has grown. Not only have the numbers of members increased in our churches, but also the number of churches has increased. Once again, it is becoming difficult to obtain a sufficient number of Psalter Hymnals for use in our churches.

Therefore, Classis Southwest U.S., overtures Synod 2004 in Calgary, Alberta: **That synod approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal with a layout similar to that of its previous republication for the United Reformed Churches.**

Grounds:

1. It has been almost 5 years since the last republication took place. Since then, several of our churches have grown, and several new churches have been organized, thereby increasing the number of books needed.
2. It appears that our own hymnal is still several years away from completion.
3. The 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal is known among us and satisfactory.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture 5: Appoint Two Churches for URCNA Financial Matters

Background. Since our “birth” in 1996, the URCNA has sought to fund the work of its various standing and ad hoc committees by way of mandating two churches- one in the USA and one in Canada- to process requests for reimbursement of costs incurred. There is no quota, neither is there a budget amount set- funds that must be collected so that the various legitimate costs incurred can be paid. Neither, for that matter, are there any guidelines in place as to what may be spent, who may authorize committee and committee members’ expenditure, etc.

As we, under the blessing of the Lord, continue to grow- and, we trust and pray, the outreach and ministries of the federation grow apace- the desirability and even necessity of working with a clearly defined budget becomes ever more obvious. For example, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad is receiving request for “Ecumenical Contact” and eventual “Ecumenical Relations” from various churches abroad (for example, sending United Reformed Church delegates to Seoul, Korea; South Africa; and perhaps Australia). Pursuing such Contact/Relations requires money. But who decides what monies may be expended?

Overture. In view of the above, Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Calgary 2004, to appoint two churches (one in the USA and one in Canada) with the following mandate:

- A. Contact all the current synodically-appointed committees and the federation treasurers (in the U.S. and Canada) to discover how these committee budgets are set and whether they have concerns about how these budgets are set.

- B. After gathering information from these committees and treasurers, propose to synod a system which would assist these committees in setting their budgets, including, but not limited to:
- whether or not these committee themselves should initiate setting their budgets,
 - whether or not synod or other assemblies should be involved in the setting or approval there budgets,
 - how the funds to meet their budget should be raised.
- C. Report to the next synod.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk

Overture 6: Authorize Formation of Classis Pacific Northwest

Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Calgary 2004 to authorize the formation of Classis Pacific Northwest, consisting of the following congregations:

Abbotsford, British Columbia—Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church
 Bellingham, WA—United Reformed Church of Bellingham, WA [unorganized]
 Boise, ID—Cloverdale United Reformed Church
 Jerome, ID—United Reformed Church of the Magic Valley [unorganized]
 Kennewick, WA—Grace United Reformed Church
 Lynden, WA—United Reformed Church of Lynden, WA
 Nampa, ID—United Reformed Church of Nampa, ID
 Salem, OR—Immanuel’s Reformed Church
 Surrey, British Columbia—Surrey Covenant Reformed Church
 Tacoma, WA—Evangelical Reformed Church

Grounds:

1. Since the meeting of Synod St. Catharines [1997] when most of the present URCNA classes were established, a number of congregations [excluding two unorganized congregations] from the Pacific Northwest have joined the federation, including:
 - Abbotsford, British Columbia—Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church
 - Belgrade, MT—Belgrade United Reformed Church
 - Kennewick, WA—Grace United Reformed Church
 - Nampa, ID—United Reformed Church of Nampa, ID
 - Surrey, British Columbia—Surrey Covenant Reformed Church
 - Tacoma, WA—Evangelical Reformed Church
2. The establishment of a new classis in the Pacific Northwest will help alleviate some of the formidable travel expenses for those congregations whose delegates must travel long distances to attend classis meetings. Most of the congregations listed in the overture are within one day’s drive of each other.
3. There is a strong desire among many of the congregations listed in the overture to create a classis that will allow them to work more closely together as members of a broader regional assembly. At the present time, the URCNA congregations in the Pacific Northwest are divided arbitrarily between Classis Southwest U.S. and Classis Western Canada. This configuration is not conducive to closer ecclesiastical cooperation with congregations in

close geographic proximity to each other.

4. We urge the broader assemblies of the URCNA to include the Abbotsford, BC and Surrey, BC congregations as part of Classis Pacific Northwest in light of the fact that they are in close geographic proximity to the other congregations listed in the overture. In addition, it is our desire to express both our confessional and organizational unity in a manner that transcends national boundaries.

Note: The consistories of the Belgrade United Reformed Church of Belgrade, Montana, and the Calvary United Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado, have expressed their reasons for remaining in Classis Southwest U.S. These have been affirmed by classical action.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture 7: Adopt Statement on Admission to the Lord's Supper

Background: In recent years, a good deal of debate in the Reformed churches has centered around paedocommunion - the practice of admitting to the Lord's Supper all those who are baptized, solely by virtue of their baptism. The issue has been studied and debated in a number of denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the US, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America.

The issue made its appearance among the United Reformed Churches during the June 2000 meeting of Classis Western Canada. At that time, a man being examined for candidacy requested clarification on the question of whether the Reformed Confessions teach that a profession of faith is a necessary prerequisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper. After consideration of the question, classis judged that the Confessions to which the URCNA subscribe - the Belgic Confession of Faith (BCF), Heidelberg Catechism (HC) and Canons of Dort (CD) - do require a public profession of faith as a prerequisite for participating in the Lord's Supper.

Since that time, the issue has continued to come before the churches, both formally at the classical level, and informally through discussions, debates, and published arguments. In all of these, a primary question centers on the Confessions of the Church: Do the Three Forms of Unity permit participation in the Lord's Supper by those who have not yet made profession of faith?

A careful examination of those Confessions reveals that, although the phrase "profession of faith" is never used, the substance of the practice - as set forth in our "Form for the Public Profession of Faith" - is presented as the necessary demand for those who would participate in the Lord's Supper. Such an examination must take into account the different goals of the Church's recognized sacraments; the different intended recipients of those sacraments; and the different manner of prescribed participation in the sacraments.

Our Confessions recognize a clear difference between the goals of the sacraments. In examining the goal of baptism, HC Ques. 69 presumes that this sacrament is *passive*, signifying and sealing that the recipient *has a part* in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The ensuing answer portrays the participant as being wholly passive: "I am washed." In contrast to this, Ques. 75 presumes a more active goal for the Lord's Supper, which is presumed to signify and seal that the recipient *partakes* if the sacrifice of Christ and His benefits. And again, the answer portrays an activity on the part of the participant: the believer eats, sees, receives and tastes.

Similarly, BCF Art. 34 teaches us that baptism is the sacrament "by which we are received into the Church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions," and thus it "serves as a testimony to us that He will forever be our gracious God and Father." That is, baptism

is the sacrament by which we are received into the Covenant community. This truth is emphasized when this article notes that baptism is to be received by “all those who are His” - that is, “every man who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal,” as well as “infants of believers.” We see here a distinction being made between those who consciously present themselves as desiring God’s salvation, on the one hand, and their infant children, on the other. Both are presented as rightful recipients of the sign of the covenant, but on different bases.

Contrary to this, BCF Art. 35 teaches us that the Lord’s Supper has been ordained and instituted “to nourish and support those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church.” Those so regenerated are described as having a two-fold life - one corporal and temporal, and the other spiritual and heavenly - with the spiritual life given in their second birth, “effected by the Word of the gospel, in the communion of the body of Christ.” For those baptized as adults, this presents no significantly different ground for participation, But concerning infants, this article would seem to point us toward a change normally worked in them after infancy - unless, that is, all children of believers are taken to be regenerated in this sense at the moment of their baptism, and the Word of the gospel here refers solely to the promises spoken during the baptismal ceremony.

That this latter is not the case is confirmed by HC Ans. 81. Addressing itself to the question, “For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?”, this answer sets forth three general qualifications for those who would come to the Lord’s Table:

Acknowledgment of and sorrow over their sins.

Trust that their sins are forgiven by and for the sake of Christ.

Earnest desire to have their faith strengthened and to experience growth in holiness.

Admittedly, some have complained that this answer of the Catechism addresses itself only to adult participants, speaking neither for nor against the participation of covenant youths. In support of this claim, they note that those described are contrasted with hypocrites on the one hand, as those who should not come; and the openly unbelieving and ungodly on the other hand, as those who should not be admitted. However, these contrasts are not exclusive, but reflect the most significant threats of profaning the Lord’s Table at the time the Catechism was written. If children partaking of the elements was not an issue at that time, it would make sense that the authors would not have included a prohibition against their participation. (Incidentally, co-author Zacharias Ursinus’ own remarks on p.425 of his commentary indicate that he was quite aware that Ans. 81 excluded children from participating from the Supper, and that he supported this conclusion.)

Concerning the manner of participation in the sacraments, we have already noted that recipients of baptism are utterly passive (cf. HC Ans. 69; BCF Art. 34). The same is not so, however, for recipients of the Lord’s Supper. HC Ans. 75 indicates that participants must receive the elements with discernment, receiving them in remembrance of Christ and of the promises granted by virtue of His sacrifice. Likewise, Ans. 76 teaches that eating the body and drinking the shed blood of Christ is to be for believers an embracing of Christ’s sufferings and death with a believing heart, as well as a means of becoming ever more united to His body by the Holy Spirit.

BCF Art. 35 expands on these teachings. Here we learn that participants in the Lord’s Supper ought to receive not merely bread and wine, but also to “receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls.” Later, we are told that the manner of this reception is “not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith,” and thus we must receive the Supper “with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, with thanksgiving, making there confession of faith and of the Christian religion.” Indeed, our participation must move us “to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.”

All of this points us toward the requirement of a higher level of understanding and spiritual

maturity among those who partake of the holy Supper. While we must readily concur that children of believers are members of the covenant, whose salvation we ought not to doubt should the Lord take them from us in their infancy (CD I,17); yet we must see that they are immature members of that covenant, made holy by virtue of their parentage (1 Cor. 7:14), but not yet by their own apprehension of the faith. Such apprehension of the faith, along with a maturing in the Christian life seen in a growing desire to flee from sin and to delight in living according to God's will (HC Lord's Day 33), is required of all covenant children. Without faith that understands and grasps the essence of the Christian faith, they cannot enjoy the gospel comforts held out to them in baptism (HC Lord's Days 1 and 7).

All of this demands a process of growth, instruction and admonition directed by parents and the Church, to the end that the infant recipient of baptism receives by faith the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Without such personal apprehension of the faith, even those baptized as infants may ultimately reject the gospel and show themselves to have been reprobate (CD I, 15-16 and III/IV, 9). By God's grace, our elect children receive the working of the Spirit to create faith in their hearts, using the preaching of the holy gospel to work this faith in their hearts, and the sacraments to confirm it this faith (HC Ans. 65).

All of this presumes the practice we have come to term "Public Profession of Faith" as the means whereby baptized members of Christ's Church are admitted to full participation in the Church, including participation in the privilege of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

It is by this ceremony that our children stand before God's people to profess their belief in the doctrines of Scripture and the Christian faith, as described in HC Lord's Day 7. It is at this time that they express their acceptance of God's covenant promises, signified and sealed in baptism; their abhorrence and humbling of themselves before God because of their sins (HC Ans. 82); their desire to seek life not in themselves, but in Jesus Christ alone (HC Lord's Days 23-24); and their intent to mortify the old man as the new is quickened, serving God in true faith, according to His Law and to His glory (HC Lord's Day 33); while submitting willingly to the government of God's Church (HC Ans. 85). In all of this, they formally, willingly and knowingly take on themselves the name of "Christian," as members of Christ by faith, intent on sharing in His offices of prophet, priest and king (HC Ans. 32).

In light of the above background, the Council of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton submits the following overture:

Overture: The Council of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton respectfully overtures Classis Western Canada to overture URCNA Synod Calgary, 2004, to adopt the following statement: "The Confessions to which the URCNA subscribe - the Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort - require that the Lord's Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church."

Grounds:

1. The Validity of this statement:
 - 1.1. In the Three Forms of Unity (particularly the BCF and HC), we confess the purpose, participants and manner of partaking of the Lord's Supper in such a way as to make clear that a personal and understanding faith is a prerequisite for coming to the Table of the Lord (BCF, Articles 33, 35; HC, LDs 25, 28, 30)
 - 1.2. The presence of such faith must become evident for admission to the Lord's Supper by means of a public testimony or profession in the church. (BCF, Article 35; HC, LD 30)
2. The Value of adopting this statement:

- 2.1. A central point of debate over paedo-communion is whether the Confessions provide a definite standard on this issue.
- 2.2. Because this issue concerns the churches at large, it should be addressed by the collective wisdom of the federation's broadest assembly.
- 2.3. The adoption of a statement clarifying this matter would uphold the Confessional basis for our Profession of Faith, thereby promoting unity in Truth among the churches.

Classis Western Canada
Rev. Henry Van Olst

Overture 8: Affirm Statement on Creation

Background: Synod Escondido 2001 made an excellent beginning in the affirmations of what the Bible teaches as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity concerning our interpretation of Genesis 1&2 (cf. Footnote # 1 below). However in this regard, Synod did not fully resolve the issues that continue to face the churches. We maintain, that the final affirmation of Article XLIII 3d ought to be strengthened. Furthermore, the single rejection (contained within the affirmations), is incomplete and needs further expansion in order to clarify our federation's understanding, interpretation and submission to God's teaching in Genesis 1 & 2. Given the brevity of our Synodical deliberations, an expanded statement should be provided for the well-being of the churches.

Overture: Classis Southern Ontario overtures Synod 2004 of the United Reformed Churches in North America: To affirm the following: we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of earth and of all creatures. It furthermore means that we reject any teaching about the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 that would discount or call our confession of the perspicuity of Scripture into question; such as, teaching that speculates about the days of creation, to the effect that these days may constitute no more than a literary device, or an extended literary metaphor, having little or no meaningful correspondence to real, historical events which took place in creation; or, that these days may in fact be understood to represent epochs, or long periods of time, bearing no meaningful resemblance to days as we know them today; or, that the sequence of creation days and the activities of God on these days as presented in Scripture was not necessarily historical; or, an accurate record of the sequence of the events and acts of creation. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 9). It also means that we would reject any teaching which includes speculation that there may have been death and/or sacrifice in the world before the fall into sin (Genesis 1:31; Romans 5:12, Romans 8:20,21), or that Scripture suggests that God limited Himself, or was bound to follow, the patterns of ordinary providence in His work of creating (Belgic Confession Articles 12 and 13).

Grounds:

1. It is necessary as churches to give Scriptural direction to the churches when various unsettling non-Scriptural ideas/theories are being promulgated and propagated within the federation and in the broader conservative Reformed and Presbyterian world.

There is a fundamental danger in our understanding, respect and submission to the entire Scriptures when the supernatural events of the creation week are undermined by man's speculative thinking and/or interpretation. Our scholarship and our interpretation of Scripture must be submissive to the plain teaching of God's Word. Human imagination

should not rule over Scripture nor, should theological-scholarly systems and terminology replace the living Word of God, nor should man's so called reasonable findings take the place of God's revelation in His Word.

Scripture warns us "not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (I Cor. 4:6). Furthermore, Scripture directs us to cast "down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) and to "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

2. In discussing the interpretation of Scripture concerning creation at Synod Escondido 2001, the United Reformed Churches of North America maintained that, the "Three Forms of Unity adequately contain the parameters within which the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 can responsibly take place" (Minutes Synod Escondido 2001 Article XLIII p. 23). The Belgic Confession makes it clear that while creation is set before us as a most elegant book, God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation" (Belgic Confession Article 2).
3. God is sovereign in all that He does. His sovereignty in creation includes both the ordering of creation and creation days and should not be subject to question (Psalm 33:6-9; Belgic Confession Article 1) (cf. Footnote # 2).
4. When we say that Genesis is historical; we mean it relates and documents matters which actually occurred. This applies to the whole book of Genesis. Herman Bavinck wrote: When God's Word "speaks about the origin of heaven and earth, it presents no saga or myth or poetical fantasy but even then, according to its clear intention, presents history, which deserves faith and trust (Herman Bavinck: *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Tweede Deel, Kampen, 1928, p. 458).
5. In our exegetical work, we must resist any conclusion that would suggest that God's revelation is in conflict with itself. One comes into conflict with Scripture when one believes that the Bible has to be rescued from appearing to be in conflict with the data of modern science. There is no warrant for assuming that God could not have told man in simple language just what God did in creating the heaven and the earth nor that the unknown could only be represented through symbolic forms (cf. E.J. Young: Studies in Genesis One (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975, pp. 49-50).

"His revelation in nature and that in Scripture are in perfect accord. Man, however, is a rational creature, and needs a revelation in words that he may properly understand himself and his relation to the world in which he lives. Even in his unfallen state, God gave to Adam a word-revelation, for by his very constitution as an intellectual being, man must have such. The word-revelation, therefore, must interpret revelation in nature. Fallen man must read general revelation in light of Scripture, else he will go basically astray. Of course the Bible is not a textbook of science, but the Bible is necessary properly to understand the purpose of science. ... And on whatever subject the Bible speaks, whether it be creation, the making of the sun, the fall, the flood, man's redemption, it is authoritative and true. We are to think God's thoughts after him, and his thoughts are expressed in the words of Scripture. When these thoughts have to do with the origin of man, we are to think them also. They alone must be our guide. "Therefore," says Calvin, "while it becomes man seriously to employ his eyes

in considering the works of God, since a place has been assigned him in this most glorious theatre that he may be a spectator of them, his special duty is to give ear to the Word, that he may the better profit" (Young p.54) (cf. Footnote # 3).

6. Our Form of Subscription outlines the parameters which is to guide our thinking and the method we are to follow with respect to difficulties we may have with the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity. Speculative teaching is not static; "ideas have legs" (cf. Footnote # 4).
7. We contend that the creation week displayed God's super-natural and extraordinary providence. We may not presuppose that merely the normal means of providence were in effect during the creation week. We must maintain the distinction between creation and providence. Do we not believe ordinary providence took effect after God had created? For instance, Psalm 104 was written as a song of praise to the Sovereign LORD for His creation and His providence. It distinguishes these two works of God. The Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 9 makes the same differentiation. Must we not hold, that the failure to separate creation as a distinct act from the acts of ordinary (day to day) providence to be a major theological error? (Belgic Confession Articles 12 & 13) (cf. Footnote # 5).
8. Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12). One day "creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). Isaiah 65 depicts the glorious restoration of creation where the "wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (vs.25a cf. also Genesis 1:29-30). Sacrifices exist because sin exists. When Adam sinned God cursed the entire world (Genesis 3:18-19). When one alleges that animals devoured animals before the fall one does not acknowledge the perfection of God's work before sin. Death by means of shedding of blood before the fall implies imperfection within the creation contra Genesis 1:31. A zebra has never been happy when a lion put his paws on her back.
9. Views outside our creedal standards undermine the believer's confidence in the clarity of Scripture. God's clear Word deserves faith and trust. (Hebrews 11:3; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 7) If what we historically understood as clear now becomes obscure, other clear passages will be subject to question and uncertainty.
10. The allowance of speculative thinking and hypnotizing hypothesizes disrupts and threatens unity within the federation. It also restricts and impedes unity amongst those federations we are called to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:4). (cf. Footnote # 6)

Footnote # 1: The Synodical decision Synod Escondido 2001, (Article XLIII 3d) as found in the minutes on pp. 22-23, reads as follows: "Synod affirms that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity:

- The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (Belgic Confession V; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII).
- Necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (Belgic Confession VII; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day VII).
- God the Father almighty created the heaven and the earth and all things visible and invisible (Apostle's and Nicene Creed).
- The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day IX).
- God gave every creation its shape and being (Belgic XII).
- The creation and the fall of man. "God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to

the devil." (Belgic Confession XIV).

- The historicity of Adam (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII.20; Canons of Dort III,IV.1).
- Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day III and IV).
- God's words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VI).
- Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (Belgic Confession XVI).
- Adam's fall into sin and our connection to it (Canons of Dort 1.1).
- God came seeking man when he, trembling, fled from Him (Belgic Confession XVII).
- God created all things good in six day defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 & 2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day IX).

Footnote # 2: The text of Genesis does not give a "single allusion to suggest that the days are to be regarded as a form or mere manner of representation and hence of no significance for the essential knowledge of the divine creative activity." Moreover in "Exodus 20:11 the activity of God is presented to man as a pattern, and this fact presupposes that there was a reality in the activity of God which man is to follow. How could man be held accountable for working six days if God Himself had not actually worked for six days?" E. J. Young: Studies in Genesis One (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975), p.47.

Footnote # 3: "It is this remarkable fact of progression, both in method of statement and in actual content, which proves that the days of Genesis are to be understood as following one another chronologically. When to this there is added the plain chronological indications, day one, day two, etc., climaxing in *the sixth day*) all support for a non-chronological view is removed.

In this connection the question must be raised, "if a non-chronological view of the days be admitted, what is the purpose of mentioning six day?" For, once we reject the chronological sequence which Genesis gives, we are brought to the point where we can really say very little about the content of Genesis one. It is impossible to hold that there are two trios of days, each paralleling the other. Day four, as has already been pointed out, speaks of God's placing the light bearers in the firmament. The firmament, however, had been made on the second day. If the fourth and the first days are two aspects of the same thing, then the second day also (which speaks of the firmament) must precede days one and four. If this procedure be allowed, with its wholesale disregard of grammar, why may we not be consistent and equate all four of these days with the first verse of Genesis? There is no defense against such a procedure, if once we abandon the clear language of the text. In all seriousness it must be asked, Can we believe that the first chapter of Genesis intends to teach that day two preceded days one and four? To ask the question is to answer it.

There is, of course, a purpose in the mention of six days. It is to emphasize the great contrast between the unformed universe of verse two and the completed world of verse thirty-one. Step by step in majestic grandeur God worked to transform the unformed earth into a world upon which man might dwell and which man might rule for God's glory. How noble and beautiful is this purpose, a purpose which is obscured and even obliterated when once we deny that the six days are to be taken in sequence. If Moses had intended to teach a non-chronological view of the days, it is indeed strange that he went out of his way, as it were to emphasize chronology and sequence. We may recall the thought of Aalders that in the first chapter of Genesis there is not a hint that the days are to be taken as mere form or manner of representation. In other words, if Moses intended to

teach something like the so-called "framework theory" of the days, why did he not give at least some indication that such was intention? This question demands an answer" (Young pp. 99-100).

Footnote # 4: To illustrate the conviction that "ideas have legs": One of the major proponents of the Framework Hypothesis view is Professor Meredith Kline. In his own article, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony" (From Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith <<http://www.calvin.edu/chemistry/ASA/PSCF.html>>) he indicates his intent for propounding this view to be as follows: "To rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation week propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article. At the same time, the exegetical evidence adduced also refutes the harmonistic day-age view. The conclusion is that as far as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesizing about cosmic origins."

In a concluding note in the same article, Dr. Kline writes, "In this article I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which Scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of evolutionary origin of man". Moreover, he regards the "widespread insistence on a young earth to be a deplorable disservice to the cause of Biblical truth" (from footnote 47 in his paper).

These expressed views stand contrary to Scripture and are antithetical to what we have affirmed at Synod Escondido 2001.

The Framework Hypothesis has been defined in a number of ways. Two definitions are presented as follows:

- a. "The Framework Hypothesis" is a view of Genesis 1:1-2:3 which claims that the Bible's use of the seven-day week in its narration of the creation is a literary (theological) framework and is not intended to indicate the chronology or duration of the acts of creation. ... The Framework Hypothesis argues, *on exegetical grounds*, that the organizing principle of the creation account is topical rather than chronological. It denies, *on exegetical grounds*, that the seven-day week is intended as a chronological unfolding of the separate acts of creation limited in duration to one calendar week. (Mark Ross: "The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3" an essay in "**DID GOD CREATE IN SIX DAYS?**" ed. by Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and David W. Hall Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999, pp. 113&114)
- b. "The Framework Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the view which maintains that, while the six days of creation are normal solar days, the total picture of God's completing His creative work in a week of days is not to be taken literally, but functions as a literary framework for the creation narrative; and that the eight creative historical works of God have been arranged according to other than strictly sequential considerations, and that where there is sequential order it must be determined by factors other than the order of narration alone" (Majority Report of the Report of the Committee to Study the Framework Hypothesis Presbytery of Southern California (OPC), 1999).

Footnote # 5: The argument that some make contending that Genesis 2:5 "provides evidence for ordinary providence in Genesis 1 contains a logical fallacy. Even if Gen. 2:5 applies to the circumstances in Genesis 1 (which is questionable), it does not follow that ordinary providence alone was operating during that period of time. The presence of ordinary providence does not disprove the possibility of extraordinary providence. The text tells us in fact just the opposite" Robert E. Grossman. "The Light He Called Day," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 3/1 (1987), 28.

It should be clear to us and we should teach with clarity that Genesis 1 "teaches the operation of extraordinary providence during creation. Only if God created everything fully at once, would there be no place for supernatural preservation. The natural order of creation, through which the Spirit normally preserves and governs, is dependent on the whole ordered cosmos. Surely Genesis 1:2 assumes extraordinary providence when Moses describes the Spirit hovering over the original fluid mass at creation--preserving, separating at the command of Christ, and perfecting. Moses relates in Genesis 1:4 that God caused the separation between light and darkness. Or take for example gravity, tides and the boundaries of water. Our providential system of gravity depends on the mass of the earth. Before the waters were separate on the second day, the ordinary factors involved in gravity would have been lacking. And tides depend on the moon. At the beginning, when the first created stuff was in existence, the Spirit held it together. Later, when the waters were separated from the waters, the Spirit would have held them in place. When the dry land was separated from the waters, the Spirit kept the water within its boundaries and controlled the tides until the moon was created. Thus, the text implies some acts of extraordinary providence, during the process of creation" (Joseph Pipa: "From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3" an essay in "**DID GOD CREATE IN SIX DAYS?**" ed. by Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and David W. Hall Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999, p.164).

Footnote # 6: A hypothesis is something not proved, but assumed for the purpose of argument, a theory imagined or assumed to account for what is not understood.

Classis Southern Ontario
Mr. Robert Vanderhill

Overture 9: Affirm Statement on Human or Animal Death before the Fall

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following: The teaching that there was any human death or animal death before the Fall in Paradise is a false doctrine condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

1. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address these issues in order to maintain a faithful witness. False views of death permeate our culture such as death as the means of evolving from "lower" to "higher" forms of life.
2. The Word of God clearly speaks to the issue of death before sin: Genesis 3:14_19; Romans 5:12; Romans 8:20, 21.
3. The confessions implicitly address this issue in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 4, 5; Belgic Confession Article 14 and the Canons of Dort III & IV Articles 1, 2, 3 teach that death is the curse of God against sin and Lord's Day 3 contrasts a cursed world with Paradise.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture 10: Affirm Statement on Homosexuality

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following: All homosexual desires and actions are sins that are condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

1. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address this issue in order to maintain a faithful witness. Recent court decisions in Canada and the U.S. reflect the sinful views of homosexuality in our culture.
2. The Word of God clearly speaks to homosexuality: I Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 1:26, 27; Matthew 5:27, 28
3. The confessions implicitly addresses homosexuality in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 41 condemns all forms of unchastity and homosexuality is one form of unchastity.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture 11: Affirm Statement on Abortion

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following: Abortion is sin condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

1. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address this issue in order to maintain a faithful witness. Abortion remains legal and abortions are sought and performed by millions.
2. The Word of God clearly speaks to the issue of abortion: Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13; Psalm 106:31.
3. The confessions implicitly addresses abortion in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 40 makes it clear that all forms of murder are condemned by God and abortion is clearly one form of murder rooted in hatred.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture 12: Approve New Method for Selecting Members of CERCU

Classis Michigan overtures the fifth Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America to adopt the following changes relating to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity: That Synod approve the following method for the selection of members of the Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee and the Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad Committee:

- A. The nominations be given by the churches to each classis which will elect one member per classis to each committee for a term of three years and then to be eligible for reelection of one more term of service, after which they retire for at least three years as members of each committee (a total of six members).
- B. That Synod elect from names submitted by church councils three members at large for each committee to serve a term of three years and then to be eligible for the reelection of one more term of service, after which they retire.
- C. This procedure shall be implemented by the following: All current members who are sole representatives from their classis shall be considered classical members. If members of a current committee has served between two to five years he will be eligible for reelection. Where there is more than one member of a committee from the same classis the member with the least amount of time served shall be the classical representative. All other current members shall fulfill their terms and be eligible for reelection as member at large position if the have served between two to five years.

Grounds:

- 1. This procedure will facilitate improved communications between the committees and the churches of individual classis.
- 2. This will broaden representatives of our federations in these committees.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture 13: Amend Phase Three of Guidelines for Ecumenicity

Classis Southern Ontario overtures the 2004 Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America to amend Phase Three (Church Union) of the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, as follows: by adding the statement, "*Entering this phase requires ratification by a two-thirds majority of the consistories.*"

We recognize that since entering Phase Three would most likely involve changes to the Church Order, the decision would, in effect, require ratification by two-thirds of the consistories. However, for pastoral reasons, we believe it would be wise to include this requirement explicitly, and as part of the process of church unity.

Grounds:

- 1. While all of the work of ecumenical relations is done "with a view toward complete church unity" (Mandate, CERCU), it is clear that entering Phase Three represents a more significant commitment than entering Phases One and Two. Since consistorial ratification is required for entering Phase Two, it seems logical that it also be required for entering Phase Three.
- 2. If changes to the Church Order are judged to be so significant that they require ratification by a two-thirds majority of consistories, it seems wise and logical to require the same majority when the union of federations is in view.
- 3. While it is always desirable, and even expected, that issues being dealt with by the broader assemblies be fully discussed locally, we believe that the requirement of consistorial ratification increases the likelihood that issues surrounding ecumenical relations and church unity will in fact be fully discussed, and therefore better understood, by local consistories and congregations. This would surely be necessary and beneficial, to achieve a unity that is genuine, and that can be experienced and celebrated at the local level. The pastoral care of

the local congregation should be considered of particular importance. A greater familiarity at the local level with the issues surrounding church unity may help to prevent misunderstandings and suspicions, which could lead to a splintering of the federations or congregations involved in the process toward federative union, when the decision to enter Phase Three is taken.

Classis Southern Ontario
Elder John Veldhuizen, Clerk

Overture 14: Realign Classical Districts of the Federation

Classis Western Canada Overtures Synod 2004 of the URCNA to realign the classical districts of the federation.

Grounds:

1. Article 26 of the Church Order of the URCNA indicates that a “Classis shall consist of neighboring churches . . .”
2. The present configuration of Classis Canada West, extending through an arc from Salem, OR through the Bulkley Valley of BC and across the Canadian Prairie all the way to Thunder Bay, ON on the north shore of Lake Superior, represents an unwieldy scale of ‘neighborhood.’
3. The great distances between the extremities of this classical district tends to preclude the convening of Classis more than once per year and contributes to potentially excessive travel costs for the churches in this district.
4. The formation of classical districts should be based on geographical proximity.
5. While it may be preferable to align classical districts to recognize international borders, we have not found an international border to be an impediment to fellowship with churches in the federation.

Classis Western Canada
Rev. Henry Van Olst

APPEALS

Appeal 1: Grande Prairie, re: Profession of Faith

History: In its January 16, 2003, meeting, the Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church in Grande Prairie decided to interview a number of the church's young people who had requested to profess their faith and come to the Table. Some of those members were as young as ten. That decision was announced to the congregation at its meeting on February 3, 2003.

After some correspondence (see Appendix 1 and 2), Mr. DDD. appealed to Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) to sustain his "objection regarding the decision of the Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church Council to interview children as young as ten for Public Profession of Faith and thus admission to the Lord's Table" (see Appendix 3).

That classis sustained his appeal (Minutes, Art. 42; see Appendix 4). No grounds were adopted.

Appeal: The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta, appeals to the URCNA Synod Calgary 2004 to declare that Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) erred in sustaining Mr. DDD's appeal against the consistory's decision to "interview children as young as ten for public profession of faith and thus admission to the Lord's Table" (Minutes, Art. 42).

Grounds:

1. Scripture. The decision of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) to sustain Mr. DDD's appeal prevents the Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, from admitting *believers* as young as ten to the Table and is therefore contrary to the Word of God.

Jesus commands His church to eat the Lord's Supper (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:23-25). Believers are to keep Jesus' commandments (John 14:15). Scripture teaches that children can be believers (e.g., Ex. 12:26ff.; Deut. 6:7-9; Josh. 4:21ff.; 1 Sam. 3; 2 Kings 5:2-3; Ps. 8:2; 22:9-10; Matt. 18:1-10; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 1:41-44; Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). According to Scripture, it is possible for young children to trust in God and confess their faith in Him. Nothing in Scripture prohibits children from doing so.
2. Three Forms of Unity: The Three Forms of Unity do not set an age for public profession of faith (which the Three Forms don't even mention), let alone indicate that a church member must be older than ten before he may profess his faith and come to the Table.
 - A. The Heidelberg Catechism answers the question "For whom is the Lord's Supper instituted?" — or, as some translations have it: "Who *are* to come to the table of the Lord?" — by pointing to "Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life" (Q&A 81). Therefore, if a child is a believer, according to the Catechism, he should not stay away from the Table or be kept from the Table. Rather, according to the teaching of the Catechism, he is to come to

the Table. It was instituted for him.

B. The Belgic Confession, Art. 35, says that Christ instituted this Supper “to nourish and support those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church.” If someone ten or younger is a believer, he falls into the category of people whom the Supper is intended to nourish and support and should therefore not be kept from the Table.

C. The Canons of Dort do not address this issue.

3. Church Order. By sustaining Mr. DDD’s appeal, Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) intruded upon the freedom of the elders of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, to interview baptized members who desire to profess their faith (Church Order, Art. 43) and has imposed an age limit not found in the Church Order. Article 43 of the Church Order does not restrict admission to the Table to those who are older than ten. It speaks of “years of understanding,” but does not define what those years are. Rather, it leaves the decision about whom to admit to the Table to the *Consistory*: “Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life.” The *Consistory* must decide if the member interviewed is able to answer the questions in the liturgical form for Profession of Faith and come to the Table.

4. Precedence: By sustaining DDD’s appeal, Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) imposed a restriction on the Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, which is not shared by the other churches in the federation — or even in the classis itself.

At least one other church in the URCNA has admitted members ten or younger to the Table. Classis Western Canada 2002 (Ponoka) admitted the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma, WA, to the federation pending ratification at Synod 2004 (Executive Minutes, Art. 2; see Appendix 5). This congregation has admitted members as young as six to the Table by way of public profession of faith. Though Classis Western Canada 2002 (Ponoka) did urge the Evangelical Reformed Church’s Consistory to “give further consideration to the reasons for requiring a more mature and well-informed confession of the Reformed Faith for admission to the Lord’s Table,” it did not require the congregation to change her practice as a prerequisite for admission to the federation (see Appendices 6 & 7).

Done in Consistory, February 12, 2004

The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie

Dick Barendregt, chairman

John Barach, clerk

APPENDIX 1: Letter from Mr. DDD

March 12, 2003

To the Consistory of Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church:

Regarding councils’ decision to allow children, aged 10 or older, to do Public Profession of Faith, which was announced publicly at the congregational meeting on Feb 3, 2003; I would like to formally register my disagreement and ask that council reverse that decision.

Having met with Pastor Barach and Elder Barendregt on March 4, 2003, with my fiancée UUU, we discussed this issue, and during this discussion it was revealed to me that the age of 10 was not a minimum, but that council would allow even younger children to do Public Profession of Faith, possibly even as young as six should a six year old make that request. I asked Pastor Barach and Elder

Barendregt to seek the advice of classis regarding the decision to allow young children to make Public Profession of Faith. This suggestion was not readily received, in fact, I was told that perhaps I ought to bring this matter myself to classis. After more discussion, it was mutually agreed that council would delay the implementation of their decision if I agreed to meet with council and other members of this church to study the issue further. It was also suggested that I talk to other ministers in our federation and receive their input regarding this issue as well.

Having spent the weekend of March 8 to 10, 2003, in the Edmonton area, I met with two ministers from our federation to seek their advice. After these discussions, I feel that delaying the decision to allow children as young as ten or less, to make Public Profession of Faith, is not what is needed but instead, a complete reversal of that decision is necessary.

First of all, I feel that allowing young children to make public profession of faith is contrary to the guidelines given in Article 43 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America. There it clearly states that only “baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding” can make public profession of faith, “. . . with the use of the appropriate liturgical form”. The questions in our form require a level of understanding and maturity that young children do not possess.

Secondly, I feel that this decision is also contrary to Article 24 of the Church Order, where it states that, “Although congregations are distinct and equal and do not have dominion over each other, they ought to preserve fellowship with each other because they are all united with Christ, the spiritual and governing head of the Church . . .”. If Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church allows children as young as ten years old or less to make Public Profession of Faith, our fellowship as a church with other churches in our federation, specifically Classis Western Canada, will be severely strained. This was clearly indicated to me in my conversations this past weekend with the ministers I visited. For instance, they stated that if they were asked to serve young children who have made public profession of faith, the Lord’s Supper, in our church or theirs, they would refuse to do so. This does not build the spirit of unity, and preserve the fellowship, that ought to exist between churches in our classis and federation.

Finally, I think it is significant that the long-standing tradition in Reformed Churches has been to permit older teenagers or young adults to make public profession of their faith. I think any changes to this tradition ought to be done very carefully, and with the support of other churches in our federation, especially those in our classis.

I would once again like to ask council to reverse the decision to allow children as young as ten to do Public Profession of Faith, or not act upon this decision until you have sought the advise of classis. I request a written response regarding this issue no later than March 24, 2003 and thank you in advance for it.

Yours in Christ;
DDD

APPENDIX 2: Covenant Reformed Consistory’s Response to Mr. DDD

March 21, 2003

Dear DDD:

Thank you for your letter dated March 12, 2003. We appreciate your concern for the well-being of the church. Your concerns are certainly understandable, especially since most of the other churches in our federation have not admitted younger members to the Lord’s Supper.

We deeply regret that our report at the congregational meeting was not clear. We accept full responsibility for communicating badly. Our report indicated that the council had decided to lower the age of profession of faith. In fact, the council did not make such a decision, nor could it do so, since we had never specified an age to begin with.

What did happen was that some young people expressed a desire to profess their faith in Christ and to come to His Table and the council agreed to interview these young people (in accordance with the Church Order, Art. 43). None of the officebearers expressed any objection, even though the youngest member who was requesting an interview was ten years old. So there was no decision to lower the age for profession of faith to ten or any other age, but there was an agreement that the elders would interview all the young people who had asked for an interview. Again, we regret that our agreement to do so was not communicated clearly to the congregation.

You have asked us not merely to delay the implementation of our decision but rather to reverse our decision (which would mean deciding not to interview these young people). You provide three arguments to support your request.

First, you point out that the Church Order, Art. 43, requires all who profess their faith to do so “with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.” You write, “The questions in our form require a level of understanding and maturity that young children do not possess.”

As a council, we intend to abide by the Church Order and therefore before we admit someone to the Table, we interview him (Art. 43). Through that interview, we ascertain, to the best of our ability, if the person can answer the questions in the form for the profession of faith. We are working as a council to prepare a list of questions which might be asked in a profession of faith interview. The local elders must be satisfied by the interview (even if not all of the church members would be and even if the elders of another church in the federation might not be). It is the elders who decide if a person is able to profess his faith and come to the Table. If we, as elders, are not satisfied by an interview, we will not admit that person to the Table. There has been no change in our policy in this regard; it is the same policy that all the churches have agreed to follow, as stated in the Church Order.

Second, you point out that the Church Order, Art. 24, stresses that congregations “ought to preserve fellowship with each other.” We are grateful for this reminder of the need for maintaining and building bonds with our fellow United Reformed Churches and we desire to do so.

We do not believe, however, that to preserve fellowship all the churches must be completely uniform in their practices, even when those practices concern the sacraments. We already have a variety of practices in the federation. Some churches practice weekly Lord’s Supper, while others have it only four times a year. But all of us are uniform to this extent: we all have the Lord’s Supper at least once every three months. That degree of uniformity is all that we agreed to require of each other with regard to the frequency of the Supper (Church Order, Art. 46).

Likewise, there is a variety of practices with regard to the admission of visitors to the Supper. Some churches, including this congregation, would admit a member of a Baptist church to the Supper. Other churches in our federation would not. The only requirement in our Church Order is that the consistory be assured, as much as possible, of the guests’ “biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk” (Art. 45). Though there may be a variety of practices, all of the churches are seeking to be faithful to the Church Order and are uniform in practice as far as is required by the Church Order.

So, too, with regard to the age of profession of faith. Classis 2002 admitted into the federation a congregation in Tacoma which has permitted six year olds to profess their faith and come to the Table. If the classis had believed that such a practice was a violation of the church order, it would have said so, but it didn’t. Furthermore, if the classis had believed that such a practice was out of keeping with the requirements of Scripture or the Three Forms of Unity, it would have said so, but again it didn’t. In the letter sent to Tacoma, while urging the consistory to think through the issue

more carefully in light of the “more common age” in our churches, the committee appointed by the classis also said explicitly that “this is not strictly a Confessional matter.”

We already have a variety of practice in the federation, therefore, with regard to the age of profession of faith. That variety may cause some tensions. But it is not a violation of our unity as churches, nor should it be an obstacle to our fellowship as a federation, because all of us — even with our variety in practice — are in line with the Confessions and the Church Order. We may not be completely uniform on this issue, but we are as uniform as we have agreed to be in the Church Order. We are not allowed, as churches, to lord it over each other (Art. 65) — for instance, by requiring uniformity where the Church Order and Confessions do not.

Third, you point to the “long-standing tradition in Reformed Churches” of permitting people to profess their faith when they are in their later teens. You urge us to depart from that tradition only with great care and with the support of the other churches in our federation. Classis 2002’s decision to admit into the federation a church which practices younger profession of faith indicates to us that the churches in this classis do not believe that younger profession of faith violates the Confessions or the Church Order and that they do not see it as a barrier to fellowship and unity as a federation. It is our intention to abide by the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order and so to maintain fellowship with the other churches in this federation.

We appreciate your exhortation to be very careful in departing from a long-standing tradition. For this reason, we have invited men who have concerns to sit in on our council meetings and to discuss those concerns with us. If other ministers would like to meet with us to discuss this issue, we would be glad for them to do so. We are especially interested in hearing Scriptural or confessional arguments against younger profession of faith.

We recognize that, as a church member, you are not obligated to agree with the council on this issue. We do ask that you would continue to discuss this issue with us and especially that you would pray for us as we discuss it together as a council. We strongly hope that we can resolve our disagreements about younger profession of faith in a way that honours the Lord and builds up His church. Again, we are thankful that you took the time to write to us and to express your concerns and we look forward to further discussions with you.

May the Lord bless you richly in your upcoming marriage!

In Christ,

The Council of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, AB

Dick Barendregt, Chairman

John Barach, Clerk

APPENDIX 3: Mr. DDD’s Appeal to Classis Western Canada Spring 2003.

April 7, 2003

Classis Western Canada:

I am writing to you regarding a decision made by the council of Covenant Reformed Church of Grande Prairie.

On Feb. 3, 2003, the Council of the Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church announced that they were going to interview children as young as ten for Public Profession of Faith. Finding that objectionable, I wrote a letter to my Council stating my objection and the reasons for it. I asked them to reverse the decision.

I received a letter of response from my Council that stated that my reasons of objection were insufficient and that because of Classis's decision in 2002 to admit into the federation a church that practices younger profession of faith, Tacoma Washington, Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church is not violating the church order in their decision.

I now ask Classis Western Canada to sustain my objection regarding the decision of the Grande Prairie Covenant Reformed Church Council to interview children as young as ten for Public Profession of Faith and thus admission to the Lord's Table. My reasons of objection remain as stated in the letter I sent to my council on March 12, 2003. Please find this letter enclosed. Also enclosed is the letter I received from my council.

Regarding Classis 2002 decision to admit into the Federation a church that practices younger profession of Faith, as young as seven even to this day, I think that some clarification is needed to ensure that this practice does not continue.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this matter.

In Christ,
DDD

APPENDIX 4: Minutes of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003, Art. 42

Appeal from Grande Prairie Member DDD

Motion: to sustain the appeal of Mr. DDD PASSED

NOTE: the Right of Protest was exercised by the following delegates: Rev. John Barach, Mr. Dick Barendregt

APPENDIX 5: Minutes of Classis Western Canada 2002, Executive Session, Art. 2

A. Lynden Overture: Reception of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma.
The following overture is made and supported:

The council of the United Reformed Church of Lynden overtures Classis Western Canada to receive the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma into the federation of United Reformed Churches pending ratification at our upcoming synod (CO. Art.32).

ADOPTED

B. Motion is made and supported to urge the church to bring their practice to conformity to the church order on the issue of frequency of worship on Sunday and to instruct the committee previously appointed to convey this message.

APPENDIX 6: Minutes of Classis Western Canada 2002, General Session, Art. 42

A. Rev. Pols, representing the committee appointed to communicate the concerns of classis to Rev. EEE and the Tacoma church, reads the letter this committee drafted.

B. Motion is made and supported adopt the letter as read.

ADOPTED

APPENDIX 7: Letter from Classis Western Canada 2002 to Tacoma

To the Council of the Evangelical Reformed Church,

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We are pleased to inform you that your pastor, Rev. EEE, has sustained his *Colloquium Doctum*, and that the Evangelical Reformed Church has been accepted as a member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America. We warmly welcome you into this federation of Reformed Churches. We trust that this will be a mutually blessed relationship of church unity and cooperation.

A few matters of concern were discussed in relation to Rev. EEE's exam, and your application for membership in the URCNA. A committee was formed for the purpose of formulating these concerns so that they might be clearly communicated to you for your serious attention. The following matters were deemed most important.

Our requirements for candidacy and ordination of ministers in the URC involve knowledge of the original languages of Scripture. Although the *Colloquium Doctum* does not specify the need for such knowledge, classis is unanimous as to the importance of this for our ministers. In this connection, classis agreed to recommend that Rev. EEE take some courses in Greek and Hebrew. Without specifying where or how to pursue this study, we urge the Evangelical Reformed Church Council to assist and encourage him in this. Rev. EEE has shown himself to be a very capable student of Scripture, and we trust that he could make rapid progress in this area, and thus enhance his ability to faithfully administer God's Word among you. We also recommend that Rev. EEE receive some additional training in homiletics. We believe that a correspondence course through Mid-America Reformed Seminary or another faithful Reformed seminary would be of great value, particularly in the area of sermon structure and organization.

As to the congregation of Evangelical Reformed, it was noted that the present practice of an evening service only once a month is not in accord with our Church Order (Article 37). We urge you to bring your practice into conformity to this Article as soon as possible. Considerable attention was also given to your current practice of admitting children to the Lord's Supper upon their profession of faith. Although this is not strictly a Confessional matter, our churches generally regard children under twelve to be too young to make profession of faith. The mid to late teenage years is the more common age for profession of faith in the UR Churches. We recommend that you give further consideration to the reasons for requiring a more mature and well-informed confession of the Reformed Faith for admission to the Lord's Table.

The Lord willing, your entrance into the United Reformed Churches will be ratified at Synod 2004. We trust that in mean time, you will already enjoy the blessings of being one with us in church fellowship and cooperation. We hope that the above mentioned matters will serve for your help and progress in the faith as pastor and congregation. We look forward to hearing of such progress. We also wish to be of whatever help we can to that end.

Fraternally,

For classis Western Canada: Revs. Pols, Grotenhuis, Folkerts and Barach

Appeal 2: Grande Prairie, re: Extra-Confessional Statement

History: Classis Western Canada 2000 (Lynden) of the United Reformed Churches in North America adopted the following statement as advice given to Mr. GGG in the course of his candidacy exam: “The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper.” Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) adopted the following statement with regard to that decision:

This decision is not an “extra-confessional” statement that somehow has special status alongside of our Confessions. It is rather an affirmation of the Confessions themselves on a specific point of their teaching. Therefore, agreement with this teaching of our Confessions as recognized and affirmed by classis has a direct bearing on Confessional Subscription. Any candidates or officebearers who cannot affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity (Minutes, Article 34; see Appendix 1).

No grounds were adopted.

Appeal: The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta, appeals to Synod Calgary 2004 to declare that Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) erred in adopting its statement regarding the advice given to Mr. GGG (Minutes, Art. 34) and that this statement is therefore not binding on the churches or officebearers.

Grounds:

1. Procedure. This motion was not properly before the classis because it did not originate with a consistory, as required by the Church Order (Art. 25), nor was it part of an overture on the classis agenda, but instead was moved by a delegate. The delegates, therefore, did not have the opportunity to consider the statement prior to the classis.
2. Failure to Clarify: This statement was adopted following the adoption of an overture which called the classis to “clarify the status and function of the decision of Classis 2000 (Lynden) that ‘The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper’” (Minutes, Art. 34). The statement itself, however, does not *clarify* the status or function of the 2000 decision. Rather, it gives it a status that it didn’t originally have.

The issue of paedocommunion (or, perhaps more accurately, “covenant communion,” i.e., the admission of covenant members, including children, to the Table on the basis of their membership in the covenant and not on the basis of a profession of faith) was not properly before Classis Western Canada 2000 (Lynden), since it did not originate with a consistory (Church Order, Art. 25) nor was it on the classis’s agenda. It arose as a result of a question asked by Mr. GGG in the course of his candidacy examination. The statement adopted in response to his question (“The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper”) should therefore be viewed simply as *ad hoc* advice given to Mr. GGG.

The statement adopted by Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem), however, declares that this statement is now binding on all officebearers: “Any candidates or officebearers who cannot affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity” (Minutes, Article 34). This declaration gives the 2000 advice to Mr. GGG a new status and function in the churches of Classis Western Canada, and therefore is not a *clarification* but rather a *modification* of the status and function of the 2000 decision.

3. Imposition of a Confessional Interpretation. As officebearers and churches, we subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity (Church Order, Introduction). We have not, however, agreed to

subscribe to particular (extra-confessional) interpretations thereof. The decision of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem), however, makes a particular *interpretation* of the Three Forms binding on all officebearers and candidates for office and excludes men from office if they hold a different interpretation.

The decision is, therefore, a form of classical domination over the local church, requiring the churches and their officebearers to subscribe to *more* than what we have agreed to as members of this federation.

4. Wrong Understanding of the Three Forms of Unity. By making the advice given to Mr. GGG in 2000 (“The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper”) binding on all officebearers, the decision of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem), commits the churches and officebearers of Classis Western Canada to an *erroneous* interpretation of the Three Forms of Unity.

It is not the case that the Three Forms “exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper.” Rather, they *leave room* for differing views, including the view that members should be admitted to the Table on the basis of their membership in the covenant, apart from a profession of faith. As a federation of churches, we must also leave room for men to differ within confessional bounds.

A. Nowhere do the Three Forms of Unity refer to a profession of faith as a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s Supper.

B. *Belgic Confession*, Art. 35.

- (i) The BC states that the purpose of the supper is “to nourish and support those whom He [Christ] has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church.” If we take that purpose as indicating that only those who are regenerated (in the sense of CD III/IV, 11-12) may partake of the supper, then we have proved too much and we are forbidden to admit anyone to the Table unless we know for certain that he is regenerate in this sense. This purpose clause should not be taken to restrict participation in the Supper to those who are regenerate.

Furthermore, the infants of believers *are* already incorporated into the church (HC 74) and have received baptism which is the “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5; HC 71; cf. BC 34).

- (ii) The BC states that we receive the true body and blood of Christ for our benefit only when we partake in faith. It does not state that we must make a profession of faith first. Those who hold to paedocommunion would agree with the BC that one must come to the Table in faith and not in unbelief to benefit from partaking of the Supper.

- (iii) The BC says that, when we receive this sacrament, we are “keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior.” That statement, however, does not indicate that one must first have a mature knowledge of Christ or the gospel and have professed faith in Him prior to coming to the Table. The BC is not stipulating a requirement for partaking; rather, it is stating what happens when we do partake.

In the BC as in 1 Cor. 11:24, 25 (and parallels), the Supper is itself a memorial of Christ. The literal translation of the phrase in 1 Cor. 11:24, etc., is “Do this *for my memorial*.” Jesus isn’t saying, “You have to be able to remember first before you can partake.” Rather, He is saying, “Do this to remind God and yourselves of me.

Similarly, Passover was a memorial of the Exodus (Ex. 12:14),

designed to remind Israel of what God had done for her, but it didn't require participants to understand prior to partaking. Whole families partook together (Ex. 12:3-4, 21), even though not all the children would understand the meaning of the meal (Ex. 12:26-27). The meal's function as a memorial did not exclude those who didn't yet understand what was being memorialized.

- (iv) The BC says that, when we receive this sacrament, we are "making there confession of our faith and of the Christian religion." Again, this is not a requirement for partaking; it is rather what happens when we do partake.

The BC is reflecting 1 Cor. 11:26: Eating the bread and drinking the wine together at the Lord's Table is a proclamation of the Lord's death and is therefore a confession of faith. But the BC *doesn't* say that one must first make a "profession of faith" before partaking of the Table (which is itself a "confession of our faith"), any more than we require our children first to make a "profession of faith" before they are allowed to recite the Creed in church.

- (v) The BC says "No one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself." But the BC does not spell out what that examination entails. The BC is drawing on 1 Cor. 11:28, where examining (or better: "proving") oneself has the sense of making sure one is in a right relationship with Christ, and specifically, with His body, the church. Those who hold to paedocommunion would agree with the BC: No one ought to come to the Lord's Table without making sure that he is in a right relationship to Christ and His church.

C. *Heidelberg Catechism.*

- (i) It is sometimes argued that the Catechism presents baptism as *passive* (Q&A 69) and the Supper as *active* (Q&A 75) and that by doing so the Catechism is requiring a mature faith on the part of those who partake of the Supper. Those who hold to paedocommunion, however, would not deny that baptism is passive and the Supper active.

That distinction is found in the Old Covenant, too. Circumcision was passive and the feasts were active, and yet children were admitted to Passover (Ex. 12:3-4, 21) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:13, 14).

Furthermore, children who partake in the Table *are* being active: they are seeing, receiving, eating, drinking, and tasting (cf. Q&A 75). The active-passive distinction, therefore, does not exclude covenant children from the Table until they have first professed their faith.

- (ii) Q&A 81 asks, "For whom is the Lord's Supper instituted?" or, in some translations, "Who are to come to the Table of the Lord?" The answer speaks of those who are displeased with themselves for their sins, trust that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, and desire to strengthen their faith and amend their life — in short, believers. It also says that hypocrites and secretly unrepentant people eat and drink judgment to themselves. Q&A 82 then denies that those who are openly unbelieving and ungodly may also be admitted to the Table. Clearly, believers and hypocrites are to be admitted (Q&A 81) and the openly ungodly are not (Q&A 82).

Into which of these three categories do covenant children fall? At the very least, they are not openly unbelieving and ungodly and are therefore not explicitly excluded from the Table. Rather, it seems that either they are included in the first

category (“Believers”) or they are in a fourth category, which the Catechism doesn’t address. In either case, they are not clearly *excluded*.

- (iii) Furthermore, if we take Q&A 81 as saying that the only people who may be admitted to the Table are people who are able to articulate clearly their displeasure with their sins, their trust in Christ, and their desire to live a godly life — that is, if Q&A 81 is saying that a person must first make an articulate profession of faith before being admitted to the Table — then we must read Q&A 117 in the same way.

Q&A 117 indicates that “such prayer as God is pleased with and will hear” involves knowing our need and misery, calling on the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word, trusting that, though we are unworthy, God will hear us for Christ’s sake, and requesting what He has commanded us to ask for. The prayer God hears is *believing* prayer, prayer that involves a knowledge of our sin, a trust in Christ, and a desire to obey God — the very same things that Q&A 81 mentions. And yet, we do not maintain that our children must first be able to articulate these three things before we teach them to pray and we do not believe that their inarticulate prayers and “Amens” to our prayers are displeasing to God.

If Q&A 117 does not exclude non-professing children from prayer, then we must be consistent and affirm that Q&A 81 does not exclude non-professing children from the Table either. As with prayer, so with the Table: Those who come must come in faith, but the Catechism does not require an articulation of that faith prior to praying or being admitted to the Table.

D. *The Canons of Dort* do not address the issue.

E. Therefore, contrary to the advice given to Mr. GGG in 2000 and made binding on all officebearers and churches by Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem), the Three Forms of Unity do *not* “exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper.” Rather, they *leave room for differing views*, including the view that covenant members may be admitted to the Table on the basis of their membership in the covenant, apart from a profession of faith. The decision of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) binds officebearers and churches to an *interpretation* of the Three Forms rather than to the Three Forms themselves — and to an *incorrect* interpretation at that.

Done in Consistory, February 12, 2004

The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grande Prairie

Dick Barendregt, chairman

John Barach, clerk

APPENDIX 1: Minutes of Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem): Article 34

OVERTURE #1: Edmonton

Background: Classis 2000 (Lynden) ruled that “The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper.” The occasion of this decision was GGG’s admission of uncertainty regarding paedocommunion during his candidacy exam. Upon this decision of classis, GGG indicated that he could not then sign the Form of Subscription. Because of this, GGG did not sustain his examination. The judgment of Classis 2000 regarding the teaching of our Confessions on this point was made without dissent, and appeared to be a non-controversial statement of their obvious meaning. This was challenged two years later when GGG appealed the decision of Classis 2000, with

the support of his Consistory (Covenant Reformed URC of Grande Prairie). Classis 2002 (Ponoka) reaffirmed the judgment of 2000, answering GGG's appeal with arguments from the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. It has subsequently become clear that the issue of paedocommunion is unsettled and unsettling, at least among some of our churches. There remain issues needing clarification among us. For example:

1. Can officebearers in the URC properly sign the Form of Subscription while differing with the teaching of our Confessions as affirmed by Classis 2000?
2. The Consistory of Covenant Reformed URC of Grande Prairie, which supported GGG's appeal has thereby officially indicated disagreement with the decision of 2000 regarding the teaching of our Confessions on this matter. This Consistory has not yet chosen to appeal this decision (according to Article 29), nor has it indicated a change of thinking regarding the teaching of our Confessions on this matter. This raises the question of the settled and binding nature of this decision of a broader assembly and this Consistory's relationship thereto.

In view of the importance of this issue in our federation and the unresolved questions it has raised, the Consistory of The Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton submits the following overture.

Overture: The Consistory of The Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton requests Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) to clarify the status and function of the decision of Classis 2000 (Lynden) that “The Confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord's Supper.”

Grounds:

1. The unity of our churches in the faith requires agreement as to the proper recipients of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
2. The meaning of subscription to our Confessions may be jeopardized if differing interpretations of those Confessions are allowable on such important matters.
3. Adhering to our Church Order regarding the settled and binding nature of the decisions of broader assemblies (Article 29) is also at issue here.
4. Christian integrity and fairness requires consistency in the application of the Classis 2000 decision as it relates to currently serving and retired officebearers as well as to candidates to the ministry.

Motion: to adopt the Overture of The Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton

Motion: call for the question - PASSED

Motion: to adopt PASSED

Motion: that the following statement be received as a response of clarification.

“This decision is not an ‘extra-confessional’ statement that somehow has special status along side of our Confessions. It is rather an affirmation of the Confessions themselves on a specific point of their teaching. Therefore, agreement with this teaching of our Confessions as recognized and affirmed by classis has a direct bearing on Confessional Subscription. Any candidates or officebearers who cannot affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.”

Motion: to table that copies of this statement be made available for further review DEFEATED

Motion: to adopt this statement PASSED

NOTE: the Right of Protest was exercised by the following delegates:

Rev. John Barach, Mr. Dick Barendregt, Rev. Tim Kolkman, Mr. Henry Klooster

Appeal 3: Leduc, re: Extra-confessional Statement

Dear Brothers in the Lord:

The consistory of Grace Reformed Church of Leduc is appealing to Synod 2004 to judge that Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) erred in clarifying the status and function of the decision of Classis 2000 Lynden by adopting this statement: “the confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper”:

“This decision is not an “extra-confessional” statement that somehow has special status alongside of our Confessions. It is rather an affirmation of the Confessions themselves on a specific point of their teaching. Therefore, agreement with this teaching of our Confessions as recognized and affirmed by classis has a direct bearing on Confessional Subscription. Any candidates or officebearers who can’t affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.”

Our appeal (attached) is based on weighty matters such as this being improperly brought before lower assemblies and then made binding on all. We therefore wish to provide you with some background for the Appeal as presented.

Classis 2000 Western Canada - Lynden Washington

The issue of paedocommunion was first raised at this Classis. Mr. GGG after sustaining his candidacy exam, refused to sign the Form of Subscription based on his views of paedocommunion. This presented a number of concerns and came to Classis as a surprise as it became clear that Mr. GGG’s sponsoring church the Orthodox Reformed Church (URC) was fully aware of Mr. GGG’s position. As a result of the issue being brought forward at that time delegates had little time to deal with or examine the issue. A statement prepared by the Edmonton delegates (not appearing on the Agenda) was adopted. The statement adopted read “ That the confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper” A second motion was adopted stating “to have Mr. GGG’s church council call a Classis when he can subscribe to the Three Forms Of Unity”, the understanding of the majority of the delegates that Mr. GGG would work with the council of his sponsoring church to seek a resolution to his beliefs and then be admitted to candidacy. The decision was considered binding on Mr. GGG as it specifically addressed his concern, and subsequent inability to sign the Form of Subscription. For the majority of the delegates the matter was closed, and now became an issue to be dealt with by Mr. GGG and the Edmonton Church.

Classis 2001 Western Canada – Neerlandia Alberta

The issue was not formally discussed, however it was noted that Mr. GGG was planning to appeal the Classis 2000 decision.

Classis Western Canada 2002 – Ponoka Alberta

An appeal of the decision of Classis 2000 regarding paedocommunion by Mr. GGG was attached and circulated with the Agenda for Classis. The appeal was scheduled as the last item on the agenda. Article 45 of the official minutes of Classis 2002, indicates that prior to the appeal being heard, Rev. John Barach was replaced by Rev. J. Tuininga as the official delegate for Lethbridge. The appeal as attached to the circulated agenda is presented, however the appeal is not read, rather the

chairman gives a short summary of the appeal, due to time constraints (late in the afternoon of the last day, with several delegates needing to catch flights). After the appeal is presented the Edmonton delegates present a letter of response a copy of which had been sent to Mr. GGG, (not circulated with the agenda) and moved Classis adopt the letter as their official position. During the discussion concern was expressed by several delegates since the letter had not been circulated and therefore could not be studied by delegates and their councils that it was not properly before Classis. The concern was noted by the chair however the chair ruled that the letter was part of the appeal and therefore before Classis even though it had not been formally circulated. The Motion to adopt the letter was carried.

Classis Western Canada 2003 – Salem Oregon

The issue of paedo-communion and the decisions of Classis 2000 & 2002 were again placed on the agenda in the form of a number of overtures by several churches. It became clear that a number of delegates had a specific agenda when examining the candidates, that one of the delegates appealed to the chair to control the line of questioning and put an end to the tone of the examination. The chair upheld the appeal and cautioned delegates to temper their questioning in both tone and substance. An overture was then presented from the Orthodox Reformed Church In Edmonton requesting a further clarification of the decisions of Classis 2000 & 2002. The overture was presented due to the fact that a church within the Classis had interviewed members as young as 10 in response to request by those members for participation. Although the church had interviewed these younger members they had not made a decision to accept them, and certainly indicated they would not be accepted without a formal Profession of Faith. (Article 34 of the official minutes) presents the overture by Edmonton to further clarify the decision of Classis 2000 & 2002. An appeal was made on the floor of Classis that the issue had now become divisive and to make a further declaration of this nature required Biblical study and should not be made hastily, as well it was noted that it should be referred to consistories for study and input. The appeal was dismissed and the overture as presented was carried. Rev. Pols from the URC Edmonton then read a statement he had prepared and made a subsequent motion for the adoption of that statement. The statement as presented (Article 34 of the official minutes) took the decision of Classis one step further and now called into question all office-bearers and candidates that did not wholeheartedly affirm the decisions of Classis, and questioned the stand of Classis based on a need to biblically examine the issue. A number of objections were raised from the floor citing several grounds for protest. Firstly the statement was not properly before the body as it had not been circulated, and secondly the statement and the motion originated with a delegate at Classis and not from a consistory (CO Article 25), and thirdly the statement appeared to improperly bind the conscience of all who questioned the validity of the decision. A motion was subsequently made to table the original motion and to make it available for review by consistories, or at the very least to recess Classis so the delegates could review the statement in detail. That motion was defeated. The chair was then challenged on the basis of the statement not being properly before the body.(Not noted in the minutes) The challenge to the chair was then defeated, and the question was called. The motion to adopt the statement as presented by the Edmonton delegate was carried with several delegates exercising the Right of Protest.

As a result of the adoption of the statement presented by the Edmonton delegate at Classis 2003 a sharp division within Classis has become evident. Several consistories within the Classis have also made decision to not allow other pastors in the Classis to preach in their churches.

We do not wish to editorialize brothers, but rather present a summary of the facts as reflected in the minutes as background for our appeal. An appeal based on procedure, and not on the basis of a stance for or against paedo-communion.

Appeal: We hereby appeal to Synod 2004 of the URCNA to judge that Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) erred in clarifying the status and function of the decision of Classis 2000 Lynden by adopting this statement: “the confessions exclude non-professing members from participating in the Lord’s Supper and to declare it to be null and void because:

1. The way the recent meetings of Classis Western Canada accomplished this decision goes against art. 25 of our church order which requires “all such matters shall originate with a consistory.”
 - A. The issue of Mr. GGG’s beliefs concerning paedocommunion was not communicated in the agenda of Classis 2000 (Lynden) or by his consistory at Classis before the candidacy exam resulting in a surprise at Classis.
 - B. The paper adopted by Classis Western Canada 2002 (Ponoka) was not properly brought before Classis in that it was not in the agenda therefore it does not allow the churches to discuss a paper of such length in a meaningful way. Such work belongs in consistory and is difficult to do on the floor of Classis.
 - C. The statement adopted by Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) in response to Edmonton’s request for clarification of Classis 2000 decision again was not in the agenda and thus was not properly brought to Classis.
 - D. Classis Western Canada 2003 (Salem) denied tabling the adopted statement for a specific time in order to allow delegates from the consistories to discuss the statement among themselves showing a disregard for the intent of art. 25.
 - E. Classis Salem denied the frequent appeals from the floor to follow this article of our church order indicating that there was a mentality of trying to squash this issue and any who hold to it without doing the work of a proper Biblical Study.
2. This decision is not following the fundamental principle of our church order that we do everything decently and in good order (1 Cor. 14:40). On this issue Classis 2000 (Lynden), 2002 (Ponoka), and 2003 (Salem) made decisions that do not follow good order. The decisions of Classis Western Canada must follow the objectivity of the Church order and the rules of procedure in order to deal properly with this issue.
3. The recent decisions Classis Western Canada concerning this issue have led to a diminished unity of our Classis. The unity of Classis has suffered to the point that some ministers in the URC will not preach in other URC churches or other URC ministers are not allowed in URC Pulpits!
4. The decisions made concerning the issue raised with Mr. GGG’s candidacy exam have kept the issue from being a Biblical study and have left the issue in the realm of the confessions and opinions.
5. What has happened in the last few meetings of Classis Western Canada is that the consciences of some were forced upon others violating the principle that the Lord alone is the Lord of the conscience. (Col. 2:20-23; Ro. 14:4; James 4:12, WCF 20.2).

The decisions have required men to bind themselves to an interpretation of the confessions which borders on lording it over one another. (1 Peter 5:3).
6. We see the recent decisions as a danger in the light of church history. History has taught us, especially with the liberated church in the Netherlands, that settling such weighty matters by the muscle of Classical or Synodical decisions leads to the demolition of church unity.

Done in Consistory February 04, 2004

Rev. Tim Kolkman (Chairman)

Elder Henry Klooster (Clerk)

Appeal 4: The Text of the New Testament

March-17-2004

Dear Pastor DeJong:

Classis Southwest U.S, meeting on March 17-18, 2003 in Escondido, California declined to sustain my appeal regarding the Greek text of the New Testament, (see minutes of Classis Article 37). The ground for doing so was void of scriptural and reformed doctrinal justifications, neither did it address the main subject of my grievance, which is: God instituted and authorized the successive copies for the delivery of the divine Scripture to all successive generations. The Greek text of the successive copies for the New Testament commonly came to be known as the Received Text. This text alone (never can be more than one) is the pure, authentic, and authoritative text of the Scripture, which was so received by all the churches of the Protestant Reformation and the Reformed churches confessed it as the one pure and authentic text of the Scripture.

I was informed as to my right to appeal to Synod, which privilege I now choose to use. I hereby appeal to Synod Calgary 2004 to declare that Classis Southwest US, meeting on March 17-18, 2003, erred in denying my appeal regarding the Greek text of the New Testament. With all due respect I plead before Synod to review and accept the appeal, and make known to the churches the necessity to comply with the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions regarding the authorized by God successive copies.

Pastor DeJong, here is included the same text of the grievance that was submitted to Classis Southwest, please submit it to the Synod.

CONTENTS:

1. Introduction
2. Grievance
3. Scriptural and confessional articles of the faith that testify only of one true text, The Received Text.
4. The textual criticism of the Bible.

I also would like to submit four (4) additional articles which will contribute for a more clear and distinct understanding of the grievance:

5. The testimony of the Scripture to the authority of the successive copies.
6. The delivered and received text is the all assuring witness of the Holy Spirit to the one true text.
7. The revelation of God: inspired, delivered, and received.
8. The origin and authority of the received text.

Greetings in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

FFF

1. Introduction

According to Scriptures themselves, most fundamental is the fact, that they are abiding throughout time in their purity and entirety. Deu. 29.29, Isa. 48.8; 59.21, Mat. 24.25. They continue, uninterrupted, to be the ultimate standard and authority of the Christian faith. By the Scriptures all

things are judged, but no one and nothing judges them and they emphatically and uncompromisingly insist on this fact. II Tim 3. 16-17, Rev 22. 18-19, Pro. 30.5-6.

A text that admittedly is not true and authentic, and rivals against the true text of the Scriptures, on the fictitious and false accusation basis, namely that both are not true texts, by definition disqualifies itself. The suggestion that a corrupt text could be the authority of God at once constitutes heresy, and profanes the Word of God, void of any authority to bind the conscience of God's people. No corrupt text can ever be considered to be the Word of God, and no corrupt text can be admitted to be the standard of truth for the church of Christ.

The true text by its own declaration, and uninterrupted continuity, and abiding presence in the true universal church is the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit that this is His Word, which is the continuous and abiding standard in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of being the Word of God, the truth.

All other texts are void of and in violation of the Scripture's own confirming witness and evidence, and universal presence and acceptance in the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, all the manifestations and confirmations of the Holy Spirit in the other texts are none existent, and contrary to Scripture's own declaration of how it manifests itself to be the Word of God in the divine process of delivering and receiving the true text in all successive generations.

The Holy Spirit inspired only one authoritative text, He delivered only this text in the successive copies of that text, and He enlightened the true church to receive only this text in all successive generations. There is no room for, and there is no need for any other text, in fact, that is an idolatrous suggestion.

The one true text of the Scriptures (The Received Text) was delivered to and received by all the churches of the Protestant Reformation, this is an absolute historical fact. The Reformed Church in Geneva was the church foremost involved in that process, as well as all the other true churches, and the numerous Reformed centers and academies throughout Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean region. All the Reformed confessions declare that this is the one true, authentic, and authoritative text. All of the Reformed confessions are based upon this text alone, and they reject all other texts on the basis of this text alone. To deny this text and to introduce new unauthentic, void of authority texts in the church is a clear violation of the Reformed confessions, and the historic Christian faith. That of course includes all translations of these texts.

These central to the Reformed faith, Scriptural, confessional and historical facts are rarely taught or known in our churches.

2. Grievance

A plea for a return to the historic Christian and Reformed confession.

Subject matter: The doctrine of delivering and receiving the holy and divine Scriptures, which are the revelation of our God.

The areas of concern in which scriptures and confessions have been denied, and our unity and continuity in the historic Christian and Reformed faith violated.

1. It is contrary to the scriptures and the reformed confessions, to declare or use the divine text as if the text of the Scripture became corrupted as soon as a single copy was made from the autograph and progressively worse as time went on, therefore the authentic text permanently lost.

This behavior in the church clearly negates the authority and dignity of the Scriptures and is

destructive to the Christian faith.

According to Scriptures the true authentic text will be always with the church of the Lord Jesus, in one and the same text, as it was in all successive generations.

The all-able, and unfathomable providence of the Holy Spirit, the command and promise of God preserve the truthfulness, faithfulness, completeness, and purity of the scriptures. Deu. 4.2, 29.29, Isa. 30.8, 59.21, Mat. 24.35, Rev. 21.5, 22.18-19.

(See Reformed Confessions quoted below).

2. The Reformed churches in their confessions did not confess a text that they did not receive, nor did they confess some theoretical text that at one time was pure and complete, but since the days of old no longer exists. The text that they did confess as authentic, pure, and authoritative, is that very same text that they did receive, which is abundantly demonstrated in the Greek text they printed, which text they copied from the authentic text of the manuscripts (copies), and in the translations of the Bible that they made from this text. The text that they quoted, and based all the Reformed confession upon is that same text. This text was to them and continues to be for us the pure word of God, fundamental for our Reformed, Christian and scriptural unity.
(See Reformed Confessions quoted below).
3. Who authorized, delivered, received, all this new texts, which by their own admissions of their fabricators are corrupt texts?
(See Reformed Confessions below)
4. By what authority the text (the Received Text) that the Reformed churches received and confessed as the pure authentic and authoritative Word of God, delivered and received since the days of the apostles by the true church, which text we inherited from them, sadly now is declared by many in the churches, corrupted and unauthentic?
(See Reformed Confessions below).
5. All these activities profane the Word of God, creating great doubts among God's people, shame, and discredit the truth of God before those outside the household of faith.

Reformed Confessions

- The Belgic Confession, A.D. 1561

Article III: The Written Word of God: We confess that this Word of God was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man, ... Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

Article IV: We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.

Article V: Whence the Holy Scriptures Derive Their Dignity and Authority: We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and because they carry the evidence thereof in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.

Article VII: ... Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy this men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of time and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; *for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself*. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us saying, *Prove the spirits, whether they are of God*. Likewise: If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into you house.

Article XXIX: If all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary

thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church

- Heidelberg Catechism, A.D. 1563

21. Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, ...

- Westminster Confession, A.D. 1647 Chap. I . *Of the Holy Scripture.*

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.

X . The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

- The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566.

Chapter I. Of the Holy Scriptures Being the True Word of God ... We therefore detest all the heresies of Artemon, the Manichans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon, and the Marcionites, who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Spirit; or else received not, or interpolated and corrupted, some of them.

- Calvin's Institutes, Book I, Chap. 6, 7, 8,

... A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed – viz. That Scripture is of importance only insofar as conceded to it by the suffrage of the church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that *this* book is to be received with reverence, and *that one expunged from the list*, did not the church regulate all this things with certainty? ... Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, than power of judging Scripture is in the church, and that on her nod it certainty depends. When the church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful, or controverted, but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating ascend.

... Truth so well founded so firmly established, so gloriously renowned, and handed down by sure succession from the days of the apostles. But he nowhere insinuates that the authority that we give to the Scriptures depends upon the definitions or devices of men....

Add, moreover, that, for the best of reasons, the consent of the Church is not without its weight. ... Being transmitted to us with such an earnest, who of us shall not receive it with firm and unshaken conviction? It is therefore no small proof of the authority of Scripture, that it was sealed with the blood of so many witnesses, especially when it is considered in bearing testimony to the faith, they met death, not with fanatical enthusiasm (as erring spirits are sometimes wont to do), but with firm and constant, yet sober godly zeal.

- Second Antiochian Confession, A.D. 275 – 300

If a man teaches or preaches anything else contrary to what we have received let him be accursed. For we truly and clearly both believe, and follow all things from the Holy Scriptures, that have been delivered to us by the prophets and apostles.

- Athanasius

But I have also thought it necessary to inform you of the fact, that Bishops have succeeded those who have fallen asleep. In Tanis, instead of Elias, is Theodorus. In Arsenotis, (list continues) so that to these you may write, and from these receive the canonical Letters. 340 A.D.

... But since we have made mention of heretics as that, but ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures ... the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Cannon, handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that anyone that has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance. (the names of the Old and New Testament books listed). These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take out from these.

367 A.D.

3. Scriptural and Confessional Articles of Faith that Testify Only of One True Text, the Received Text.

The witness of God is greater than the witness of man, in the decisive role and efficacy in making copies of the Scriptures.

Article 1. The revelation of God to His people and the inscribing and copying of the same, the delivering to, and receiving it by God's covenant people, in each and every successive generation, throughout the Old and New Testament period, is one integral and divine process, instituted and commanded by God Himself, in which God graciously, and faithfully fulfills His covenant promises to His people.

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deu. 29.29

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever. Isa. 59.21

Now to Him that is of power establish according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began. But now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the

everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of the faith. To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. Rom. 16.25-26

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Mat. 28.19-20

Article II. God commanded that copies of the holy and divine Scriptures are made for the instruction, propagation, and preservation of the faith through all successive generations, this process being instituted and carried out by God is therefore divine. Deu. 17.18; 31.9-13; 27.1-8; 8.6-8; Ac. 13.15; 15.21; Luk. 4.16-17; Rev. 1.3,11.

Article III. According to the Scriptures the text of these copies are as authentic and as authoritative as the autographs themselves, therefore holy and divine. Scrpts. Same as for Article II.

Article IV. The divine process by which the Word of God is delivered to, and received by each and every successive generation is accomplished by successive copies, according to the record of the Scriptures themselves. For we dare not impose upon the divine process and methodology, nor question its efficacy and accuracy. Making copies of the Scriptures does not necessitate error, but it is the God-given way of preserving the purity of the Scriptures.

Let us not forget that our God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself read the Scriptures from a copy, and declared that which was written, copied, and delivered to His own generation to be the very Word of God that cannot be broken. All this divinely instituted process uninterruptedly continues throughout the Old and the New Testament period. Lk. 4:15-17, Acts 15:21; Job. 40. 6-14, 42. 3-6, Isa. 43.8-9; 44. 25-26, Rom. 3. 2-4.

Article V. The making and keeping of copies of the holy and divine Scriptures in clear and plain to read script is required by the command of God, therefore it would be against His command for the church to keep worn-out copies. Antiquity is not a scriptural aspiration for the preservation of the text, but clarity is. An unclear, illegible and intermittently destroyed text confuses and profanes the Word of God, and thus ceases to be the Word of God. New copy does not make the text new and different, nor does old copy make the text more trustworthy. God does not require from His church to keep old copies, but to keep the same authentic, pure, and authoritative text. According to the Scriptures this task is accomplished by making many copies, and continuously replacing the worn out ones in every synagogue and church throughout the Old and New Testament periods. The more faithful copies are made, the better the text is preserved, and made known, His people are blessed by reading and hearing the Word of God. The only way to avoid confusion is to dispose the illegible copies, and make new copies, the process of successive and time-wise overlapping copies assures an accurate transmission. Old copy does not mean true copy, a steady and continuous stream of faithful copies is what we expect from the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures. Deu. 17.18, 27.8, Hab. 2.2, I Cor. 14.7-11, 33, Acts 13.15, 15.21.

Article VI. The text of the Scriptures, which the churches of the Protestant Reformation received, was part of that same covenant succession of delivering, and receiving of the pure and complete Scripture.

The text of the divine Scriptures, which the Reformed doctrinal standards confess, and the churches have received, is the authentic and authoritative text that God has revealed and delivered to the churches in its entirety, and in its purity, in the successive copies to each and every generation, one and the same text. This text commonly has been called through the years, the canonical Letters, Canonical books, Antiochian text, Traditional text, Byzantine text, Basel's text*, Stephanos text,

Received text, Majority text, etc. But to the historic Christian church, and that of course includes all the churches of the Protestant Reformation, and to us, the heirs of this same faith; simply, totally, and absolutely, is the very Word of God, the Scriptures, the Bible. This text of the Scriptures we have received from the Reformed churches, which we read, and acknowledge with them as the pure and complete revelation of God to His people. Against this text nothing can be alleged (Belgic confession, Article IV). Having been revealed, delivered, and received by the will, and intended purpose and saving grace of God. Therefore known and read to us, and by us, in its entirety, and confessed to be the very word of God in every word, what Scripture says is what God says, and it cannot be broken, but remains the pure and complete revelation of God to His people. This text alone is the complete, authentical, and authoritative rule to us, in faith and life, by this text alone is our conscience bound, our hope entrusted, and our children instructed in each and every generation, and so we worship the God of our fathers, believing all things that are written therein. We with all the churches of the Protestant Reformation, and the historic Christian faith, reject all other texts to be of any divine authority.

We confess and reaffirm with one voice with the Reformed confessions and the churches of the Protestant Reformation that the text which all the churches of the Protestant Reformation received is the authentical, and authoritative text of the Scriptures, being delivered to them by the faithful churches, (who also both worked towards, and joint the Reformation) from the churches of the Eastern Mediterranean region, to whom the copies of the divine and inspired Scriptures had been delivered, and entrusted since the days of the apostles. This text the Reformed churches received from them as the authentical and authoritative text of the Holy Scriptures, and upon the basis of this text all our Reformed Confessions derive their authority, in which we have our Christian unity. Apart from that text our confessions and unity has no credence.

To teach or preach otherwise is contrary to our Reformed heritage and confessions, in fact, the heritage of the historic Christian faith.

Article VII. The lively oracles of God, the Scriptures, are entrusted to the true church, the elect covenant people of God, and to their posterity. The truth of the Scriptures is not established by any succession or tradition, but the power of the Scriptures establishes itself in the true church and in faithful receiving and keeping of the truth by God's grace, from one generation to the next, in continuous tradition by the elect covenant people of God. Therein God's covenant faithfulness and truth makes itself known in the God-given and established tradition. *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.* " *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*" *I Thes. 2.13-14, II Thes. 2.15.* Therefore they are "*the church of the living God, the pillar and grounder of the truth*" "*Who received the lively oracles to give them unto us*" *I Tim. 3.15, Acts 7.38. Deu. 29.29; Deu. 31.9-13; Psm. 78.1-8, Isa. 59.21; Acts 7.38; Rom. 3.2-4; I Tim. 3.15, Lk. 1.1-4, Lk.4.16-17, Eph. 2.20-22.*

Article VIII. Any additions and deletions from the one true text as defined above, though it is done in the cause of text improvement, or whatever reason or cause, always constitutes change of the divine text, therefore it is a most serious violation of the commandment. Deu. 4:2, Prv. 30. 5-6, Rev. 22: 18-19.

Article IX. God is equally concerned for all portions of His Word, and bestows equal care for the preservation of all parts of the Scriptures, without discrimination of more important and less

important, nor for that fact does error discriminate but hits and destroys recklessly and senselessly. Mat. 5.17-19.

Article X. According to the Scriptures our assurance that true and complete copies are possible is due to the continuous, unfathomable, and all-able providential guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Article XI. The making and existence of corrupt and profane copies does not off-set the process and witness of God in the successive copies being received in each and every successive generation, one and the same text, true, authentic, complete, and authoritative. When the Scriptures are perverted by changing the text, as so many now do, it is not because there is something wrong with the divine process. In fact the scriptures themselves warns us of this heretical developments, but at the same time points us to their own record to bring correction and restoration, assuring us that the true text will be always with us according to the commandment and promise of God Rev 21.5, Isa. 59 .21, to expose and to prove them to be a false, lying, and perverted counterfeits. Prov. 30.5-6, II Tim. 3. 16-17. Corruption and errors creep in when wicked, unbelieving, and disobedient men change, add, or take away from the words of the true copies, as so many do today, under the disguise that these new texts of the Bible are better and superior. All these schemes from unscriptural sources never were able nor it is possible to displace the uninterrupted process of God, delivering His pure Word, the Scriptures, to His people. But God frequently through out history exposes, shames, and frustrates their destructive ways, and they come and they go, but never were able to demonstrate establish any textual uniformity and continuity, acceptance in the universal church, the more apostate and liberal the church the more eager to receive and promote these new texts.

“Thus saith the LORD thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers.” Isa 44. 24-26.

Definition of terms: “Textus Receptus” (Lat., The Received Text) The authentic and authoritative Greek text (The Greek language is the authentic language of the New Testament) that was put into printing form in Basel* 1516, and Geneva 1550, copied from the authentic and authoritative Greek Manuscripts (manuscripts, meaning hand written copies) that were delivered to, and received by the churches of the Protestant Reformation from the churches in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This text has been confessed by the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ since the days of the Apostles, and this is the one true authentic and authoritative text of God.

It is neither scriptural, nor expedient to obscure the name and work of Johannes Oecolampadius, that blessed reformer, and the great work that he did, in regard to the scriptures being made available to the church.

This text popularly is known as the Erasmus text, but we must “ *give honor to whom honor*” is due. Erasmus neither was the printer, nor the sponsor of the New Testament printed Greek text, nor was it his idea, all this were the efforts and means of Johann Froben, the printer from Basel. The person responsible for the critical work of the Greek text was Johannes Oecolampadius, if anyone is to be credited for the printed Greek text it should be him, this great reformer, preacher, and pillar of the Reformation, from Basel. Oecolampadius relation to Erasmus, was much like that of King David to king Saul.

4. The Textual Criticism of the Bible

The textual criticism of the Scriptures, is a self-appointed discipline, the practitioner of this discipline presupposes that all copies of the Holy Scriptures are corrupt, due to the imperfection of mankind, claiming that as soon as men makes a hand written copy of autograph mistakes and corruption are inevitable. They deliberately disregard the role of the Holy Spirit the author and Lord of the Divine Scriptures, of whose decisive role the Scriptures teach so clearly. To them it makes no difference whether these are the words of God, or the words of men, both get the same treatment. The textual critic's task is to restore the copies that exist, as close to the autographs as possible. His prerequisite for this self appointed task, void from any scriptural call and authority, is not to use any biblical guidance in this work in order to avoid scriptural presuppositions of how the text is delivered, received, and kept pure according to the command of God. Rather he engages himself in an art-like and guessing-type of work, of what possibly the author might have had in mind. He frequently changes his methodology, never sure of what the text is, and his conclusions are as variable as his personal guesses and preferences are, changing, removing and adding thousands of words, sentences, verses and many times entire passages, all this perverted activity subject to change at any time. Assuring and achieving one thing alone, that the word of God cannot be trusted, and they can change it as it deems right to them. So distant is he from the actual autograph of the Scripture, that if the very autograph is placed before him, that is quite different from his newly derived text, and he is not aware that this is the autograph of the Holy Scripture, he can easily dismiss the autograph of the Scripture, and prefer his own made text. This complete uncertainty as to what the Word of God is, is commonly acknowledged among them.

The textual biblical critic is not a Bible translator, neither is he responsible for the periodic update of the syntax of the Scripture due to the transition of the authentical languages of the Scriptures from ancient to modern script. All this work is within the science of linguists, philologists, and above all eloquent faithful to the Scriptures Christian teachers, frequently called theologians. By far most of this work has been done a long time ago, but especially during the time of the Protestant Reformation. These works were of great need, and the Lord most wonderfully provided to His church in so great a measure as never before, nor after has been seen in the church.

Textual criticism has no authority to bind the conscience of the Christian as regard to what the text of the Scriptures is, nor how it is delivered to and received by the churches, nor how its purity is protected and proved. In all activities, modern and post-modern textual criticism belittles, ridicules and dismisses the authority of the Reformed Confessions on this fundamental article of our faith. Much more, they deny every scriptural guiding principle on this matter, deceiving and leading the church into the sphere of unbelief. Profaning the Word of God, calling it corrupt, lost, unauthentic and unauthoritative, bringing many Christians and churches into the state of confusion as to what exactly the Word of God is. Creating continually suspicions and distrust in the Word of God, thus profaning and voiding the authority of the Scriptures.

Textual criticism of the Bible is very rapidly becoming a new, diverse, and perverted form of revelation, trespassing the limits of divine revelation, and reducing the Word of God to the level of the devices of men, being self authorized in this dubious activity, contradictions, additions, deletions, in, to, and from the Word of God.

5. The Testimonies of the Scriptures to the Authority of the Successive Copies.

The successive copies being immediately instituted and authorized by God are the divine Scripture by which the pure and authentic text of the Scripture according to the command of God is delivered to, and received by the true church in all ages.

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law...” Deu 29.29

“And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them. That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or the left” Deu. 17:18-20

“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth, and forever.” Isa. 59:21.

“...our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:” Act.7:38

“...the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day...” Act.13:27

“For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.” Act.15:21

“What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?” I Cor.14:36.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe. For you brethren became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.” I Ths. 2:13-14.

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” II Tim. 3:14-17.

As soon as God originated the written revelation, He also instituted and incorporated the successive copies. They were authorized by God as the trusted, truthful, and continuous record of His all-inspired Scripture, God extending to them the same trust and authority as to the autograph (the first writ). The successive copies were authorized by God to deliver and to make the authentic text of the Scripture accessible and profitable for His covenant people in all successive generations, that is clearly declared by the Scripture, and confessed by the historic Christian and Reformed faith. The successive copies did not originate by the will of man, but by the explicit command and all wise counsel of God. Therefore, this process is beyond any criticism.

Both the autograph and the copy occupy a vital and unique place in the process by which God chose to deliver His written Word to His people, the successive copies by the command of God have their origin from the autograph, the autograph has its God decreed and promised continuity and accessibility for all of God’s people by the successive copies. In the process that God was pleased to use, He never intended the autograph alone to be His written revelation to His people, for it is impossible His written Word to be delivered and made known to His people apart from the successive copies, in fact revelation would cease.

God does not hold the authentic text of the Scripture captive by the material upon which it was first written. The authentic, inspired by God text does not corrupt and perish because the material upon which it was first written decayed and perished. But long before that began to take place, the inspired text, according to the command of God, was living and residing with God's people in the successive copies. As soon as God originated His written revelation, according to His command was extended the same trust and authority in every word and all the words to the copy (the duplicate) as to the autograph (the first writ). Thereafter the testimony of the Scripture, invariably and consistently does not at any time differentiate between the text in the autograph and the text in the successive copies, in terms of trust, truthfulness, purity, completeness, authenticity and authority. The Scriptural comparison between, Deu. 29:29 and 17:18-20, shown below is clear proof of it, as well as the quotations that follow after.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law...” Deu 29:29

“... write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them.... that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or the left” Deu. 17:18-20

“These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the man of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.” Prv.25:1

“Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read.” Isa.34:16

“It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. ” Mat. 4:4

“have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying” Mat.22:31

“And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written” Lk.4:17

“sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet” Act.8:28

“Searched the scriptures daily” Act. 17:11

“The scripture cannot be broken” Jon. 10:35

“The scripture says” Rom. 10:11

“Does God take care for oxen?

Or saith He it altogether for our sake?

For our sakes no doubt, this is written” I Cor. 9:10

“According to the scripture” I Cor. 15:3, 4

“And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures... All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...” II Tim. 3:16

In all of these instances and many more, the Scripture in reference to itself clearly refers to the successive copies. The Lord Jesus Himself, and His holy apostles and prophets were fully aware that when they spoke in reference to the Scripture, that the Scripture they read, quoted, and put forth as the all inspired by God Scripture was delivered to them by the successive copies. Making copies of the holy Scripture was commonly known among the people of God, and we have every reason to believe that many times they witnessed this process. The prophets and the apostles frequently employed the faithful scribes of the Lord for the recording of the Scripture, Jer. 36:32, Ezz.7:6, 11, Rom. 16:22, Mat.23:34. Every Synagogue (thousands of them Mic. 5:2) Act. 15:21, 13:27, as well as individuals, possessed copies of the holy Scriptures. Act. 8:32.

According to the testimonies of the Scripture, the successive copies are the authentic and authorized by God Scripture.

The Scripture of the successive copies which the Lord Jesus read, and the people of God read, is the Scripture which the Lord declared that it cannot be broken, according to the command of God all words in them must be obeyed. Deu. 17:18-19. Therefore the successive copies are free from any deception and error (“error” as defined by the Scriptures); kept pure by the singular and all-able providential care of the Holy Spirit, therefore authentic and all authoritative. The text in the autograph and in the successive copies does not constitute two texts; a superior and inferior one, but one and the same inspired text, given in the autograph, and delivered to all God’s people by the successive copies throughout the Old and New Testament age, according to the command and covenant of God. Ps. 119:160, Isa.59:21, Act.7:38, 13:27, II Tim.3:14-17.

The declarations of the Scripture: “*it is written*” Mat. 4:4, “*who received the lively oracles to give unto us*” Act.7:38”, “*unto them were committed the oracles of God.*” Rom. 3:2, “*so worship I the God of my Fathers believing all things which are written*” Act.24:14, “*have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying*” Mat. 22:31. “*the scripture cannot be broken*” Jn. 10:35, “*from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures...*” II Tim.3:14-17, etc. These testimonies of the Holy Spirit in the Scripture as well as many more consistently reveal that the successive copies were received by the people of God as the very Word of God. We are compelled by the testimonies of the Scripture and the command of God to receive the successive copies as the authentic, authorized Scripture of God, and at no time we are to receive them in any other way. They are the lively oracles of God spoken unto us by God. Deu.17:18-20, Act.7:38, Rom.3:2, Mat.22:31.

The eternal and inviolable revealed truth of God, depends not on the will of men, the authentic text of the delivered and revealed Scripture can not be restricted to the duration of the material upon which it was first written, in this case the authority of the Scripture which requires a sincere, complete trust and active obedience to all the words that are written and read, will be abrogated, allowing room for distrust, rejection and, confusion, negating its power to bless, bring comfort and conformity to those who read and hear the Word of God.

The Spirit of the LORD blows as He wills, and to the purposes He desires to achieve. He alone decides and decrees what will wither, fade, fall, and perish, and what will live, stand, and abide forever. Isa. 40:6-8. To believe that the written Word of God began to wither and decay as soon as the material upon which it was first written, began to wither and decay, and that is impossible to make accurate copies, therefore the written Word by God, corrupt and broken, such a teaching violates everything that the Scriptures have to say to this end of themselves. According to the Scripture itself the successive copies are the Word of God to His people. The all inspired by God Scripture, for the purpose that it was given; is uninterruptedly abiding and standing in the true church of the Lord Jesus throughout all successive generation, delivered by the authorized of God successive copies. Deu. 29:29, 17:18-20, Ps. 119:152,160, Mat. 5:18-19, Act.24:14, I Tim 3:15.

It is an appalling thought that God has left the Scripture in a state were men with their whimsical, impure, and subjective demands, are to determine what within the Scripture is false and of none effect, and what is the true Word of God. By that very same action the Word of God is made of none effect, void, Lordless, and by that very same action their dishonor for the Word of God is manifested. Mk. 7:13; Rom. 3:17. And even if one believes the Scriptures because of the verdict of men and not because what the Scripture says, may he heed the warnings of our fathers in the faith, Martin Luther and John Calvin, who have these words for that kind of faith:

“May the devil thank you for believing it“ Martin Luther.

“It is shocking blasphemy to say that God’s Word is uncertain until it obtains a certainty borrowed from men.” John Calvin.

- Calvin's Institutes, Book I, Chap. 6,7,8.

... A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed – viz. That Scripture is of importance only insofar as conceded to it by the suffrage of the church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that this book is to be received with reverence, and that one expunged from the list, did not the church regulate all this things with certainty? ... Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, than power of judging Scripture is in the church, and that on her nod it certainty depends. When the church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful, or controverted, but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating ascend.

... - Truth so well founded so firmly established, so gloriously renowned, and handed down by sure succession from the days of the apostles. But he nowhere insinuates that the authority that we give to the Scriptures depends upon the definitions or devices of men....

Add, moreover, that, for the best of reasons, the consent of the Church is not without its weight. ... Being transmitted to us with such an earnest, who of us shall not receive it with firm and unshaken conviction? It is therefore no small proof of the authority of Scripture, that it was sealed with the blood of so many witnesses, especially when it is considered in bearing testimony to the faith, they met death, not with fanatical enthusiasm (as erring spirits are sometimes wont to do), but with firm and constant, yet sober godly zeal.

- Belgic Confession, V & IV, XXIX.

“We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them...against which nothing can be alleged.”

“ If all things are managed according to the pure word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church “

- Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap.I.VIII.

“...(the Scriptures) being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.

- The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566.

Chapter I. - Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God.... We therefore detest all the heresies of Artemon, the Manichans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon, and the Marcionites, who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Spirit; or else received not, or interpolated and corrupted, some of them.

- Second Antiochian Confession, A.D. 275-300

If a man teaches or preaches anything else contrary to what we have received let him be accursed. For we truly and clearly both believe, and follow all things from the Holy Scripture, that have been delivered to us by the prophets and apostles.

- Athanasius

But I have also thought it necessary to inform you of the fact, that Bishops have succeeded those who have fallen asleep. In Tanis, instead of Elias, is Theodorus. In Arsenotis, (list continues) so that to these you may write, and from these receive the canonical Letters. 340 A.D.

6. The Delivered and Received Text is the All Assuring Witness of the Holy Spirit to the One True Text.

“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be red unto all the holy brethren.” I Ths. 5:27.

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD ...And he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the audience of the people: and they said, all that the LORD said will we do, and be obedient.” Ex. 24:4, 7.

“...our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:” Act.7:38

“...the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day...” Act.13:

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets:” Act.24:14

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse, and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; And that from a child you have known the holy scripture, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” II Tim.3:13-17.

“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them...Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. Jn. 17:8, 20.

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” I. Cor.11:33.

“What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?” I Cor.14:36.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe. For you brethren became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.” I Ths. 2:13-14.

“Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightiest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?” Prv. 22:20-21.

“The secret things belong unto to the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Deu. 29:29.

“...As for me this is my covenant with them, says Jehovah; My spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, says Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever.” Isa.59:19, 21

The Holy Scripture delivered to, and received by the true church of the Lord Jesus, to the obedience of the faith throughout all generations, is the work of the Holy Spirit in His continuous providential care, in leading His people into all truth. Precisely that work, the Scripture being delivered to and received by the true church, is the witness of the Holy Spirit of the one true and authentic Scripture to the people of God, apart from that work, neither can we know nor receive the Word of God.

God commands that all the words of His written revelation must be delivered to and received by His people in all successive generations, the sacred record is clear that that is what took place and will continue to take place according to God’s covenant promise, command, and prayer of the Lord, which makes the Scripture to be most necessary.

For that very same purpose as soon as God gave the autograph, the first writ of the all inspired by Him Scripture, He instituted and authorized the successive copies, by which the pure and authentic

Scripture is delivered to His people. By this uninterrupted and continual abode of the Scripture in the church of the living God, the people of God can know and be assured, that this is the pure and authentic Scripture. The inward work of the Holy Spirit is never separate from the outward receiving of the holy Scripture. Deu. 29:29, 6:4-9, Isa. 30:8, 59:21, Mt. 4:4, 5:18-19, 28:19-20, Jn. 14:15-26, 16:13, Jn. 17:8, 20, Rom. 16:25-26, I Ths. 5:27, II Tim. 3:14-17, Rev. 1:3, 22:6-7.

The inspiration, the delivery, and the receiving of the authentic Scripture comprise the revelation of God. Inspiration alone cannot be the revelation of God, the authentic Scripture must be delivered to and received by the people of God. This entire work and process throughout the Old and New Testament age can be attributed to none other but the Holy Spirit. If we consider only for a moment the powers of darkness and their intense hatred for the Word of God, it becomes at once clear that the revelation of God to His people is the work of the Lord. Jer. 33:1-2, 36:5-6, 23-28.32. Act. 5:17-20, 7:54-60, 12:1-4, 24. Rev. 1:9, 6:9, 20:4, etc.

The authentic text of the Scripture is not hidden from the true church, nor is to be discovered by searching from one end of the earth to the other, but has been delivered, revealed, and made known to the true church throughout all successive generations.

The authentic text cannot be held captive by any particular time, nor for that fact rediscovered at any particular time, but according to God's decree it lives, stands, and abides in the church of the living God, which has been the recipient of His Word since the world began. Isa. 48:16, Lk. 1:70, Rom. 3:1-4, I Cor. 4:17, I Ths. 2:13-14, Tim. 3:15, Heb. 1:1-2, Jud. 14, Rev. 1:11, 22:16-21.

This work of the Holy Spirit is His continuous witness by which the covenant people are assured in each and every successive generation, that the delivered to and received by the true church Scripture in all successive generations is the one and the same authentic text of the Scripture. Deu. 29:29, 17:18-20, Isa. 59:21, Mt. 4:4, 5:18-19, 28:18-20, Lk. 1:1-4, 4:16-17, Jn. 6:68, II Tim. 3:13-17, I Pet. 2:2, Rev. 22:6-7.

The pure and authentic Scripture was delivered by the successive copies, received, and entrusted to the true churches of the Protestant Reformation and to the successive true churches thereafter. The Reformed Churches without any doubt testified in their doctrinal standards to the successive copies that were delivered to them, to be the pure, complete, authentic, and all authoritative Word of God.

That also was clearly demonstrated by the Bible which they put into printed form, by the translations of the Bible that they made in all the languages of the Reformed Churches, by the Scripture which they quoted to prove the verity, and justify the authority of their (and our) doctrinal standards, confessions of faith, forms of unity, the Institutes of the Christian faith, the Church Order, the various commentaries, the forms for the sacraments, etc.

The successive copies alone manifested themselves in the one stream of uninterrupted delivery to the true church throughout the New Testament age, their text is commonly known now as "The Received Text", or "The Traditional Text".

By that very same witness of the Holy Spirit we, with the true churches of the Protestant Reformation, and the true church of all ages receive the pure, authentic and authoritative Scripture, delivered to us by the successive copies.

All other MSS (hand written copies) only can compliment the instituted and authorized by God successive copies (The Received Text) to the degree that they agree with, but never detract from its authority, because they have been altered and corrupted by men, therefore they are void of authority and power to bind the conscience of the Christian.

- Calvin's Institutes, Book I, Chap. 6, 7, 8,
... A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed – viz. That Scripture is of importance only insofar as conceded to it by the suffrage of the church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God

could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that this book is to be received with reference, and that one expunged from the list, did not the church regulate all this things with certainty? ... Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, than power of judging Scripture is in the church, and that on her nod it certainty depends. When the church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful, or controverted, but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating ascend.

... - Truth so well founded so firmly established, so gloriously renowned, and handed down by sure succession from the days of the apostles. But he nowhere insinuates that the authority that we give to the Scriptures depends upon the definitions or devices of men....

Add, moreover, that, for the best of reasons, the consent of the Church is not without its weight. ... Being transmitted to us with such an earnest, who of us shall not receive it with firm and unshaken conviction? It is therefore no small proof of the authority of Scripture, that it was sealed with the blood of so many witnesses, especially when it is considered in bearing testimony to the faith, they met death, not with fanatical enthusiasm (as erring spirits are sometimes wont to do), but with firm and constant, yet sober godly zeal.

- Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. I. I.

Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;

- Belgic Confession, 1561, Article III, IV, V

We confess that this Word of God was not send nor delivered by the will of man, but that *men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit*, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing; and He himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures...

...the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.

... We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, ...

ARTICLE XXIX: "...If the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of

God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Herby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself."

- Second Antiochian Confession, A.D. 275 – 300

If a man teaches or preaches anything else contrary to what we have received let him be accursed. For we truly and clearly both believe, and follow all things from the Holy Scriptures, that have been delivered to us by the prophets and apostles.

- Athanasius

But I have also thought it necessary to inform you of the fact, that Bishops have succeeded those who have fallen asleep. In Tanis, instead of Elias, is Theodorus. In Arsenotis, (list continues) so that to these you may write, and from these receive the canonical Letters. 340 A.D.

7. The Revelation of God Inspired, Delivered, and Received.

“The secret things belong unto to the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Deu. 29:29.

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD...And he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.”

Ex. 24:4, 7.

“I have received of the Lord that which also I have delivered unto you “ I Cor.11:23

“You received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”

I Ths. 2:13

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse, and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; And that from a child you have known the holy scripture, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” II Tim.3:13-17.

“...As for me this is my covenant with them, says Jehovah; My spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, says Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever.” Isa.59:19, 21

“...unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if someone did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar;”

Rom. 3:2-4

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Rom.15:4.

“That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mayest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?” Prv. 22:19-21

The inspiration, the delivery, and the receiving of the authentic Scripture comprise the revelation of God. The inspiration of the Scripture alone cannot be the revelation of God, the authentic Scripture must be delivered to, and received by the people of God. One must not lose sight of that the Scripture was given to be the revelation of God to His people, which apart from being delivered and received will cease being revelation, nor is a corrupted scripture an acceptable form for God’s revelation. At the foundation of the Christian doctrine is the acceptance of the full truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God, not only in the Scripture that it once was, but thereafter became corrupt, such a doctrine is foreign to the Scripture. The Scriptures uncompromisingly define themselves as the pure Word of God, in the entire process of revelation: At the time that God inspired the Scripture, at the time that God delivered the Scripture to His covenant people, at the time that His people received the Scripture, throughout this entire process the Scripture remains the pure, authentic, and all authoritative Word of God.

The fact that some corrupt, add, and take away from the Word of God, this activity by no means can corrupt, or in any way frustrate or obscure the process of God’s revelation, though they are

violating the most dreadful prohibition and warning of the Lord, which dreadful prohibition speaks of the protective zeal the Lord has for the purity of His Word. Deu. 4:2-4, Prv. 30:5-6, Gal. 1:6-9, Rev. 22:18-19.

The Scripture all along remains the pure Word of God in the authentic successive copies that God authorized to be delivered to His church. By this instituted of God process, the corrupt copies systematically are rejected and removed as they occur.

The authentic and authorized by God copies of His Word, and the corrupted by men copies always existed, but so does the division between the two, the truth of the Scripture will remain separated from corruption by the decree, promise, purpose and the person of the Holy Spirit, its purity remains continually with the people of God.

“Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of His holiness. ...The (pseudo-) prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words everyone from his neighbor.” Jer. 23:9, 28-30.

“For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity, but peace shall be upon Israel.” Ps. 125:3, 5; II Tim. 3:13-17, Prv. 22:19-21, 30:5-6, Act. 17:11, Gal. 1:6-9, II Ths. 2:2, Rev. 2:2, 22:6-7, 18-19.

The pure and authentic Scripture of God’s revelation to His people is delivered to, and received throughout all successive generations. Ex. 24:4, 7, Deu. 6:1-9, 17:18-20, 29:29, 31:9-13, Isa. 30:8, 40:8, 59:21, Mt. 4:4, 5:18-19, 28:18-20, Lk. 1:1-4, 4:16-17, Act. 7:38, 13:27, 15:21, Rev.1:3.

The proposition and teaching that all copies are corrupt, and man should search within the Scripture to judge by subjective preferences and probabilities which Scripture is false, and which is authentic, is appalling and foreign to the entire Bible. Such conclusions can never be the Oracles of God. Nor are the given to us Oracles of God in need for sanctification. Therefore such a teaching must be rejected, being void of any scriptural proofs. The Christian faith is based on what the Scripture says, not on what the Scripture does not say, therefore this teaching is doubly wrong. According to the Scripture it is clear that this teaching has its origin in man, and is based upon unbelief, and not the faithful study of the Scripture. Rom. 3:2-4, I Pe.4:11, Jer.23.

“The truth of God does not depend on the truth of man” John Calvin.

- Belgic Confession, A.D. 1561, Article V: We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them,
- Westminster Confession, A.D. 1647 Chap. I. Of the Holy Scripture.
I. ...to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary.
IV .The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.
VIII . The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.

- The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566. Chapter I. Of the Holy Scripture Being The True Word of God: ... We therefore detest all the heresies of Artemon, the Manichans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon, and the Marcionites, who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Spirit; or else received not, r interpolated and corrupted, some of them.

8. The Origin and Authority of the Received Text.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law..” Deu 29:29

“...our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:” Act.7:38

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” I. Cor.11:33,

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe. For you brethren became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.” I Ths. 2:13-14.

The origin and authority of the text used by the Received Text is one and the same as the origin and authority of the successive copies. The successive copies being immediately instituted and authorized by God are the divine Scripture by which the pure and authentic text of the Scripture according to the command of God is delivered to, and received by the true church throughout all ages. All this is well defined by the testimonies of the Scripture, which scriptural truth is clearly confessed by the historic Christian and Reformed faith. Deu. 17:18-20, 31:9, Isa. 30:8, Lk. 4:16-17, Act.13:27, 15:21, Rom. 15:4, I Cor. 14:36, II Tim. 3:13-17, etc.

The successive copies and “The Received Text” are one and the same text.

At the end of the thirteen hundreds and throughout the fourteen hundreds, thousands of Christians from the eastern Mediterranean region fled for their safety from the onslaught of the Turks to northern and western Europe, bringing with them thousands of MSS (hand written copies) in the original language of the New Testament, which is Greek. These MSS copies of the Holy Scripture are the same successive copies as described above, which were delivered to this region since the days of the Apostles. There was no need for translation, since these nations spoke Greek. Soon it became clear to many in the western churches who cared for the truth of the Scripture that these were the authorized by God successive copies, and that the Latin version was a translation, and not the text of the original language. All this debates at that time regarding the authentic text of the Scripture created renewed interest in the Word of God, which greatly contributed towards understanding the authority of the Scripture, and it became clear that neither man nor ecclesiastical government can have supreme authority in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the Scriptures the Reformed Churches declared that the supreme judge of the Christian Faith, who has the power to bind the Christian conscience, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, what Scripture says God says. All these developments swiftly contributed to the reformation of the church. It rapidly became clear by the testimonies of the Scripture that the successive copies are the authorized by God Scripture, and not any translation, or some other MSS in the original language. All of the Reformed Churches received the successive copies as the pure, complete, and therefore authentic and authoritative text of the Scripture. They rejected all the other MSS because they were corrupt, altered, interpolated, much added to, or removed from, and much of the text missing or illegible.

With the printing press having come into existence at that time, and the Reformed Churches desiring to have printed version of the authentic successive copies, the time was right to put the text of the successive copies into printed form. Most noteworthy works of transferring the text from the hand written successive copies to the printed form are:

Ximenez de Cisneros, Francisco (1436-1517), sponsored the work, Stunica led a team of Scholars in Alcala, Spain, (Lat. Complutum for Alcala) hence the Complutensian Bible, which New Testament was printed from the successive copies and was the first ever New Testament printed in Greek, the work was of excellent quality and proficiency. The New Testament was issued in 1514. The whole work began in 1502, and the whole Bible was finished in 1522. This was a polyglot (multilingual) Bible. The Old Testament has Hebrew, Latin, Greek, with Latin interlinear, and much more.

Johann Froben (1460-1527) A printer and a scholar in Basel, a leading city of the Reformation, made a contract with Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) to manage a team of scholars in the production of a printed version of the Bible. Using the text of the successive copies, the work was accomplished in 1516. Because the work was done in great haste the edition contained many typographical errors. They continued to issue new versions until 1537, which with time improved the quality of work, learning much from the Complutensian Polyglot Bible.

Robert Estienne (1503-59), (Stephanos), Second generation in family of scholars-printers, the royal printer in Paris, one of the finest printer that ever lived, most proficient in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, after 20 years of persecution because of his reformed persuasions fled his native town and settled his family in Geneva, where he could continue his work for the Reformation, Calvin was daily in his printing shop, and they became good friends.

From 1546 through 1551 four printed editions of the Greek New Testament were published, using the text of the successive copies. By this work the pure authentic text of the New Testament was transferred into printed form at the level of complete truthfulness and trust, against which nothing can be alleged. And like the successive copies, (which text they both use) the now called Received Text is the authorized by God Scripture to be delivered to His covenant people.

Stephanos possessed numerous MSS from the successive copies, and had an immense inheritance and access to information of this sort, most of which as expected does no longer exist. He also benefited from the Complutensian and the Basel editions.

Numerous other editions by different printers followed, but the Stephanos text is for what any edition at the most can aspire to be; having the faithful text of the successive copies, which God Himself instituted and authorized to be delivered to His people throughout all successive generations.

- Calvin's Institutes, Book I, Chap. 6,7,8: .. A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed – viz. That Scripture is of importance only insofar as conceded to it by the suffrage of the church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that this book is to be received with reverence, and that one expunged from the list, did not the church regulate all this things with certainty? ... Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, than power of judging Scripture is in the church, and that on her nod it certainty depends. When the church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful, or controverted, but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating ascend.... Truth so well founded so firmly established, so gloriously renowned, and handed down by sure succession from the days of the apostles. But he nowhere insinuates that the authority that we give to the Scriptures depends upon the definitions or devices of men....Add, moreover, that, for the best of reasons, the consent of the Church is not without its weight. ... Being transmitted to us with such an earnest, who of us shall not receive it with firm and unshaken conviction? It is therefore no small proof of the authority of Scripture, that it was sealed with the blood of so many witnesses, especially when it is considered in bearing testimony to the faith,

they met death, not with fanatical enthusiasm (as erring spirits are sometimes wont to do), but with firm and constant, yet sober godly zeal.

- Belgic Confession, 1561, Article IV, V...the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.... We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, ...
- Westminster Confession, A.D. 1647, Chap.I.IV, VIII. *Of the Holy Scripture*. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God....The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it was Most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His Singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.
- The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566. Chapter I. Of The Holy Scripture Being The True Word of God: ... We therefore detest all the heresies of Artemon, the Manichans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon, and the Marcionites, who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Spirit; or else received not, or interpolated and corrupted, some of them.
- Second Antiochian Confession, A.D. 275 – 300: If a man teaches or preaches anything else contrary to what we have received let him be accursed. For we truly and clearly both believe, and follow all things from the Holy Scriptures, that have been delivered to us by the prophets and apostles.
- Athanasius, 340 A.D: But I have also thought it necessary to inform you of the fact, that Bishops have succeeded those who have fallen asleep. In Tanis, instead of Elias, is Theodorus. In Arsenotis, (list continues) so that to these you may write, and from these receive the canonical Letters.

Appeal 5: Judgment on Sermon

Dear Brothers in Christ,

On Nov. 24/02 our pastor preached a sermon *The Lion Won't Bite The Innocent* using as text Daniel 6: 22 where Daniel says, "My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight." We had doubts and concerns about the sermon and after the activities listed below we appealed to Classis Western Canada. Classis ruled against our appeal. We now appeal to Synod based on Church Order Art. 31.

Timeline of main events regarding the sermon in question

- Nov. 24/02 Sermon *The Lion Won't Bite The Innocent* preached
- Dec. 6/02 We were deeply troubled by this sermon and for advice sent tapes of the sermon to some Reformed ministers.
- Jan.22/03 Consistory visit. At that time our concern regarding *The Lion* was brought to elders visiting us. Short discussion followed. By this time the pastor was gone on sabbatical so we did nothing until he returned in May.
- May 31/03 Received a critique of the sermon from an advisor.
- June 14/03 CCCs sent letter of concern and critique to consistory
- Sept. 9/03 Letter of reply from consistory
- Sept. 19 ?/03 Appeal sent to Classis Western Canada asking Classis to rule on the orthodoxy of the sermon. (In order to meet deadline for submissions to Classis)
- Sept.25/03 CCCs met with consistory.
- Nov. 21/03 Classis ruled as follows:

"An appeal is received from CCC from XXX Reformed Church of YYY "to review this sermon and make a judgment concerning its orthodoxy as judged by Holy Scripture as understood by the Three Forms of Unity."

"Motion: to uphold the YYY council that "We do not believe Pastor BBB's views are in conflict with Scripture or the confessions."

"Motion passed: to amend as follows; 'We do not believe Pastor BBB's views expressed in the sermon which Classis has reviewed is in conflict with Scripture or the Confessions.'

"Motion passed unanimously: "To uphold the decision of the YYY council that we do not believe Pastor BBB's view expressed in the sermon which Classis has reviewed is in conflict with Scripture or the Confessions."

We humbly submit that this decision of Classis is not in accord with Scripture and the Confessions. We stated in our grounds to Classis: "This sermon overtly contradicted the Biblical doctrine of justification as understood by the Heidelberg Catechism Questions 21, 56, 60 and Belgic Confession Articles 22-24." As members in good standing in XXX we therefore exercise our right to appeal to synod. Attached is the appeal we sent to Classis including the sermon, *The Lion Won't Bite the Innocent*. Included with our appeal, as we sent it to Classis, is a critique of the sermon by Mr. AAA. Classis did not distribute this critique but made the following statement in the Agenda for classis:

"VI Appeals and Communications 4 CCC from YYY, appeal to Classis. Pg. 51-64. A critical review by Mr. AAA, from Calgary on the sermon preached by Rev. BBB is available at Classis on request, from the Smithers Clerk."

We appeal to Synod to declare that Classis Western Canada erred in judging this sermon not to be in conflict with the Scriptures or the Confessions. Our concern in making this appeal is that we understand the sermon to teach that Daniel was justified for two reasons: (1) because he was clothed in Christ's righteousness and (2) because he lived in covenant faithfulness. This teaching we believe is not in accord with God's Word as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity.

In Christ's service

CCC

APPEAL TO CLASSIS WESTERN CANADA

September 15, 2003

Dear Fathers and Brothers in Christ:

On November 24, 2002 our pastor Rev. BBB preached a sermon entitled "The Lion Won't Bite the Innocent." In this sermon he taught both the doctrine of justification on the ground of Christ's imputed righteousness and the doctrine of justification by our own intrinsic righteousness.

As members in good standing of XXX Reformed Church of YYY (URC), we hereby *appeal to Classis to review this sermon and make a judgement concerning its orthodoxy as judged by Holy Scripture as understood by the Three Forms of Unity.*

Grounds:

1. This sermon overtly contradicted the Biblical doctrine of justification as understood by the Heidelberg Catechism Questions 21, 56, 60 and Belgic Confession Articles 22-24.

Belgic Confession Art. 22 says, "And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified 'by faith alone' or by faith 'apart from works.'" In Art. 23 the Confession continues to say that "faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness." The only ground of our justification before God is that we lean and rest "on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him." In Art. 24, the Confession concludes that Spirit-wrought sanctity and our good works "do not count toward our justification-- for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works."

This was also the teaching of Heidelberg Catechism Question 21. The Catechism interprets Scripture to teach that justifying faith is a "certain knowledge" and "hearty trust" that Christ's righteousness is freely given and that we are justified "only for the sake of Christ's merits." Question 56 says that the only ground of our justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In Question 60 the Catechism says that sinners are justified, "of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart."

From these statements, we conclude that the Scriptures as understood by our Confession and Catechism teach that the only ground of the justification of sinners before God is the perfect obedience of Christ for sinners which is imputed to them and the only instrument of justification is true faith which trusts, rests and leans only on Christ and his finished work.

This was not the approach to justification taken by Rev. BBB in his sermon. He asked, "Would it be because you are clothed in Christ's righteousness or because you live in covenant faithfulness?" He concluded that Daniel was "...found innocent, being judged on the basis of what he had done," that "all his works appeared before the Lord, *and in those works* it was found that he was innocent...."

Slowly, as profound and true and comforting as our earlier insight was – Daniel standing in Christ’s righteousness – slowly we realise there’s more here. The innocence of Daniel that we are meant to consider and think about here, it cannot be reduced to the sacrifice of Christ and His imputed righteousness, not without doing violence to the story.

In this sermon, *his thesis was that the righteousness of Christ imputed to sinners and received through faith alone is not the sole ground of our justification*. Rather, Rev. BBB asked, “And so now again we’re asking ourselves how can I be innocent before God? What does that involve?” His answer is that “We start to realise that we are indeed found innocent in faith, clothed in Christ’s righteousness. But this faith is not a mere intellectual assent to some doctrinal truths. It is a living, dynamic in-grafting into Christ, whose power has been also at work in us, teaching us to fight against evil and to seek to do the good.” We agree heartily that a justifying faith is a faith that works, but Rev. BBB preached to us in his congregation that faith justifies *because* it works [we are found innocent before God in our works]. This is another gospel. As Rev. BBB said, “Daniel was not innocent as if he had paid for his own sins or as if he had earned his acquittal before the judgment seat of God. But he was still found innocent, being judged *on the basis of what he had done*.” The ground of his justification was “that he trusted God. He lived by faith when he served the king; he lived by faith when he was thrown to lions. He had been faithful to God’s covenant with him.”

We continue quoting the sermon extensively so as not to take his words out of context:

Covenant keeping is the issue here. By faith, humbling ourselves and fulfilling our daily tasks as before God, as a mother, a father, a husband or wife, or whatever our tasks might be – by faith fulfilling these tasks as before the Lord, doing works of mercy as we are able, and seeking to keep ourselves unstained from the world. Covenant keeping is the issue.

Consider this, too. In the judgment we will all be judged on the basis of what we have done. Revelation 22:12. You say, why? How is that possible? Judged on the basis of what we’ve have done? We’re saved by grace through faith alone. Well, we’re judged in that way because true faith reveals itself in a life of humble service. Call upon God to indeed work in us that which is pleasing in His sight. See, we don’t mean this is of ourselves – when we look at this covenant issue, we don’t mean this is of ourselves. It is from God who is at work in us.

He concluded and summarised the sermon saying,

Congregation, we read the story of Daniel escaping from the lions without a scratch on him. Understand that it means the lions won’t bite the innocent. That’s the point. And know for sure that we, too, are innocent before God and we are invited to come to the table of the Lord. But this invitation is given only as we call upon Him, both for His blood to cleanse us, and His Spirit to guide us in the paths of righteousness. Only as by faith we seek to turn away from evil and do what is good.

We acknowledge that there is truth in the sermon and we do not disagree with every part of it. We acknowledge that Rev. BBB desires to be faithful to Scripture and we honour that intention.

Nevertheless, it is clear to us that in this sermon, Rev. BBB proclaimed that we are justified by grace through faith *and* on the basis of the sanctity, which the Spirit works in us. We told the congregation that Daniel was saved by his covenantal faithfulness, that is by his deeds in addition to his faith in God.

We believe that this teaching is contrary to the Word of God as summarised in the Three Forms of Unity. Specifically Heidelberg Catechism questions 21 and 60 as well as Belgic Confession Articles 22-24 reject the very position that Rev. BBB was teaching.

We hasten to add that we are not antinomians. We believe heartily in the necessity of sanctification, but it is not the Gospel that we are finally justified in part because we are sanctified. We

believe that the justified will be sanctified, indeed that they must be sanctified, but that does not mean that God accepts us *because* we are sanctified.

2. Consistory has failed to provide a timely and satisfactory response to our complaint.

We bring this appeal to Classis only because we believe that the peace and purity of the congregation is in jeopardy. We write in the spirit of Church Order articles 31, 61, and 62. The Church Order instructs us in such cases to bring our complaint to the broader assembly, hence this letter. In signing the Form of Subscription the minister and elders promise “diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing.”

When we originally heard this sermon on November 24, 2002 we were deeply troubled. We did not believe it to be in accord with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. Mindful of the caution in Scripture to not accept a complaint against an elder except at the mouth of two or three witnesses we consulted Reformed ministers of good standing (Matt 18); each of them found serious problems with it.

We then asked Mr. AAA if he would be willing to write a critique of the sermon for us, and this he agreed to do. He said that he wanted to speak to Rev. BBB before he would do so. After corresponding with Rev. BBB the two men decided to meet face to face. Rev. BBB asked if Mr. AAA would agree to have XXX’s consistory present. This meeting between Mr. AAA and Rev. BBB and XXX’s consistory took place in YYY on January 2, 2003. Mr. AAA informed the consistory that he was acting at our behest.

We also discussed this sermon with representatives of our Consistory on an official visit by two elders to our home on January 22, 2003. After further correspondence between Revs. BBB and AAA, Mr. AAA prepared and sent us (and Rev. BBB) a copy of his critique of the sermon.

Next (June 14, 2003) we sent the critique¹ with the transcribed sermon² to our Consistory with a letter requesting that Rev. BBB publicly retract what he had said in that sermon or, if necessary, that the Consistory take the necessary steps to maintain the purity of the Church. We wrote,

We request your careful attention to this matter for it strikes at the very heart of the Gospel. In this sermon Rev. BBB taught that Christians will be found innocent in the final judgement based on works. He asserted that the imputed righteousness of Christ is not enough. We trust that you will show concern for Rev. BBB by attempting to show him the error he proclaimed from the pulpit of our church. We ask that you seriously consider your responsibility to Christ’s Church (especially its members here in YYY), and your vow to uphold the doctrines of the Church.

We asked the consistory,

Do you agree with this sermon? If not, what will you do about it? We humbly remind the consistory of its sacred obligations to protect the flock of Christ (Acts 20:28; John 21:17; Church Order Article 61). We urge you to call Rev. BBB to public repentance of the errors contained in this sermon and if he will not, to take the necessary steps to safeguard the peace and purity of the church. We are grieved by this but believe that what Rev. BBB has said about justification by works in this sermon is false doctrine. We are attaching that letter³ to this document.

¹ Attachment 1: Critique of The Lion Won’t Bite the Innocent by Mr. AAA (**Not Included -Ruled Not Admissible by Synod 2004**)

² Attachment 2: Sermon By Rev. BBB: The Lion Won’t Bite the Innocent

³ Attachment 3: June 14 letter to XXX’s consistory

Since then we wrote them twice (July 15⁴ and August. 20⁵) asking for a written response. Because the time before documents have to be in to Classis was short, and because the Consistory have been aware of the concerns over this sermon since the beginning of January 2003, we have asked Consistory repeatedly to give us a written document so that we may clearly understand their answer, so that we don't misinterpret their answer, and so that we will know whether or not it is necessary for us to go to Classis.

On Sept 9, 2003 we received a written response⁶ from Consistory. This response, however, did not answer our question. They did not attempt to demonstrate that the sermon is congruent with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. They indicate support of Rev. BBB and his views, but concede "a lack of clarity in the sermon on Daniel 6 that seems to allow for different interpretations of its meaning. However, even those who see problems with it are not persuaded that charges of heresy should be brought."

The question before Classis is not whether the hearers chose one or another interpretation of the sermon, rather the question is what was the preacher teaching the congregation in that sermon?

For the sake of the peace of the church, we have not brought charges of heresy against Rev. BBB, but we do believe that his teaching at this point is not congruent with the Three Forms of Unity and Scripture. We understand Rev. BBB to be saying that they are necessary for justification. We therefore appeal to you to examine the sermon and make a judgement as to its orthodoxy.

We humbly ask Classis not to discard it our appeal on a technicality or because we have unwittingly not followed the proper procedure. We have made every effort to follow the spirit and letter of Scriptures and the Church Order in this matter.

If further clarification of our concerns is needed we ask that Mr. AAA be allowed to speak on our behalf. As a minister he is far better able than we are to understand and articulate the issues in question. Our concern is that God's honour be upheld, that Mr. BBB and our Consistory may be properly served, for their welfare and for the welfare of XXX (of which we are a part). We realise that it is a difficult thing for Classis delegates to deal with colleagues and fellow office bearers but we beg of you that you will hold paramount concern for the truth of God's Word. We plead with you to make decisions that will uphold the purity of the preaching and that will encourage elders to take seriously their task of being watchmen on the walls of Zion. We ask you to declare as false the notion that we are found innocent in our sin-stained works on the Judgment Day, and we ask you to declare that the gift of the pure righteousness of Christ is all that we ever need for justification.

Yours in Christ,

CCC
YYY, Alberta

ATTACHMENT 2 : "The Lion Won't Bite the Innocent" Rev. BBB, November 24, 2002

1 ¶ 1 We're turning to another very well known story – event in the history of Israel – the Book of
2 Daniel, Chapter 6. We all know that Daniel was a prophet among the exiles in Babylon serving

⁴ Attachment 4: July 15 letter to XXX's consistory

⁵ Attachment 5: August 20 letter to XXX's consistory

⁶ Attachment 6: September 9 response from XXX's consistory

3 the king, interpreting dreams. Daniel, chapter 6 – we’re going to read the entire chapter: (Text
4 omitted.)

5 ¶ 2 We’re taking as our text especially vs. 22 where Daniel says, “My God sent his angel and he
6 shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.”
7

8 ¶ 3 Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ, as I started to prepare this sermon, I couldn’t
9 help wondering if we have tamed this story somewhat – you know with all the Sunday school
10 pictures of Daniel in the lions’ den petting the friendly kitty-cats. Because we made it a favorite
11 children’s story and we don’t want to upset the little children, we now have to reflect
12 thoughtfully on this event before it really strikes us what an amazing and fearful thing it was. For
13 me it was helpful to reflect upon other children of God in Romans times who were thrown to the
14 lions – those placed in the arena with thousands of people watching as the lions were let loose
15 upon them tearing and devouring them alive. Now that’s the reality of the situation that was to
16 be expected – being devoured alive. The lions were kept very hungry for that very purpose.
17 When the enemies of Daniel were thrown in, the lions acted naturally – they were torn and all
18 their bones were crushed before they hit the floor of the den. That was what was to be expected.
19

20 ¶ 4 I don’t say this by wanting to give anyone nightmares, but the story has no power if we
21 airbrush it and clean it all up and make it into a fairy tale. I do want you to think about being
22 thrown to the lions – a fearful thing if there ever was one. I also want you to think about Daniel’s
23 answer to the king’s question. He said, “O king, live forever. The Lord has sent His angel to shut
24 the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in His sight.”
25

26 ¶ 5 And I want you to ask yourself the question, would the Lord find you innocent and close the
27 lions’ mouths? Would He? On what basis would He find you innocent? Would it be because you
28 are clothed in Christ’s righteousness or because you live in covenant faithfulness?
29

30 ¶ 6 Obviously, this is a very important question to have answered, because in this story we just
31 read, the lion won’t bite the innocent, but the guilty he tears to pieces. Our theme is “the lion
32 won’t bite the innocent” – and then our point, was Daniel innocent because clothed in Christ’s
33 righteousness, or was he innocent because he lived in covenant faithfulness?
34

35 ¶ 7 If we read this story, and especially our text, with any attention and understanding of the
36 issues, we can’t help wanting to know how we might be found innocent before the Lord. We
37 can’t escape the sense that there’s something very deep going on here; it’s not just a story. The
38 Spirit of God is revealing something relevant, important for every generation. Behind, or
39 underneath the story of Daniel and his trouble with the other satraps and his harrowing escape
40 from the lions – behind that all is the theme of God’s judgment of all men. Daniel was saved
41 because he was found innocent before the Lord. He is portrayed as having stood before the
42 judgment seat of God and declared innocent. When we understand the story on this level, we
43 come to see the lions by the type of all God’s judgments on the guilty. We come to see the lions
44 as a type of Satan himself who wants to rend and tear to bits all those who are made in the image
45 of God, and especially those who have the mark of the covenant upon them – God’s special
46 people. We see the lions as the yawning gates of hell itself when we understand this story. Will
47 you be found innocent?
48

49 ¶ 8 Our first reaction at this point, it seems to me, is to look at the sin in our lives. We think of
50 the times when we have outright rebelled against the Lord and refused to do what we knew was

51 right and was within our power to do. We think of the times that we have forgotten God, been
52 delinquent in prayer, and walked in worldly ways. We think of the sins that remain in us against
53 our will, the lust of the world and the pride of life, the self-service mixed with the constant
54 temptation to a self-righteousness. And our first thought is: all is lost for me, there's no hope for
55 me. I'm not innocent like Daniel, and I will never live up to that standard; it is beyond me.
56 Satan, and the world, and my own flesh are like the powerful gusting wind whose sudden blasts
57 blow you off the road time and time again. I am not innocent like Daniel was.
58

59 ¶ 9 But, you know, we're not satisfied with that; we come to that conclusion and we're not
60 satisfied. We can't be! That would be to give up all hope of salvation. And so we start looking
61 around for some reason still to have hope. And we're reminded suddenly that Christ is called our
62 Savior, a perfect Savior, a complete Savior. We find that we have in Him, the Bible says – we
63 have in Him – all that we need for salvation. And we start pouring through our systematic
64 textbooks and our confessions and we find that we are innocent before God in Christ. He died on
65 the cross to take away our sins. He was there as a substitute for us in our place. Our guilt is
66 atoned for. We are innocent after all. His perfect righteousness is imputed to us, credited to our
67 account. "Praise the Lord," we say, "thought for a moment it was all lost." This must be though,
68 this must be what Daniel meant though, when he said he was found innocent before God – in
69 Christ. The prophets of old said of Christ: "He will give His angels charge over you lest at any
70 point you dash your foot against a stone. He will guard you from all evil. You will tread upon the
71 lion and the cobra." Daniel entered the lions' den in Christ, being found in Him. United with
72 Him. It was as if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself were thrown into that lions' den.
73

74 ¶ 10 And further study reveals that indeed all this is true. I have told you no lie. Who is this
75 Daniel? He was a mark of the covenant of God. He was circumcised, and the blood of
76 circumcision declared that the blood of the covenant had taken away all his guilt. And how was
77 this Daniel found innocent? Was it not by faith? Yes, it was faith! Verse 23 says "No wound was
78 found on him because he trusted in his God." His faith! Hebrews 11 speaks of those who by
79 faith shut the mouths of lions, an obvious reference to Daniel. Suddenly we think about the
80 prayers of Daniel that he was saying three times a day. And we think instead of what he was
81 saying. Was he not confessing his sins to God? Surely he was! His thanks included thanks for the
82 blood of the sacrifice. He was not saying to God, "Lord, I thank you that I am not like those
83 wicked satraps, or the rest of your people who are so weak. I pray three times a day." That was
84 not his prayer.
85

86 ¶ 11 Suddenly it dawns on us – no doubt he was also confessing his sins to God. Did he not have
87 the same heart as David, the man after God's own heart who said in Psalm 143:2: "Do not bring
88 your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteousness before you?" Was he not like Job
89 who was called 'blameless' before God, but who cried out for a mediator who could lay his hand
90 upon us both – who declared 'I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end He will stand
91 upon the earth, and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God'?"
92

93 ¶ 12 Slowly we piece these things together and we say, "Yes, praise God; I too, am innocent. I
94 too am innocent." So now we're a little more relaxed and we go back to the story of Daniel
95 determined to read it with a little understanding this time. Had a bit of a scare there, but this
96 time we're going to read it right. No reason to compare our lives to Daniel's life – it's just faith
97 that matters. We're all sinners anyway. The story doesn't reveal it, but so was Daniel.
98

99 ¶ 13 And so we start to read the story again with our new insight. This time we're only going to
100 look at the grace and power of God, and we get started with great enthusiasm thinking
101 everything has been made clear now. But somehow as we read on, we can't seem to make it fit
102 all so neatly. We thought we had worked out the problem of how we will be found innocent. We
103 thought we had it all packaged and put away in the cupboard. But we get to verse 4 where it says
104 that the enemies of Daniel could find nothing against him in all his conduct of the king's affairs.
105 This story makes quite a point of revealing the honesty of Daniel that he actually served the king
106 wholeheartedly, faithfully. He was neither corrupt nor negligent. Had committed sins neither of
107 commission nor omission. This story makes a strong point of his personal righteousness. We get
108 to verse 5 where it is revealed that the only way that they could get any dirt on him, was if they
109 set a trap for him so that it was his own obedience to the Lord that got him in trouble. This story
110 is really pointing out the personal righteousness and innocence of Daniel. And we get to verse
111 16. The king says to Daniel as he's about to be thrown to the lions, "May your God whom you
112 serve continually, may He keep you, may He rescue you." And then we get to our text, "They
113 have not hurt me because I was found innocent."
114

115 ¶ 14 Slowly, as profound and true and comforting as our earlier insight was – Daniel standing
116 in Christ's righteousness – slowly we realize there's more here. The innocence of Daniel that we
117 are meant to consider and think about here, it cannot be reduced to the sacrifice of Christ and
118 His imputed righteousness, not without doing violence to the story. It cannot be reduced to that
119 unless we simply want to deceive ourselves.
120

121 ¶ 15 Think of it this way. Suppose Daniel had agreed to the king's demand and gone to worship
122 him for the next thirty days. And then suppose, you know in that way and [unclear] ... that he
123 was unfaithful to the covenant. And then suppose that on his way to worship the king, he
124 happened to meet a hungry lion. Would he have been able to put his hand on the lion's head and
125 say to her, "Aw, so cute, nice little kitty." Or would she have chewed his arm off. Does our story
126 lend itself to the teaching that Daniel could have worshipped the king and still met a hungry lion,
127 and been found innocent? We all know it doesn't. And so now again we're asking ourselves how
128 can I be innocent before God? What does that involve? And we start to look through the Word of
129 God again to see what we missed when we read the story the first time and ran away from it.
130

131 ¶ 16 This time we begin to ponder the whole counsel of God. We go to Hebrews 11 where we
132 find the great chapter on faith. And we see what faith accomplished. We see how faith reveals
133 itself in a new life. Abel offered a better sacrifice. Noah built an ark. Abraham left his home and
134 went where God told him. Moses chose to be mistreated along with God's people rather than
135 enjoy the pleasures of sin. We start to realize that we are indeed found innocent in faith, clothed
136 in Christ's righteousness. But this faith is not a mere intellectual assent to some doctrinal truths.
137 It is a living, dynamic in-grafting into Christ, whose power has been also at work in us, teaching
138 us to fight against evil and to seek to do the good.
139

140 ¶ 17 Daniel was not innocent as if he had paid for his own sins or as if he had earned his
141 acquittal before the judgment seat of God. But he was still found innocent, being judged on the
142 basis of what he had done. As James teaches, his deeds revealed his faith. All his works
143 appeared before the Lord and in those works it was found that he was innocent. It was found that
144 he trusted God. He lived by faith when he served the king; he lived by faith when he was thrown
145 to lions. He had been faithful to God's covenant with him.
146

147 ¶ 18 And that is the necessary result of faith. It's inseparable from faith. As our catechism says,
148 "It is impossible that those who have been implanted into Christ by a true faith should fail to
149 bring forth the fruits of thanksgiving." Impossible. And it was in this way that he was found
150 innocent in Christ before God. There is no other way to read the story and understand the point.
151 This is no denial of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, a gift of God? But it points out
152 that faith reveals itself in covenant keeping. Covenant keeping is living by faith.

153
154 ¶ 19 A few Scripture passages – Paul says to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:12 – “If we disown Him, He
155 will disown us because He can't disown Himself.” Faith led Daniel to ignore the king's edict. He
156 didn't do it on a dare, as in the children's song almost leads us to think. “Dare to be a Daniel” –
157 I'm not so much against the song, but understand – Daniel doesn't do this on a dare. It's not an
158 option. It's not something that you do if you happen to be one of those brave people. He did it as
159 a response of faith to the command of God, the required response of all who wish to be found
160 innocent by faith in Christ.

161
162 ¶ 20 Think about Article 28, in this light, of the Belgic Confession. Concerning the true church,
163 it says, “We must separate ourselves from anything else and be joined to that church, yes, even if
164 the edicts of princes [kings] are against it and we should suffer death or any other corporal
165 punishment.” Our confession says that by faith we must be joined to the true church and honor
166 the Lord even if the king is going to throw us to the lions. So that's faith. There's no innocence
167 in salvation apart from keeping covenant with the Lord our God, living by faith.

168
169 ¶ 21 In Hebrews 3:19 we read about the guilty disobedience of the Israelites for which they
170 were destroyed in the desert, their guilty disobedience for which they would have gotten torn by
171 the lions, just like the satraps. That was called unbelief. They are still confessing the name of the
172 Lord and still bringing their sacrifices, but their disobedience the Lord says was unbelief. And
173 they were destroyed.

174
175 ¶ 22 Covenant keeping is the issue here. The Spirit of our Lord Jesus will not have us deceived.
176 As James says, “Do not be hearers only of the Word of God, and so deceive yourselves, but be
177 doers of the word, and so be saved.” And then when he explains that, he speaks immediately
178 about keeping a tight reign on our tongues and practicing true religion that pleases God –
179 looking after orphans and widows. Don't be deceived. Let your life be filled with these things.

180
181 ¶ 23 Covenant keeping is the issue here. By faith, humbling ourselves and fulfilling our daily
182 tasks as before God, as a mother, a father, a husband or wife, or whatever our tasks might be –
183 by faith fulfilling these tasks as before the Lord, doing works of mercy as we are able, and
184 seeking to keep ourselves unstained from the world. Covenant keeping is the issue.

185
186 ¶ 24 Consider this, too. In the judgment we will all be judged on the basis of what we have
187 done. Revelation 22:12. You say, why? How is that possible? Judged on the basis of what we've
188 done? We're saved by grace through faith alone. Well, we're judged in that way because
189 true faith reveals itself in a life of humble service. Call upon God to indeed work in us that
190 which is pleasing in His sight. See, we don't mean this is of ourselves – when we look at this
191 covenant issue, we don't mean this is of ourselves. It is from God who is at work in us.

192
193 ¶ 25 Think of how the new covenant was heralded – proclaimed – Jeremiah 31:33, repeated in
194 Hebrews. God said, “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time. I

195 will put my law in their minds and write it upon their hearts. And so I will be their God and they
196 will be My people.” I inserted the word “so” to make the meaning clear.

197
198 ¶ 26 And it’s been said here. Isn’t this also what we confess when we prepare for the Lord’s
199 Supper as we do this week or next week? Don’t we say exactly the same thing in our forms? We
200 warn those who are covenant-breakers, who trust not in God alone, but are superstitious, who are
201 disrespectful to those in authority, who are drunkards or liars. We warn them that they eat and
202 drink judgment unto themselves if they come to the table of the Lord.

203
204 ¶ 27 And the list we read. It’s not an exhaustive list. Paul warns that those who live in hatred or
205 discord or jealousy or dissensions or factions or envy, or those who slander their brother – He
206 says they will not inherit the kingdom of God. They will not be declared innocent. 1 Cor 11. We
207 are taught specifically concerning the Lord’s Supper. That if we do not come with love and
208 compassion for one another, recognizing the body, with forgiving hearts if we think someone has
209 wronged us, if we come with disregard for our sisters and brothers, we eat and drink judgment to
210 ourselves. We are not innocent. We must come keeping covenant with our God by faith taking
211 part in this meal.

212
213 ¶ 28 Will there still be sin in our lives? Who denies it? The form again helps us so profoundly.
214 Our coming to the table is itself an accusation against ourselves that we are guilty and worthy of
215 death. But it also points out that this sin, that which is in us against our will, we’re not defending
216 it; we hate it. We call upon God to help us get rid of it, to help us overcome.

217
218 ¶ 29 Congregation, we read the story of Daniel escaping from the lions without a scratch on
219 him. Understand that it means the lions won’t bite the innocent. That’s the point. And know for
220 sure that we, too, are innocent before God and we are invited to come to the table of the Lord.
221 But this invitation is given only as we call upon Him, both for His blood to cleanse us, and His
222 Spirit to guide us in the paths of righteousness. Only as by faith we seek to turn away from evil
223 and do what is good.

224
225 Let’s pray

ATTACHMENT 3

June 14, 2003
Consistory of XXX

Dear Consistory,

In the past we brought to the consistory’s attention our concerns about Rev. BBB’s preaching, the most recent being concerning the sermons *Christ Preserves His Own*, preached on November 17, 2002 and *The Lion Won’t Bite the Innocent*, preached on November 24, 2002.

We are now enclosing a copy of *The Lion Won’t Bite the Innocent* and a critique of this sermon prepared at our request by Mr. AAA, an elder in another URC church, We are in agreement with the substance of this critique and are presenting it to you with the request that you seriously consider this analysis of the doctrine presented in the sermon.

We believe that some of the views Rev. BBB presented in this sermon are in conflict with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. Mr. AAA has carefully laid out ways in which Rev. BBB’s

views conflict with Scripture, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, but we ask you to also look at the Canons of Dort, especially the Fifth Head of Doctrine.

We request your careful attention to this matter for it strikes at the very heart of the Gospel. In this sermon Rev. BBB taught that Christians will be found innocent in the final judgement based on works. He asserted that the imputed righteousness of Christ is not enough. We trust that you will show concern for Rev. BBB by attempting to show him the error he proclaimed from the pulpit of our church. We ask that you seriously consider your responsibility to Christ's Church (especially its members here in YYY), and your vow to uphold the doctrines of the Church.

We know these are difficult questions and issues. We pray that you will consider these matters objectively and that your decisions may be to the honour and glory of our LORD and Saviour.

We also have some questions for the consistory. You have known for some months that this sermon was being questioned. Do you agree with this sermon? If not, what will you do about it? We humbly remind the consistory of its sacred obligations to protect the flock of Christ (Acts20:28; John 21:17; Church Order Article 61). We urge you to call Rev. BBB to public repentance of the errors contained in this sermon and if he will not, to take the necessary steps to safeguard the peace and purity of the church. We are grieved by this but believe that what Rev. BBB has said about justification by works in this sermon is false doctrine.

We humbly request your response in writing so that we can be sure to understand clearly your views but also in case it should become necessary to take this matter to classis. We submit this letter with our prayers that God will guide you in the difficult decisions you have to make.

In Christ's service
CCC

ATTACHMENT 4
July 15, 2003

Consistory of XXX
YYY, Alberta

Dear Brethren:

We appreciate your courtesy in informing us that we would not soon receive a letter regarding our concern. We recognise that the issue before you is a very serious matter and that you want to thoroughly study the matter and make a wise decision regarding it. Nevertheless we are anxiously awaiting your reply. We hope that there will be no need to do so, but if it becomes necessary to take this matter to Classis we will need an adequate amount of time to prepare an overture. Please send a written response at your earliest convenience.

In Christ's service
CCC

ATTACHMENT 5
August 20, 2003

Consistory of XXX,
YYY, AB

Dear Brethren,

We are considering your request to meet with the consistory. While we are not refusing to meet with you, we ask that you first consider our letter and respond to the concerns we raised there. We have written you a detailed letter, including a comprehensive critique of the Dan. 6 sermon. The matter as we see it is an extremely serious one—one which strikes at the heart of the gospel. Are we saved by faith alone or is our faithfulness also necessary? Is Christ a full and complete Saviour or is he not? (L.D. 11 Q&A 30). Depending on how you answer these questions and our concerns in the June 15, 2003 communication, we may be obliged to present this matter to Classis. In order for us to be fair in our presentation we need your written answer. We are sure that you as well as we want this matter to be resolved according to God's Word and for his honour and glory and for the welfare of XXX.

We will need your answer to our June 15, 2003 letter by September 1 in order for us to meet the deadline for submitting material to Classis. It would be awkward for both you and us if we are compelled to report to Classis that you have not given us an answer we can submit to them.

We understand that you want to talk with us about a statement by Rev. BBB and about how issues such as the one we have raised should be dealt with in the future. Neither of these is integral to our original letter so once again we ask that you respond in writing to our original letter first, because time is of the essence.

In Christ's service,
CCC

ATTACHMENT 6

CCC

Sept. 9/2003

Brother and sister CCC:

In response to your letter of June 14, 2003. We will try to keep our reply brief.

1. Council has been and remains supportive of Pastor BBB's preaching.
2. Council recognizes a lack of clarity in the sermon on Daniel 6 that seems to allow for different interpretations of its meaning. However, even those who see problems with it are not persuaded that charges of heresy should be brought.
3. We do not believe Pastor BBB's views are in conflict with Scripture or the confessions.

In your letter of August 20, you ask the question; "Are we saved by faith alone or is our faithfulness also necessary? Is Christ a full and complete Saviour or is He not?" We answer, yes, indeed, we are saved through faith alone and point out that the second section of the Heidelberg Catechism points to Christ's word and not to ours.

However, our thankful response to such deliverance, worked by the Lord himself is a necessary response. Cf. Lord's Day 32.

Seeking to do everything decently and in good order as the Lord calls us in 1 Cor. 14: 40, we request that you meet with us at our next scheduled meeting. Letters back and forth do little to clarify things and promote unity in the Spirit. It seems to us that a proper procedure would have us meet face to face and discuss any differences we might have. Only by discussing concerns in a humble Christ-like manner will we come to understanding to the honour and praise of our gracious almighty God. Please make arrangements with our chairman as to the time of your visit.

Sincerely,

For the council of XXX

REMARKS BY ECUMENICAL DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

Rev. Hans Uittenbosch

International Seafarer's Ministry

Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates and visitors who are here today. I should like to say that I am really privileged to be with you here. I have been a chaplain to seafaring people for 40 years. In the last 12 years, I have been working primarily on board of cruise ships. Half of those who are here as delegates I already know from history, and I am very happy that I met you. With respect to all those whom I do not know, I would like to say thank you for welcoming me in your context and fellowship.

I must say it might be a little bit of what happened on board of a Pakistani ship, which was a freighter, and there were all kinds of Muslims. On board, in fact, the entire ship was Muslim with the exception of, interestingly, three people who came up to me. And the one person said, "My name happens to be Jamal Massih." I said, "Congratulations." The second person said, "My name happens to be Wasir Massih," so I thought they must be brothers. And the third person said, My name is Ramin Massih. I said, "How come? Is everybody in Pakistan called "Massih"? And the one man said to me, "No, sir. You should know better. We are the only three people who are Christians, and when you are a Christian in Pakistan, you take the name of the Messiah, and you put it on to your own name. So we are the three Massihs because Massih is Urdu for "the Messiah."

I thought it magnificent that I found myself in the midst of all those, although I didn't know their name, who are belonging to the Massih, to the Messiah. I am here for two reasons. Number one, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to a number of you and to your churches for your magnificent support of the Ministry to Seafarers that I have been conducting during the last 12 years. That's number one. And number two, I would like to challenge you, as a federation, if you perhaps could start a Ministry to Seafarers independent and separate from me, a Ministry in which a person would be placed to visit the crew members on board of Cruise ships in the port of Miami, in particular. And I think that it would be so significant if you could do that by yourself and if you could supervise the person and if you could support the person and if you could call a person. I would be very happy to give any counseling in how to start this ministry; but other than that, it would be under your total control. Since you do not have a particular Mission Committee I could approach, I'm approaching you as a synod. And I would like to say that six years ago, the Hamilton United Reformed Church already started this and wanted to get the thing on the runway and get it to fly, but it didn't, because of the fact that there was no financial support. And so I thought perhaps I might inspire you all.

As you well know, in terms of the ministry to seafaring people, it's biblically oriented. The scriptures speak about the stranger in the gate, and God said there are three categories you must pay attention to: first, the poor, you have always them with you; secondly, the widows and orphans and keeping yourself unspotted from the world, says James; and, thirdly, the stranger in the gate.

And I'm concerned about the Cruise Ships because of four reasons. Number one, on board of the Cruise Ships, there are, I should like to submit to you, between 500 and 1,400 members of the Officers, the Staff, and the Crew. And the second reason is that all of those people, by and large, are young people. And the third reason is that all of those people come from a great variety of some 60 nationalities to our ports, and we are in the position to bring them the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And the fourth reason is that all of these people return home to their respective countries, and we can entrust unto them the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I distribute the Scriptures, and I am so delighted that I can do that, and you can do that as well. It is a great, magnificent ministry right at your doorstep. Last night, we had a magnificent service with Reverend Vander Kooi who let us sing, "All Thy works

shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea,” and I would like to add on to that “and on the sea” as well.

I have left some of my propaganda material, if you will, (or some of the flyers, or if you want to call it, in a more naval manner, some of my sailors). They are lying on the table in the back there on the starboard side of the foyer or narthex, or whatever you wish to call it, and you are welcome to them. Help yourself liberally and freely to them, and I hope that you will get inspired for this particular type of Ministry.

In conclusion, let me simply make one observation. My son happens to be a member of this congregation. In view of the fact that he’s a member of the congregation, I would like to let you know that – in fact, two of our children are here in Calgary. My daughter is in the Christian school teaching. The wife of my son is the principal of the Christian school -- or the Assistant Principal, and my son-in-law is a person who is also working in the Christian school.

My son regrettably did not become a pastor. But I spoke to him one day, his profession happens to be air traffic controller here in Calgary, and I said: Well, Marcel, let’s keep one thing in mind. There’s a great resemblance between your work and my work, isn’t that so? After all, I preach salvation, and you, in the last analysis, when you get up into the tower every time, you preach safety, correct? And he said, Yes, you’re right. And for the rest, he didn’t say very much. But a moment later, he suddenly broke the silence. He said, Dad, there is one fundamental difference. I said, What is it? He said, When you get up in the pulpit, then lo and behold, you preach, and they are deathly quiet. They listen to your sermon. They go out, but they don’t necessarily do what you said. But when I get up in the tower and Air Canada 787 is coming in from Montreal, and I tell them, “Land on runway 28,” the pilot doesn’t say, “Well, it looks like 36 is just as good to me.” They always do exactly what I say. I hope that my speech here was in line with the principles of my son, the air traffic controller. Thank you very much indeed. May the Lord bless you all in your deliberations.

Dr. C.W. “Bud” Powell

The Reformed Church of the United States

Thank you so much. We have enjoyed the warm fellowship. It’s good to meet new friends and to see the work of the Spirit of God in your midst. It’s wonderful to see all you men, wonderful to hear you sing, and we rejoice in the opportunity to be here.

I’m here from the Reformed Church of the United States because at our 2003 synod, a committee was appointed to study justification by faith in light of present controversies. I was on that committee, and we brought a report to the 2004 synod that met in May. And I’m here just to lay a few ideas at the door of your mind as Christian brothers, as a fellow denomination, that holds to the three forms of unity and has a great tradition in the reformed faith and some of the results and some of our thinking as far as that report was concerned.

The issue that we dealt with was the relationship of faith to works, justification by faith. Faith alone, or is it other things involved? We decided to split the scope of our work to include, first of all, the theology of Norman Shepherd. That report came in this year. Next year, we expect to bring a report on the new perspectives of Paul in the light of the same parameter. The report this year confessedly dealt with the confession of faith. The creeds, the three forms of unity which we espouse, which you espouse, we hold to be the summation, accurate summaries, of the word of God, and we expect our ministers to hold to them.

And, therefore, we were involved with two things. We want to study the theology of Norman Shepherd and then to see whether or not the theology actually was in conformity to the three forms of unity. We decided that his theology was not. I brought eight copies of the report to synod, and I understand that 25 more are being printed. They’ll be on the table at the back. When they’re gone,

they're gone. But you can also get the report on a number of places on the web. Speak to me, and I will give the address on that.

I would like to say that very often, there is a problem discerning cause and effect. I had that illustrated to me a number of years ago. I was preaching in a little church out in eastern Colorado. The minister and his wife and family went off early to prepare the church and left me at the house with my family, and he left his 5- or 6-year-old son. He said, "Tommy, do you know the way to the church?" And Tommy said "yes."

And so they went off on their merry way, and about a half an hour later, we were all ready, got in the car, and started down the country road to go to church. Tommy was sitting in the back seat between my two sons. He was leaning forward between my wife and I, and we got partway down the road, and I said, "Now, I know we're going to have to turn pretty soon. Tommy, do you know where to turn?" And he leaned forward. He said, "Yes, it's very easy. Look right up there at the front of the car, when that little light starts flashing."

Fortunately, Tommy also knew where to turn, even though he had cause and effect mixed up. And I think in some of the theology of the modern day, and I would just lay this idea before the door of your mind, sometimes we get cause and effect mixed up.

The thinking of our committee was that sanctification is the result of justification. We love the Lord because he first loved us. That faith is the cause of good works, but no amount of good works can be the cause of faith. Regeneration brings us into new life, which produces faith and good works; but the cause of that regeneration is in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and no amount of effort on our part can take dead faith and make it alive.

Many years ago, I was teaching in the Christian school in southern Oregon. I'll never forget this experience. I was a young minister teaching school, trying to effect a church plant, and the magnitude of the task that was before me was illustrated by this experience. It was a very small school. I was the principal and bus driver and the janitor and chief executive officer. And one day, I had another teacher assist me, and when she was out on the playground, I was inside; and when I was out on the playground, she was inside.

Well, one recess, it was my turn to be inside, and while I'm sitting there trying to grade some papers, a little boy comes in, and he says, "Mr. Powell, Mrs. Zeer tells me that there are kids fighting on the playground." So I went out there, and, sure enough, there were a couple little boys going at it, as Mark Twain says, covering themselves with dust and glory. And I discerned which one seemed to be mostly at fault. And he was a beautiful, little boy, blond, curly hair, bright, blue eyes.

When I got to him, he had smudged dirt across his face. And I took him by the hand, and I was going to take him into the classroom and put him on timeout because we didn't allow fighting at the school. And I'm walking along and I'm giving him the lecture. It goes something like this. Every schoolteacher knows it. "You know, the Bible tells us that we're supposed to love each other. God didn't give us hands to smite one another. We're to be kind; we're to be gentle; we're to be loving." You probably know the lecture. You probably used it from time to time.

Partway through the lecture, I decided I better see what effect my words were having, and so I looked down, and he looked up at me, and I'll never forget that beautiful, little face and the bright, blue eyes and the curly, golden hair, and he said, "But I like to fight." I realized the magnitude of the task that was before me.

Justification and the cause of justification, we believe, is the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and his perfect obedience to God. It is that gospel which is the power of God to change lives, to change hearts, to renew us unto the kind of obedience that God accepts, not because it's perfect obedience, but because we have already been justified because Jesus Christ died for us and fully kept the law for us. I would lay these ideas at the door of your mind. Read the report. And we would invite you, by God's grace, to join with us in some such affirmation that our message to the world, our hope to sinners, might be clear and unified in the gospel of Christ. Thank you and God bless you.

Canadian Reformed Churches

Mr. Chairman, brothers, and some sisters in the audience, it is a privilege for Reverend Willem Slomp and myself to be here this afternoon as delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches. We thank you for your kind invitation, and we've accepted that very joyfully. We would like to extend to you warm greetings from our churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and I don't just say that. I've talked to a lot of people in our churches in recent days, and many of them have expressed real appreciation for the United Reformed Churches and have thought about your synod and have prayed for it and have really expressed that warm greetings should be extended to you.

This is the first time that either Reverend Slomp or I are attending a United Reformed synod. I have attended the Alliance of Reformed Churches in Chicago three times. Those were great days. Your synod is a little different than ours. When our synod meets once every three years, we have 16 men: Eight ministers, eight elders. At our last synod, we decided to increase that by 50 percent, so we're up to 24 at our next synod, so we're catching up to you. I think we've got a long ways to go.

For your information, our churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches, are comprised of about 16,000 members. We have 52 churches with retired ministers and professors. We have about 71 ministers. We have eight classes, two regional synods, and our general synod meets once every three years. We also are tremendously blessed with elementary schools, high schools, quite a few of them. We have a teacher's college, a theological college, nursing homes, homes for the aged, an association for the handicapped. The Lord has blessed us so much.

I would like to share with you that among the Canadian Reformed Churches, there is a great deal of peace and a great deal of unity. We hold to a very high view of the scriptures, and we love our three forms of unity. We have had ecclesiastical fellowship, or sister church relationship, with quite a number of churches for a long time, with the Gereformeerde Kerken (*Vrijgemaakt*) in the Netherlands, Free Reformed Churches in Africa and Australia. But in recent years, we've also developed a sister church, full ecclesiastical fellowship, with a presbyterian church in Korea, Kosin, also with the Free Church of Scotland and Free Church of Scotland continuing, as well as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church of the United States, and the reformed churches in Brazil. We also have very close contact with the Free Reformed Churches in L'Église réformée du Québec and a few other churches as well.

You should understand that the Canadian Reformed Churches go very slowly when we're working towards ecclesiastical relationships. It's a big struggle for us. It's something that we have to get used to. We go slowly. We go carefully, but we have been blessed so much with our relationships with new churches like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Free Church of Scotland, RCUS. But we realize we have a common front. Sometimes we thought Presbyterianism is so different from being Reformed. We realize that we are so close. We hold to the same scriptures. We love the Lord. We want to bring the gospel to the world, and we realize that our enemy is secularism, this post-modern age in which we live, and we love to work together.

Then, brothers, there's our relationship with you, the United Reformed Churches in North America. I say this carefully, but this relationship really excites us. That's because we have the common backgrounds. We come from the same roots, the same reformed roots. We have relationships as families. If you go back far enough, we were one church. We have watched you for about, oh, 15, 20 years. We've seen how you've been working towards unity as a federation with the Alliance of Reformed Churches. You became a federation. We were excited. We prayed for you. We loved how you held to the infallibility and authority of God's word, to the three forms of unity, working for a church order based on the old church order, Dort, and we have been very pleased that we were able to Phase 2 of ecclesiastical relationships.

In Edmonton where I'm from, Reverend Slomp and I have very close fellowship with Reverend William Pols here and Reverend Jacob Kits. We exchange pulpits all the time. We have friendships. We hold speeches together. It's been great for the Edmonton area. Our people there see United Reformed and Canadian Reformed as being the same, and we have a high regard for one another, and we long to express unity even more and more.

Brothers, we're very thankful for what has been achieved thus far, for the unity we have. It is our hope and our prayer that greater unity can even be expressed in the future. It's our hope and prayer that one day the Lord would bless us with federative unity. Please understand, as Canadian Reformed people, we do not say that means you have to join us and you have to do it our way, but a mutual working together, talking through things like a Psalter, theological education, and church order. As a matter of fact, my colleagues and I have been talking and say you have a beautiful name. You are the United Reformed Churches, and we would love to be a part of the United Reformed Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is our hope and our prayer that the Lord will bless this synod. This past Sunday afternoon, many Canadian Reformed pulpits prayed for your upcoming synod. We know that you're dealing with some difficult issues. May the Holy Spirit guide you. May the word of God and the confessions be your guide so that all your decisions are pleasing to the Lord and for the edification of the church. Brothers, we love you. We care for you very deeply, and we pray that the Lord will continue to bless you. Thank you.

Rev. R.C. "Karlo" Janssen

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)

Thank you, Reverend Sikkema, for your kind words. What he did not mention was that we also used to be neighbours in Hamilton. We lived on the same road.

Chairman, brothers, delegates, brothers and sisters in the public, it is a great privilege and honour to be allowed to address your assembly. You and the churches Reverend Ter Beek and I represent, the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands, share a common urge to serve the one, only true God and spread the truth of scripture. We do so in the tradition of the great reformation, building forth upon the faith articulated and confessed in the three forms of unity. It is good and proper for us to mutually encourage one another. In the history of ecumenics, our contacts are of a recent date. In 1996, news reached us of a schism in the CRC. Our synod instructed deputies BBK, that's our version of CECCA, to investigate whether closer contact with these churches should be sought. In 1999, our churches met simultaneously in synod. Two of our deputies were present at your synod but were, of course, unable to report back to our synod. Our most recent synod, synod 2002, received a positive report from deputies BBK and instructed them to prepare a sister church relationship with the URC, and it is for that purpose that we are in your midst.

The history of the GKN(v) is characterized by many church schisms and a church merger. We think of the secession of 1834, the *doleantie* of 1886, and the union of 1892, which led to the formation of the GKN. However, we're generally not known as the GKN but the GKN(v), the liberated churches. Liberated from what, you might ask. Liberated from extra confessional subscription. During the Second World War, the synod of the GKN enforced subscription to certain doctrinal statements for candidates to the ministry, which was considered to be binding to more than the three forms of unity, and this was proven when a candidate refused to subscribe and was, therefore, refused admission to the ministry. This candidate later served our churches as professor of Old Testament.

During the 1960s, we had struggles over confessional subscription and compliance with the church order. Office bearers in the churches felt free to disagree with explicit statements of confessions, arguing that these statements were not substantial to the confessions. When classes, regional synods, and general

synods contradicted them, these office bearers continued to expound their views. The church has considered them to be in violation of the church order and de facto withdrawn from the federation. These churches reorganized themselves in a somewhat more congregationalistic church federation known as the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken. At present, our churches are undergoing a new separation movement. A number of persons spread throughout the country have taken issue with several decisions taken by synods Zuidhorn. The numbers are relatively small.

Our church federation numbers just over 127,000, and the group that is separating, roughly 1,000 at this moment. They are led by one retired minister. No other minister has joined this group. However, this is not to say that the concerns of those who have liberated themselves are not shared by others in the churches. The fact is that most are agreed that the proper ecclesiastical channels have not been exhausted and that the discussion on the issues around which concerns have arisen, especially the exegesis of the fourth commandment, the position of divorce and remarriage, underlying hermeneutical questions, have not come to a close.

In this context, it should be noted that the allegation that the reformed character of the GKN(v) is hardly recognizable is entirely out of order. The Canadian Reformed Churches, in whose circles this statement originated, have, when assembled in synod earlier this year, publicly apologized to our churches for the claims that have been made and the hurt that has been caused. We mention this because this statement was quoted in Christian Renewal.

We are, thus, a federation of churches that have struggled, on the one hand, with extra confessional binding and, on the other hand, with a marginalization of the confession. Given the overtures and appeals on your agenda and having heard your debate yesterday, we urge you to hold fast the doctrine of scripture as articulated in your confessional documents, and be very cautious in binding consciences with respect to doctrine where scripture and, in its wake, the Reformed confessions allow room for divergence of opinions or where our understanding of scripture has not sufficiently crystallized. The Spirit who guides us in all the truth tells us that our knowledge at this moment is in part and that now we only see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13).

This history of church secession stimulated us to seek those who stand with us on the foundations of the reformed faith. In the Netherlands, we are accustomed to speak of the "*kleine oecumene*", the small ecumenicity. We have been speaking of the GKN-V. The Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken correspond to the Free Reformed Churches here in North America, and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken who have no North American equivalent. The status of our relationship with the CGK is akin to your relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Our contacts with the NGK continues to falter at a church federational level on the point of confessional subscription; though, at a local level, many congregations are making progress, convincing congregations of the necessity of confessional subscription. We rejoice, therefore, at the progress there is and the contact between your churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches. We even dare to say that we are jealous. You seem to have come further in the past decade than we in Holland with the CGK in the past half century. And we also enjoy seeing you seeking unity with others. We think especially of other sister churches of ours, the RCUS and the OPC, and churches with whom we have contact via the ICRC, and we sincerely hope the Lord will cause you to become a focal point of Reformed and Presbyterian ecumenicity.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands live in a secularized society in which post-modernism, relativism, individualism, and syncretism leave their mark. Though once a staunchly Calvinist nation, it is today the most de-Christianized country in western Europe. The baptism of the eldest daughter of our crown prince last Saturday evidenced how little is left of the national religion. The meaning of baptism was explained by the legend of Saint Christopher rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Increasing secularization has led the GKN(v) to become more involved in outreach and to speak the language of today.

At the same time, the GKN(v) have realized the need for reformed churches worldwide to combine their powers and talents as globalization becomes a reality. We are keen to share what God has granted us, be it through the sending of theological instructors, missionaries, mission aide workers, or supplying literature. On this score, we believe the GKN(v) and the URCNA can be of much benefit to each other. Perhaps we can even be of service in your quest for regulations to manage your federation.

Churches of our Lord in North America, we encourage you to continue to strive for the proper worship of our God and Father and Jesus Christ our Saviour. By keeping the word that God has entrusted to you, the saving gospel can shine in your environment and across plains, deserts, mountains, and oceans right around the globe. May the King of the church bless you in the struggle for the unity of the faith and in all your endeavors, and may His name be glorified by all who see your works. Christ's church-gathering work really supersedes boundaries and cultures, for our commonwealth comes to us from heaven. May Christ make haste.

In closing, we extend you the right hand of fellowship. Our heart's desire is that we might enter into a sister church relationship with you and that you here are willing to make a start. We heartily invite your churches to be represented at our synod to be held, the Lord willing, in the spring and summer of 2005 in Amersfoort. -- Though having heard the discussion this morning, I wonder whether you can still do that since you'll also have to attend the ICRC, which is also next year. And if you can't come, you'll have to wait another three years. And by the time you're done, you'll probably be united with the Canadian Reformed, and there's no point. --

We hope that by then, you've learned enough of us to fully trust us as true reformed churches. How good it would be if, already next year, we could look each other in the eye as lovers do and, by establishing a form of full ecclesiastical fellowship, profess our shared faith in the one and only God. That surely will be praised as a mighty work of the One who gathers one people across the globe for His Father. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Douwe Breed

Reformed Churches in South Africa

Mr. chairman, brothers, sisters, thank you for the invitation to send delegates to your synod and that we may be here on behalf of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. Our synod mandated me and my colleague, Professor du Plooy to attend this synod. Thank you for your hospitality and all the arrangements and accommodation, and a word of special thanks to the people where we are staying.

It is our first visit to the URCNA and to Calgary. I am, since 1981, a minister in the Reformed Churches in South Africa and serve at the moment, as you heard, at the Reformed church Waterkloofrand in Pretoria. Professor Prof. du Plooy is a professor at the theological school of the GKSA in Potchefstroom.

Perhaps a few facts about our churches: Our churches were founded in 1959. Our theological school dates back to 1869, and that was also the beginning of the Potchefstroom university for Christian education. At the moment, we have 300 congregations in our synod. The other synod, synod Soutpansberg, has about 10 to 15 churches, small churches, but about 200 of them. And we are working at the moment hard to reorganize the structure of our synod, of our churches.

Perhaps you will know that, but we have an institution in Potchefstroom where all our students selected for the ministry are being trained. As you perhaps know, we have 11 official languages in South Africa, so we try to accommodate every one and are, therefore, teaching in Afrikaans and in English and work hard on a system to translate our seminars and teachings in all the other languages.

The faculty of theology in the theological school have been -- have established more than 15 agreements with other theological institutions in our country and countries in Africa and abroad, for

instance, in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand. This way of training and education is known as the Telematic or distance-learning system.

Something about our political environment: As you perhaps know, the new South Africa is ten years old. We are thankful to our Lord for some political stability that we experienced in the past ten years, but there remain a lot of concerns that need to be addressed, such as violence, murders on the farmers in South Africa, attacks on many innocent people, hijacking, a lot of corruption, discrimination, and ethical problems, *et cetera*. Many people, including well-trained professional people, and particularly young people, have left the country. It is also true that many of them are returning to the country better skilled and perhaps a little wiser. The church has to guide these members in these specific circumstances.

The other governments, the department of education and the whole cabinet, decided in 2003 to diminish the number of higher education institutions and that the Potchefstroom university for Christian education should merge with another university of the Northwest. It was decided that the university should no longer maintain its Christian character. They are currently involved in this process of merging and trying to manage it in such a way that the values of the institution could be maintained, at least on the campus of Potchefstroom. It doesn't affect the theological seminary, which belongs to our denomination and which is governed by the board of curators appointed by the church; and, therefore, Mr. Chairman, brothers and sisters, we need your prayers in this regard.

About all ecumenical ties: We are convinced that everybody who is acquainted with the history of the Reformed churches in South Africa will know that we value our relationship with other churches as part of our calling to be one in Christ and, therefore, as something special among Christians with the same creeds and convictions.

We were co-founders of the REC but are, since 1988, no more members. We have ecumenical unity with churches such as the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands, Reformed churches in Japan, the Presbyterian church in Korea, Netherlands Gereformeerde Kerken and the New Zealand Reformed churches and the Christian Reformed churches in Australia, the Reformed churches in Botswana, and also the Free churches in Scotland and the continuing one.

As you know, we also have unity with the CRC, but our synod put the relationship on hold since 2003. And yesterday and the day before that, Professor du Plooy and I had intensive discussions with the delegates of the CRC about their course, directions, and views with regard to authority of scripture, liturgy, homosexuality, unity in the church, and issues about church polity. We shall report to our commission on church relations when we go back on these matters and make some recommendations to our synod in 2006.

Professor du Plooy and I are mandated by our synod to discuss some form of unity between the Reformed Churches of South Africa and the URCNA. We would like to discuss this in depth with your committee. Fortunately, some of your representatives have been in South Africa attending our synod in 2003 and are familiar with our resolutions on a variety of issues.

We have had the opportunity to read your recommendation of advisory committee number 8 and the proposed letter to the synod of Potchefstroom in 2006. Mr. Chairman, we know that you have a very strong conviction of women in any office, and we respect it. We would like to indicate to the committee, and be thankful for the chance to do that, that we value the authority of scripture in any matter, without exceptions, as very serious, and we would like to illustrate that to the committee. This is not the chance to do that, but we thank you for having the opportunity to talk to them, and perhaps the letter that you will write us will be different from the one that you have in front of you.

Mr. Chairperson, we want to assure you of our prayers. We trust that the Holy Spirit is enlightening you to understand the word of God directly and to be able to apply the principles of the word of God with regard to the decisions to be made. We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Mr. Chairman, delegates and visitors to synod 2004, David confesses in Psalm 139, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, and Your right hand will hold me fast.”

On behalf of some of your Reformed brothers and sisters who have settled on the far side of the sea, I bring you greetings, warm greetings in the name of our common Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the privilege of being able to speak to you today, and it’s good to be among you once again. I speak this morning as a representative of the Reformed churches of New Zealand, churches, not just church, and as a member of our interchurch relations committee.

We, in the RCNZ are a rather small group. We have only 19 established churches with about 3,300 members. We are very aware of our small size and our relative isolation from the rest of the Reformed world. We live in an island nation, but still, we do not want to be an island to ourselves. Thus, it is our desire to establish good relationships with other Reformed denominations. And to that end, I am here this week.

I was able to be here because my parents, who live in Ontario, wanted to fly us out to celebrate their anniversary this summer, and when some members of our denomination found out about that, they said, Well, you’re going to be in Ontario. While you’re in the area, you may as well go to the meeting, so I’m in the area. I mention this for a reason. At our last synod meetings, one of the decisions that we made with regard to the URCNA was that a delegate be sent to the upcoming synod of the URCNA if it could be done at no cost to synod.

Now, I mention that because I think that perhaps there are many creative ways of dealing with the concerns expressed about costs than simply limiting the committee to one visit a year. In our denomination, it’s our experience to vote each time at each synod meeting with respect to those churches that we have either in fellowship with already or that we are interested in fellowship with. We vote on whether we send a delegate to them. And we recognize that we’re a small church. We have limited resources, and so a number of decisions are made with the added statement “if it could be done at no cost to synod.” And I think that’s perhaps a little bit wiser way to go about it than simply limiting the number of visits that could be made, and so I would certainly urge you to reconsider that particular amendment that was made. I know we’re going to be having another synod meeting in our Hamilton congregation on the north island, and you’re certainly welcome to send a delegate, and I can imagine that there’s got to be a minister or an elder out there who would love to visit New Zealand as a tourist. We already see a hand there. It’s a beautiful country. I certainly recommend it, and then it can be done at no cost.

Well, in any event, why are we interested in contact with you, with the URCNA? We have to understand the history of our churches in New Zealand. Historically, we’ve had a very strong relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The first church order that we adopted was that of the CRCNA, and we received much support from the CRC in our early years. A number of CRC ministers have served in our churches, including the church I served. I’m the third North American pastor to serve there. And even now, most of our churches still use the old blue CRC *Psalter Hymnal* as their main songbook, as you yourselves do. However, the same liberal tendencies that led to the formation of your federation forced our synod to officially cut ties with the CRCNA in 1998.

Now, given that our relationship with the CRCNA has been severed and given the reasons for the breakup of our relationship, we believe in New Zealand that it’s only natural for us to seek to establish a relationship with you. We believe that this would be the natural continuation of our ties to the confessional Reformed tradition in North America.

Brothers, we have so much in common. The cultures we operate in are very similar. We are both members of the ICRC. We speak the same language, both in the actual words that we utter and in the truth that we seek to convey through those words. To demonstrate our commitment to scripture and the confessions, RCNZ office bearers are required to sign a form of subscription quite similar to your own. Like yourselves, we subscribe to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. Mind you, we have also added a fourth form of unity, the Westminster Confession of Faith. Our system of church government is very similar to yours. Now, we call our consistory the session, and we call our classes presbyteries, but our church order otherwise is quite similar. We trace the same roots as you do to the continental Reformed tradition. Like yourselves, we meet as synod once every three years. Our last synod was held in 2002, our next synod next year. And we certainly hope that someone from the URC would be able to attend and also be invited to participate in our discussions. This is a small group. We're easily able to accommodate others speaking at our assemblies, and it's been very helpful for us. We appreciate it. We enjoy the contact that we can have at such meetings.

I believe also that any URC member visiting with us would feel quite at home in our worship services. Our liturgies would be very familiar to you. We use many of the same liturgical forms. We preach the same gospel in much the same manner. Mind you, there are some minor differences of matters of worship among our New Zealand churches but certainly no greater than the differences existing already among your own churches. Now, given our similarities, it's only natural that we should work together towards formalizing our ties. It would be good to mutually recognize one another and to build relationship for the upbuilding of our two federations and the glory of God.

As I mentioned, we have made a decision to send a delegate to your synod. We've also made a decision to encourage the URCNA in the progress that they have made in establishing closer ties with the Canadian and American Reformed churches. So incidentally, consider yourselves encouraged. We also made a decision to continue an exchange of information with a view to establishing a sister church relationship with the URCNA. Now, what our decisions should convey is that we are interested in you. We are interested in what is happening with you, and we do want to establish closer ties. It's my understanding that our term "sister church relationship" would roughly be the equivalent of your new term "ecumenical fellowship." That's what we would like to work toward.

Now, to demonstrate this desire, I come bringing gifts. I have for you a copy of the minutes of our last synod meeting and also a book detailing the history of our churches during the first 40 years of our existence, and I have for you a book containing a copy of our church order and a commentary on it by one of our respected elders. I have here a most recent copy of our church yearbook and even a number of issues from our magazine, the magazine of the Reformed churches in New Zealand, *Faith and Focus*, and also a written extended copy of my speech, which has in it a few more details about our churches.

Now, I give these to you, Mr. Chairman, and I give them to you at no charge. I'd also like to encourage anyone interested in learning more about us to check out our federation's web page, the address of which can be found in the printed copy of the speech. Now, I pray that we may be able to be of assistance to each other in the service of our Lord and Saviour. In the words of Romans 1:8, we thank our God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith has been recorded all over the world. We encourage you in the deliberations you are engaging in this week, and we wish you wisdom in the decisions that you make. May God continue to work in both our federations for the advancement of his truth and the praise of his name. Thank you.

Rev. Frank Lanting

Presbyterian Church in America

Mr. Chairman and delegates to the URC, it's a privilege to be here. I think it was because there would be no cost that they asked me to come. I live here in Calgary. It was the obvious choice, but when Reverend Roy Taylor, stated clerk of the PCA, asked me to come and address you, I really, even though I've been in the ministry for 20 years, had no idea what that exactly meant except to say, "Hello. Greetings from the Presbyterian Church of America."

But before I do that, I'm going to back up and just tell you a little bit about myself. Some of you know me. As it was said, I pastor Woodgreen Presbyterian Church. We just built a new building as well. We praise the Lord for that. I've been in a basement office for 9 years – 10 years, going on 11 years, and I have my own office now in the church building. And if you dial to the church, you have to dial 22 in order to reach me. And as you know, in the Presbyterian Church of America, we're called not pastors. First of all, we're called teaching elders, and an elder, you know, is a bishop. So I've been lovingly called, jokingly called, Bishop 22. My views are far from his.

I was the obvious choice being here, but also the fact that I have the same heritage as many of you do. My parents emigrated from Holland after the war. I was raised in the CRC. I graduated from Dordt College and Calvin Seminary. I pastored in the CRC for seven years before being called to the PCA and to serve here in Calgary in '92. And over the 12 years that I've served, I've had the honour and privilege to be connected to Bethel URC before it was Bethel URC, knowing Dick Wynia, Ed Marcusse, and now Joel Vander Kooi. Also Jogi Gangar, we had some acquaintance before.

So I've wrestled with some of the same issues and concerns that were at the core foundation and formation of the URC. My personal thanks to you as a denomination – as a federation, excuse me, for our labours, for your sincerity, for your hard work at upholding the Reformed faith. I appreciate very much the works of Michael Horton. They've been a blessing to me. Pastor Kim Riddlebarger, I appreciate you having put your sermons on Revelation on the internet. I just finished – or I'm still working on a series on Revelation, and they've been a great help to me.

All of this leads me to say that as the PCA delegate – which the Presbyterian Church of America, many of you know, came out of what's now called the PCUSA and began in 1973. As a denomination, three hallmarks or three things that they set out to do when they started and formed that denomination is, number one, to be faithful to the word, to be true to the Reformed faith, and to be obedient to the great commission. And I appreciate the fact that we, as different denominations, have that same heart, that same concern. I appreciate my fellowship with my brothers here at Bethel URC, in our many different times of fellowship, and having the privilege of serving bringing God's word from this platform. I appreciate the fact that we are standing in the trenches together bringing that same gospel, appreciating the same Reformed faith.

I was told by Cal Tuininga, and I don't think we have seen each other since seminary days, that there's three levels of fellowship, and I'm not sure where we're at between the URC and the PCA, if it's at the beginning stages. I guess that's where we are. But I would encourage and challenge both you and our denomination to continue to maintain that fellowship, to do all that we can to work together, maybe to the place where we can exchange pastors in the pulpits because we uphold and we teach, we promote, the same Christ and the same gospel.

And I know, and I've been told by various people at this synod, that report number 9 is somewhat of a struggle, the whole issue of law and grace, justification, sanctification. We just had our last presbytery meeting, debate, discussion on this new perspective on Paul. And I'm not going to preach a sermon to you because I feel like I'm preaching to the choir, but I want to plead with you, don't move off that foundation of sovereign grace. And I say that because so much of what I hear from the modern

evangelical church sermons, pastors, teaching, it burdens the sheep continually exhorting to do, to do, to do. And if you ask me, that's exactly what it is, do-do.

Some of those sermons that I've heard preached on the radio, they have their lists, their principles, their programs, their victorious living steps, but not the gospel. And I tell you that good humanists and good Mormons can pull it off. They can wash the outside. They can change the behaviour, but they cannot clean the inside. We want Marys, and we do not want Marthas. We want to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. And so I encourage you, as brothers in the Lord, as a denomination, to continue to preach the unadulterated, Reformed faith gospel of Jesus Christ.

I want to close with two illustrations that help keep the gospel before me, and this is not, in any way, to slander my wife. But let me just have a show of hands, How many of you men that are married share a closet with your wife? Most of you. After 20 years of marriage, I share a closet with my wife, and she takes up two-thirds of the closet. I get the one-third, and she has, not every day but at times, walked into that closet and said, "I have nothing to wear." I don't understand it, but, brothers, this is what helps and sits with me: That is the greatest confession.

Whether you're born again yesterday and you've come to understand the gospel for the first time or whether you've been in the marriage for 20 years, from the day we're first believing to the day we will stand in heaven, what are we going to say? "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." We will never find our joy, our happiness, our satisfaction, our identity, not even in the righteousness, in the goodness, that Christ works in our lives. We will always find it in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I pray personally that you will continue, especially in our day and age, to teach and preach that gospel. So much of the church wants an instant field, so they're coming up with the lists, the rules, the laws, and the dangers that will have people who are religious, and they're changed on the outside but not on the inside. We must be like the farmer, and I've learned that especially here in Alberta, who plows his fields. He will fertilize. He will scatter the seed, and at the end of the day, after he's worked maybe weeks, at the end of the day, at the end of the week, he looks over his field, and what does he have? He has dirt. And two weeks later and three weeks later, he looks over his field, and maybe all he has is dirt. And he waits and he waits and he waits on the Lord.

We have to continue to bring that gospel, and I challenge you and encourage you to continue to bring that gospel. Continue planting that seed. Continue bringing it to your people. Tell them how wonderful and great our Saviour is. And as we do that, and sometimes it takes – that field takes forever to grow, but it's the gospel that justifies, and it's the gospel that sanctifies. Fellow brothers and elders in Christ, stay the course. May the Lord richly bless you and your discussions and your decisions to further His gospel of amazing grace. Thank you.

Dr. Richard Venema

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Mr. Chairman and delegates of the synod, brothers and fathers of the faith, when I was asked to do this thing, the committee on ecumenicity and church relations sent me a list of instructions, and one of them was that I was not to deal with personal matters, but I was to speak for the church. But when you get my age, you don't always do what they tell you to do, and so personally, I want to say it is a real treat for me to be here with you today. It's been a joy to meet many of you whom I have not seen for many years.

Perhaps the last time I saw many of you was at the Alliance of Reformed Churches. Many of you were fellow office bearers with me in the Christian Reformed Church for many years. You might be interested to know that 50 years ago, I was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church at Sioux Centre, Iowa. Forty years to the day, I was received into the Dakota presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. And perhaps had you been in existence at that time, I might have become one of you, but I opted

at that time to join, to be received, into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and I've been very happy in my new church home.

But speaking for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, I can truthfully say we have followed with joy the development, as well as the establishment, of your churches. We have observed down through the years that you have sought to be a faithful church of Jesus Christ, a genuine pillar and ground of the truth. You have taken your confessions, your church order, seriously, and we salute you for that. In your establishment and in all your deliberations, as I followed it, and the only way I can follow you is through the *Christian Renewal*, we have seen that you have taken seriously what you confess through the Belgic Confession, "that for the maintaining of the body of Christ," I'm quoting now, "you ought to take care that you do not depart from those things which Christ our Master has instituted," Article 32.

And, therefore, I think it's a rare privilege and a great honour for me that I may represent my denomination at your synod today. We have sent to you our greetings, and I assure you our very best wishes and our prayers, that you may continue to serve the Lord as you have. In my correspondence with my good friend G. I. Williamson, who is a member of our ecumenicity, trying to find out a little bit about the relations of our two denominations, he has informed me that they had two good committee meetings with your committee, and there are those of us who wish that, in the near future, you would proceed to accept us not just in a correspondent relationship but in genuine sisterly relationship and ecclesiastical fellowship.

G. I. wrote this to me: He said in doctrine, we're pretty much alike, as our discussions have demonstrated. But we both recognize that it's more difficult to come to a common mind in church government or church polity matters. And no one of us, I'm sure, would deny there are differences between the continental Reformed traditions and those of Scottish Presbyterianism, which has largely influenced our denomination. But G. I. and I are agreed that having served together in New Zealand where they have sort of tried to embrace both of those traditions, as he says, I think those differences are often grossly exaggerated. I think we can learn from one another, and I believe our two traditions complement one another. And I believe very strongly if we lived in an ideal world and if this name United Reformed really meant something, then we would all together strive earnestly to come to the place where we someday would live under the same ecclesiastical roof.

I've learned something these last ten years. I think I'm as Reformed, as conservative, as I ever was, but I learned from the differences that there are things that I want to share with you somewhat as a father in the faith that you might remember as you carry on your work. The one is that you remember very seriously that you have a church order, and that church order is not there for you to serve but to serve you. Secondly, your church order, I think if you have the order of Dordt, that you believe that the original authority rests with the local session or consistory, elders, rather than the broader assemblies. And the third thing I would like to urge you to consider is that you not become more narrow, more restrictive, than the word of God that you ascribe to yourself more authority, more power than God's word demands.

I might say this facetiously. I couldn't be a member in your church. I'm serving a church in Helena which began a little more than a year ago, and we have one service on Sunday. We recently accepted a member who was under ten years of age, but I have to say to you that was a better and more mature profession than I've heard from many in Pella, Chino, the other churches I've served, of those who were high school graduates. It strikes me that the session must determine; and I agree with what you decided last night, and we, as an Orthodox Presbyterian Church have strived to that too, that you make a profession of faith a genuine, credible confession. And I believe that elders ought to have the option of determining whether that's the case.

Our 71st general assembly came to a close a week ago yesterday. And I look at the agenda of our assembly and looking at yours, you might be interested to know we have a lot of things in common, that we are dealing with many of the same issues. For instance, we dealt with the matter of justification, and I'm happy to report that our assembly unequivocally declared this, its continued commitment to the

teaching of the word of God, our confessions with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The assembly reaffirmed that faith, which is a gift of God, is the sole instrument of justification and went on to reaffirm these historical beliefs on justification by citing a number of the statements in our confessions which demand that kind of faith.

They also pointed the committee to study and to critique the new view on Paul. They also dealt with the matter of creation, the days of creation. They didn't declare that everybody has to believe that they are 24-hour days, but they did say this: They recommended that presbytery should expect a ministerial candidate to articulate his views on the days of creation with a proper recognition of the hermeneutical, exegetical, and confessional considerations. The assembly then suggested a number of questions which could be asked to determine this.

It's not only our agendas, but I believe that in terms of our history, we have much in common. Our website tells us that, and declares that, we were born out of persecution. Looking at your history and the history of many of you, I believe you, in many ways, were born out of persecution. I lived in the days in which those who sought to maintain the truth, to stand firm for what the church always believed, were regarded as troublemakers and even some deposed, which was the case in the origin of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. What a man valued for the truth, like J. Gresham Machen, was deposed from the ministry.

Our website states this, that we are, as a church, steadfastly committed to the glory of God. She has seen His hand guide and protect her in the 60 – we ought to update that – 70 plus years of her existence. She has nurtured – she was nurtured in adversity, strengthened as she sought to fulfill her Master's call. She strives to keep her eyes fixed on Christ Jesus, her Saviour and Lord. And by the strength of His Spirit, she endeavors to live righteously in full obedience to His word, her only rule for faith in life. Acts 2 informs us that the early Christian church continued steadfastly in the apostolic faith, and then it adds that the Lord added to that church.

Our growth has not been spectacular, but I believe we have sought to be steadfastly continuing in that apostolic faith, and the Lord has blessed the one who builds the church and He alone. Our home mission secretary informs us that there are 62 missions in the United States and Alaska. We have missionaries, foreign missionaries, in Eritrea, Kenya, Ethiopia, Japan, Korea, and Surinam; and our total budget adopted by this general assembly for outreach was \$2,550,000.

My brothers and sisters here, in closing, let me say it's my wish and our wish, our prayer, that you will continue steadfastly in that apostolic faith, and may our sovereign God be pleased to keep you faithful and make you to be what Christ wants His church to be and to do. And some day, when you're four score and seven years old, we hope and pray that you'll experience that the Lord is adding to your church all those many who are to be saved.

The apostle Paul to the elders of Ephesus said take good care of the flock for which Christ gave His precious blood, and may you be able to say someday like Paul that now the time of my departure has come. I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith; and, henceforth, the Lord has laid up for me a crown which the righteous Judge will give me in that day. I can assure you that's our prayer, our wish for you. Thank you very much.

Rev. Neil Pronk

Free Reformed Churches of North America

Mr. Chairman, esteemed delegates to this synod, observers, I also have the honour and privilege of conveying to you the greetings of the Free Reformed churches of North America. The name is rather pretentious. North America, that's quite a wide area, yet we have churches in both countries and from coast to coast, even though very few in between, and even at the coast, only one or two.

We have a federation consisting of some 20 congregations. Most of our congregations are located in Ontario in Canada, a few in Alberta, and also in B.C., three or four, and that's about it. Our students are presently being trained at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. We have, in our denomination, ministers who have trained in various different seminaries, a great variety. Some of our older ministers were trained in Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. That is the seminary of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. Some have graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Then also a few graduated from the Canadian Reformed Seminary, the theological school in Hamilton, Ontario; a few from Westminster; and also Calvin.

I myself am a graduate from Calvin Seminary. I graduated in 1968, and while there, I was privileged to sit at the feet of such good men as Dr. Martin Woudstra, Fred Klooster, P.Y. DeJong, Anthony Hoekema, and others. These men had beautiful feet, if you recall the inspirational message a few days ago, in that they, I believe, taught the true Reformed faith to the students at that time. And I was privileged to benefit from their teaching. So I know something of the Christian Reformed Church and the ethos of the students and ministers there. I'm familiar with you also as a federation because when you started to talk about secession, I was present there. Some of the older ministers, you may remember. I was always very interested, on behalf of our churches, as to what would come out of this new denomination.

Allow me briefly to explain where we are coming from. Most of you don't know, I'm sure. The Free Reformed churches of North America are, indeed, sister churches to the CGKN. I bet that alphabet soup doesn't make much sense to you, I'm sure. It's Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. That is a denomination that goes back all the way to the Reformation, of course, in the low countries. But more specifically, we trace our roots to the secession or the Doleantie of 1834. This morning, we heard a presentation by Reverend Janssen who also showed a diagram on the board explaining their history. Our two histories and yours too, actually, if you think of your roots, coincided for quite a while until, of course, in 1892 – I say “of course.” You don't know that perhaps, but we are very conscious of that.

See, we are the secession churches of 1834, but in 1886, another secession took place out of the state church, and that was led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper, and in 1892, the original secession churches merged with the Doleantie churches, as they were called, and they became the Gereformeerde Kerken of The Netherlands. But a small group of churches, they did not go along with that merger. Why not? That has been disputed and the subject of much controversy in The Netherlands. Why not? Well, our fathers, which we now call Free Reformed fathers, they were troubled by some aspects of the teachings of Dr. Abraham Kuyper. While we have a great respect for the work that he's done for culture and in many other areas, we had problems with his views on the covenant of grace and baptism and related issues. Especially the doctrine of presumptive or assumed regeneration gave us deep troubles, and it was for these and other reasons as well that our fathers decided against joining the new denomination. They viewed themselves as continuing the secession or the teachings of the secession. They sought to remain true to their precious Reformed heritage. Theirs was a heritage, you ought to know, that consisted of not only sound Reformation doctrine but also of a rich experiential understanding of the truth that was passed on to them by the men of the second Reformation, and that was a movement that was closely related to the Puritan movement in Great Britain. The emphasis of the Puritans, as well as the men of the second Reformation was on regeneration, the necessity of a new birth, and also a life of holiness as evidence of that regeneration.

The Free Reformed churches, those who know them, they know that their emphasis is on experiential preaching. What do we mean by that? Well, simply put, it is not enough to know the Bible, to know the doctrines set forth in scripture or to adhere to those doctrines, but that we also need to experience the heart and the life-changing power of that word of God. You know, even – not “even” but certainly also John Calvin warns against speculative or rational faith that involves the mind only. The knowledge of God, Calvin says, is not a floating hallucination but is accompanied by lively feeling. Faith involves knowledge, but a knowledge characterized by a hearty confidence in God's goodness. For Calvin, the objective truth of scripture can benefit us – cannot really profit us without the application of that truth by the Holy Spirit to the heart of the sinner. Calvin says that, in *The Institutes*, as long as Christ remains outside of us and we are

separated from Him, all that He has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us. It is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ. He is the inner teacher – I’m still quoting Calvin – the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the ear or beat upon our ears. The Spirit leads us to faith in the word of God, all of the word of God, the promises but also the warnings and the threats. But particularly, faith focuses on Christ. In Christ, God is merciful, and faith finds rest in that wonderful truth. Faith, in the view of Calvin, is a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us founded upon the freely given promise of God in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

We, in the Free Reformed churches emphasize that preaching must be scriptural, confessional, but also experiential, and that means taking into account the awful reality of sin and God’s judgment upon it so that sinners are convicted of their sin and are shown their need of a Saviour. Preaching that is true to scripture, we believe, must result in conviction and to the jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?”

Too much preaching today – I’m not saying that that is so in your circles, I don’t know, but I don’t think so either, but too much preaching today in evangelical circles and also in many Reformed circles is aimed at making people feel good about themselves. We’d like to hear our members say, “Pastor, I enjoyed that message.” But while this can be an expression of appreciation for a word from God that gave much-needed comfort and encouragement, we should not think that enjoyment is the only response that we should look for when we stand there at the door greeting our people. I don’t think that the 3,000 folks on Pentecost day said to each other, “I sure enjoyed that message from Peter this morning.” No, they were pricked in their hearts, it says in Acts 2. And what they did say was, “Men, brethren, what must we do?”

Now, I’m not saying that we must always look for this kind of response. Of course not. But if we never hear sentiments expressed like those, we are not really preaching the doctrines of the apostles. If we faithfully bring the word of God to our congregations and something happens, then sinners are convicted or awakened to see their need of Christ. The Spirit opens their eyes for Christ, the only Saviour. They flee to Him, they trust in Him, and they look to Him as their justification.

I could not agree more with what I heard this morning – or this afternoon from Reverend Lanting. It’s so true, Christ and Him alone. But Christ will not be seen and He will not be understood to be the only Saviour unless we see our sins and our guilt before God. When we preach like that, anointed by the Holy Spirit, something will happen. Then people will not just say, “Oh, that’s nice,” but lives will be changed, transformed. People will be converted. Sinners will believe in Christ. They will live and start to live for the Lord.

We hear much nowadays about the need for changes in liturgy, praise and worship, and all those things, and I’m not saying it’s all wrong, but let us not think that the malaise in which the churches find themselves today can be solved that way, by constantly updated forms of worship. Rather, the solution is to walk in the good old paths trod by our Reformed and Puritan fathers. We in the Free Reformed Church are convinced that we must, at all costs, preserve that kind of preaching, and that is why we insist on discussing these doctrines. We call them the doctrines of appropriation of salvation, the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion, and so on. We insist on discussing this with all other Reformed denominations, including the URC, whenever we meet. Other things we discuss also.

We’ve had several fruitful discussions already, and I may say that considerable agreement has been expressed by members of your subcommittee as to the definition of the covenant of grace, membership in the covenant, the idea that we have been assured that you do not believe in presumptive regeneration, for which we are very grateful. But it is still possible that while you do not teach it, it may still be in your background, and I think it is so in certain ways in which you cannot escape the influence that you have received through the Doleantie, and we, in our secession churches, have always been strongly opposed to this doctrine.

And I hope that as you develop as churches, that you will not only go back to your roots in the Doleantie, worthwhile as that is, but that you will go a little bit further back and investigate also the teachings of the secession people. You have them in your background, in America especially, men like Ten

Hoor and others. They stood firm on secession principles, and I'm so sad to see that these are not studied very much, maybe because that's all in Dutch, but I hope that you can find a way to learn about these things too.

What I do appreciate very much about what I've heard here so far today or this week is the way you seek to be faithful to scripture and to the confessions as well as your church order. Whatever issue comes up, you go to the word and to the confessions, and if that were not so, I would not be here. I find that it's very wonderful to go to an assembly like this and to know already ahead of time that these people, they go to the word. There are other assemblies where you go to where you are not all that sure about that, where you feel uneasy where things are leading.

You are true to the word. And all those who are true to the word of God, they may expect God's blessing. After all, without that blessing, what can we do and what can we be? The Lord grant, therefore, to you that you be faithful, remain faithful, and that you will, with us and other faithful churches, contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. May God richly bless your assembly and also your churches as you go from here back to your churches and labour in the ministry of the word and sacraments. Thank you.

Rev. Jim Reaves

Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

Delegates, brothers and sisters, I use the terms brothers and sisters – when I use those terms, I'm very conscious that they're family terms, and I have sensed since I arrived that I have been with family and am very much at home. When the invitation of your gracious clerk came to our contact man, it was forwarded to our Classis West, which, in its wisdom, asked me to come and to bring you their greetings at this synod, and it's an honour and pleasure for me to extend the greetings of your brothers and sisters in the Orthodox Christian Reformed churches.

We see ourselves as your older sister or, if you insist, sisters. We left the family home a little earlier and met up with our unique experiences. And in our wisdom, we adopted a position on paper on the days of creation, taking the view that they are six days as we know them today, evening, morning, 24 hours, if you insist, and we have stood by that position. We don't regard it as an extra confessional statement. We don't even regard it as an interpretive statement. We call it a position paper. But however you look at it or whatever you call it, you better believe it if you're going to serve in the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, and that's where we're at today.

We have watched as you, our younger sister, left the home at a later time, and we shared with you and sensed the difficulty that that always is. We were a little bit disappointed that perhaps more of you didn't join with us, but we rejoice with you that God has blessed you and given you much usefulness in His kingdom, and we praise God for that.

I was sent to observe, and I'm going to limit my comments, and hopefully you can get right at your business quickly, but I must express a few words of thanksgiving. Thank you for the wonderful hospitality that I've enjoyed when I have been here. Thank you for selecting the city of Calgary for your synod. All my grandchildren live in Calgary. Thank you for selecting this week. Timothy Daniel was born in Rockyview Hospital just nearby on Monday morning at 9 a.m. As you can see, this week has been a mountaintop experience. Thank you so much. We do serve a gracious Master, and I give thanks to Him and pray that He will bless you in your deliberations today, that He'll go with you as you travel home, and give you much usefulness in His kingdom. Thank you very much.

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