Acts of Synod London 2010

Seventh Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America

July 26-30, 2010

Held at the University of Western Ontario
Convened by the Consistory of
Cornerstone United Reformed Church
London, Ontario

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Minutes of Synod London 2010

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Tuesday, July 27, 2010
Morning Session

Article 1

The chairman *pro tem*, Rev. Dennis Royall, minister of Cornerstone United Reformed Church of London, Ontario, calls the assembly to order, leads the assembly in the singing of Psalter Hymnal 166, and reads Hebrews 12. He then leads in prayer (using the *Opening Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies*, as formulated by the Liturgical Forms Committee) and invites the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal 383.

Article 2

The chairman *pro tem* welcomes all delegates, guests and visitors.

Article 3

Motion is made and supported to adopt the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, as recommended by the ad hoc Synodical Rules Committee, as the provisional guide for the organization and deliberation of Synod 2010.

Adopted

Article 4

The chairman *pro tem* reads the roll call, which reveals that the following delegates are present:

Abbotsford, BC	Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Steve Swets Elder John Van Muyen
Alto, MI	Grace United Reformed Church	Elder Duane Sneller Elder Marvin Mingerink
Anaheim, CA	Christ Reformed Church	Rev. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger Elder Eric Akiyoshi
Apple Valley, CA	High Desert United Reformed Church	Rev. Tom Morrison
Aylmer, ON	Bethel United Reformed Church of Aylmer	Rev. Al Korvemaker Elder Scott De Jong
Beecher, IL	Faith United Reformed Church	Rev. Todd Joling Elder Randy Helmus
Belgrade, MT	Belgrade United Reformed Church	Rev. Mark Stromberg Elder Darrel DeHaan
Bellingham, WA	Bellingham United Reformed Church	Rev. Kevin Efflandt Elder Harry Efflandt
Boise, ID	Cloverdale United Reformed Church	Rev. Jonathan VanHoogen Elder Dennis VanderStelt
Bowmanville, ON	Orthodox Christian Reformed Church	Rev. Martin Overgaauw Elder Piet Louws
Brantford, ON	Living Water Reformed Church	Elder Anthony Schmidt Elder Paul Bootsma
Brockville, ON	Ebenezer Orthodox Reformed Church	Rev. John Roke
Burlington, WA	Burlington Orthodox Christian Reformed Church	Elder Ashley Sybrandy
Byron Center, MI	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Greg Lubbers Elder Mark Dykstra

Caledonia, MI	Trinity United Reformed Church	Rev. Brian Vos Elder Harry Kooistra
Calgary, AB	Bethel United Reformed Church	Rev. Joel Vander Kooi Elder Bill Konynenbelt
Cape Coral, FL	Trinity Reformed Church	Rev. Richard Stevens Elder Stephen Wetmore
Charlottetown, PEI	United Reformed Church of Prince Edward Island	Rev. Nicholas Alons Elder Dr. Solke De Boer
Chino, CA	First United Reformed Church	Rev. Ronald Scheuers Elder Dr. Scott Swanson
Clinton, ON	Grace United Reformed Church of Clinton	Rev. Peter Vellenga Elder Jake Kikkert
Coopersville, MI	Eastmanville United Reformed Church	Rev. Steve Postma Elder Henry Vander Wal
DeMotte, IN	Immanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Thomas Wetselaar Elder Mark Van Der Molen
Des Moines, IA	Providence Reformed Church	Rev. Jody Lucero Elder David Hondred
Doon, IA	Doon United Reformed Church	Elder Clyde Lems
Dunnville, ON	Grace Reformed Church	Elder Arthur Struyk Elder Dan Lindeboom
Dutton, MI	Dutton United Reformed Church	Rev. Richard Miller Elder David Boekestein
Dyer, IN	Redeemer United Reformed Church	Rev. Jacques Roets Elder Ken Kreykes
Edmonton, AB	Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton	Rev. Bill Pols Elder Peter Wright
Escondido, CA	Escondido United Reformed Church	Rev. Stephen Donovan Elder Huibert Den Boer
Fresno, CA	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Paul Lindemulder

Grand Rapids, MI	Walker United Reformed Church	Elder Steve Kuiper
Hamilton, ON	Rehoboth United Reformed Church	Rev. Henry Van Olst Elder Louis Andela
Hanford, CA	Emmanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Brad Lenzner
Hills, MN	Hills United Reformed Church	Rev. Douglas Barnes Elder Greg Vande Kamp
Holland, MI	Faith United Reformed Church	Rev. Edward Marcusse Elder Henry Kortman
Hudsonville, MI	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Rev. James Admiraal Elder Raymond Dykehouse
Jenison, MI	Bethel United Reformed Church	Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra Rev. Travis Grassmid
Jordan, ON	Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church of Niagra	Rev. John Bouwers Elder Jack Huizenga
Kalamazoo, MI	Covenant United Reformed Church	Elder Leon Bronsink Elder Myron Rau
Kansas City, MO	Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Harold Miller Elder Wil Postma
Kelowna, BC	Grace Reformed Church in Kelowna	Rev. James Reaves
Kennewick, WA	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Craig Davis Elder Paul Davis
Lancaster, PA	Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Dr. Brian Lee
Lansing, IL	Oak Glen United Reformed Church	Rev. John Vermeer Elder Peter Smith
Leduc, AB	Grace Reformed Church of Leduc	Rev. Daniel Kok Elder Henry Klaas
Lethbridge, AB	Trinity Reformed Church	Rev. Wybren Oord Elder Harry Lubbers

Listowel, ON	Immanuel United Reformed Church	Rev. Fred Folkerts Elder Jeffrey Burgsma
Littleton, CO	Coram Deo Reformation Church	Rev. Carl Heuss Elder Robert De Ruiter
London, ON	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Rev. Dennis Royall Elder John Lindeboom
Loveland, CO	Calvary United Reformed Church	Elder Ronald Prins
Lynden, WA	United Reformed Church of Lynden	Rev. Chris Gordon Elder Ian McClure
Lynwood, IL	Lynwood United Reformed Church	Rev. Keith Davis Elder Ronald Ellens
Nampa, ID	United Reformed Church of Nampa	Rev. Nick Smith Elder Martin Van Egmond
Neerlandia, AB	Emmanuel Reformed Church	Rev. Ralph A. Pontier Elder Jan Harink
New Haven, VT	New Haven United Reformed Church	Rev. Jeremy Veldman
Newton, NJ	Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Mark Stewart Elder Andy Billing
Nobleton, ON	Immanuel Reformed Church of Nobleton	Rev. Maurice Luimes Elder Mike Koerssen
Oceanside, CA	Oceanside United Reformed Church	Rev. Daniel Hyde Rev. Derrick VanderMeulen
Ontario, CA	Ontario United Reformed Church	Rev. Ruben Sernas Elder William Bejarano
Orange City, IA	Redeemer United Reformed Church	Rev. Todd De Rooy Elder Daryl DeJong
Oro-Medonte, ON	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Ancel Merwin Elder Ken Evans
Pantego, NC	Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Calvin Tuininga

Pasadena, CA	Pasedena United Reformed Church	Rev. Movses Janbazian Elder Joel Richter
Pella, IA	Covenant Reformed Church	Elder Junior DeJong Elder Ken Veenstra
Phoenix, AZ	Phoenix United Reformed Church	Elder Clayton Danzeisen Elder Rod Tussing
Pompton Plains, NJ	Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church	Rev. Richard Kuiken Rev. Dale Van Dyke
Ponoka, AB	Parkland Reformed Church	Rev. Mitch Ramkissoon Elder Morris Thalem
Portland, OR	Grace Church	Rev. Dan McManigal Elder Richard Giles
Ripon, CA	Zion United Reformed Church	Elder Ken Koolhaas Elder Tim Philipsen
Rock Valley, IA	Rock Valley United Reformed Church	Rev. James Sinke Elder Allan Vande Kamp
Salem, OR	Immanuel's Reformed Church	Rev. Eric Tuininga Elder Leonard Lodder
Sanborn, IA	Cornerstone United Reformed Church	Rev. Dan Donovan Elder Alan Van Maanen
Santee, CA	Christ United Reformed Church	Rev. Michael Brown Elder Daniel Palmer
Schererville, IN	Community United Reformed Church	Rev. Paul Ipema
Sheffield, ON	Zion United Reformed Church of Sheffield	Rev. Christo Heiberg Elder Ed Gringhuis
Sioux Center, IA	Sioux Center United Reformed Church	Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer Elder Justin Vander Werff
Smithers, BC	Bethel Reformed Church	Rev. Lawrens Slagter Elder Dick Adema
St. Catharines, ON	Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church	Rev. Albert Bezuyen Elder John Boekestyn

Strathroy, ON	Providence United Reformed Church	Rev. Harry Zekveld Elder Roger Vanoostveen
Sunnyside, WA	United Reformed Church of Sunnyside	Rev. Shane Lems
Surrey, BC	Surrey Covenant Reformed Church	Rev. Dick Moes Elder Irik Mallie
Telkwa, BC	Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa	Elder Don Tuininga
Thunder Bay, ON	United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay	Rev. Barry Beukema Elder David Haveman
Toronto, ON	Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto	Rev. Randal Lankheet Elder Art Miedema
Torrance, CA	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Dr. Gregory Bero Elder Mark Lockyear
Twin Falls, ID	New Covenant United Reformed Church	Rev. Christopher Folkerts Elder Clint Krahn
Walnut Creek, CA	Trinity United Reformed Church	Rev. Joghinda Gangar Elder Henry De Wit
Warwick, NY	Hudson Valley United Reformed Church	Rev. Kevin Hossink Elder Luke Zylstra
Waupun, WI	Grace United Reformed Church	Rev. Talman Wagenmaker Elder Joel Alsum
Wellandport, ON	Wellandport United Reformed Church	Rev. Joel Dykstra Elder Cope Gritter
Wellsburg, IA	United Reformed Church of Wellsburg	Rev. Matthew Nuiver Elder Daryl Geiken
West Sayville, NY	West Sayville Reformed Bible Church	Rev. Andrew Eenigenburg Elder Raymond Lackey
Winnipeg, MB	Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg	Elder Henry Nagtegaal Elder Sandy Siepman
Woodbridge, ON	Hope Reformed Church	Rev. Richard Anjema Elder Bruce Vrieling

Woodstock, ON	Bethel United Reformed Church of Woodstock	Rev. Greg Bylsma Elder Tony De Weerd
Wyoming, MI	Bethany United Reformed Church	Rev. Casey Freswick Elder Ed Toonstra
Wyoming, ON	Covenant Christian Church	Rev. Martin Vogel Elder James Korvemaker

Article 5

Fourteen churches were present with only one delegate, and Synod notes with regret that the following churches are not represented by delegates at Synod London 2010: First United Reformed Church of Oak Lawn, IL, and Preakness Valley United Reformed Church of Wayne, NJ.

Article 6

The chairman *pro tem* reads the Form of Subscription. The delegates rise to declare their assent to the Form of Subscription.

Article 7

The chairman *pro tem* declares synod constituted.

Article 8

Ratification of the provisional acceptance of churches established under Church Order Art. 32.

A. Motion is made and supported to ratify the Article 32 acceptance of the following churches:
    1. Covenant Reformed Church of Carbondale, PA.
    2. First United Reformed Church of Oak Lawn, IL.
    3. Redeemer Reformed Church of Regina, SK.
    4. Trinity United Reformed Church of Visalia, CA.

    Adopted

B. The chairman *pro tem* asks delegates from these churches to rise in declaring their assent to the Form of Subscription. The following delegates are present and rise to affirm their assent.

C.	From Carbondale	Rev. William Boekestein Rev. George Mall
	From Oak Lawn	*None Present*
	From Regina	Elder Geoff Leo
	From Visalia	Rev. Adrian Dieleman Elder Case Anker

ARTICLE 9

A. Motion is made and supported to adopt the Provisional Agenda and the advisory committee assignments, as follows: (Members denoted by * were added to the committee later.)

Advisory Committee 1

Materials:	Credentials, Report of the Convening Consistory, Report of the Stated Clerk, Overture 9, Overture 17
Chairman:	Elder Ronald Prins
Reporter:	Rev. Richard Kuiken
Committee:	Rev. Nicholas Alons, Rev. Dr. Gregory Bero, Elder Paul Davis, Elder Daryl DeJong, Rev. Todd De Rooy, Elder Daryl Geiken, Rev. Paul Ipema, Elder James Korvemaker, Elder Tim Philipsen, Elder Alan Van Maanen, Elder John Van Muyen

Advisory Committee 2

Materials:	Financial Matters, Healthcare Matters, Reports of U.S. and Canada Boards of Directors
Chairman:	Elder Dennis VanderStelt
Reporter:	Elder Huibert Den Boer
Committee:	Elder Andy Billing, Elder John Boekestyn, Rev. Craig Davis, Rev. Joel Dykstra, Elder Mark Dykstra, Elder Clyde Lems, Elder Geoff Leo, Elder Mark Lockyear, Elder Marvin Mingerink, Elder Allan Vande Kamp, Elder Greg Vande Kamp, Elder Harry Lubbers*

Advisory Committee 3

Materials:	Appeals
Chairman:	Rev. Barry Beukema
Reporter:	Rev. Richard Miller
Committee:	Rev. Maurice Luimes, Elder Irik Mallie, Elder Luke Zylstra, Rev. Wybren Oord*, Rev. Stephen Arrick*, Rev. William Boekestein*

Advisory Committee 4

Materials:	Overture 2, Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel
Chairman:	Rev. Steve Swets
Reporter:	Rev. Lawrens Slagter
Committee:	Elder Eric Akiyoshi, Elder Harry Efflandt, Elder David Haveman, Rev. Todd Joling, Elder Mike Korssen, Rev. Randal Lankheet, Rev. Jody Lucero, Elder Duane Sneller

Advisory Committee 5

Materials:	Overture 1, Report from Committee Studying the Federal Vision and Justification
Chairman:	Rev. Joghinda Gangar
Reporter:	Rev. Daniel Kok
Committee:	Elder Dick Adema, Elder Henry De Wit, Elder Ken Evans, Rev. Travis Grassmid, Rev. Movses Janbazian, Rev. Greg Lubbers, Rev. Ancel Merwin, Rev. Martin Overgaauw, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Elder Leon Bronsink*, Rev. Greg Bylsma*, Rev. Brad Lenzner*

Advisory Committee 6

Materials:	Overture 7, Overture 8
Chairman:	Rev. William Boekestein
Reporter:	Rev. Richard Anjema
Committee:	Elder Joel Alsum, Elder David Boekestein, Rev. Michael Brown, Rev. Andrew Eenigenburg, Elder Richard Giles, Rev. Carl Heuss, Elder Jake Kikkert, Elder Harry Kooistra, Elder Henry Kortman, Elder Clint Krahn, Elder Ken Kreykes, Elder Raymond Lackey,

Rev. Shane Lems, Rev. Paul Lindemulder, Rev. Steve Postma, Rev. James Reaves, Elder Sandy Siepman, Elder Peter Wright, Elder Ken Veenstra*

Advisory Committee 7

Materials: Proposed Joint Church Order, Joint Church Order Committee Report, Overture 3, Overture 5, Overture 12, Overture 13, Overture 18

Chairman: Rev. Thomas Wetselaar

Reporter: Rev. Dan Donovan

Committee: Rev. Adrian Dieleman, Elder Ronald Ellens, Rev. Casey Freswick, Elder Ken Koolhaas, Elder Leonard Lodder, Rev. Harold Miller, Rev. Bradd Nymeyer, Elder Daniel Palmer, Elder Wil Postma, Rev. John Roke, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Elder Mark Van Der Molen, Rev. Peter Vellenga, Elder Cope Gritter*

Advisory Committee 8

Materials: Report of Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU), Overture 11, Overture 16

Chairman: Rev. Keith Davis

Reporter: Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

Committee: Dr. Solke DeBoer, Elder Junior DeJong, Elder Raymond Dykehouse, Elder David Hondred, Rev. Kevin Hossink, Elder John Lindeboom, Elder Art Miedema, Elder Henry Nagtegaal, Elder Don Tuininga, Rev. Tom Morrison, Elder Henry Vander Wal, Rev. Martin Vogel

Advisory Committee 9

Materials: Psalter Hymnal Committee Report, Liturgical Forms Committee Report

Chairman: Rev. Brian Vos

Reporter: Rev. Al Bezuyen

Committee: Rev. James Admiraal, Elder Case Anker, Elder Clayton Danzeisen, Rev. Kevin Efflandt, Rev. Christopher Folkerts, Elder

Randy Helmus, Rev. Daniel Hyde, Elder Henry Klaas, Elder Piet Louws, Rev. Matthew Nuiver, Rev. Richard Stevens, Elder Arthur Struyk, Rev. Eric Tuininga, Rev. Joel Vander Kooi, Elder Justin VanderWerff, Rev. Derrick VanderMeulen, Rev. Jonathan VanHoogen, Elder Roger VanOostveen, Elder Arthur Struyk*,
Elder Darrel DeHaan*, Elder Tony De Weerd*

Advisory Committee 10

Materials:	Theological Education Committee Report, Report from the Committee on Level of Doctrinal Commitment, Report of Web Oversight Consistory, Report of URCNA Web Oversight Committee
Chairman:	Rev. Chris Gordon
Reporter:	Rev. Talman Wagenmaker
Committee:	Elder Robert De Ruiter, Elder Ian McClure, Rev. Dan McManigal, Rev. Mitch Ramkissoon, Elder Dan Lindeboom, Elder Dr. Scott Swanson, Rev. Calvin Tuininga, Elder Rod Tussing, Rev. Dale Van Dyke, Elder Bruce Vrieling, Elder Stephen Wetmore, Rev. Mark Stromberg*, Rev. Dr. Brian Lee*, Rev. Fred Folkerts*, Elder Scott De Jong*, Rev. Jeremy Veldman*

Advisory Committee 11

Materials:	Report of the Synodical Rules Committee, Overture 10, Overture 14, Overture 15
Chairman:	Rev. Jacques Roets
Reporter:	Rev. Stephen Donovan
Committee:	Elder Jan Harink, Elder Jack Huizenga, Rev. George Mall, Rev. Edward Marcusse, Elder Joel Richter, Elder Ashley Sybrandy, Elder Morris Thalem, Elder Ed Toonstra, Rev. Henry VanOlst

Advisory Committee 12

Materials:	Report of the Committee for Ecumenical

	Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA), Overture 4
Chairman:	Rev. Christo Heiberg
Reporter:	Rev. James Sinke
Committee:	Elder William DeBoer, Elder Ed Gringhuis, Rev. Dick Moes, Rev. Nick Smith, Rev. Mark Stewart, Elder Martin Van Egmond, Elder Anthony Schmidt

B. Motion is made and supported to amend the agenda by reinstating Appeal #3, providing the material for this matter to Advisory Committee 3. *Adopted*

C. Motion is made and supported to allow Rev. Raymond Sikkema the privilege of the floor. *Adopted*

D. Motion is made and supported to amend the agenda by reinstating Appeal #2, providing the material for this matter to Advisory Committee 3. *Adopted*

E. Motion to adopt the Provisional Agenda, as amended; and to approve advisory committee assignments. *Adopted*

Article 10

Motion is made and supported to adopt the Time Schedule printed in the agenda. *Adopted*

Article 11

A. Motion is made and supported to adopt the special orders of the day, providing for 10-minute addresses by fraternal delegates and observers and 5-minute addresses by representatives of schools and ministries. *Adopted*

B. Motion is made and supported to amend the special orders to allow a 5-minute address by Rev. Allen Vander Pol on behalf of Miami International Assembly (MINTS). *Adopted*

C. Motion is made and supported to amend the special orders to allow a 5-minute address by Rev. Derrick VanderMeulen on behalf of Kauai Reformation Church. *Adopted*

D. Motion to adopt the special orders of the day, as amended: *Adopted*

Article 12

Motion is made and supported to approve a request by CERCU to allow two Canadian Reformed fraternal delegates to address the assembly for one hour on Tuesday evening, at a time to be determined by the chairman, to answer questions submitted to them by URCNA councils.

Adopted

Article 13

Motion is made and supported to allow a 5-minute address by URC church planters who are present. *Adopted*

Article 14

Motion is made and supported to seat the delegates of the United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay without having their credentials presented to us. *Adopted*

Article 15

Election of Officers for Synod London 2010.

A. The chairman *pro tem* initiates selection of a chairman of synod by means of an open ballot.

B. While ballots are tabulated, explanations are solicited from six churches who sent only one delegate without providing explanation on their credentials. These churches include:
    1. Emmanuel United Reformed Church of Hanford, CA.
    2. Doon United Reformed Church of Doon, IA.
    3. Covenant United Reformed Church of Fresno, CA.
    4. Calvary United Reformed Church of Loveland, CO.
    5. Covenant United Reformed Church of Pantego, NC.
    6. Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI.

C. Rev. Ralph Pontier of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Neerlandia, AB, is elected to serve as chairman of Synod London 2010.

D. Rev. Ron Scheuers of First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA, is

elected to serve as vice-chairman of Synod London 2010.

E. The chairman *pro tem* solicits nominations for first clerk. Rev. Doug Barnes of Hills United Reformed Church in Hills, MN, is elected to serve as first clerk of Synod London 2010.

F. Rev. Bradd Nymeyer of Sioux Center United Reformed Church in Sioux Center, IA, is elected to serve as second clerk of Synod London 2010.

Article 16

The officers of Synod London 2010 assume their duties at this time. Chairman Pontier thanks Rev. Royall for his able service as chairman *pro tem* and offers some instructions. He solicits the prayers of the delegates for the officers.

Article 17

The chairman welcomes the following Fraternal Delegates and Fraternal Observers:

Calvinist Reformed Churches-Indonesia	Rev. Yonson Dethan
Canadian Reformed Churches	Rev. Peter Feenstra
	Rev. William Den Hollander
Église Réformée du Québec	Rev. Ben Westerveld
Free Reformed Churches in North America	Rev. John Koopman
Reformed Church of the United States	Rev. Maynard Koerner
	Rev. Vern Pollema
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Rev. John Hilbelink
	Rev. Jack Peterson
Reformed Churches of New Zealand	Rev. Peter Kloosterman
Reformed Churches of South Africa	Dr. Douw Breed
	Rev. Risimati Hobyane
United Reformed Church in Congo	Rev. Kalala Kabongo

The chairman informs the Fraternal Delegates that they do have the privilege of the floor.

Article 18

The chairman provides general instructions and dismisses the delegates to begin the work of the advisory committees.

Tuesday, July 27, 2010
Evening Session

Article 19

Rev. Casey Freswick of Bethany United Reformed Church in Wyoming, MI, opens the session with devotions by inviting the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal 13, reading 2 John, and leading the delegates in prayer. He then asks the delegates to sing Psalter Hymnal 426.

Article 20

Advisory Committee 6
Materials: Overture 8

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 8 to evaluate the need for a part-time/full-time "volunteer" position of URCNA coordinator of missions, with this position functioning under the authority and oversight of a specific consistory, and one of his responsibilities would be to edit and publish the federation's mission newsletter. *Adopted*

2. That Synod appoint a study committee to evaluate the need for a missions coordinator. *Adopted*

3. Motion is made and supported to refer this matter back to the advisory committee to formulate a mandate for the study committee. *Adopted*

Article 21

Advisory Committee 6
Materials: Overture 7

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 7 to relieve Cornerstone URC of Hudsonville, MI, of its oversight and publication responsibilities for the federation missions newsletter, *The Trumpet*. *Adopted*

2. That Synod thank Mr. Don Van Dyke and Mrs. Cheryl Doll as well

as the council of Cornerstone URC for their diligent work in the publication of this newsletter.

So ordered by the chairman.

The stated clerk is directed to send a letter to this effect.

3. That Synod seek immediately a church council to assume the responsibility of implementing Proposal 2 of Report 4 of Synod 2001, which states "that the URC publish a denominational semi-annual mission update." This arrangement shall be reviewed at next Synod. *Adopted*

4. Motion is made and supported that Synod 2010 accept West Sayville Reformed Bible Church's offer to assume the responsibility of publishing a federational semi-annual mission update.

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 6 continued in Art. 98.)

Article 22

Advisory Committee 12
Materials: Overture 4

Recommendation:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 4 as presented.

2. Motion is made and supported to table this recommendation temporarily, until we have the revised Synodical Rules Committee recommendation before us. *Adopted*

(Advisory Committee 12 continued in Art. 126.)

Article 23

Advisory Committee 8
Materials: Overture 11

Recommendations:

1. Advisory Committee 8 recommends that Synod approve Overture 11 as presented.

2. Motion is made and supported to recommit this recommendation to the advisory committee. *Adopted*

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 66.)

Article 24

Advisory Committee 9
Materials: Report #3 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee

Recommendations:

1. That Synod receive the work of the committee to date.
Chairman so rules

2. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Psalter Hymnal Committee when this report is being discussed.
Granted

3. That Synod 2010 affirm the production of an official songbook which will be purchased and used by all URCNA churches.

   Grounds:
   a. This is in keeping with Synod 1997's decision to appoint the Psalter Hymnal Committee.
   b. An official songbook for all the churches would promote the unity, identity and well-being of the federation.
   c. This would keep the cost of producing the songbook to a minimum.
   d. This would give a positive impetus to a project on which the committee has spent thousands of hours and reviewed over 2,000 songs. *Adopted*

(Advisory Committee 9 continued in Art. 39.)

Article 25

The chairman invites Rev. William den Hollander, fraternal delegate from the Canadian Reformed Churches, to bring greetings. Rev. den Hollander speaks of how Christ has been bringing our churches closer in true unity. Acknowledging the practical difficulties of this delicate time in which we find ourselves, Rev. den Hollander encourages us to move ahead without hesita-

tion or reluctance in our mutual pursuit of unity. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 26

The chairman invites Rev. John Bouwers to moderate a one-hour question-and-answer period. During this time, Dr. Gerhard Visscher and Dr. Jason Van Vliet, professors at the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, ON, appear before the body to answer a series of questions concerning the Canadian Reformed Churches. These questions had been submitted by consistories of United Reformed Churches. Opportunity then is provided for delegates to ask questions from the floor.

Article 27

The chairman speaks in response both to Rev. Den Hollander and to Drs. Visscher and Van Vliet. He emphasizes that the Canadian Reformed Churches are one in the faith with us and that the unity which we are seeking with them is vital. Our credibility with the world hinges on the reconciliation which God's people are able to obtain with one another.

Article 28

The second clerk reads a press release (Number 1) concerning the work of Synod 2010 on Tuesday. Corrections and suggestions are received from the delegates. Motion is made and supported to approve this press release, as corrected. *Adopted*

Article 29

Rev. Dale Van Dyke from Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church closes the assembly's evening session by leading the delegates in prayer.

Wednesday, July 28, 2010
Morning Session

Article 30

Rev. James Reaves of the Grace Reformed Church in Kelowna, BC, opens the morning session by calling the delegates to sing Psalter Hymnal 84 and by reading 2 Peter 3:10-18. He then leads the assembly in prayer before calling the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 86.

Article 31

Motion is made and supported to receive a late correspondence from the Canadian Reformed Synod Burlington 2010 and to refer it to an advisory committee at the discretion of the officers. *Adopted*

The correspondence is assigned to Advisory Committee 1.

Article 32

Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes, which were distributed previously. *Adopted*

Article 33

The chairman dismisses the delegates to continue their advisory committee work.

Wednesday, July 27, 2010
Afternoon Session

Article 34

Elder Darrel DeHaan from Belgrade United Reformed Church in Belgrade, MT, opens the session by calling the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 121, reading 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, and leading in prayer. He then calls the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 135.

Article 35

A. The chairman welcomes Rev. Stephen Arrick, a delegate from Covenant

Reformed Church in Lancaster, PA, who just arrived this morning. Rev. Arrick stands to give his assent to the Form of Subscription.

B. The chairman welcomes Rev. David Fraser, fraternal observer from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

Article 36

The chairman invites Rev. Steve Oeverman, associate minister at Escondido United Reformed Church, to address the assembly on behalf of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, where Rev. Oeverman serves as a vice-president. (Information can be found online at www.twscal.edu)

Article 37

The chairman invites Dr. Gerhard Visscher to address the assembly on behalf of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, ON, where Dr. Visscher serves as principal and is a professor. (Information can be found online at www.theologicalcollege.ca)

Article 38

The chairman invites Rev. Dr. Brian Lee to address the assembly on behalf of Christ Reformed Church – the URC church plant in Washington, D.C. (Information can be found online at www.ChristReformedDC.org)

Article 39

Advisory Committee 9 (continued from Art. 24)
Materials: Report #3 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accept the resignations of Mrs. Daphne Jasperse, Rev. Ed Knott, and Rev. Richard Wynia, and express the churches' appreciation for their service on the committee.

The chairman so rules

2. That Synod augment the current Psalter Hymnal Committee with one member from each classis not yet represented on the committee (Classes Central U.S., Eastern U.S., Michigan, and Western Canada), and that these classes be mandated to appoint a qualified

member for the committee. Such qualification includes:

- Biblical and theological knowledge;
- Musical ability: a working knowledge of music and (preferably) artistic talent;
- Language ability: ability to work with poetry and an understanding and appreciation of poetry as an art form;
- A passion for working with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

(Note: members need not be office-bearers.)

Grounds:

a. This practice has precedence in the makeup of other synodically-appointed committees;
b. Due to resignations, the present committee is too small to continue its mandate effectively and efficiently;
c. Having a member from each classis on the committee will give each classis representation on the committee;
d. Having a member from each classis on the committee will enable the committee to better answer the needs/concerns of the churches;
e. Having a member from each classis on the committee will aid the churches to take ownership of this project and be more willing to support it financially and prayerfully.

Adopted

The chairman instructs the stated clerk to inform the four classes without representation – Central U.S., Eastern U.S., Michigan, and Western Canada – of their need to appoint a member to the Psalter Hymnal Committee.

3. That Synod approve the following process for evaluation and approval of the hymn section:

   a. That each consistory evaluate the proposed hymn section in light of the synodically approved "Principles and Guidelines" (included in the Psalter Hymnal Committee report), and send recommended changes in the form of an overture to its classis. The overtures should follow this format: "The Consistory of ____ Church overtures Classis _____ to approve the following changes to the proposed hymn section and communicate its decision to the Psalter Hymnal Committee. …" The overture should include grounds.
   (Note: The consistory may appoint musically gifted and theo-

logically astute members of their congregation to help evaluate the hymns.)

b. That classis deliberates the merits of the overture in light of the synodically-approved "Principles and Guidelines." If classis agrees with the overture or a portion thereof, classis shall send an official communication regarding the recommended changes to the Psalter Hymnal Committee for its consideration and written response. Such communication must be received by the Psalter Hymnal committee no later than March 31, 2012.

c. That the Psalter Hymnal Committee categorizes and prints these communications, along with the written response, in a "master report." This report will also include the final proposed hymn section and be distributed to all the consistories at least six months before the next meeting of synod.

d. That the Synod which will decide upon the hymn section for the new songbook shall not consider other hymns or changes to the hymns beyond those contained in the previously submitted communications from classes to the Psalter Hymnal Committee or in the "master report" from the Psalter Hymnal Committee.

Grounds:

a. This process will allow for individuals, churches and classes to have a voice.
b. This process ensures that the discussions will be directed by the objective criteria of the synodically-approved principles and guidelines.
c. This process allows for the Psalter Hymnal Committee to give due consideration to the communications, understanding that such communications have the approval of both a consistory and a classis.
d. This process will ensure that all things are done decently and in good order (1 Corinthians 14:40), avoiding the chaos which would result if delegates make motions from the floor to include or exclude a particular hymn. With this recommended process, we are confident that most of the discussion and deliberation about the hymn proposal will be objective and professional.

Adopted

Advisory Committee 9
Materials: Report 4 of the Liturgical Forms Committee

Recommendations:

1. That Synod receive the work of the committee thus far.

   The chairman so rules

2. Synod encourages the churches to utilize these forms and prayers and continue to give feedback to the committee.

   Ground: Feedback from the churches has been very helpful in clarifying and refining the forms. *Adopted*

3. Three current members of our committee (including our chairman) have requested to be released from service (Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, Dr. Michael Horton). Rev. Al Bezuyen and Dr. J. Mark Beach wish to remain on the committee. The committee will need three new members to remain at its current size, including a new chairman to be appointed. Advisory Committee 9 recommends:

   a. That Synod offer gratitude to Drs. Riddlebarger, Horton and Godfrey.

      The chairman so rules

      The chairman directs that the stated clerk write letters expressing these sentiments.

   b. That Synod appoint Rev. Danny Hyde to chair this committee. (He has already agreed to serve if appointed.)

      Adopted

   c. That Synod approve the names of Rev. Dr. Brian Lee, Rev. William Vanderwoerd, Rev. Patrick Edouard and Elder Dr. Scott Swanson (two to be chosen) to fill the other two positions.

      Adopted

4. Regarding concerns about Form Number 1 for the Baptism of Infants: Advisory Committee 9 recommends that Synod instruct

concerned consistories to overture their respective classes about undertaking a study regarding issues with the present Form 1 for Baptism, and that such a study ought to determine whether or not the production of a new form for infant baptism is warranted. If Synod then so desires, the Liturgical Forms Committee would be instructed to write a new form.

Motion is made and supported to table this recommendation indefinitely.

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 9 continued in Art. 107.)

Article 41

Advisory Committee 7

Materials: Proposed Joint Church Order Committee Report and Overture 18

Recommendations:

1. That Synod thank the committee for the work it has completed.

   The chairman so rules

2. That Synod receive for information the committee report and the PJCO 2010 (with the two-column document comparing PJCO 2007 and PJCO 2010 as an appendix, as well as the Majority and Minority Reports on PJCO Article 36).

   The chairman so rules

3. That Synod accept for continued study the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches. *Adopted*

4. That Synod remind the churches that suggested changes to the PJCO 2010 should be directed to the Synod by way of overture through the Classes. *Adopted*

5. That Synod take note of and mandate the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee to develop Forms of Discipline for a united federation. *Adopted*

6. That Synod reappoint the current committee for the sake of continuity, with the mandate to continue working closely with the church order sub-committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address matters yet unfinished (such as PJCO Article 4).

Adopted

7. That Synod declare that this be our answer to Overture 18.

Grounds:

a. Recommending continued study by the Churches would promote the opportunity for harvesting the good fruit produced by the committee.
b. With regard to G.3. of the Report (Recommendation 3. above), Advisory Committee 7 chose to use the phrase "accept for continued study" instead of "adopt" because the PJCO 2010 is a work in progress. *Adopted*

(Advisory Committee 7 continued in Art. 45.)

Article 42

The chairman invites Rev. Richard Bout of Hope Reformed Church (URC) in Woodbridge, ON, to address the assembly regarding his work as a missionary in Tepic, Mexico.

Article 43

The chairman invites Rev. Vern Pollema to bring greetings on behalf of the Reformed Church in the United States. Rev. Pollema offers encouragement to the delegates and urges them to continue striving toward faithfulness, addressing specifically several matters on our agenda. He also provides an update concerning the most recent synod of the RCUS. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 44

The chairman invites Rev. Spencer Aalsburg of Hills United Reformed Church in Hills, MN, to address the assembly on behalf of the URC church plant in Sioux Falls, SD. (Information can be found online at www.sfurc.org)

Article 45

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 41)
Materials: PJCO Majority and Minority Reports RE PJCO Art. 35

Recommendation: That Synod withhold action on the recommendations of the Majority and Minority Reports regarding Article 35 (PJCO 2010, Article 36).

Ground:
Because the PJCO 2010 has been received and accepted for continued study, it is still subject to change by way of overture.

Adopted

Article 46

Advisory Committee 7
Materials: Overture 3

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 3 with its grounds and change Article 66 to read: "…if it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the Consistories of the Federation, after which they shall take effect. The time-frame for ratification shall be determined by synod."

   Grounds:
   a. The current delay to changes in the Church Order creates confusion rather than good order among the churches. Confusion is created under our current practice because consistories and councils have spent time discussing the benefit and necessity of the change before synod and revisited the matter again after synod, yet are then asked to ignore the change for two years.
   b. The process of ratification by two-thirds of the consistories is a sufficient safeguard against changes to Church Order being made against the will of the Consistories of the federation.
   c. Article 66 tells us that changes to Church Order are made "that God may be more honored and the churches better served." Realizing that any change must be made for these reasons, why would the better service of the churches and the greater glory

of God be delayed?

d. The only benefit to the delay in our current system is that it allows an appeal to be heard by a future synod regarding a change to the Church Order that is "forthcoming." Because this change does not take effect until *after the next synod* in our current system, it could be argued that Synod London 2010 could receive an appeal and *veto* a change in the Church Order that was adopted at Synod Schererville in 2007. Since the change voted upon at Schererville in 2007 has not yet actually taken effect, London's *veto* would not be changing an article of Church Order, and thus would not require the ratification by the consistories or even a two-thirds majority vote at Synod London. Instead, only a 50 percent-plus-one vote would be needed to prevent a change to Church Order adopted by Schererville and ratified by the consistories.

Adopted without dissent

2. That Synod remind the Churches to adhere to the regulations for synodical procedure in the preparation of overtures, to include a background section.

The chairman so orders

ARTICLE 47

Advisory Committee 7
Materials: PJCO Committee Report (Agenda p.291)

Recommendations:

1. That Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow-workers in the kingdom.

Adopted without dissent

2. That Synod express thanks to the members of our unity committees, as well as the members of the corresponding committees in the Canadian Reformed Churches, for their faithful service.

Adopted

3. That Synod encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at confer-

ences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built.

Adopted

4. That Synod recognize that challenges and concerns remain among both the committees and congregations of the URCNA with regard to our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Adopted

5. That Synod not accede to the request of Overture 13 to conclude the current mandates of the unity committees; and to encourage the unity committees to complete the work they have been assigned as far as they believe is possible.

   Grounds:
   a. There is more work to be done by these committees.
   b. Past Synods (2001 – Escondido, 2004 – Calgary, and 2007 – Schererville) have approved the current ecumenical process with the use of unity committees.
   c. Over the course of the last nine years the unity committees have made tangible progress.
   d. We believe that the Lord of the Church does call His people to pursue unity of heart, mind and purpose (Eph. 4:1-6; John 17:20-23).

(Advisory Committee 7 continued in Art. 52.)

Article 48

Elder Bruce Vrieling of Hope Reformed Church in Woodbridge, ON, leads the assembly in closing devotions. He calls the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 361, reads Ezekiel 37:15-28, and leads the delegates in prayer.

Wednesday, July 28, 2010
Evening Session

Article 49

Rev. Steven Swets from Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC, opens the evening session with devotions by calling the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 165, reading Ephesians 2:11-22, and leading in

prayer. He then calls the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 398.

Article 50

The chairman invites Rev. John Hilbelink to bring greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Rev. Hilbelink reads Psalm 133, expositing it to demonstrate the blessed refreshment that results from fellowship among God's people. Recalling the ways in which the histories of the OPC and the URC have intertwined, he encourages us to continue fostering our mutual unity in the faith and in the work of Christ's church. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 51

The chairman invites Rev. Tony Zekveld of Covenant Christian Church in Wyoming, ON, to speak to the assembly about his work with The Hope Centre, which is a church plant and mission to the Sikh and Hindu peoples in Toronto. (Information can be found online at www.hope-centre.ca)

Article 52

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 47)
Materials: Overture 13

Recommendations:
The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 7, taking up Recommendation 5.:

5. That Synod not accede to the request of Overture 13 to conclude the current mandates of the unity committees; and to encourage the unity committees to complete the work they have been assigned as far as they believe is possible.

   Motion is made and supported to table this recommendation temporarily, until Synod has considered the report of Advisory Committee 10 regarding the Theological Education Committee.

   Adopted

(Advisory Committee 7 continued in Art. 54.)

Advisory Committee 10
Materials: Theological Education Committee Report

Recommendations:

1. That Synod receive and approve the work of the Theological Education Committee without endorsing every formulation in their report.

   Adopted

2. That Synod declare that the Theological Education Committee's mandate has been fulfilled and is at an end.

   Adopted

3. That Synod dismiss with thanks the Theological Education Committee.

   Adopted

4. That Synod note that if a Consistory believes a particular model for theological education would be beneficial to the churches, that consistory should overture to that effect.

   Grounds:
   a. Sufficient information has been gained by the work of the Theological Education Committee to make the churches aware of the issues involved.
   b. Our current Church Order does not specify a particular model for theological education. Establishing such a model should follow Church Order Article 25 ("In the broader assemblies only those matters that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches of the broader assembly in common, shall be considered. All such matters shall originate with a Consistory and be considered by classis before being considered by synod.").

   Adopted

5. That Synod affirm that Appendix 3 (p. 563 of the Agenda) describes a "thoroughly reformed" education as is required in Church Order Article 3 and is a point of unity between the churches.

Ground: It is beneficial to affirm our great agreement with regard to Theological Education.

Adopted

6. That Synod **not** accede to recommendation #11.

   Ground: The Theological Education Committee did not make the case as stated in Conclusion/Recommendation #3 that the hybrid model is a "viable" choice.

   Adopted

(Advisory Committee 10 continued in Art. 57.)

Article 54

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 52)
Materials: PJCO Committee Report

Recommendations:

The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 7, taking up Recommendation 5.

5. That Synod not accede to the request of Overture 13 to conclude the current mandates of the unity committees; and to encourage the remaining unity committees to complete the work they have been assigned as far as they believe is possible.

   Defeated

   Motion is made and supported to recommit this matter to Advisory Committee 7. *Adopted*

(**Advisory Committee 7** continued in Art. 56.)

Article 55

Rev. Martin Vogel of Covenant Christian Church of Wyoming, ON, informs the chairman with regret that he must depart from the assembly to attend to the death of a member of the Living Water Reformed Church of Brantford, ON.

Article 56

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 54)

Materials: Overture 5

Recommendations:

1. That Synod withhold action on Overture 5.

2. That Synod remind the churches to adhere to the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* in the preparation of overtures to include a background section.

   Motion is made and supported to recommit this matter to Advisory Committee 7.

   Adopted

(Advisory Committee 7 continued in Art. 105.)

ARTICLE 57

Advisory Committee 10 (continued from Art. 53)
Materials: Website Oversight Committee Report and Report of Website Oversight Consistory

Recommendations:

1. That Synod declare that the two positions of Stated Clerk and Webmaster may or may not be occupied by the same person.

   Adopted

2. That Synod grant the Website Oversight Committee authority to establish and maintain the duties of the Webmaster with the approval of the Oversight Consistory.

   Adopted

3. That Synod grant authority to the Website Oversight Committee to appoint a Webmaster, with the approval of the Oversight Consistory, if Synod does not appoint a Webmaster.

   Grounds:
   a. The duties of the Webmaster do not require it to be joined to or separated from the position of the Stated Clerk.
   b. Flexibility should be given to the Website Oversight Committee to establish and maintain duties of the Webmaster.
   c. Our committee is not recommending a Webmaster be ap-

pointed or not be appointed at Synod, because it depends on who is appointed by Synod to serve as Stated Clerk.

Adopted

4. That Synod declare the Webmaster to be a full member of the Website Oversight Committee.

   Grounds:
   a. The Webmaster should function as a federation functionary and not as a classical functionary.
   b. Synod has not specified the relationship of the Webmaster to the Website Oversight Committee.

   Adopted

5. That Synod set the annual remuneration for the Webmaster at $3,000. The remuneration of the Webmaster is **not** to be taken from the Website fund.
   Ground: The current Stated Clerk (who also is the Webmaster) recommended this amount as reasonable given the duties expected of each position.

   Adopted

6. That Synod thank outgoing Webmaster Mr. Bill Konynenbelt for his years of service to the committee.

   Adopted

   The chairman expresses to Elder Konynenbelt the appreciation of the federation for the work he has done in helping to build and maintain the URCNA's web presence.

7. That Synod thank the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun for their oversight of the Website Oversight Committee.

   Adopted

   The chairman expresses to the Consistory of Grace United Reformed Church the appreciation of the federation for the work it has done in helping to build and oversee the URCNA's web presence.

8. That Synod **not** establish a term limit for a consistory to serve as the Oversight Consistory.

   Adopted

9. That Synod reappoint the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church as the Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee until the next Synod.

   Ground: For the sake of consistency the term ought not to be limited.

   Adopted

10. That Synod decrease the amount requested from each Classis for the Website Oversight Committee fund to $100 per year from the current $200.

    Grounds:
    a. Our current fund balances, plus this decreased amount, should keep us going for the next three years.
    b. This is the recommendation of the U.S. Treasurer.

    Adopted

11. That Synod thank the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo for transferring ownership of the domains.

    Ground: The ownership of urcna.com and urcna.net has been transferred.

    Adopted

    The chairman expresses thanks to the representatives of Covenant Reformed Church for transferring these domains to the federation.

12. That Synod mandate the Website Oversight Committee to continue the current practice of producing an annual yearbook for download, and that the Website Oversight Committee seek guidance from the consistories regarding what information it should contain.

    Ground: An annual yearbook benefits the churches.

    Adopted

13. That Synod **not** accede to the recommendation to rename the Oversight Consistory.

    Ground: "Oversight" more accurately reflects the role of the consistory between synods than "partnering."

    Adopted

14. That Synod declare that the responsibilities of the Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee include and are limited to:
    a. Acting as a legal entity when such is requested by the Website Oversight Committee for the proper fulfillment of the Website Oversight Committee's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.
    b. Acting as the responsible ecclesiastical assembly, in the time between synods, when such is requested by the Website Oversight Committee for the proper clarification and fulfillment of the Website Oversight Committee's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

    Ground: These accurately reflect the duties of the Oversight Consistory.

    Adopted

15. That Synod refer the creation of new introductions for the Canons of Dort and the Confession of Faith to the Liturgical Forms Committee.
    a. Motion is made and supported to include a new introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism in this recommendation.
    Adopted
    b. The motion now reads:
    "That Synod refer the creation of new introductions for the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Confession of Faith to the Liturgical Forms Committee."

    Grounds:
    a. New introductions are desirable to present them as the confessions of the URCNA.
    b. The Liturgical Forms Committee is best suited to this task.

    Adopted

(Advisory Committee 10 continued in Art. 108.)

Article 58

Motion is made and supported to allow the officers of Synod to review and approve the daily press release.

Adopted

Article 59

Rev. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger from Christ Church in Anaheim, CA, closes the assembly's evening session with devotions by calling the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 156, reading Psalm 130, and leading the delegates in prayer.

Thursday, July 29, 2010
Morning Session

Article 60

Rev. Philip Vos of Escondido United Reformed Church in Escondido, CA, begins the morning session with opening devotions. He leads the delegates in singing Psalter Hymnal 187, reads Revelation 1:4-20 and 7:9-17, and leads in prayer. He then asks the delegates to join in singing from Psalter Hymnal 376.

Article 61

The chairman notes that Elder John Lindeboom, delegate of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in London, ON, is unable to be present this morning, so alternate delegate Elder Eric Luth is present. Elder Luth stands to indicate his assent to the Form of Subscription.

Article 62

The chairman invites Dr. Hubert Krygsman to address the assembly on behalf of Redeemer University College of Ancaster, ON. (Information can be found online at www.redeemer.ca)

Article 63

The chairman invites Rev. Ben Westerveld to address the assembly as a fraternal observer, bringing greetings on behalf of the Église Réformée du Québec. Rev. Westerveld explains the history of the Église Réformée du Québec, sharing some of the federation's struggles and joys. He urges us to bear and forebear with like-minded federations, and he requests our prayers on behalf of the mission of the Église Réformée du Québec to the people of Quebec. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 64

Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes, which were distributed previously. *Adopted*

Article 65

Advisory Committee 11
Materials: Overture 15

Recommendations:

1. That Synod adopt Overture 15 to amend Articles 29 and 31 of the Church Order by removing the second sentence of Article 29, "Any individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly," and to move it to become the second sentence of Article 31.

   Grounds:
   a. This is in keeping with the different appellant addressed in each article.
   b. This would help clarify the first step when an individual decides to make an appeal.
   c. Nothing will be lost by making this change.

   Adopted without dissent

2. That the Chairman of Synod rule that the ratification vote of the churches be accomplished before January 1, 2011.
   a. Motion is made and supported to have the ratification vote of the churches be accomplished by March 15, 2011. *Adopted*
   b. The chairman rules that this date will apply to all other required ratifications, as well.

(Advisory Committee 11 continued in Art. 87.)

Article 66

Advisory Committee 8 (continued from Art. 23)
Materials: Overture 6

Recommendations:

1. That Synod not accede to Overture 6 to reassign CERCU with the "mandate of exploring real or perceived differences of emphasis within the covenant theologies of the respective URC and CanRC federations." There is no need to reassign CERCU for the following grounds:

   Grounds:
   a. All the discussions of *phase one* were published, distributed and received by previous synods. Synod 2001 agreed to move to phase two relations on the basis of our mutual understanding.
   b. Differing emphases on the covenant continue to be discussed between our churches. Churches have been and are still encouraged to invite Canadian Reformed representatives, both on a local and classical level, to engage and dialogue over these matters. (Agenda p. 252 records this dialogue and feedback.)
   c. Canadian Reformed representatives have offered their explanations over concerns raised regarding point 6 of the nine points of Synod 2007 in our broader assemblies.

   Adopted

Article 67

The chairman temporarily relinquishes the chair to the vice-chairman.

Article 68

Advisory Committee 8
Materials: CERCU Report Recommendations

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to the editorial changes proposed in the Synodical guidelines for ecumenical relations (Agenda pp. 211-213).

   Grounds:
   a. What the federations are committing to do under Step A is to develop a plan of union, since there is as yet no plan in place.
   b. These words were retained from the pre-2007 edition but actually belong now under Step B, where they are already found in substance.
   c. The word "step" was inadvertently left out by Synod Schererville.

   Adopted

That Synod extend the allowable time of service of CERCU members-at-large to three 3-year terms.

Ground: This allows for continuity on the committee.

Motion is made and supported to table this recommendation temporarily. *Adopted*

2. That Synod reappoint Revs. Bill Pols, Peter Vellenga, Harry Zekveld to continue in their service as members-at-large on CERCU. If one of these members does not wish to be reappointed, our committee recommends that Rev. Brian Vos be appointed.

   Adopted

3. That Synod declare the matter of term limits for classical representatives be left to the discretion of each individual classis. Further, that Synod encourage the Classes to give full consideration to elder delegates for appointment to CERCU.

   Grounds:
   a. While this is a synodical committee, members are appointed by each classis and fall under individual classical rules.
   b. This would serve the concern the churches had for broad, regional representation.
   c. It would also serve the need for experience and continuity on the committee in the ongoing development of its contacts with other bodies.
   d. Currently there are no elders on the committee.

   Adopted

4. That Synod increase the budget for CERCU to $6,000 per annum (Agenda p. 217).

   Ground: The current budget is inadequate to meet their needs (Agenda p. 217, 2 B).

   Adopted

5. Recommendation regarding the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ) and Phase Two relations:

   a. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Ben Westerveld, minister of St. Marc (ERQ), to state his concerns and

field any questions regarding the subsequent recommendation.
Adopted

b. That Synod not accede to Phase Two – Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).

Ground:
Art. 12 of our Church Order prescribes that the office of deacon shall be fulfilled by male confessing members who meet the biblical requirements for office (in accordance with I Timothy 3:12; Belgic Confession Article 30).

After some discussion, the assembly takes a brief break for refreshment.

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 72.)

Article 69

The chairman invites Dr. Cornelis Venema of Redeemer United Reformed Church in Dyer, IN, to address the assembly on behalf of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, where Dr. Venema is president and a professor. (Information can be found online at www/midamerica.edu)

Article 70

The chairman invites Rev. Andrea Ferrari of Christ United Reformed Church in San Diego, CA, to speak to the assembly regarding his work as a missionary in Italy. (Information can be found online at www.reformationitaly.org)

Article 71

The chairman invites Rev. Paul Murphy of West Sayville Reformed Bible Church in West Sayville, NY, to speak to the assembly regarding his work as a church planter at Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in New York City. (Information can be found online at www.merfnyc.org)

Article 72

Advisory Committee 8 (continued from Art. 68)
Materials: CERCU Report Recommendations

Recommendations:

The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 8, taking up Recommendation 6.b.:

6. Recommendation regarding the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ) Phase Two:

   b. That Synod not accede to phase two ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).

      Ground: Art. 12 of our Church Order prescribes that the office of deacon shall be fulfilled by male confessing members who meet the biblical requirements for office (in accordance with I Timothy 3:12; Belgic Confession Article 30).

Defeated

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 74.)

Article 73

A. Motion is made and supported to approve Recommendation 7 of the CERCU report (Agenda p.261): "That Synod establish *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* – Phase 2 – with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ), and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Article 36 of the Church Order."

Adopted

1. The chairman orders that the supplemental information regarding the ERQ, found on Agenda pp.224-229, be included with the material sent to our consistories when informing them of the need for one half of the consistories to ratify this action.

2. The chairman rules that the deadline for the required ratification by one-half of the consistories be set at March 15, 2011.

B. The chairman asks Rev. Keith Davis to lead the assembly in a prayer of thanksgiving, after which the assembly sings the Doxology.

Article 74

Advisory Committee 8 (continued from Art. 72)
Materials: CERCU Report Recommendations

Recommendations:

The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 8, taking up Recommendation 7.

7. That Synod not accede to Phase Two – Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

   Ground: Art. 12 of our Church Order prescribes that the office of deacon shall be fulfilled by "male confessing members who meet the biblical requirements for office" (in accordance with I Timothy 3:12; Belgic Confession Article 30).

   Motion is made and supported to table this recommendation indefinitely. *Adopted*

8. NAPARC Ratifications:

   a. That Synod ratify the decision of NAPARC to welcome the Canadian Reformed Churches into the membership of NAPARC.

      Adopted

   b. That Synod ratify the decision of NAPARC to welcome the Presbyterian Reformed Church into the membership of NAPARC.

      Adopted

   c. That Synod instruct the Stated Clerk to communicate these decisions to the NAPARC clerk.

      Adopted

   d. That Synod take note of the reports submitted by Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema concerning the NAPARC foreign missions consultation. These reports are found in Appendix 7 (Agenda pp. 277-281).

      The chairman so rules

9. That Synod consider all member denominations and federations of NAPARC which are not already in Phase 1 or 2 of ecumenical relations to be in Phase 1—Corresponding Relations. This includes the *Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Heritage Reformed Con-*

gregations, the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

Grounds:

a. This is in fulfillment to our NAPARC commitment.
b. This clarifies for CERCU the URCNA's relationship with these federations.

Adopted

10. Recommend that Synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 99.)

Article 75

The delegates from Living Water Reformed Church, Elder Anthony Schmidt and Elder Paul Bootsma, inform the assembly of their need to depart due to the death of a member of their congregation. The chairman excuses them.

Article 76

Rev. Doug Barnes of Hills United Reformed Church in Hills, MN, closes the session by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 398 and by leading in prayer.

Thursday, July 27, 2010
Afternoon Session

Article 77

Elder Henry Vander Wal from Eastmanville United Reformed Church in Coopersville, MI, opens the afternoon session by leading the delegates in singing from Psalter Hymnal 400, reading 2 Timothy 1:1-10, and leading in prayer. He then calls the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 218.

Article 78

The chairman resumes the chair from the vice-chairman.

Elder John Lindeboom of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in London, ON, has returned to the assembly and replaces alternate delegate Elder Eric Luth.

Article 79

The chairman invites Rev. Hans Uittenbosch to address the assembly regarding his work with the Seafarer's Ministry, who urges men to join him in the work.

Article 80

The chairman invites Rev. John Koopmans, fraternal observer, to bring greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of North America. He informs the delegates of the mission work of the Free Reformed Churches; discusses some of the emphases of the federation; and remarks on the challenges of the work of fraternal relations, which disappear when we look to the unity we have in the cross of Christ.

Article 81

The chairman invites Rev. Ruben Sernas of Ontario United Reformed Church in Ontario, CA, to address the assembly regarding his work with the Spanish outreach mission. (Information can be found online at www.ontariourc.org/espanol)

Article 82

The chairman leads the assembly in praying for Fable Eenigenburg, the young daughter of delegate Rev. Drew Eenigenburg, who has been admitted to the hospital for a breathing infection (mild pneumonia), and for Rev. Eenigenburg's wife, Annaleah.

The chairman then relinquishes the chair to the vice-chairman.

Article 83

Advisory Committee 3
Materials: Appeal #1 from Hills United Reformed Church

Recommendation: The advisory committee recommends that we sustain the appeal from the Hills URC regarding the 9 points (Agenda p. 195) of Synod

2007, citing the first ground of the appeal as sufficient.

1. During the course of debate, the vice-chairman relinquishes the chair to the second clerk, since he desires to speak and both the chairman and first clerk have already spoken to the issue at hand.

2. The recommendation of Advisory Committee 3 to sustain the appeal of Hills URC is: *Defeated*

(Advisory Committee 3 continued in Art. 96.)

Article 84

The chairman resumes the chair from the second clerk.

He invites Rev. Paul Ipema to introduce fraternal observer Rev. Kalala Kabongo of the United Reformed Church in Congo. Rev. Kabongo brings greetings to the assembly and explains how Reformed doctrine came to the Congo by means of the radio ministry of Rev. Aaron Kayayan and, later, through the Reformed Church in the United States. He relates the history of the United Reformed Church in Congo and describes the culture in which they labor, urging us to remember them and their labors in our prayers. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 85

The chairman invites Rev. Allen Vander Pol of First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA, to address the assembly on behalf of the Miami International Seminary (MINTS). (Information can be found online at www.mints.edu)

Article 86

The chairman invites Rev. Larry Johnson of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, IA, to address the assembly concerning his church planting work at the Covenant United Reformed church plant in Prinsburg, MN. (Information can be found online at www.covenanturc.org)

Article 87

Advisory Committee 11 (continued from Art. 65)
Materials: Overture 14

Recommendations:

1. That Synod adopt the following definitions with their explanations of particular types of synodical actions.

   1. **<u>Doctrinal Affirmations</u>**: A *Doctrinal Affirmation* is an interpretation of the Confessions on a specific point of their teaching (*Acts of Synod 2004*, Article 76.B.b., p. 29).

      1.1 A Doctrinal Affirmation serves the churches by guiding us back to the Confessions and giving clarification in response to doctrinal questions. The Scriptures, Ecumenical Creeds, and Three Forms of Unity alone may serve as grounds in matters of discipline (*Acts of Synod 2007*, Article 67.4, p. 36).
      1.2 A Doctrinal Affirmation should be received by the churches with respect and submission, and it should not be directly or indirectly contradicted in preaching or in writing (Church Order Articles 29 and 31; *Form of Subscription*).
      1.3 A Doctrinal Affirmation may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31 (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B).

   2. **<u>Pastoral Advice</u>**: *Pastoral Advice* is the application of the Scriptures and the Confessions in response to particular circumstances in the churches.

      1.1 Pastoral Advice expresses the collective wisdom of Synod to guide the churches in their pastoral care. It may not serve as grounds in matters of discipline.
      1.2 Pastoral Advice should be received with reverence and respect. It would be unwise to contradict or disregard Pastoral Advice in preaching or writing.
      1.3 Pastoral Advice may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31 (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4 and Appendix B).

   3. **<u>Study Committee Reports</u>**: A *Study Committee Report* is the response of a Study Committee to the mandate given it by Synod (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.2 and 5.3.3.a.).

      3.1 A Study Committee Report, if received by Synod, serves to recommend action by Synod on the basis of grounds

(*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 5.3.3.c.3). If these recommended actions call for Synod to adopt Doctrinal Affirmations or to provide Pastoral Advice, these actions should be clearly identified and distinguished as such.

3.2 A Study Committee Report becomes a matter of record in the Acts of Synod. Any Doctrinal Affirmations adopted or Pastoral Advice given by Synod should be received by the churches as agreed in 1.2 or 2.2 respectively.

3.3 A Study Committee Report, as a matter of record, may not be appealed. Synodical actions arising from a Study Committee Report may be appealed as outlined in CO Articles 29 and 31 (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4 and Appendix B).

4. **Synodical Judgement**: A *Synodical Judgment* is the answer of Synod to an appeal (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4; Appendix B, 6 and 7).

4.1 A Synodical Judgment either sustains or denies an appeal on the basis of specified grounds determined to be valid or invalid. (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4 and Appendix B, 6 and 8)

4.2 A Synodical Judgment should be received by the appellants with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order (Church Order Articles 29 and 31; *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4 and Appendix B, 7)

1.3 A Synodical Judgment may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31. (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 3.4 and Appendix B).

(Advisory Committee 11 continued in Art. 94.)

Article 88

Elder Dr. Scott Swanson of First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA, closes the session by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 234 and by leading the delegates in prayer.

Thursday, July 27, 2010
Evening Session

Article 89

Rev. Fred Folkerts of Immanuel United Reformed Church of Listowel, ON, opens the session by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 240, reading Galatians 3:1-14, and leading in prayer.

Article 90

The chairman invites Rev. Nick Smith to introduce fraternal observer Rev. Yonson Dethan, who brings greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Geraja-Geraja Reformasi Calvinis – GGRC). Rev. Dethan relates the history of the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia, describes some of the recent works of their churches, and invites delegates to visit in order to learn more about them. He noted that they live in the midst of a large Muslim population, and they are eager to develop a closer relationship with the URCNA.

Article 91

The chairman invites Rev. Dick Moes to introduce fraternal observer Rev. David Fraser, who brings greetings on behalf of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Rev. Fraser explains the reason for the formation of his denomination and their desire for the fellowship and prayers of sister churches, that there might be peace and unity among the churches of Christ. He describes some of the work of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and urges the assembly to join him in working and praying for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 92

The chairman invites Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen of Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, CA, to address the assembly concerning his church planting work with Kauai Reformation Church. (Information can be found online at www.kauaireformation.com)

Article 93

The chairman notes that delegate Rev. Martin Vogel from Covenant Christian Church of Wyoming, ON, has been replaced by alternate delegate Elder

William Sipkens. Elder Sipkens rises to affirm his assent with the Form of Subscription.

The chairman relinquishes the chair to the vice-chairman.

ARTICLE 94

Advisory Committee 11 (continued from Art. 87)
Materials: Overture 14

A. The assembly returns to the report of Advisory Committee 11, taking up its discussion of Recommendation 1: That Synod adopt the following definitions with their explanations of particular types of synodical actions.

Motion is made and supported to commit this matter to the Synodical Rules Committee to perfect these definitions in order to effectively promote sound doctrine without binding officers and members beyond Scripture and the Confessions.

Adopted

(**Advisory Committee 11** continued in Art. 118.)

B. The vice-chairman returns the chair to the chairman.

ARTICLE 95

A. Motion is made and supported to enter into strict executive session.

Adopted

B. Motion is made and supported to allow an elder from the consistory related to Appeal #2 to remain in executive session.

Adopted

C. All other non-delegates are excused from the meeting hall.

D. Rev. Rick Miller, reporter of Advisory Committee 3, leads the delegates in prayer for their impending deliberations.

ARTICLE 96

Advisory Committee 3 (continued from Art. 83)

Materials: Appeal #2 from Brouwer/Telman

Motion is made and supported to declare that this matter is not properly before Synod as an appeal.

> Ground: An appeal is a written request for a decision or judgment, made to an assembly by a consistory or individual within the federation, regarding a matter previously decided upon by an assembly within the federation.
>
> *Adopted*

ARTICLE 97

Advisory Committee 3
Materials: Appeal #3 from R. Sikkema/T. Sikkema

A. Appeal #3 is recognized by Synod as comprising three distinct appeals, hereafter referred to as Appeal 3.1, Appeal 3.2, and Appeal 3.3.

B. Motion is made and supported to declare that Appeal 3.3 of the three appeals submitted by R. Sikkema and T. Sikkema is not properly before Synod as an appeal.

> Ground: An appeal is a written request for a decision or judgment, made to an assembly by a consistory or individual within the federation, regarding a matter previously decided upon by an assembly within the federation.
>
> *Adopted*

C. Consideration is given to the grounds of the Sikkema appeals, and a preliminary response to the grounds is drawn up.

D. Motion is made and supported to recommit to the advisory committee Synod's preliminary response to the grounds of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2 to allow the advisory committee to meet with the appellants and discuss with them Synod's preliminary response.

Adopted

E. The chairman appoints Rev. Stephen Arrick and Rev. William Boekestein to Advisory Committee 3.

F. Strict executive session is ended.

(**Advisory Committee 3** continued in Art. 136.)

Article 98

Advisory Committee 6 (continued from Art. 21)
Materials: Overture 8

Synod has already adopted recommendations (see Art. 20):

1. To evaluate the need for a part-time/full-time or "volunteer" position of URCNA coordinator of missions, with this position functioning under the authority and oversight of a specific consistory, and one of his responsibilities would be to edit and publish the federation's mission newsletter.
2. To appoint a study committee to evaluate the need for a missions coordinator.

Recommendations:

1. That Synod mandate this study committee, in evaluating the need for a missions coordinator, to make inquiries of NAPARC churches regarding their policies on missions and to consult URCNA records.
   Adopted

2. That Synod mandate this study committee to develop a proposed set of federational mission policies and guidelines.
   a. This report should include the possibility of developing a missions coordinator position.
   b. This report should include recommendations regarding:
      i. How to encourage communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations.
      ii. How to obtain updates from the missionaries and church planters for publication in the missions newsletter.
      iii. How to maintain the "missionsURC.org" website and utilize it to post prayer requests and other matters relevant to URCNA membership – e.g., when and where missionaries are "home" and available for speaking.
      iv. How to ascertain and remain abreast of the disparate financial needs of missionaries and to disseminate pertinent information to URCNA councils (e.g., location, family, nature & needs of a particular ministry).

   Adopted

3. Term: Study committee to present its report to the next Synod.

The chairman so orders

4. Budget: That Synod authorize a budget for this committee *not to exceed* $6,000 over three years.

   Grounds:
   a. The advisory committee envisions most study committee work being done remotely.
   b. The advisory committee recommends one face-to-face meeting.

Adopted

5. Nominations: We suggest the following names to serve on this study committee: Rev. Michael Brown (Chairman), Rev. Jody Lucero (Clerk), Rev. William Boekestein, Rev. Harry Bout, Elder Paul Wagenmaker, Rev. Richard Anjema and Rev. Kevin Efflandt. *Alternates:* Rev. Steve Arrick, Rev. Alan VanderPol, Rev. Reuben Sernas and Elder Harry Kooistra

   Grounds:
   a. The URCNA has realized substantial growth in the scope of domestic and foreign mission activities of its member congregations and classes.
   b. While the URCNA stands as one in spirit and truth, there exists among many of our member congregations, missionaries and church planters a sense of standing alone.

Adopted

Article 99

Advisory Committee 8 (continued from Art. 74)
Materials: Overture 16

Recommendations:

1. That Synod not accede to Overture 16, part 1 (*Adopting the "Application for Church Membership into the United Reformed Churches in North America"*) and part 2 (*Posting this "Application" prominently on the URCNA's website*).

Grounds:

a. There is a distinction between the dissemination of information and a standardized application for acceptance. Insisting on a standardized application goes beyond the bounds of the Church Order, which states that a congregation is "sponsored" into the Federation via a local URCNA consistory (Church Order Art. 32).
b. The intent of the overture is to gather and dispense information concerning the churches coming into the federation. Therefore, a standardized application process is unnecessary.

Adopted

2. That Synod, in answer to Overture 16, part 3, instruct the classes to provide the stated clerk with the appropriate information on each church being ratified to be included in the synodical agenda.

Grounds:

a. This would provide greater access to the history and character of the churches who are coming into our federation.
b. It will promote mutual understanding between our churches.

Adopted

3. That the questions provided in Overture 16 (Agenda p. 189) be used as a guideline for the sponsoring consistory in the gathering of information.

Ground: These questions facilitate the previous recommendation.

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 119.)

Article 100

Advisory Committee 2

Materials: Financial Reports, Healthcare Matters, URCNA Boards of Directors

Recommendations:

1. That Synod approve the above-mentioned Financial Reports.

Adopted

2. That Synod recommend strongly that all councils make the federation's Askings a budget line-item.

Adopted

Explanation:
- Synod makes commitments which require financial support.
- 25% of churches (on average) fail to contribute to the financial needs of the federation. Both Treasurers indicated that 'forgetfulness' may be a contributing cause for this failure.
- A budget line-item will keep the matter before the churches on an annual basis.
- The amount budgeted may be raised by offerings or any other appropriate means.
- The Treasurers of the Corporations will be permitted to send reminders to all the churches regarding their contributions towards the federation's expenses.

3. That Synod lift the requirement of Synod 2007 to have standardized reporting methods for the financial statements of the Canadian and American Corporations (cf. Article 20.2 in the Acts of Synod 2007, p. 14).

Adopted

Explanation:
- The Canadian Corporation uses the Accrual Basis of Accounting. The American Corporation uses the Cash Basis of Accounting.
- Synod 2007's standardizing of the reporting method created unnecessary and burdensome duplication for the Treasurer of the Canadian Corporation.
- The financial difference between the methods of reporting is immaterial.

4. That Synod approve the work of the Canadian and American URCNA Corporations, taking note of the following:
   a. The appointment of Mr. Cliffe Hodgkinson as Director of the Canadian Corporation, replacing Mr. Gary De Groot.
   b. The ratification of the appointment of Mr. Bob Huisjen to the Board of the URCNA U.S.
   c. The criterion for inclusion on the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) Budget, which is as follows: "Causes to be supported by the JVA will be limited to churches in the URCNA. Any

request for support will have to come from and through a congregation within the URCNA."

Adopted

Explanation:

- The JVA allows for support from the Canadian churches to all charitable causes in the USA consistent with the principles of our federation.
- Causes to be supported must be approved.
- Requiring local churches to submit causes places the responsibility of approval with the churches, rather than with the Board of the JVA.

5. That Synod thank the Treasurers – Pam Hessels and Peter J. Moen – for their work throughout the past three years and for their attendance at this synodical meeting. (The Committee notes the nine years of excellent service provided by Peter J. Moen to the federation. The U.S. Corporation will appoint his replacement. Nominations ought to be forwarded to the Chairman of the U.S. Corporation, Mr. Lynn Brouwer.)

Adopted

The chairman instructs the stated clerk to carry out this motion via letter.

(Advisory Committee 2 continued in Art. 134.)

Article 101

Rev. Phil Grotenhuis from Phoenix United Reformed Church in Phoenix, AZ, closes the session by leading the assembly in the Lord's Prayer.

Friday, July 30, 2010
Morning Session

Article 102

The chairman calls the assembly to sing Psalter Hymnal 279. Rev. Ron Scheuers then reads Isaiah 12 and leads the assembly in prayer.

Article 103

The chairman invites Elder Huibert Den Boer to introduce the fraternal delegates from the Reformed Churches of South Africa (Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika – GKSA), Rev. Risimati Hobyane and Dr. Douw Breed. Dr. Breed addresses the assembly, speaking briefly of recent highlights in the life of the GKSA, including the restructuring of their synod and their tabling of the question of women in church office. He explains how the GKSA seeks to serve the churches through teaching and training. And he expresses the prayer that God will strengthen and encourage the URCNA to continue obediently fulfilling the calling of God. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 104

Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes, which were distributed previously.

Adopted

Article 105

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 56)
Materials: Overture 5

Recommendations:

1. That Synod table indefinitely Overture 5.

   Grounds:
   a. Synod already accepted "for continued study [rather than for adoption] the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches" (Article 41).
   b. Synod already instructed the churches "that suggested changes to the PJCO 2010 should be directed to the Synod by way of overture through the Classes" (Article 41).
   c. The issues raised by Overture 5 regarding who does missions, the definition/scope of missions, and who is the audience/recipient of missions needs further clarification.
   d. The elder delegate of the Cape Coral Consistory, from whom this overture originated, indicated a willingness to refine Overture 5 and resubmit it to Classis. *Adopted*

2. That Synod receive this as the answer to Overture 5. *Adopted*

Article 106

Advisory Committee 7
Materials: Overture 13

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 13.3.a, as follows: To conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook with the Canadian Reformed Churches for use in the united federation.

   Motion is made and supported to recommit this matter to the advisory committee for the purpose of adding grounds.

   Adopted

(Advisory Committee 7 continued in Art. 135.)

Article 107

Advisory Committee 9 (continued from Art. 40)
Materials: Overture 12

Recommendations:

1. That Synod amend the procedure by which a man is declared to have sustained the candidacy and ordination exam and the colloquium doctum as follows:
   A. Following the completion the entire exam, each specific area must receive a vote of approbation.
   B. In the case of the candidacy exam, the particular vote of approbation of each specific area will be given by both the consistory and by the delegates to classis.
   C. In the case of the ordination exam and the colloquium doctum, a vote of approbation of each specific area will be given by the delegates to classis.
   D. The classis shall determine the method by which the vote of approbation of each specific area will be taken.
   E. An exam may only be declared as sustained after a particular vote of approbation of each specific area has been received by either this or a previous classis within 13 months of the original exam.

Grounds:

a. The amended procedure will bring uniformity within the entire federation.
b. The amended procedure provides a unified application of Articles 4, 6 and 8 of the Church Order.
c. The amended procedure will enable a consistory and the classis to make a more careful approbation about each specific area which will:
    i. Provide examinees careful and pastoral guidance to overcome any area(s) of weakness.
    ii. Ensure the purity of the churches by providing competent men for the gospel ministry.

Adopted

2. The committee recommends the following changes to the Church Order appendices:
    A. In Appendix 2.2 (Procedure): letter "d." be renamed "e." and a new letter "d." be added, which shall read, "A declaration by the consistory that the candidate has sustained the exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the consistory, along with the delegates to classis."
    B. In Appendix 3.2 (Procedure): letter "d." be renamed "e." and a new letter "d." be added, which shall read, "A determination that the candidate has sustained this exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the delegates to classis."
    C. In Appendix 4.2 (Procedure): letter "c." be renamed "d." and a new letter "c." be added, which shall read, "A determination that the minister has sustained this exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the delegates to classis." *Adopted*

3. The committee recommends that the following example be placed in the Acts of Synod and the appendices of our Church Order (see below).

    Grounds: This will allow easy reference and application of this process for the consistories and classis. *Adopted*

EXAMPLE OF Procedure for Examination

A. For Candidacy Examinations:
   1. Following the examination and the decision of the man's consistory, the delegates will enter executive session. The following motion will be made at the appropriate time: "We are satisfied that the examinee has sustained the _____ area of the examination."
   2. After discussion of each area, a vote will be taken. If the delegates are satisfied with all of the areas, the man may continue the process toward admission to the Ministry of the Word in the URCNA.
   3. If the delegates are not satisfied with any particular area(s) of the examination, the examinee may return to classis within 13 months to be examined in that/those area(s) only. He need not undergo the entire examination again if he returns within that time period.

B. For Ordination Examinations and Colloquia Docta:
   1. Following the examination, the delegates will enter executive session. The following motion will be made at the appropriate time: "We are satisfied that the examinee has sustained the _____ area of the examination."
   2. After discussion of each area, a vote will be taken. If the delegates are satisfied with all of the areas, the man may continue the process toward admission to the Ministry of the Word in the URCNA.
   3. If the delegates are not satisfied with any particular area(s) of the examination, the examinee may return to classis within 13 months to be examined in that/those area(s) only. He need not undergo the entire examination again if he returns within that time period.

C. In the event that a man does not sustain an entire examination at classis:
   1. The classis shall remain in the Executive Session declared for the purpose of discussing and voting on the examinee's performance in his examination.
   2. A delegate from the examinee's Consistory shall be sent to explain what is going to happen next (see #3 below), and accompany the examinee back into Executive Session and to the front of the assembly.

3. The Chairman, on behalf of Classis, shall acknowledge and give thanks to God for the examinee's success by identifying that/those area(s) of the examination that he may have sustained; and encourage and instruct him in how he may proceed.
4. The accompanying delegate from his Consistory shall offer a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication on behalf of the examinee.
5. The Chairman, before ending Executive Session, shall ask the examinee if he would prefer to remain as an observer when General Session is resumed, or be excused from the Classis before the General Session is resumed.
6. Upon resuming General Session, the Chairman shall announce the outcome of the examination and the broad outlines of the Classis' dealings with the examinee (see #3 above).

4. Note: Synod is aware of a precedent in 2004 of the churches ratifying a change to the Church Order appendices, but we consider this to be in error and a non-binding precedent.

5. The Committee recommends that this be considered Synod's response to Overture 12.

Adopted

Article 108

Advisory Committee 10 (continued from Art. 57)
Materials: Level of Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee Reports

Recommendations:

1. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Tom Morrison, Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. Danny Hyde, and Rev. Mitchell Persaud.

Granted

2. That Synod declare that neither report on the two given positions is satisfactory as presented in order to provide guidance to the churches.

Grounds:
a. It is the overwhelming consensus of the advisory committee that the reports were unclear.

b. The oral presentations by the authors of both reports did not fairly represent what the reports themselves stated.

Adopted

Article 109

Advisory Committee 10 – Majority Report
Materials: Level of Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee Report

Recommendations:

1. That Synod affirm this conclusion of Position 2, as follows: that members and prospective members of our churches assent to our Confessions without conscious objection.

   Grounds:
   a. Weaknesses in the report of Position 2 as written were acknowledged by its authors, and those authors accepted this recommendation as an appropriate clarification of the position.
   b. Position 1 is clearly inconsistent with one of the vows in Form 2 for the Profession of Faith ("Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?"), as acknowledged by an author of the Majority Report.
   c. Position 1 is arguably inconsistent with one of the vows in Form 1 for the Profession of Faith ("Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation …")
   d. This will safeguard the flock according to our subscription vows.

a. A minority report from Advisory Committee 10 was read for information.
b. Motion is made and supported to recommit this matter to the study committee to perfect their report.

Adopted

Article 110

The chairman invites Rev. Mark Stewart to introduce fraternal observer Rev. Peter Kloosterman, who brings greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Re-

formed Churches of New Zealand. Rev. Kloosterman updates the delegates on the situation of the New Zealand churches and urges the establishment of closer ties between the URCNA and the RCNZ. He assures us of their prayers on behalf of our churches. (His speech is appended to these Acts of Synod.)

Article 111

The chairman informs the assembly that Rev. Greg Bylsma and Elder Tony De Weerd of Bethel United Reformed Church in Woodstock, ON, have departed to attend a funeral.

Article 112

A. Motion is made and supported to add Elder Dr. Scott Swanson of First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA, to the Level of Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee.

B. Motion is made to divide the question, determining first whether we should add a seventh member to the committee.

Adopted

C. The motion to add a seventh person to the committee is:

Defeated

Article 113

Advisory Committee 5
Materials: Overture 1; Report from the Committee to Study the Federal Vision

Recommendations:

1. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Brian Vos (secretary), and to Dr. Cornelis P. Venema (substitute for the chair) as well as any other members of the study committee present during the discussion of this report.

   Grounds:

   a. These two brothers were present during our deliberations and would be able to give a fuller defense and explanation of the recommendations from the Report that the committee has proposed to adopt.

b. This is consistent with rule 5.4.2 of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

Granted

2. That Synod urge all office-bearers to repudiate Federal Vision teachings where they are not in harmony with the following articles from the Three Forms of Unity (with underlining emphasis added).

Grounds:

a. It is in keeping with the original intent of Overture 1 to address the Federal Vision controversy from the perspective of the confessions.
b. Urging office-bearers to refute Federal Vision teachings where they are not in harmony with the specific citations of the confessions strengthens the report, and thus serves the churches in a way that avoids controversy.
c. The highlighted articles and statements pertain to the theological teachings which the Federal Vision movement has affected, as noted in the report.
d. Our Form of Subscription requires us to refute all errors that militate against our confessional documents.
e. In addition, see Recommendation 3.

Adopted without dissent

Canons of Dort I, Article 7
Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby ... God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them....

Canons of Dort I, Article 8
There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved, both under the Old and the New Testament; since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which He has chosen us from eternity, both to grace and to glory, to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He has ordained that we should walk therein (Eph. 1:4, 5; 2:10).

Canons of Dort I, Article 15
... Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehen-

sible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion....

Canons of Dort I, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 2
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute. Likewise: That there is one election unto faith and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation.

For this is a fancy of men's minds, invented regardless of the Scriptures, whereby the doctrine of election is corrupted, and this golden chain of our salvation is broken. *And whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:30)*.

Canons of Dort, V, Article 1
Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin....

Canons of Dort, V, Article 6
But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

Canons of Dort V, Article 7
For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost....

Canons of Dort V, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 7
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That the faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except only in duration.

For Christ Himself, in Matt. 13:20, Luke 8:13, and in other places, evidently notes, besides this duration, a threefold difference between

those who believe only for a time and true believers, when He declares that the former receive the seed in stony ground, but the latter in the good ground or heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; that the former are without fruit, but that the latter bring forth their fruit in various measure, with constancy and stedfastness.

Belgic Confession, Article 22
… Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we *are justified by faith* alone, or *by faith apart from works*. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins**.**

3. That Synod affirm the following teachings of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

Grounds:
a. Clearly distinguishing direct quotations from the Confessions from the formulations of the 15 points respects the binding nature of our Confessions as our doctrinal standards. The Scriptures, Ecumenical Creeds, and Three Forms of Unity alone may serve as grounds in matters of discipline.
b. Moving the affirmations as proposed in Overture 1 diminishes the weight of the statements addressing the Federal Vision errors.
c. Overture 1's proposal to move these affirmations to summary statements would disrupt the coherence and logical flow of the report.
d. The churches have a responsibility to address contemporary theological errors in a language that is applicable to those errors.

Adopted without dissent

1. In God's unchangeable purpose, He elects His chosen ones to salvation and effectively draws them into fellowship with Christ through His Word and Spirit, granting them true faith in Christ, justifying, sanctifying and preserving them in Christ's fellowship until He glorifies them (Canons of Dort, 1.7).

2. The election of God is of one kind only, and is to everlasting life, and not to a mutable relationship dependent on the good

work of man, which can be forfeited (Canons of Dort, 1.8). Those who finally fall away have not forfeited their election, but demonstrate they never were elect, though members of the covenant community (Canons of Dort, 5.7).

3. Some members of the church or covenant community "are not of the Church, though externally in it" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

4. Those who are truly "of the Church" may be known by the "marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

5. Adam was obligated to obey "the commandment of life" in order to live in fellowship with God and enjoy His favor eternally (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3).

6. All human beings have fallen in Adam, are subject to condemnation and death, and are wholly incapable of finding favor with God on the basis of obedience to the law of God (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3 and 24).

7. The work of Christ as Mediator of the covenant of grace fully accords with God's truth and justice, satisfies all the demands of God's holy law, and thereby properly "merits" the believer's righteousness and eternal life (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 5-7, 15, 23-24; Belgic Confession, Article 22; Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors 2:3).

8. The entire obedience of Christ "under the law," both active and passive, constitutes the righteousness that is granted and imputed to believers for their justification (Belgic Confession, Article 22; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23).

9. Faith is the sole instrument of the believer's justification, so that believers may be said to be justified "even before [they] do good works" (Belgic Confession, Article 24).

10. The good works of believers, though necessary fruits of thankfulness, contribute nothing to their justification before God since they proceed from true faith, are themselves the fruits of the renewing work of Christ's Spirit, are imperfect and corrupted by sin, and are performed out of gratitude for God's grace in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24, 32, 33; Belgic Confession, Article 24).

11. The justification of true believers is a definitive and irrevocable blessing of Christ's saving work, and therefore cannot be increased by the good works that proceed from true faith or be lost through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:9; Rejection of Errors 1:2, 2:8, 5:7; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 20 and 21)

12. The sacrament of Baptism does not affect the believer's union with Christ ***or*** justification but is a confirmation and assurance of the benefits of Christ's saving work to those who respond to the sacrament in the way of faith (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25 and 27).

13. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a means to strengthen and nourish the believer in Christ when it is received by the "mouth of faith" and therefore the children of believing parents shall make public profession of faith before receiving the sacrament (Belgic Confession, Article 35; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 28-30).

14. The assurance of salvation springs from true faith, which looks primarily to the gospel promise and the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the basis for confidence before God. Although good works confirm the genuineness of faith, they are not the primary basis for such assurance of salvation (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, 23, 32; Belgic Confession, Article 22-23; Canons of Dort, 5:8-13).

15. According to God's electing purpose and grace revealed in the gospel, true believers may be confident that God will preserve them in the way of salvation and keep them from losing their salvation through apostasy (Canons of Dort, 1:12, 5:8-10)

4. That recommendations 2 and 3 above be Synod's answer to Overture 1, points 1 and 2. *Adopted*
5. "That Synod remind and encourage individuals that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our Confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) and the Form of Subscription for addressing theological error" (Acts of Synod 2007, Art. 67.4). *Adopted*

(**Advisory Committee 5** continued in Art. 116.)

Article 114

Rev. Maurice Luimes from Immanuel Reformed Church of Nobleton, ON, closes the session by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 426 and leading in prayer.

Friday, July 30, 2010
Afternoon Session

Article 115

Rev. Keith Davis of Lynwood United Reformed Church in Lynwood, IL, opens the session by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 302, reading 1 Corinthians 13, and leading in prayer.

Article 116

Advisory Committee 5 (continued from Art. 113)
Materials: Overture 1; Report from the Committee to Study the Federal Vision

The assembly resumes consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 5, beginning with Recommendation 6.
Recommendations:

6. That Synod:
   a. Distribute sections 1-5 of the study committee report, together with Synod's decisions on this matter, to all the consistories of the URCNA, commending it for study;
   b. Post the study committee report, together with Synod's decisions

on this matter, on the federation website; and

c. Instruct the Stated Clerk to mail copies of the study committee report, together with Synod's decisions on this matter, to those denominations with which the URCNA enjoys ecumenical relations.

Adopted

7. That Synod publish the study committee report, together with Synod's decisions on this matter, within six months of Synod, separate from the Acts of Synod, for the sake of greater accessibility to the churches.

Defeated

8. That Synod thank the study committee for its excellent work.

Adopted

Article 117

A. The chairman clarifies that e-mail distribution is an acceptable means of meeting the instruction adopted in Recommendation 6.c., above.

B. Motion is made and supported to rule that the convening consistory has the right to give permission to a secondary organization to publish this study committee report.

Adopted

Article 118

Advisory Committee 11 (continued from Art. 94)
Materials: Report of the Ad Hoc URCNA Synodical Rules Committee

Recommendations:

1. That during the discussion of this report the members of the *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee be granted the privilege of the floor.

   Grounds: This action answers Recommendation 1 of the Report of the *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee to Synod.

   Granted

2. That Synod adopt the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* as amended.
   a. Motion is made and supported to amend the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, point 3.1, by deleting "Immediately

when synod has been declared to be constituted" and replacing it with the phrase: "Following the ratification of Article 32 churches and the seating of their delegates"; and by inserting "subsequent" between "any of its" and "items."

Adopted

b. Motion is made and supported to amend the definition of Appendix B of the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* by replacing the word "for" with "that appeals from." This same change is to be made in point 3.4 of the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*.

Adopted

c. Motion is made and supported to amend the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* by inserting at the end of point 1.5: "The convening consistory shall give preference to experienced delegates to serve as chairmen and reporters of Advisory Committees and shall provide them with the material and the rules of procedure for their tasks."

Adopted

d. The recommendation regarding the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, as amended, is:

Adopted

3. That Synod declare Synod's adoption of the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 5.3.2.c. serves to answer Overture 4, Overture 10, and Recommendation #2 of the CERCU Report to Synod 2010 (Agenda p. 261).

Adopted

4. That Synod direct the Stated Clerk to prepare a "Standardized Reporting Form" to be followed by synodical Advisory Committees for inclusion in the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* as an appendix (see *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, 2.7).

Adopted

5. That Synod mandate the Stated Clerk to prepare and distribute copies of the adopted *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* to the churches for their use, and maintain a copy on the federation's website for ready public access.

Ground: This action answers Recommendation 3 of the Report of the *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee to Synod. *Adopted*

6. That Synod thank the members of *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee for their faithful and diligent work thus far.

   Grounds:
   a. The *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee has not completed its work having been given a new mandate for dealing with a report committed to them by Synod 2010.
   b. This action answers Recommendation 4 of the Report of the *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee to Synod.

   Adopted

Article 119

Advisory Committee 8 (continued from Art. 99)
Materials: Overture 11

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 11 and adopt the recommended changes to Church Order Article 32 as well as Appendix 4 (included below, with changes indicated).

   Grounds:
   a. Adding the words "upon the recommendation of a Consistory" to Article 32 helps clarify the procedure that is necessary to bring a church into the federation.
   b. Using the language of a "recommending" Consistory instead of a "sponsoring" Consistory grants more clarity to the process at hand.
   c. The changes made in Appendix 4 provide the necessary clarification for examinations made under Church Order Art. 8 and Art. 32.

   Adopted by the required two-thirds majority

PROPOSED CHANGES TO ARTICLE 32:
(bold=’s additions; [_] =’s struck)

Any church may be admitted into the federation **upon the recommendation of a Consistory and** provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with this Church Order. [and its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis] Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into mem-

bership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod. **Any of these office-bearers who are ministers shall be examined before being declared a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America,** according to the regulations adopted by the federation. **(See Appendix 4)**

PROPOSED CHANGES TO APPENDIX 4: (Bold =’s additions):

Appendix 4
Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum

For ministers who have been ordained outside the federation and are seeking to be admitted to serve a congregation within the federation. (Article 8)

1. CREDENTIALS: two letters of request and information relating to the background and circumstances of the relationship, one from the examinee and one from the sponsoring consistory.

2. PROCEDURE
   a. The calling Consistory must invite classis to participate in a colloquium doctum.
   b. The examinee is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of his sponsoring Consistory.
   c. Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare the minister eligible to be called by the sponsoring Consistory as a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.

For ministers who have been ordained outside the federation and are office-bearers of a congregation which has been provisionally accepted into the federation (Article 32).

1. CREDENTIALS: three letters of request and information relating to the background and circumstances of the relationship, one from the examinee, one from the examinee’s Consistory and one from the recommending Consistory.
2. PROCEDURE
   a. The recommending Consistory must invite classis to

participate in colloquium doctum.

b. The examinee is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of the recommending Consistory.

c. Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare him a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.

3. CONTENT(No Changes are recommended to the content of the exam)

2. That the chairman of Synod rule that the ratification vote of the churches (to adopt changes to Art. 32) be received no later than March 15, 2011.

The chairman so rules

Article 120

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Credentials
Recommendations:

That Synod declare the Credentials to be in order while noting that 14 congregations sent only one delegate and noting with regret that two congregations sent no delegates.

Adopted

Article 121

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Convening Consistory's Report

Recommendations:

1. That Synod approve the request noted in the Convening Consistory Clerk's Supplementary Report that the Pastor, Chairman or Clerk of the Consistory or a member of the Synod Organizing Committee be granted the privilege of the floor when this report is discussed.

Granted

2. That Synod accept the Report of the Convening Consistory with sincere thanks for their faithful labours in the Lord.

Adopted

Article 122

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Overture 9

Recommendations:

That Synod not accede to Overture 9 (which would have Synod instruct the Stated Clerk to allow others to publish a directory).

Grounds:

a. Overture 9 is sufficiently ambiguous such as to create problems with its implementation.
b. Synod 2004 stated, "That Synod maintain a federational website with the following purposes: … 2. To act as a current directory for the churches" (Acts of Synod 2004, Article 40, A.2., p. 16).
c. The Stated Clerk was simply following the directive of Synod 2007 which directed "the Website Oversight Committee to make available online viewing and printing of the directory of churches of the URCNA" (Acts of Synod 2007, Article 51.11, p. 26).
d. Any church which is having problems printing the available information could seek assistance from a neighbouring congregation or its classis.

Adopted

Article 123

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Stated Clerk's Interim Report, Stated Clerk's Report of July 10, 2010

Recommendations:

1. That Synod not accede to the Stated Clerk's Interim Report, Recommendation #1, Agenda, p.103, that Synod should determine whether a yearbook or directory is to be published on an annual

basis.
Grounds: Synod 2004 stated, "That Synod maintain a federational website with the following purposes: … Item 2. To act as a current directory for the churches" (Acts of Synod 2004, Article 40, A.2., p. 16).

Defeated

Motion is made and supported that the Interim Committee (convening consistory) be allowed to give permission to publish a hard-copy of a directory or yearbook.

Adopted

2. That Synod accept the Interim Report of the Stated Clerk.

Adopted

3. That Synod accept the Report of the Stated Clerk dated July 10, 2010, with sincere thanks for his faithful labours in the Lord.

Adopted

The assembly offers a standing ovation to Stated Clerk Bill Konynenbelt.

Article 124

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Overture 17

Recommendations:

1. That Synod amend Overture 17 to read '*to mandate the printing and distribution of the Acts of Synod within 180 days,*' rather than the 90 days which are stated in the overture.

   Grounds: The Stated Clerk has noted that this entire task is not reasonably possible to complete within the 90 days requested in the overture.

   Adopted

2. That Synod accede to Overture 17 as amended.

   Grounds: We believe that 180 days will provide for timely distribution of the Acts of Synod, thereby enabling the churches to keep abreast of the decisions of Synod.

   Adopted

Article 125

Advisory Committee 1
Materials: Letters of Communication from Canadian Reformed Synod Burlington, dated May 2010 and June 7, 2010

Recommendations:

1. That Synod acknowledge with appreciation through a letter drafted by the officers and subject to approval by the next convening consistory the receipt of a Letter of Communication from the Canadian Reformed Synod dated May 2010.

   Adopted

2. That Synod acknowledge with appreciation through a letter drafted by the officers and subject to approval by the next convening consistory the receipt of a Letter of Communication from the Canadian Reformed Synod dated June 7, 2010.

   Adopted

Article 126

Advisory Committee 12 (continued from Art. 22)
Materials: CECCA Report

Recommendations:

1. That Synod take note of the fact that the ICRC has re-appointed Rev. Raymond Sikkema to serve on the ICRC Missions Committee, appointing him the convener (chairman) of the committee.

   The chairman so rules

2. That Synod accede to Recommendation 9, which states, "That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of CECCA to answer Synod's questions regarding this report: Rev. Ray Sikkema, chairman, and Rev. Dick Moes, secretary."

   Granted

3. That Synod accede to Recommendation 1, which states, "That the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase Two) with the RCNZ."

   Adopted

a. The assembly rises to sing the Doxology in recognition of the significance of this moment in the life of the churches.
b. The chairman rules that ratification of this action by a majority of the consistories, in line with Church Order Art. 36, will have a deadline of March 15, 2011.

4. That Synod accede to Recommendation 2, which states, "That the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase Two) with the GKSA."

Defeated

a. The chairman asks Rev. Matthew Nuiver to lead the assembly in prayer regarding this decision and for the Reformed Churches in South Africa.
b. Motion is made and supported to ask the officers of Synod to write a letter conveying our decision to the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

Adopted

5. That Synod accede to Recommendation 3, which states, "That the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the GKN(v)."

Adopted

6. That Synod accede to Recommendation 4, which states, "That the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the United Reformed Church of Congo (formerly known as the CRCC)."

Adopted

7. That Synod accede to Recommendation 5, which states, "That the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (Phase One) with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRT-NTT)."

Adopted

8. That Synod accede to Recommendation 7, which states, "That Synod appoint Rev. Dick Moes to serve as Primus Delegate to the next meeting of the ICRC and that Synod appoint Rev. Paul Ipema to serve as the Secundus Delegate."

Adopted

9. That Synod accede to Recommendation 8, which states, "That Syn-

od inform the ICRC that the URCNA is willing to host the 2017 meeting of the ICRC."

Adopted

10. That Synod appoint Rev. Ray Sikkema as CECCA member-at-large. *Adopted*

Article 127

Advisory Committee 4
Materials: Overture 2

A. Recommendations:

1. That Synod 2010 revise Church Order Article 10, as follows, along with the amendment of the Advisory Committee:

"Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of minister of the Word. **The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of his Consistory and with the concurring advice of Classis, *which shall include consideration of his financial needs and credentials.*** ~~The ministerial credentials of an emeritus minister will ordinarily remain with the church which granted his emeritation.~~

Note: Proposed changes are shown in bold. Italics indicate Advisory committee changes to the original overture. The strike-through indicates a sentence that has been removed from Overture 2 by the Advisory Committee.

Grounds:

a. Ministerial credentials are a matter of the churches in common and therefore ought to be addressed in the broader assembly of classis.
b. The current Church Order does not address the ministerial credentials as it relates to the emeritation of ministers.
c. This change to our Church Order will help to clarify the status of the credentials of the increasing numbers of ministers who have received emeritation in our federation.

d. Certain ministers emeriti have financial needs. The proposed change to the Church Order will help ensure that an inquiry of the minister's financial status be made.
e. This revision of the Church Order would not imply that a minister's credentials be separated from his church membership.

B. Motion is made and supported to recommit this matter to the advisory committee.

Adopted

ARTICLE 128

Advisory Committee 4
Materials: Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel

Recommendations:

1. That Synod direct the Stated Clerk to give the contact information of the URCNA to the PRJC. This in accord with Recommendation 1 of the report on the PRJC.

   Grounds:
   a. The URCNA is an associate member of the PRJC, and we have an interest in supporting the URCNA chaplain(s) through receiving information about the PRJC.
   b. The PRJC has asked the URCNA for a means of contacting the churches in the federation.
   c. The PRJC has done valuable work and have advocated on behalf of our chaplain.

   Adopted

2. That Synod instruct the Stated Clerk to send a letter to the United States Armed Forces officials (see page 809 of the Provisional Agenda for a list of recipients) on behalf of the URCNA, urging them to maintain the current policy on homosexuals serving in the military. This is in accord with Recommendation 2 of the report on the PRJC.

   Grounds:
   a. The PRJC asked the URCNA to write this letter to the contacts

listed on page 809 of the Provisional Agenda.

b. The repeal of this policy would jeopardize URCNA chaplain(s) ability to fulfill their ordination vows.

Discussion ceases due to the orders of the day.
(Advisory Committee 4 continued in Art. 132.)

Article 129

Elder Randy Helmus from Faith United Reformed Church of Beecher, IL, closes the session by reading Ephesians 1:15-22, leading in prayer, and calling the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 483.

Friday, July 30, 2010
Evening Session

Article 130

Elder Wil Postma from Covenant Reformed Church in Kansas City, MO, opens the session with devotions by calling the assembly to sing from Psalter Hymnal 314, reading Proverbs 3:1-7, and leading in prayer. He then calls the delegates to sing from Psalter Hymnal 314.

Article 131

Motion is made and supported to approve the concept minutes, which were distributed previously.

Adopted

Article 132

Advisory Committee 4 (continued from Art. 128)
Materials: Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel

The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 4 regarding the PRJC Report, taking up Recommendation 2:

Recommendations:

2. That Synod instruct the Stated Clerk to send a letter to the Unit-

ed States Armed Forces officials (see page 813 of the Provisional Agenda for a list of recipients) on behalf of the URCNA, urging them to maintain the current policy on homosexuals serving in the military. This is in accord with Recommendation 2 of the report on the PRJC.

Grounds:

a. The PRJC asked the URCNA to write this letter to the contacts listed on page 813 of the Agenda.
b. The repeal of this policy would jeopardize URCNA chaplain(s) ability to fulfill their ordination vows.

Adopted

3. That Synod adopt the following letter (see below) for the Stated Clerk to send.

Adopted

SAMPLE LETTER TO MILITARY/CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES

DATE:
TO: General or Honorable XXXXX
FROM: The United Reformed Churches in North America

SUBJECT: Possible repeal of the current policy regarding homosexual individuals in military.

1. Concern: The URCNA is gravely concerned over the potential repeal of the current policy governing homosexual individuals in the military. Should this repeal occur we fear that the free exercise of the faith of our chaplains will be jeopardized. This repeal may go so far as to force the resignation of our currently serving chaplains from the military as well as the service of military members from this federation.

2. Consequences: The potential change increases the likelihood of the following:
   - Chaplains may be open to the charge of discrimination or command reprimand when they preach or teach in accordance with the passages in the Bible which directly speak to the sin of homosexual practice.
   - Bibles in military chapels and on military bases may be under the threat of excision of all passages which speak very directly to the sin of homosexual practice. Whether it will be under

the guise of "hate speech" or speech contrary to the policy of the Department of Defense, the effort may be made soon after the removal of the policy.

- Marriage retreats conducted by chaplains intended to strengthen marriage may have to include homosexual couples which will violate our chaplains' faith tenets and negatively impact the voluntary participation of married heterosexual couples.
- Homosexual couples may seek union ceremonies or marriages, which are in violation of the beliefs and ordination vows of a large percentage of military chaplains, not just those from our federation. Refusal may invite the charge of discrimination and command reprimand.
- The "free exercise" and free speech rights of chaplains and military members may be violated.

3. Appeal: For the above and many other reasons affecting chaplains and military members in the ranks we humbly recommend that you consider the ramifications for religious freedom that legislation in this regard may have. It is of utmost importance that you take all necessary measures to ensure that our chaplains are free, without censure, to preach, teach, and practice in accordance with the beliefs of our federation. We plead for this on behalf of the chaplains who serve our churches and country.

Sincerely,
Stated Clerk, URCNA

4. That Synod appoint Faith URC of Beecher, IL, to send one observer in two years to the annual, two-day meeting of the PRJC, at URCNA expense (should not exceed $1,000 per trip), and to submit reports on the PRJC to future synod meetings. This is in accord with Recommendation 3 of the report on the PRJC.
   Grounds:
   a. Attendance at the past three annual meetings has proven to be very useful for establishing relationships, understanding the workings of the PRJC, and giving input to the PRJC.
   b. Responsibilities of associate membership can be fulfilled by attendance at every other annual meeting.
   c. The Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, IL, is willing send a representative to the meetings.

Adopted

Advisory Committee 4
Materials: Overture 2

The assembly returns to its consideration of the report of Advisory Committee 4 regarding Overture 2, taking up a revised Recommendation 2:

Recommendations:

2. That Synod appoint an ad hoc committee with the following mandate:

   Ad Hoc Committee Mandate: That the committee study and report on the matters of:
   1) Status of an emeritus minister's credentials.
   2) Status of membership upon their emeritation.
   3) The role of Consistory, Classis, and Synod in these matters.
   4) Financial support of emeriti ministers.
   5) The bearing of potential dissolution of a congregation and/or implementation of Church Order Article 11, or a geographical move, on the above items.
   6) Review of previous synodical decisions and Church Order related to the above items.
   7) How the above mentioned matters are interconnected.

   Grounds:
   a. There is a confusion regarding these matters in the churches.
   b. There may be ministers who are not adequately cared for after becoming emeritus.
   c. Study committees have proven useful in addressing complex issues.
   d. The complexity of this matter is beyond the scope of this advisory committee.

   Adopted

3. That Synod appoint the following men as members of the ad hoc committee:

Proposed Committee Membership:

- Rev. Harold Miller – Chairman
- Elder Mark Van Der Molen – Reporter
- Rev. Hank Van der Woerd
- Rev. Joel Dykstra
- Elder Art Miedema

a. Motion is made and supported to add Rev. Dennis Royall to the list.

Adopted

b. The recommended membership list, as amended, is:

- Rev. Harold Miller – Chairman
- Elder Mark Van Der Molen – Reporter
- Rev. Hank Van der Woerd
- Rev. Joel Dykstra
- Elder Art Miedema
- Rev. Dennis Royall

Adopted

4. That Synod take note of the following budget recommendation for the ad hoc committee.

Budget:
The Advisory committee recommends that this Ad Hoc committee conduct business via e-mail and telephone. Therefore we are not proposing a budget for this committee.

The chairman so orders

5. That Synod set the deadline and duration of the ad hoc committee as follows.

Deadline and Duration:
The ad hoc committee shall begin their work immediately following Synod 2010 and conclude their work by reporting to the next Synod.

The chairman so orders

Article 134

Advisory Committee 2 (continued from Art. 100)
Materials: Financial Matters
Recommendations:

1. That Synod establish the honorarium of the U.S. Treasurer at $3,000 USD/year and of the Canadian Treasurer at $3,000 CAD/year.

   Adopted

2. That the treasurer honoraria are not shared expenses between Canada and the USA.

   Received for Information

3. That Synod continue the honorarium of the outgoing Stated Clerk for two months for $830 CAD ($415 CAD per month for two months).

   Adopted

4. That Synod establish the URCNA budget as presented below.
   a. Motion is made and supported to increase the amount budgeted for the Level of Doctrinal Commitment Committee to $8,000 per year. *Adopted*
   (This is now reflected in the spreadsheet below.)

   b. To adopt the recommendation, as amended and as recorded below:

      Adopted

   c. The assembly expresses with a round of applause its appreciation for Treasurer Peter Moen, who has just completed his third term as U.S. Treasurer.

Item	2007 Synodical Budget	Average Yearly Expense	2010 Synodical Yearly Average Budget	Three-Year Budget	Canadian ~35%	USA ~65%	Percent of Total Budget
Accounting/Government Filing	$0	$500	$550	$1,650	$550	$0	0.89%
Bank Fee	$25	$31	$25	$75	$0	$25	0.04%
CECCA	$10,500	$4,372	$10,500	$31,500	$3,675	$6,825	17.00%
CERCU	$3,500	$4,230	$6,000	$18,000	$2,100	$3,900	9.71%
Clerk	$4,000	$4,000	$2,000	$6,000	$700	$1,300	3.24%
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee	$0	$4,327	$8,000	$24,000	$2,800	$5,200	12.95%
Dues							
NAPARC	$500	$500	$500	$1,500	$175	$325	0.81%
ICRC	$1,700	$1,637	$1,800	$5,400	$630	$1,170	2.91%
MNA	$0	$500	$500	$1,500	$175	$325	0.81%
Federal Vision Study Committee	$0	$4,307	$0	$0	$0	$0	0.00%
Mission Committee	N/A	N/A	$2,000	$6,000	$700	$1,300	3.24%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$695	$700	$2,100	$245	$455	1.13%
Postage/Supplies	$50	$328	$400	$1,200	$140	$260	0.65%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$484	$1,800	$5,400	$630	$1,170	2.91%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$4,712	$7,500	$22,500	$2,625	$4,875	12.14%
Song Book Committee	$3,000	$2,615	$10,000	$30,000	$3,500	$6,500	16.19%
Synod (Functionaries to attend)	$0	$568	$500	$1,500	$175	$325	0.81%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$2,850	$0	$0	$0	$0	0.00%
Treasurer - Canada & US	$0	$0	$6,000	$18,000	$2,100	$3,900	9.71%
Webmaster Honorarium	N/A	N/A	$3,000	$9,000	$1,050	$1,950	4.86%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$36,656**	**$61,775**	**$185,325**	**$21,970**	**$39,805**	**100%**

Article 135

Advisory Committee 7 (continued from Art. 106)
Materials: Overture 13

Recommendations:

1. That Synod accede to Overture 13.3.a as follows: To conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook with the Canadian Reformed Churches for use in a united federation.

   Adopted

2. That Synod remind the Songbook Committee that they be in dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches in a manner consistent with Phase 2 relations.

   Grounds:
   a. These recommendations are in keeping with the original mandate of producing a songbook for use in the URCNA (Synod 1999); given the scope of this mandate, the responsibility to work on yet another songbook would be overly burdensome at this time.

b. That the Songbook Committee be in dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches will honor our commitment to them as churches with whom we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship, as they will be informed about the development of the URCNA songbook.
c. These recommendations allow for the possibility of a common songbook with the Canadian Reformed Churches for use in a united federation.

Adopted

3. That Synod declare that Recommendations 1 and 2 above and the actions already adopted by Synod regarding the Theological Education Committee and the Joint Church Order Committee constitute its answer to Overture 13.

Grounds: This recommendation is consistent with the other actions Synod has taken in regard to Overture 13.

Adopted

Article 136

Advisory Committee 3 (continued from Art. 97)
Materials: Appeal from R. Sikkema/T. Sikkema

A. The chairman rules that the assembly is now in strict executive session.

B. As per Art. 97 of the Acts, Synod has recognized that this appeal comprises three distinct appeals.
   1. Appeal 3.3 was declared as being not properly before Synod.
   2. Synod recommitted Appeal 3.1 and Appeal 3.2 to Advisory Committee 3, with Synod's preliminary response to the grounds of the appeal, to allow the appellants opportunity to comment on Synod's response before final action by Synod.

C. Advisory Committee 3 has reviewed the materials submitted by the appellants and met with the appellants, providing opportunity for the appellants to clarify the material they submitted and allowing them to respond to preliminary answers given to the grounds of their appeal by an earlier session of Synod (see Art. 97.B.).

D. Motion is made and supported to not sustain the appeal, on the basis of the answers given to the five grounds of Appeal 3.1 and Appeal 3.2.

1. With respect to Ground #1 of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2, we find Ground #1 to be invalid on the basis given.

   Adopted

2. With respect to Ground #2 of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2, we find Ground #2 to be invalid on the basis given.

   Adopted

3. With respect to Ground #3 of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2, we find Ground #3 to be invalid on the basis given.

   Adopted

4. With respect to Ground #4 of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2, we find Ground #4 to be invalid on the basis given.

   Adopted

5. With respect to Ground #5 of Appeals 3.1 and 3.2, we find Ground #5 to be invalid on the basis given.

   Adopted

6. With respect to Appeal 3.1 and Appeal 3.2 as a whole, on the basis of the grounds given (recorded in a separate file), the motion to not sustain the appeal is:

   Adopted

   Note: The delegates from Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church recused themselves from these votes.

E. In view of its decision, Synod urges the appellants to abide by Synod's decision and to seek to heal all of the broken relationships that have arisen.

F. The chairman leads the assembly in prayer.

G. Executive session is ended.

Article 137

Elections of Functionaries

A. Election of Stated Clerk:
   1. Rev. Adrian Dieleman and Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer are nominated.
   2. Rev. Nymeyer is elected.

B. Election of Alternate Stated Clerk:
   1. Rev. Ralph Pontier and Rev. Dennis Royall are nominated.
   2. Rev. Royall is elected.

C. U.S. Treasurer: Nominations for the U.S. Treasurer may be sent to the U.S. Board of Directors in the care of Clerk Lynn Brouwer.

D. Election of a Webmaster:

1. Motion is made and supported to allow the Website Oversight Committee to name a Webmaster for the URCNA website.

Defeated

2. Motion is made and supported to nominate Gary Fisher of Bethel United Reformed Church in Jenison, MI, as Webmaster for the URCNA website. *Adopted*

Article 138

Convening the Next Synod

A. Convening Consistory:

1. Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church of Pompton Plains, NJ, and Trinity United Reformed Church of Visalia, CA, are nominated to convene the next synod.

2. Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church is selected.

B. Date for Next Synod:

1. Motion is made and supported to hold synod in 2012.

Adopted

2. Motion is made and supported to suspend the rule that we must set a specific date for the next synod.

Adopted by required two-thirds vote

3. Motion is made and supported to meet sometime in June of 2012.

Adopted

Article 139

Motion is made and supported to ask the officers of Synod to review and approve the final section of concept minutes.

The chairman so orders

Article 140

A. Motion is made that Synod extend its warmest thanks to the London Consistory and to all who assisted for the warm hospitality they have shown to Synod London 2010. In response, the delegates give a standing ovation to express its deep appreciation.

B. Mr. Henry Nieboer from Cornerstone United Reformed Church in London addresses the delegates.

C. The vice-chairman rises to express Synod's thanks to the chairman, Rev. Ralph Pontier.

D. The chairman rises to express Synod's appreciation for the many volunteers who exerted themselves to make Synod run smoothly; the vice-chairman and the synodical clerks; and the delegates to Synod London 2010.

E. The chairman reads and comments on Matthew 16:18, leads the assembly in prayer, and calls the assembly to sing the Doxology.

Article 141

Synod stands adjourned.

Report of the Convening Consistory - Synod 2010

Cornerstone URC of London has been given the task of implementing all the necessary actions to host Synod 2010 in London. In order to facilitate this task, a Synod Committee was established in July 2007 consisting of 8 people under the supervision of our consistory. This committee was given freedom to make decisions on matters that do not require a decision in principle. The committee reported to consistory on a regular basis; however, the specifics of these decisions are not all listed in this report. To see some of the work of the committee, see the section on **Housekeeping** below.

Acts of Synod 2007 Schererville

One of the first duties of consistory was to approve the printing of the Acts of Synod Schererville 2007 by motion on November 5, 2008. 600 copies were ordered and divided between the US and Canada of which 251 copies were sent to Canadian churches. The Schererville church distributed the books to the US churches. Earlier in 2007 the Stated Clerk requested that the Acts be available on-line rather than in print form, to which consistory gave its consent. However, because of a previous Synod decision, the acts were required to be printed and consistory's decision was reversed.

Appeals

August 20, 2008 – The signed "Appeal to Synod 2010" from Hills URC regarding "Nine Points" of Synod 2007 had been received and was forwarded with a letter to the stated clerk for inclusion in the Synod 2010 agenda, as it meets the ruling of the Regulation of Synodical Procedure - 3.4 and the guidelines for Appendix B.

March 21, 2010 – Consistory decides that the Schererville Appeal is properly before Synod 2010.

March 21, 2010 – Rev. Raymond and Theodore Sikkema have filed an appeal against the decisions of Classis pertaining to discipline matters. The two individuals, who are the concern in this appeal, have both, since they filed to Classis, resigned their membership in the Trinity ORC, St. Catherines and the URCNA. For this reason, the conclusion of the Convening Consistory is that the parts of the Sikkema appeal dealing with the two individuals, who have left Trinity ORC, is no longer properly before Synod. The Convening Consistory believes the only part of the appeal properly before Synod is that which deals with the **process** Classis Southern Ontario followed in their denial of the appeal. The Convening Consistory recommends that an Advisory Committee study

their decision and advise Synod either to sustain this act of the Convening Consistory or otherwise.

April 7, 2010 – The Telman-Brouwer Appeal, although not technically in order, was given to the stated clerk for inclusion because of the seriousness of the issue in this appeal. We recommend that a committee of pre-advice consisting of an equal number of elders and ministers be given the material in this appeal to offer advice to synod and/or the appellants on how to deal with the concerns expressed in the appeal.

Because of the extremely sensitive nature of the Sikkema and Telman-Brouwer appeals, the convening consistory has instructed the Stated Clerk that these will not be published in the Agenda.

Exhibitors

A number of non-commercial exhibitors have been approved to hold a display:

- Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids MI
- Providence Christian College of Ontario CA
- Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Taylors SC
- Reformed Christian Ministries of Suriname.

There will be no display of book services as financial transactions will not be allowed at Synod 2010.

The following book sellers have been refused displays:

- Jerry Tillema, a member of the Canadian Reformed Church in Chatham, ON
- Reformed Book Service, Brantford, ON
- Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids MI
- Ligonier Ministries to promote Rev. Daniel Hyde's new book

and present catalogs.

Requests for Floor Time

In response to a CERCU request for floor time, on December 6, 2009, consistory approved by motion that the CERCU request be placed on the agenda of Synod 2010 provided it be one of the first items of business Synod will take up, ***before the election of the officers, while Synod is still being led by the Chairman Pro Tem,*** and that Synod decide by vote, (1) whether or not to grant CERCU's request, (2) when to do it, if CERCU's request is granted by Synod - recommend Tuesday evening and, (3) amount of time allotted.

January 20, 2010 – Dutton URC of Dutton MI has been approved to have Rev. Uittenbosch limited time to speak at Synod 2010, time to be determined by the chairman of Synod 2010.

March 24, 2010 – Christ United Reformed Church of Santee CA requested

floor time for Rev. Andrea Ferranri as an associate pastor to serve as a URC Missionary in Italy as well as for Rev. Michael Brown. Consistory has not yet approved this request.

Finances

February 8, 2008 – Notice of check for $23,364.77 USD sent from George Oostema, Treasurer, 2007 Synod Committee was given to the Synod Committee for Synod 2010 to be deposited in a bank account administered by this committee.

The position of Synod Treasurer as listed in the Acts of Synod Schererville 2007 is being dealt with by consistory at the time of the writing of this report and consistory is hopeful we can come up with a suitable solution to the problem of the treasurer's function.

Housekeeping

On October 3, 2007, consistory approved by motion that our pastor, chairman, vice-chairman and clerk serve as de-facto advisory committee overseeing the work of the Denominational Stated Clerk.

May 27, 2009 – Approved cutoff date for submissions to Synod 2010 to be March 31, 2010.

Exhibitors at Synod 2010 – This item was given to the Synod committee for a recommendation.

August 19, 2009 – Synod Committee preliminary Information Package approved with minor changes to be made by the committee.

November 4, 2009 – Synod Committee – to publish an article on Synod 2010 in Christian Renewal, Outlook, Clarion. Consistory approved.

January 20, 2010 Approval given to allow US churches to send US funds in money orders with the provision that the Canadian Dollar stays below US Dollar.

February 3, 2010 – Approval given of increase in delegate's fees due to increased Canadian taxes on July 1, 2010. Delegate's fee is increased from $450 to $500.

Synod committee requested and received consistory approval to purchase a Christian Copyright License to cover copyright regulations. The CCLI license is received on March 21, 2010.

Joint Venture Agreement

February 18, 2009 – Convening consistory approval of Lynn Brouwer to be president of URCNA (US).

December 2, 2009 – JVA short report received from Rev. Joel Dykstra to be forwarded to URCNA US Board. Consistory assigned Rev. Joel Dykstra and Dr. Lynn Brouwer facilitate these matters by Synod Deadline date.

January 6, 2010 – JVA – a Canadian treasurer will need to be selected for international board – Pam Hessels may be appointed, depending on the expected workload.

March 25, 2010 – The Joint Venture Agreement is technically in place and we have the legal ability to transfer funds between URCNA Canada and URCNA US but we do not have the technical ability. The churches will be notified when this is in place.

OCRC Joining URCNA

August 26, 2008 – OCRC Synod accept invitation from URCNA.

September 17, 2008 – Convening consistory approval of accepting 4 churches from the OCRC into the URCNA federation with tentative approval of assignment to their local classes. These churches have been notified by letter. Bowmanville ON, Burlington WA, Kelowna BC, Nobleton ON.

Overtures

Overtures have been sent directly to the stated clerk by the various Classes.

Reporting URCNA Information

August 6, 2008 – Convening consistory approved by motion that a link from theaquillareport.com to urcna.org website be added rather than having theaquillareport.com report specific information from the URCNA churches.

Reports

August 20, 2008 – Received letter and recommendation to Proposed Church Order Committee from Living Water URC, Brantford, ON. Living Water sent this material directly to the stated clerk.

July 15, 2009 – Report on Justification sent to Synod Committee for a recommendation.

February 17, 2010 - Report received of Ad hoc URCNA Synodical Rules Committee.

Songbook Committee

February 4, 2009 – Convening consistory approval of Mr. David Buursma and Mrs. Angela Vander Boom to Songbook Committee.

April 16, 2009 – Convening consistory approval of Rev Chris Folkerts to the Synod Songbook Committee since Mr. David Buursma declined.

July 15, 2009 Resignation Letter received from Rev. Edward J. Knott from Synod Songbook Committee. On August 19, 2009 consistory sent Rev. Knott a letter of recognition for his contributions to the committee and approval of his resignation from Synod Songbook Committee.

URCNA Directory

On December 10, 2008 the convening consistory denied request by third party to print URCNA directory.

URCNA Treasurers

March 4, 2009 – Motion to approve requests from the US treasurer's report: Should the treasurers (US and Canadian) be at Synod – Yes; Should their expenses to attend Synod be paid out of the treasury – Yes; Should there be an automatic declaration that the treasurers be granted privilege of the floor. - Yes, only on matters that concern their function. Approved.

Synod Treasurer

Synod Treasurer's Job Description. The Synod Treasurer's position is really the URCNA Canada or URCNA US treasurer's position depending whether Synod is held in Canada or the US. Their job descriptions are found in the Acts of Incorporation of the two corporations. The Convening Consistory will do much of the work for the official treasurers.

URCNA Canada and URCNA US Boards of Directors

May 27, 2009 – Approved appointment of Bob Huisjen to Board of URCNA US.

Cornerstone United Reformed Church
London ON
Synod 2010
Clerk's Supplementary Report

Summary of final acts of the convening consistory

The work of preparing for Synod 2010 continues with the legwork being done by our Synod Organizing Committee. Material required for distribution to the delegates is being printed and assembled. Volunteers are being instructed. Arrangements have been made for the needed audio equipment and computer facilities to be in place before Synod starts. Consistory has been processing the final requests, mostly for display tables of organizations desiring to show the efforts of their ministries.

One of the appeals has had late developments which makes it no longer appropriate and consistory has decided that it be removed for consideration by the pre-advice committee and therefore removed from the Synod agenda. A letter was received from Peter Moen concerning funds still held by URCNA-US for printing a URCNA directory and consistory recommends it be added to Overture #9 for a final decision to be made by Synod 2010.

Direction has been given to those dealing with the requirements for foreign visitors so they may acquire visas to make their travel to Canada possible.

As preparations wind down and the date of meeting for Synod 2010 approaches, it is the desire and prayer of the convening consistory that only One is glorified through the deliberations and decisions to be made by this Synod, that being our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We ask Him for wisdom and guidance that the church may be advanced to bring Him glory.

With this Synod, as with every Synod, our eye is cast upon the next Synod. For Synod 2013, our Synod Organizing Committee will be able to give direction to the next convening consistory in order to help them in the preparations for that event.

We pray for safe travel for all the delegates and good fellowship among the brethren, including those who come from foreign lands. May it be that the visitors from other denominations will be able to return to their home churches and say that it was good for them to have been with us as we work toward the unity of the Body of Christ.

Approve the work of the convening consistory

1. By adopted motion the convening consistory recommends that Synod 2010 London permit the pastor, chairman or clerk of the consistory or a member of the Synod Organizing Committee the

privilege of the floor when this report is discussed.

2. By adopted motion the convening consistory recommends that Synod 2010 London approve its work as reported above.

Respectfully submitted,
The consistory
Robert Vanderhill, clerk
Cornerstone United Reformed Church
London ON Canada

Appendix 1: Interim Report of the Stated Clerk – Synod 2010

Esteemed Brothers;

Having been re-appointed to another three year term at Synod 2007, I continued the work I had begun in previous years. One of my first tasks was to contact the convening consistory and establish the protocols that would be used to govern my work. The consistory agreed that my work would largely be guided by precedents established by previous consistories and that any items that had no precedent would be forwarded to them for discussion and direction.

I then worked with the committee that organized Synod 2007 to ensure that they provided the Synod 2010 convening consistory with access to all the minutes and sub-committee decisions that had guided their organizing of Synod 2007. This reduced my involvement in having to provide details to the Synod 2010 committee. To this point I have had minimal interaction with the Synod 2010 organizing committee except to provide clarification on several matters.

As directed by Synod 2007, I also managed the process of obtaining ratification of synodical decisions by consistories. Synod 2007 also instructed me to obtain associate membership in the PRJC (Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel) and to request that the Three Forms of Unity be added as an alternative to the Westminster Standards, both of which were accomplished.

Synod 2004 stated that one of my roles was to be the point of contact for the federation, so I continued to offer my services to the churches to act as the forwarder of all federation related communications utilizing e-mail. This has again proved to be an effective and less costly means of quickly sharing information and I have received positive feedback from many consistories on the benefits of this method. When communicating with other federations I have also used e-mail and provided them with the option of receiving a hard copy via snail-mail, but to this point I have not had any requests for paper copies of communications.

Over the past three years I have again spent many hours collecting, compiling, nagging, editing, and producing the annual URCNA directory. The work was made easier by the introduction of the new website and the direction from Synod 2007 that only an electronic version needed to be produced. In 2009 the directory was not produced until the early part of 2010

as many churches did not provide information in a timely manner and then this information needed considerable editing to clean up. In 2010 the directory was made available in early April after receiving permission from the convening consistory to set a deadline and then just include a note where information for 2010 was not provided. This improved response time and the number of respondents significantly. Before the end of June 2010, there may be a new process put in place on the web-site which will further reduce the effort of transferring information manually from one database to another.

I was asked by a consistory to allow them to publish the annual directory and offer it for sale. Based on the guidance provided by Synod 2007, which stated that such requests would need to be guided by a policy developed by the convening consistory, I forwarded this on to them and they deferred this to the judgement of Synod 2010.

The introduction of the new web-site also meant that I was appointed to be the webmaster and super-administrator of the web-site. This was required as there were several instances where changes made to the web site were un-authorized and we needed to have a single person accountable. I have worked closely with the web-engineer, Mr. Larry Van Den Berg who provided technical advice on the CMS (content managed system) features of the web-site and who solved technical issues outside the bounds of the CMS tool. There is a proposal attached to the Web Oversight Committee which allows the role of Webmaster and Stated Clerk to be separated.

Larry also provided assistance with producing the annual archive edition of the URCNA directory. This document was never mandated by Synod 2007. It resembles a yearbook including statistics and minister histories rather than a printable version of the on-line information found on the web-site, the latter of which was mandated by Synod 2007. Synod 2010 will need to provide direction on this matter.

I have also responded to numerous e-mail requests for information about the URCNA, requests from ministers who want to join the URCNA, and from organizations requesting statistical information about the URCNA. Where required I have also forwarded communications to various committees for their attention. All classis stated clerks were contacted to confirm items required for inclusion in the Agenda for Synod 2010. I also provided advice to the convening consistory regarding appeals that have been submitted.

I have also informed the convening consistory that I would not be letting my name stand for a third three year term as Stated Clerk. I thank you for

the opportunity you have given me to serve the federation in this capacity for the past six years.

Recommendations:

1. Synod 2010 should determine whether a yearbook or a directory (these are not the same) is to be published on an annual basis. Synod 2007 only required that the directory information that was available on the private portion of the web-site be made available for churches and their membership to print themselves.
2. Synod 2010 should determine what information is to be published in a directory or a yearbook.
3. Synod 2010 should establish a consistent policy on how to categorize emeritus ministers who are now listed as associate ministers. It is not clear whether these ministers were 'grandfathered' or were added as a result of a colloquium doctum.

My final report to Synod 2010 will include late communications, required administrative information regarding churches that have not sent the prescribed number of delegates and information on new churches who have joined the federation since last Synod. This will be provided several weeks before Synod 2010 is scheduled to meet.

Bill Konynenbelt, Stated Clerk

Stated Clerks Report – July 10

As indicated in my Interim report published with the Agenda for Synod, I am providing this update to you before Synod 2010 begins.

1. Attached to this report you will find Appendix 1 which lists all delegates as of this date. Please ensure to provide me with new names if any changes have been made before Synod 2010 convenes.

2. Attached in Appendix 2 is a list of fraternal delegates and observers.

3. The following churches have been provisionally accepted at meetings of Classis and will need to have their inclusion as member churches ratified at the beginning of Synod 2010:

    1. Covenant Reformed Church, Carbondale, PA
    2. First United Reformed Church, Oak Lawn, IL
    3. Redeemer Reformation Church, Regina, SK
    4. Trinity United Reformed Church, Visalia, CA

4. I have received a communication from Trinity URC of Visalia, CA indicating they are willing to host the next Synod of the URCNA.

5. Two functionaries of the URCNA need to be replaced at Synod 2010, namely the Stated Clerk, and the US treasurer. Qualifications for both of these offices can be found in the proposed rules for Synodical Procedure, pages 674-676 of the Provisional Agenda. Please come prepared with nominations for these positions.

6. A new webmaster may also be required if the new Stated Clerk does not feel qualified to assume that role. The guidelines for this position can be found in the Web Oversight Committee report on page 661 of the provisional agenda.

Bill Konynenbelt,
Stated Clerk, URCNA

United Reformed Churches in North America

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

March 26, 2010

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. By my count, the US has 74 churches. Of those 74 churches
    a. 1 joined in 2009
    b. 8 remain "unorganized" (not member churches)
    c. 2 of the "unorganized" churches provided askings
    d. 50 of the remaining organized churches provided askings.
        i. This translates to a participation rate of 77%
    e. Of the 15 churches that did not provide askings in 2009,
        i. 3 churches have joined URCNA since Synod 2007
        ii. 4 churches were already members prior to Synod 2007
        iii. 8 churches had provided askings in 2008 (implying that they forgot in 2009)
2. One of the US classis did not send in $200 for the Web Site Fund.
3. Classical Dues are not the same as the Synodical "Askings". Any fees that are due to a particular classis must be paid to that Classis Treasurer. Any Synodical "Askings" must be paid to the US (or Canadian) Treasurer. These are separate amounts that are due. Classis will not forward a church's "Askings" to me.
4. The Board of Directors for URCNA-JVA has issued a letter concerning the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA). The Canadian and US URCNA treasurers are not involved with this activity.
5. When seeking reimbursement for work done on a committee, the Canadian members need to be reimbursed by the Canadian Treasurer and US members need to be reimbursed by the US Treasurer. There have been several instances of reimbursement requests being sent to the wrong trea-

surer. See the Reimbursement Guidelines at the end of this document for more reimbursement information.

6. In order to follow the direction of Synod 2007 to better share the committee costs between the two countries, adjustments are being made twice a year (February and August). Joint committee costs are calculated in US Dollars and then split 65/35 between the two countries. For 2009, a check was sent to URCNA-Canada for $1,238.30 USD to adjust for 2008. In August, 2009 a check was sent to URCNA-Canada for $2,291USD based on the second quarter treasurer's reports. In February, 2010, a check was sent to URCNA-Canada for $2,721 USD based on the end-of-year 2009 treasurer's reports. In summary, for 2009 (even though the cost is split between 2009 and 2010), the US needed to compensate Canada for $5,012 USD for shared committee expenses.
7. The US Treasurer is recommending Askings to be increased to $10.00 per family in order to cover the additional expenses that were not budgeted by Synod 2007 (the two new study committees).
8. Recommendations for Synod 2010 to consider are attached.

CONCERNS

1. In order to pay the bills, one of the three $5,000 CD's needed to be prematurely redeemed at a cost of $94.44 in order to keep the checking account funded.
2. For 2009, US URCNA was down about $3,500 from the end of 2008.

STATISTICS

The URC made a conscious decision to avoid assessing quotas to member churches. Instead they came up with the term "Askings". Many churches have chosen to simply budget an amount or take a special offering instead of using the formula. The following chart is derived from inference in giving and is provided simply to indicate that not all churches follow the Synodical guidelines. Many prefer to provide a budget amount or simply take a special offering. For purposes of sorting this chart, if the amount received from the church had cents or did not end in zero, it was listed as a collection (special offering). It is difficult to sort between askings and budget so, using the 2009 directory, if the number was close to either $8 or $10 times the number of families, it was considered askings. Everything else was counted as budget.

	2009		
Type	Number of Churches	Percent Participated	Percent Collected
Nothing	15	23%	0%
Askings	14	22%	26%
Budget	15	23%	21%
Collection	21	32%	53%

This chart, very simply, indicates the percentage of member churches that did not provide any Askings. Organizing churches were omitted from the calculation.

Year	Church Non-Participation
2007	26%
2008	25%
2009	23%

This chart, very simply, indicates the number (not percentage) of US churches that took a collection for the Hymnal Fund.

Year	Church Participation
2003	7
2004	7
2005	10
2006	7
2007	10
2008	9
2009	8

ASKINGS

URCNA "Askings" equals "Suggested Donation". The Synodically approved formula for a suggested donation has increased to $10.00 per family with the Treasurers (US and Canada) reviewing annually the recommended askings per family for the following year. 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. Please inform your deacons and have last year's treasurer remind this year's treasure about "Askings".

Please make your check payable to URCNA and send the check to Peter J. Moen, 15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

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."

Please make your check payable to URCNA Hymnal Fund and send the check to Peter J. Moen, 15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

WEB SITE FUND

Article 88 of Synod 2004 directed the treasurers of US and Canada to set up funds for the URCNA Web Site. A separate fund has been established by the US Treasurer. Article 84 B of Synod 2005 states: "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." **Synod 2007 modified that amount to $200 per classis.** For those churches that are responsible for the classis treasurers, please inform your classical treasurer to mail the **$200** check payable to URCNA-Web Fund to Peter J. Moen, 15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

ENCLOSURES

Synod 2007 developed a budget for 2008 through 2010 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 2009, the Synodical 2007 Budget, comparisons between US and its portion of the budget and a comparison of the total URCNA costs based on the total 2007 budget. In addition, guidelines for reimbursement are also provided. 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 "askings" checks payable to "URCNA".
Please make all Hymnal Fund checks payable to "URCNA – Hymnal Fund"
For Classis Treasurers, please make all Web Site Fund checks payable to "URCNA – Web Fund"

REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

Synod Schererville 2007 developed a new guideline for reimbursements. All reimbursement requests must be submitted to the committee chairman for approval prior to being sent to the Treasurer for reimbursement. The goal is to keep the process from being complicated while providing the chairman knowledge of what is being spent. To reduce the amount of time between submittals and reimbursement, once the committee chair has approved the expense, he should mail the reimbursement request directly to the appropriate Treasurer. Attached to this document is a copy of a Synodical Expense Reimbursement Form.

1. Receipts must be presented to the Committee Head who will approve the receipts and send them to either the Canadian or US Treasurer, depending on if the member has a Canadian or US address.
2. When possible, provide actual receipts. (Fax copies are acceptable. Just make sure the information being faxed is legible.)
3. 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.
4. If a receipt has items that are personal, send a photocopy of the receipt and circle the reimbursable items.
5. Mileage will be reimbursed at the IRS rate, which, for 2010, is currently **50** cents per mile. Gasoline is not reimbursed when mileage is submitted.
6. Meals will be reimbursed.
7. It is not necessary to submit receipts for meals unless the total exceeds $36.00 per day.
8. If somebody pays for a group meal, that receipt must be submitted.
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.

Serving the Lord together.

/s/ Peter J. Moen
Peter J. Moen, U.S. Treasurer, URCNA

SYNODICAL ACTION ITEMS

The following action items come from the US Treasurer, appointed by the deacons of the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church. These action items were endorsed by the PPRBC council on March 09, 2010.

1. Church participation in Askings
   As the 2009 chart shows, the majority of US URCNA churches do not use the Askings formula in order to provide the federation financial support. If all churches participated using the Askings formula, the amount of income from the US would have been $37,560 based on the 2009 directory and Askings of $10 per family. Unfortunately, for whatever the reason, a quarter of the federation consistently chooses not to provide any financial support to the federation, as shown in the second chart.

	2009		
Type	Number of Churches	Percent Participated	Percent Collected
Nothing	15	23%	0%
Askings	14	22%	26%
Budget	15	23%	21%
Collection	21	32%	53%

Year	**Church Non-Participation**
2007	26%
2008	25%
2009	23%

While the federation does not wish to bind the conscience of any member church, and hence the term "Askings" instead of dues,

   A. The US Treasurer recommends that Synod should challenge each church to, at a minimum, schedule one collection for the financial support of the federation.

2. Hymnal Fund
   From its inception, the Hymnal Fund never had financial support among the US URCNA churches. Fewer than 13% of the US churches participated financially in this endeavor this past year. When it was established, the committee estimated that it would cost $400,000 for this venture. The US bank account currently sits at slightly more than $34,000. It has taken nine years to get to this point. At that rate of giving it will require at least 50 years to accumulate such funds between the Canadian and US churches.

Based upon the continued financial observations over the past couple nine years,

A. The US Treasurer recommends that Synod reconsider whether the activities of the Hymnal Committee are still endorsed by the churches. If not, use the funds that have been raised to secure printing rights of the 1976 Psalter Hymnal.

3. Web Fund

   The Web site hosting Fund continues to be financially sound. Assuming that that URC does not plan to do aggressive web site development and based on our current finances,

   A. The US Treasurer recommends that Synod set the fee for each Classis at $100 USD per year.
   B. The US Treasurer requests that the URCNA Clerk send a yearly reminder to each Classis Treasurer to send the funds to the respective URCNA Treasurers for each country.

United Reformed Churches in North America

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

2007 End of Year Report (audited)

General Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2006	19,696.39
INCOME	
Askings[2] (2006)	1,084.50
Askings	15,628.85
Directory[1]	6,913.00
Interest	530.97
TOTAL INCOME	24,157.32
Transfer from Web Fund[6]	176.00
EXPENSES	
CECCA[3]	0.00
CERCU[4]	1,850.82
Church Order Committee	0.00
Clerk	1,950.00
Directory[1]	4,879.04
Dues (ICRC, NAPARC)	2,136.98
Hymnal Committee	1,513.56
Incorporation (JVA)	5,248.91
Postage	29.35
Supplies	13.89
Telephone	0.00
Theological Education Committee	66.74
Web	348.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	18,037.29
NET TOTAL	**6,296.03**
BALANCE 12/31/2007	25,992.42[5]

NOTES

1. The URC Directory is being processed through this account
2. Several churches noted that paid askings were for 2006
3. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
4. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
5. $4,107.89 is in reserve from income and expenses relative to the URCNA directory
6. Only $176 was transferred from the web fund because the general fund had $172 is in reserve for the Web Fund

Hymnal Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2006	19,302.80
INCOME	
Collections	4,174.47
Interest	104.93
TOTAL INCOME	4,279.40
EXPENSES	
Bank Charges	24.85
TOTAL EXPENSES	24.85
NET TOTAL	**4,254.55**
BALANCE 12/31/2007	23,557.35

Web Fund[1]

BALANCE 12/31/2006	5,506.54
INCOME	
Classis	1,500.00
Interest	66.82
TOTAL INCOME	1,566.82
EXPENSES	
None (see General Fund)	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
Transfer to General Fund[2,3]	176.00
NET TOTAL	**1,390.82**
BALANCE 12/31/2007	6,897.36

NOTES

1. As established by Synod 2004, each Classis must provide the US Treasurer with $500 each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA. Synod 2007 modified this amount to $200 starting in 2008.
2. Money is electronically transferred into the General Fund in order to pay web bills.
3. Web fund now has its own checking account.

2007 Budget Comparison

Line Item	Budget	Actual
Bank Fee	$ 25	$ 0.00
CECCA[3]	$3,000	$ 0.00
CERCU[3]	$4,000	$1,850.82
Church Order Committee	$4,000	$ 0.00
Clerk[1]	$1,300	$1,950.00
Directory[5]	$ 0	$4,879.04
Dues	$2,300	$2,136.98
Hymnal Committee	$2,000	$1,513.56
Incorporation (JVA)	$ 0	$5,248.91
Postage	$ 50	$ 29.35
Supplies	$ 50	$ 13.89
Synod Materials	$4,000	$ 0.00
Telephone	$ 50	$ 0.00
Theological Education Committee	$ 300	$ 66.74
Web	$ 0	$ 348.00
Total	$21,075	$18,037.29

2008 Budget[4]
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	Budget	Canadian ~35%	US ~65%	Percent of Total Budget
Bank Fee	$25		$25	0.08%
Clerk	$4,000	$1,400	$2,600	12.79%
Directory				0.00%
Dues	$2,200	$770	$1,430	7.02%
NAPARC				
ICRC				
Postage/Supplies	$50		$50	0.15%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
CECCA	$10,500	$3,675	$6,825	33.57%
CERCU	$3,500	$1,225	$2,275	11.19%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$10,920**	**$20,355**	**100.00%**

Note 1: Established by URCNA Synod. The US portion is 65% of $2,000.

Note 3: CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Note 4: Budget items were approved by Synod 2007.

Note 5: Directory is self-funded.

2007 Synod Budget vs. Actual
Updated as of 02/08/2008

Receipts	**Budget**	**Actual**
Surplus from 2004 Synod		3,666
Registration		68,872
Acts of Synod		1,520
Donations		220
Total Receipts	80,153	**74,278**
Expenses	**Budget**	**Actual**
TCC Facilities		
Dorms	16,500	14,175
Ozinga Chapel	750	750
Classrooms (12)	1,500	1,100
Setup Fee	1,000	-
Van rental (transportation)	1,500	29
Fitness Center	-	72
Insurance (TCC & URCNA)	300	-
Total Facilities:	21,550	16,126
Food Cost - TCC 25,546	20,815	
Technology		
A/V equipment	6,500	5,458
Laptop rental	1,200	933
Rental of collator/stitcher	600	410
Copiers/Printing	770	987
Other	-	-
Total Technology:	9,070	7,788
Clerical/Administrative		
Office Supplies	4,400	1,634
Postage	2,200	149
Advertising	1,000	-
Acts of Synod	1,200	-
Promotional Item	2,200	-
Other	-	3
Total Clerical/Admin:	11,000	1,786
Logistics, Reception, Admin		
Registration	4,400	3,070
Other	1,300	828
Total LRA:	5,700	3,898
10% Allowance	7,287	-
Total Expenses	80,153	**50,413**
Surplus as of 12/31/2007		**23,865**
Check sent to Cornerstone URC		**23,365**
Bank balance as of 1/31/2008		**500**

United Reformed Churches in North America

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

2008 End-of-Year Report (audited)

General Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2007		**$9,870.43**
INCOME		
	Askings[2] (2007)	$2,505.30
	Askings	$17,207.04
	Directory[1]	$82.00
	Hymnal Fund[6]	$273.00
	Interest	$102.79
	TOTAL INCOME	**$20,170.13**
EXPENSES		
	CECCA[3]	$1,880.88
	CERCU[4]	$2,850.91
	Church Order Committee	$2,263.82
	Clerk	$2,600.00
	Directory[1]	$0.00
	Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee[8]	$4,372.16
	Dues	
	ICRC	$1,636.98
	NAPARC	$500.00
	MNA[8,9]	$500.00
	Federal Vision Study Committee[8]	$3,964.09
	Hymnal Committee	$1,936.07
	Postage	$59.55
	PRJC[5]	$745.59
	Supplies	$0.00
	Telephone	$0.00
	Theological Education Committee	$4,476.32

TOTAL EXPENSES	$27,786.37
NET TOTAL	**($7,616.24)**
TRANSFERS	
Transfer From CD	$2,159.09
Transfer to Hymnal Fund[6]	($273.00)
BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$4,140.28**

General Fund Notes

1. The URC Directory is being processed through this account
2. Several churches noted that paid askings were for 2007
3. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
4. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
5. PRJC = Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel
6. Check was erroneously deposited into the General Fund and electronically transferred to the Hymnal Fund.
7. $4,189.89 is in reserve from income and expenses relative to the URCNA directory
8. Committees/commitments by Synod 2007 that were not originally in the budget
9. MNA is the Dues paid, set by the number of URCNA Chaplains, as part of PRJC

General Fund – Certificate of Deposit (3) [1]

BALANCE 12/31/2007	**$16,121.99**
INCOME	
Interest	$1,037.10
EXPENSES	
None	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$1,037.10**
TRANSFERS	
Transfer to General Fund	($2,159.09)
BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$15,000.00**

General Fund CD Notes

1. CD came due and was rolled over to three $5,000 CDs, with the remainder going into the General Fund because it was getting low.

Hymnal Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2007	**$5,557.35**
INCOME	
Collections	$5,696.87
Interest	$63.88
TOTAL INCOME	$5,760.75
EXPENSES	
None	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$5,760.75**
TRANSFERS	
Transfer from General Fund[1]	$273.00
Transfer to Hymnal Fund CD[2]	($5,879.70)
BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$5,711.40**

Hymnal Fund Notes

1. Check was erroneously deposited into the General Fund and electronically transferred to the Hymnal Fund.
2. Money was moved from Hymnal Checking account into a Hymnal CD in order to get a better interest rate.

Hymnal Fund – Certificate of Deposit (Two) [1]

BALANCE 12/31/2007	**$18,000.00**
INCOME	
Interest	$1,120.30
EXPENSES	
None	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$1,120.30**
TRANSFERS	
Transfer from Hymnal Fund	$5,879.70
BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$25,000.00**

Hymnal Fund CD Notes
1. CD came due and was rolled over to two CDs, one $5,000 and one $20,000. Money was moved from Hymnal Checking account to bring CD totals to $25,000 in order to get a better interest rate.

Web Fund[1]

BALANCE 12/31/2007	**$6,897.36**
INCOME	
Classis	$400.00
Interest	$64.63
TOTAL INCOME	$646.63
EXPENSES	
Web Site Hosting	$760.91
TOTAL EXPENSES	$760.91
NET TOTAL	**($296.28)**
BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$6,601.08**

NOTES

1. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the US Treasurer with $200 each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA.

2008 Budget Comparison

Item	US Budget	Actual	Delta
Bank Fee	$25	$0.00	$25.00
Clerk	$2,600	$2,600.00	$0.00
Dues			
NAPARC	$325	$500.00	-$175.00
ICRC	$1,105	$1,636.98	-$531.98
MNA (Chaplain)		$500.00	-$500.00
Postage/Supplies	$50	$59.55	-$9.55
Telephone/Internet	$650		$650.00
CECCA	$6,825	$1,880.88	$4,944.12
CERCU	$2,275	$2,850.91	-$575.91
Joint Church Order Committee	$1,950	$2,263.82	-$313.82
Joint Song Book Committee	$1,950	$1,936.07	$13.93
Theological Education Committee	$1,950	$4,476.32	-$2,526.32
PRJC (Chaplains)	$650	$745.59	-$95.59
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee		$4,372.16	-$4,372.16
Federal Vision Study Committee		$3,964.09	-$3,964.09
TOTALS	$20,355	$27,786.37	-$7,431.37

2009 Budget[1]
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	Budget	Canadian ~35%	US ~65%	Percent of Total Budget
Bank Fee	$25		$25	0.08%
Clerk	$4,000	$1,400	$2,600	12.79%
Dues	$2,200	$770	$1,430	7.02%
NAPARC				
ICRC				
Postage/Supplies	$50		$50	0.15%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
CECCA	$10,500	$3,675	$6,825	33.57%
CERCU	$3,500	$1,225	$2,275	11.19%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$10,920**	**$20,355**	**100.00%**

Note 1: Budget items were approved by Synod 2007.

United Reformed Churches in North America

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

2009 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2008		**$4,140.28**
INCOME		
	Askings[2] (2008)	$828.00
	Askings	$22,263.47
	Interest	$20.25
	TOTAL INCOME	**$23,111.72**
EXPENSES		
	CECCA[3]	$2,113.90
	CERCU[4]	$581.90
	Church Order Committee	$4,734.92
	Clerk	$2,600.00
	Directory[1]	$0.00
	Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee[8]	$2,553.61
	Dues	
	ICRC	$1,636.98
	NAPARC	$500.00
	MNA[8,9]	$500.00
	Federal Vision Study Committee[8]	$1,513.41
	Hymnal Committee	$1,438.98
	Postage	$326.80
	PRJC[5]	$645.10
	Supplies	$0.00
	Telephone	$0.00
	Theological Education Committee	$3,939.07
	US Share to Canada for 2008[10]	$1,238.30
	US Share to Canada for 2009[10]	$2,291.00
	TOTAL EXPENSES	$ 26,613.97
	NET TOTAL	**($3,502.25)**
TRANSFERS		
	Transfer From CD	$4,942.16
BALANCE 12/31/2009		**$5,580.19**

1. The URC Directory is being processed through this account
2. Several churches noted that paid askings were for 2007
3. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
4. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
5. PRJC = Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel
6. Check was erroneously deposited into the General Fund and electronically transferred to the Hymnal Fund.
7. $4,189.89 is in reserve from income and expenses relative to the URCNA directory
8. Committees/commitments by Synod 2007 that were not originally in the budget
9. MNA is the Dues paid, set by the number of URCNA Chaplains, as part of PRJC
10. US and Canada treasurers looked at the end of year payments across all committees and made a general adjustment such that US paid 65% and Canada paid 35%. An adjustment was made for year-ending for 2008 and a second adjustment was made based on the second quarter's treasurer's report.

General Fund – Certificate of Deposit[1]

BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$15,000.00**
INCOME	
Interest	418.68
EXPENSES	
Early Withdrawal Penalty[2]	$94.44
NET TOTAL	**$324.24**
TRANSFERS	
Transfer to General Fund	($4,942.16)
BALANCE 12/31/2009	**$10,382.08**

NOTES

1. 2009 started with three Certificates of Deposit for the General Fund. Expenses exceeded income for the first quarter and one of the three $5,000 CD's had to be redeemed early in order to continue to pay expenses.
2. There is an Early Withdrawal Penalty for redeeming a CD before its due date.

Hymnal Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$5,711.40**
INCOME	
Collections	$2,473.10
Interest	$21.30
TOTAL INCOME	$2,494.40
EXPENSES	
None	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$2,494.40**
BALANCE 12/31/2009	**$8,205.80**

Hymnal Fund – Certificate of Deposit (Two)

BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$25,000.00**
INCOME	
Interest	$955.23
EXPENSES	
None	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$955.23**
BALANCE 12/31/2009	**$25,955.23**

Web Fund[1]

BALANCE 12/31/2008	**$6,601.08**
INCOME	
Classis	$1,200.00
Interest	$21.37
TOTAL INCOME	$1,221.37
EXPENSES	
Web Site Hosting	$594.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	$0.00
NET TOTAL	**$627.37**
BALANCE 12/31/2009	**$7,228.45**

NOTES
As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the US Treasurer with $200 each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA.

Synod 2007 Budget[1]
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	Budget	Canadian ~35%	US ~65%	Percent of Total Budget
Bank Fee	$25		$25	0.08%
Clerk	$4,000	$1,400	$2,600	12.79%
Dues	$2,200	$770	$1,430	7.02%
NAPARC				
ICRC				
Postage/Supplies	$50		$50	0.15%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
CECCA	$10,500	$3,675	$6,825	33.57%
CERCU	$3,500	$1,225	$2,275	11.19%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$10,920**	**$20,355**	**100.00%**

Note 1: Budget items were approved by Synod 2007**. All committees are expected to provide Synod 2010 revised budgets for the next three years.**

2009 Budget Comparison (US Only) [1]

Item	US Budget	Actual	Delta
Bank Fee	$25	$0.00	$25.00
Clerk	$2,600	$2,600.00	$0.00
Dues			
NAPARC	$325	$500.00	-$175.00
ICRC	$1,105	$1,636.98	-$531.98
MNA (Chaplain)		$500.00	-$500.00
Postage/Supplies	$50	$326.80	-$276.80
Telephone/Internet	$650		$650.00
CECCA	$6,825	$2,113.90	$4,711.10
CERCU	$2,275	$581.90	$1,693.10
Joint Church Order Committee	$1,950	$4,734.92	-$2,784.92
Joint Song Book Committee	$1,950	$1,438.98	$511.02
Theological Education Committee	$1,950	$3,939.07	-$1,989.07
PRJC (Chaplains)	$650	$645.10	$4.90
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee		$2,553.61	-$2.553.61
Federal Vision Study Committee		$1,513.41	-$1,513.41
TOTALS	$20,355	$23,084.67	-$2,729.67

Note 1: Does not include adjustment to bring pay US percentage to Canada in order to equalize the expenses.

2009 Budget Comparison (Joint) [1]

Item	URCNA Budget	Canadian[2] Actual	US Actual	Delta
Accounting[3]		$475.06		-$475.06
Bank Fee	$25	$0.00	$0.00	$25.00
Clerk[4]	$4,000	$1,746.77	$2,600.00	-$346.77
Dues				
NAPARC	$500		$500.00	$0.00
ICRC	$1,700		$1,636.98	$63.02
MNA (Chaplain)			$500.00	-$500.00
Postage/Supplies	$50	$19.36	$326.80	-$296.16
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$422.18		$577.82
CECCA	$10,500	$6,900.42	$2,113.90	$1,485.68
CERCU	$3,500	$1,855.17	$581.90	$1,062.93
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$4,008.79	$4,734.92	-$5,743.71
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,027.81	$1,438.98	$533.21
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$67.56	$3,939.07	-$1,006.63
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000		$645.10	$354.90
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee		$1,003.28	$2,553.61	-$3,556.89
Federal Vision Study Committee		$1,699.04	$1,513.41	-$3,212.45
Fraternal Delegates		$1,737.77		-$1,737.77
Government Filing Fee[3]		$57.01		-$57.01
TOTALS	**$31,275**	$21,020.22	$23,084.67	-$12,829.89

Note 1: Provided to give an indication to Synod of the combined expenses between Canada and US. **Twice a year, the Canadian and US Treasurers review the finances and then provide compensation to maintain the split of finances.**

Note 2: Adjusted to US dollars (1.0525 CAD = 1 USD) February 2010

Conversion Rate.

Note 3: Certain expenses are incurred unique to the country.

Note 4: The Clerk's rate is converted from US to Canadian dollars. The conversion rate varies over the year which causes the difference between the expected and the final payment.

Item	URCNA Budget	Canadian Actual	US Actual	Delta
Web Hosting Fee[5]	$1,400		$594.00	$806.00

Note 5: Web Hosting Fee is paid from the Web account but included for a full picture of the finances. It is not included in the totals

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2007 End of Year Report (not audited)

March 4, 2008

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Please find the End of Year Treasurer's report for the Canadian churches of the United Reformed Churches in North America attached. From a participation perspective, I have received 2007 askings from 20 of the Canadian churches. In addition, one Canadian church had taken a collection for the Psalter Hymnal Fund; however, these funds were received in 2008 and will be reflected in the first quarter report for 2008. Only 50% of the classis have provided the $500 US for the web fund (next year the amount will drop to $200 US as per Synod, 2007).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Serving the Lord together.

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URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2007 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

INCOME	
Askings	7,891.12
Reimbursed expenses[1]	1,817.58
Interest	2.73
TOTAL INCOME	9,711.43
EXPENSES	
Accounting	500.00
CECCA[2]	467.30
CERCU[3]	1,819.36
Church Order Committee	344.49
Clerk – airfare (Synod)	598.36
Clerk – honorarium	3,098.99
Hymnal Committee	666.53
Postage	8.57
Supplies	96.49
Telephone	520.10
Theological Education Committee	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	8,120.19
NET TOTAL	**1,591.24**

NOTES

1. Represents the US share (65%) of the clerk's stipend for the entire year for 2007.
2. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
3. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections[1]	0.00
TOTAL INCOME	0.00
EXPENSES	
None	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**0.00**

NOTES

1. One church submitted a collection for the Psalter Hymnal fund but it was not received until 2008.

Web Fund[1]

INCOME	
Classis	600.00
TOTAL INCOME	600.00
EXPENSES	
None (see General Fund)	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**600.00**

NOTES

1. As established by Synod 2004, each Classis must provide the US Treasurer with $500 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA. Synod 2007 modified this amount to $200 US starting in 2008.

2008 Budget[1]
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	Budget	Canadian ~35%	US ~65%	Percent of Total Budget
Bank Fee	$25		$25	0.08%
Clerk	$4,000	$1,400	$2,600	12.79%
Directory				0.00%
Dues	$2,200	$770	$1,430	7.02%
NAPARC				
ICRC				
Postage/Supplies	$50		$50	0.15%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
CECCA[2]	$10,500	$3,675	$6,825	33.57%
CERCU	$3,500	$1,225	$2,275	11.19%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$1,050	$1,950	9.60%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$350	$650	3.20%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$10,920**	**$20,355**	**100.00%**

Note 1: Budget items were approved by Synod 2007.

Note 2: CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad

CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2008 End of Year Report (not audited)

March 2, 2009

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Please find the End of Year Treasurer's report for the Canadian churches of the United Reformed Churches in North America attached. From a participation perspective, I have received 2008 askings from 29 (2007 – 20) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 6 (2007 – 0) Canadian churches. Only 50% of the classis have provided the $200 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2008 was a positive year with more churches participating and remitting askings. However, the amount of askings at $6 per family is not sufficient to cover the expenses incurred by the various committees. As mentioned in the quarterly reports, 2 committees established at the 2007 Synod were not included in the 2008 budget on which the $6 per family askings was based. Attached is a comparison of the 2008 budget with the actual expenses incurred (in US$). Assuming that the expenses will total the same in 2009 and the higher exchange rate for the US$ (currently at 1.225 for $1 US) continues, the Canadian cost per family is significantly higher. To cover these costs and the 2008 deficit, the Canadian finance committee is asking that the churches contribute **$10 per family** for 2009.

Also, my email address has recently changed. Please make note of the new address below.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Serving the Lord together.

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URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2008 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

INCOME		
Askings		11,957.10
Donations		200.00
Reimbursed expenses[1]		2,692.12
Acts of Synod[2]		5,444.50
TOTAL INCOME	20,293.72	
EXPENSES		
Accounting		0.00
CECCA[2]		929.65
CERCU[3]		3,021.18
Doctrinal Commitment		740.52
Federal Vision		1,470.23
Church Order Committee		2,865.74
Clerk – honorarium		4,089.95
Hymnal Committee		1,326.50
Postage		553.01
Publication: Acts of Synod		4,491.55
Government Filing Fee		30.00
Telephone		547.43
Theological Education Committee		0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES		20,065.76
SUBTOTAL		227.96
Portion of US expenses		1,402.58
NET TOTAL		**(1,174.62)**
Bank balance at Dec-31-08		(3,409.41)

NOTES
1. Represents the US share (65%) of the clerk's stipend for the entire year for 2008
2. Represents the US share (65%) as well as the Canadian share (35%) of the publication costs for the Acts of Synod
   CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
   CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections[1]	3,788.15
TOTAL INCOME	3,788.15
EXPENSES	
None	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**3,788.15**
Bank balance at Dec-31-08	6,416.15

Web Fund[1]

INCOME	
Classis	733.45
TOTAL INCOME	733.45
EXPENSES	
None (see General Fund)	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**733.45**
Bank balance at Dec-31-08	3,092.95

NOTES
1. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the Treasurer with $200 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA.

2008 Budget to Actual[1]
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	2008 Budget (in US$)	2008 Actual (in US$)	2009 Cdn Budget ~35% (in Cdn$)[2]	Percent of Total Budget
Clerk	$4,000	$4,000.00	$ 1,715	9.91%
Directory				
Dues	$2,200			
MNA		$ 500.00	$ 214	1.24%
NAPARC		$ 500.00	$ 214	1.24%
ICRC		$1,636.98	$ 702	4.05%
Postage/Supplies	$ 50	$ 589.18	$ 252	1.46%
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$ 535.39	$ 230	1.32%
CECCA[3]	$10,500	$2,790.08	$ 1,196	6.91%
CERCU	$3,500	$5,805.65	$ 2,489	14.38%
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee[4]		$5,096.39	$ 2,185	12.62%
Federal Vision Study Committtee[4]		$5,401.99	$ 2,316	13.38%
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$5,066.53	$ 2,172	12.55%
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$3,233.40	$ 1,386	8.01%
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$4,476.32	$ 1,919	11.08%
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000	$ 745.59	$ 320	1.85%
TOTALS	**$31,275**	**$40,377.50**	**$ 17,310**[5]	**100.00%**

Note 1: Budget items were approved by Synod 2007**.** Budget resulted in askings being set at $6 / family.

Note 2: 2009 Canadian budget based on 2008 actual at current exchange rate of 1.225.

Note 3: CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad

CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Note 4: These committees were established at Synod 2007 and no budget amounts were determined at that time.

Note 5: At the end of 2008, the number of Canadian families totaled 1,970. This results in an increase in askings to $9 per family for 2009. To assist with the deficit from 2008, the asking amount is being set at $10 per family.

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2009 End of Year Report (not audited)

March 25, 2010

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Please find the End of Year Treasurer's report for the Canadian churches of the United Reformed Churches in North America attached. From a participation perspective, I have received 2009 askings from 31 (2008 – 29) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 15 (2008 – 6) Canadian churches. Both classes provided the $200 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2009 was a positive year with more churches participating and remitting askings. The $10 per family asking is sufficient to cover the expenses incurred by the various committees. It would be helpful if the churches remitted their asking at the beginning of the year, rather than wait until the last day of the year to contribute. The contribution to the Psalter Hymnal Fund increased significantly in 2009, largely due to the $10 per family asking that circulated early in 2009.

Also, my email address has changed in 2009. Please make note of the new address below.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Serving the Lord together.

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URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
73925 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2009 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

INCOME	
Askings	18,126.24
Donations	30.00
Reimbursed expenses[1]	2,964.00
TOTAL INCOME	21,120.24
EXPENSES	
Accounting	500.00
CECCA[2]	7,262.69
CERCU[3]	1,952.57
Doctrinal Commitment	1,055.95
Federal Vision	1,788.24
Fraternal Delegates	1,829.00
Church Order Committee	4,219.25
Clerk – honorarium	4,574.98
Hymnal Committee	1,081.77
Postage	20.38
Government Filing Fee	60.00
Telephone	444.34
Theological Education Committee	71.11
TOTAL EXPENSES	24,860.28
SUBTOTAL	(3,740.04)
Portion of US expenses	5,165.08
NET TOTAL	**1,425.04**
Bank balance at Dec-31-09	3,218.66

NOTES

1. Represents the US share (65%) of the clerk's stipend for the entire year for 2009
2. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
3. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections[1]	7,967.72
TOTAL INCOME	7,967.72
EXPENSES	
None	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**7,967.72**
Bank balance at Dec-31-09	14,383.87

Web Fund[1]

INCOME	
Classis	662.68
TOTAL INCOME	662.68
EXPENSES	
None (see General Fund)	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	**662.68**
Bank balance at Dec-31-09	3,755.63

NOTES

1. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the Treasurer with $200 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA.

2009 Budget to Actual
(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Item	2009 Budget ~35% (in Cdn$)[1]	2009 Actual (in Cdn$)	Difference (in Cdn$)	Percent of Total Budget
Clerk	$ 1,715	$ 1,611	$ 104	9.91%
Accounting		500	(500)	
Dues				
MNA	214		214	1.24%
NAPARC	214		214	1.24%
ICRC	702		702	4.05%
Government filing fee		60	(60)	
Postage/Supplies	252	20	232	1.46%
Telephone/Internet	230	444	(214)	1.32%
CECCA[2]	1,196	7,263	(6,067)	6.91%
CERCU	2,489	1,953	536	14.38%
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee[3]	2,185	1,056	1,129	12.62%
Federal Vision Study Committtee[3]	2,316	1,788	528	13.38%
Fraternal Delegates		1,829	(1,829)	
Joint Church Order Committee	2,172	4,219	(2,047)	12.55%
Joint Song Book Committee	1,386	1,082	304	8.01%
Theological Education Committee	1,919	71	1,848	11.08%
PRJC (Chaplains)	320		320	1.85%
US Reimbursement		(5,165)	5,165	
TOTALS	**$ 17,310**	**$ 16,731**	**$ 579**	**100.00%**

Note 1:2009 Canadian budget based on 2008 actual at 12/31/08 exchange rate of 1.225 (as shown on December 31, 2008 year end report).

Note 2: CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad

CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Note 3: These committees were established at Synod 2007 and no budget amounts were determined at that time.

2009 Budget Comparison (Joint) [1]

Item	URCNA Budget	Canadian[2] Actual	US Actual	Difference
Accounting[3]		$475.06		-$475.06
Bank Fee	$25	$0.00	$0.00	$25.00
Clerk[4]	$4,000	$1,746.77	$2,600.00	-$346.77
Dues				
NAPARC	$500		$500.00	$0.00
ICRC	$1,700		$1,636.98	$63.02
MNA (Chaplain)			$500.00	-$500.00
Postage/Supplies	$50	$19.36	$326.80	-$296.16
Telephone/Internet	$1,000	$422.18		$577.82
CECCA	$10,500	$6,900.42	$2,113.90	$1,485.68
CERCU	$3,500	$1,855.17	$581.90	$1,062.93
Joint Church Order Committee	$3,000	$4,008.79	$4,734.92	-$5,743.71
Joint Song Book Committee	$3,000	$1,027.81	$1,438.98	$533.21
Theological Education Committee	$3,000	$67.56	$3,939.07	-$1,006.63
PRJC (Chaplains)	$1,000		$645.10	$354.90
Doctrinal Commitment Study Committee		$1,003.28	$2,553.61	-$3,556.89
Federal Vision Study Committee		$1,699.04	$1,513.41	-$3,212.45
Fraternal Delegates		$1,737.77		-$1,737.77
Government Filing Fee[3]		$57.01		-$57.01
TOTALS	**$31,275**	$21,020.22	$23,084.67	-$12,829.89

Note 1: Provided to give an indication to Synod of the combined expenses between Canada and US. **Twice a year, the Canadian and US Treasurers review the finances and then provide compensation to maintain the split of finances.**

Note 2: Adjusted to US dollars (1.0525 CAD = 1 USD) February 2010 Conversion Rate.

Note 3: Certain expenses are incurred unique to the country.

Note 4: The Clerk's rate is converted from US to Canadian dollars. The conversion rate varies over the year which causes the difference between the expected and the final payment.

Overture #1

Classis Western Canada (Leduc 2010) overtures Synod London 2010 to make the following amendments to the *Report of the Synodical Study Committee on the Federal Vision and Justification:*

1. Place points 3-15 of the 15 points currently under Recommendation **B** back into the body of the paper under the heading: **VI. Summary Statements**, rearranging these points to begin with point 5, and inserting points 3 & 4 between current 13 & 14.

2. Place 1 and 2 of the 15 points, along with the following additional quotations of the Canons of Dort and Belgic Confession under **(VII.) Recommendation B**, with the following introduction: "That Synod London encourage all office-bearers to repudiate FV teachings where they are not in harmony with the following teachings of the Three Forms of Unity (with underlining emphasis added)":

Canons of Dort I, Article 7
Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby...God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call an draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His son, finally to glorify them...

Canons of Dort I, Article 8
There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved, both under the Old and New Testament; since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which He has chosen us from eternity, both to grace and to glory, to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He has ordained that we should walk therein (Eph. 1:4, 5; 2:10).

Canons of Dort I, Article 15
...Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion...

Canons of Dort I, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 2
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute.

Likewise: That there is one election unto faith and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation.

For this is a fancy of men's minds, invented regardless of the Scriptures, whereby the doctrine of election is corrupted, and this golden chain of our salvation is broken: *And whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified* (Rom. 8:30).

Canons of Dort, V, Article 1
Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin.

Canons of Dort, V, Article 6
But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

Canons of Dort V, Article 7
For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost...

Canons of Dort V, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 7
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That the faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except only in duration.

For Christ Himself, in Matt. 13:20, Luke 8:13, and in other places, evidently notes, beside this duration, a threefold difference between those who believe only for a time and true believers, when He declares that the former receive the seed on stony ground, but the latter in the good ground or heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; that the former are without fruit, but that the latter bring forth

their fruit in various measure, with constancy and steadfastness.

Belgic Confession, Article 22
Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works.

However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

3. Add a Recommendation F: That Synod London thank the committee for its excellent work.

Grounds:

1. Placing the (now 13) points in the body of the paper without requesting synod to officially "affirm" them would avoid the danger of extra-confessional bindings to theological formulations.
2. Rearranging the points slightly gives a more logical flow of thought.
3. Clearly distinguishing direct quotations from the Confessions from the formulations of the 13 points respects the special status of our Confessions as our doctrinal standards.
4. Urging office-bearers to refute FV teachings where they are not in harmony with the specific citations of the confessions strengthens the report, and thus serves the churches in a way that avoids controversy.
5. Since the entire report is commended to the consistories of the URCNA for study, the (now 13) points are given the attention they deserve along with the rest of the report.
6. The edited report would look like the following (recommendations A, C, D and E below are unchanged from the study committee's report):

VI. Summary Statements

1. Adam was obligated to obey the holy law of God and the —commandment of life in order to live in fellowship with God and enjoy His favor eternally. (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3).
2. All human beings have fallen in Adam, are subject to condemnation and

death, and are wholly incapable of finding favor with God on the basis of obedience to the law of God. (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24)

3. The work of Christ as Mediator of the covenant grace fully accords with God's truth and justice, satisfies all the demands of God's holy law, and thereby properly —merits the believer's righteousness and eternal life. (Heidelberg 61 Catechism, Lord's Days 5-7, 15, 23-24; Belgic Confession, Article 22; Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 2:3)
4. The entire obedience of Christ —under the law, both active and passive, constitutes the righteousness that is granted and imputed to believers for their justification. (Belgic Confession, Article 22; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23)
5. Faith is the sole instrument of the believer's justification, so that believers may be said to be justified —even before [they] do good works. (Belgic Confession, Article 24)
6. The good works of believers, though necessary fruits of thankfulness, contribute nothing to their justification before God, since they proceed from true faith, are themselves the fruits of the renewing work of Christ's Spirit, are imperfect and corrupted by sin, and are performed out of gratitude for God's grace in Christ. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24, 32, 33; Belgic Confession, Article 24)
7. The justification of true believers is a definitive and irrevocable blessing of Christ's saving work, and therefore cannot be increased by the good works that proceed from true faith or be lost through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:9; Rejection of Errors 1:2, 2:8, 5:7; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 20, 21)
8. The sacrament of baptism does not effect the believer's union with Christ and justification, but is a confirmation of the gospel promise to those who respond to the sacrament in the way of faith. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25, 27)
9. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a means to strengthen and nourish the believer in Christ, when it is received by the —mouth of faith, and therefore the children of believing parents are obligated to attest the presence of such faith before receiving the sacrament. (Belgic Confession, Article 35; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 28-30)
10. The assurance of salvation is an ordinary fruit of true faith, which looks primarily to the gospel promise and the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the basis for confidence before God. Though good works may confirm the genuineness of faith, they are not the primary basis for such assurance of salvation. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, 23, 32; Belgic Confession, Article 22-23; Canons of Dort, 5:8-13)

11. Some members of the church or covenant community —are not of the Church, though externally in it (Belgic Confession, Article 29).
12. Those who are truly of the church may be known by the —marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. (Belgic Confession, Article 29)
13. According to God's electing purpose and grace, true believers may be confident that God will preserve them in the way of salvation and keep them from losing their salvation through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:12, 5:8-10)

VII. Recommendations

A. That Synod London grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Patrick Edouard (chairman), Rev. Brian Vos (secretary, who will present our report), and to Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, as well as any other members of the Committee present during the discussion of this report.

B. That Synod London encourage all office-bearers to repudiate FV teachings where they are not in harmony with the following teachings of the Three Forms of Unity (with underlining emphasis added)

Canons of Dort I, Article 7
Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby...God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call an draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; <u>to bestow upon them true faith, justification</u>, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His son, <u>finally to glorify them</u>...

Canons of Dort I, Article 8
There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved, both under the Old and New Testament; since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which He has chosen us from eternity, both to grace and to glory, to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He has ordained that we should walk therein (Eph. 1:4, 5; 2:10).

Canons of Dort I, Article 15
...Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehen-

sible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion...

Canons of Dort I, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 2
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute. Likewise: That there is one election unto faith and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation.

For this is a fancy of men's minds, invented regardless of the Scriptures, whereby the doctrine of election is corrupted, and this golden chain of our salvation is broken: *And whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified* (Rom. 8:30).

Canons of Dort, V, Article 1
Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin.

Canons of Dort, V, Article 6
But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

Canons of Dort V, Article 7
For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost...

Canons of Dort V, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 7
[We reject the errors of those] Who teach: That the faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except only in duration.

For Christ Himself, in Matt. 13:20, Luke 8:13, and in other places, evidently notes, beside this duration, a threefold difference between

those who believe only for a time and true believers, when He declares that the former receive the seed on stony ground, but the latter in the good ground or heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; that the former are without fruit, but that the latter bring forth their fruit in various measure, with constancy and steadfastness.

Belgic Confession, Article 22
Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

C. That Synod London reaffirm the reminder of Synod Schererville: — That synod remind and encourage individuals that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our Confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) and the Form of Subscription for addressing theological error. (Acts of Synod 2007, Art. 67.4)

D. That Synod London: 1) distribute this report to all the consistories of the URCNA, commending the report to them for study; 2) post this report on the denominational website; and 3) instruct the Stated Clerk to mail copies of this report to those denominations with whom the URCNA enjoys ecumenical relations.

E. That Synod London consider publishing this report, separate from the Acts of Synod, for the sake of greater accessibility to the churches.

F. That Synod London thank the committee for its excellent work.

Overture #2

Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches in North America overtures Synod London, 2010 to amend Article 10 of the Church Order by adding the following to the end of the current article:

"The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of

his Consistory and with the concurring advice of Classis. The ministerial credentials of an emeritus minister will ordinarily remain with the church which granted his emeritation."

Current reading of Article 10:

> "Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of the Minister of the Word."

Change:

"Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. Minister's Emeritus shall retain the title and dignity of the office of the Minister of the Word. The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the concurring advice of Classis. The ministerial credentials of a minister emeritus will ordinarily remain with the church which granted his emeritation."

Grounds:

1. Ministerial credentials are a matter of the churches in common and ought to be addressed in this way.

2. Our current church order does not address the matter of ministerial credentials as it relates to emeritus ministers.

3. This change to our church order will adequately clarify the status of the credentials of the increasing number of emeritus ministers in our federation.

Argument:

As our Federation ages there is an ever increasing number of emeritus ministers in our midst. Whereas the Classis has a role in determining who may serve as ministers in our churches, and whereas the credentials of a minister are valid in any church he may serve throughout our Federation, the emeritation of a minister is done without any involvement of the Classis at all. What is more, there have been instances of confusion within the churches of our Federation on the status of emeritus ministers and their credentials. This is especially true in instances of the dissolution of a congregation and the implementation of Article 11 between a minister and his congregation. In either of these events a minister nearing the age of retirement may wish to emeritate. The financial support of such a minister ought to fall to his local

congregation. However, in the instance of dissolution such a congregation no longer exists and in the instance of Article 11 the local congregation may not be willing to grant emeritation for this reason. It is also possible that he might move or desire to serve the churches in another capacity, even to receive a call after his emeritation. The status of his credentials becomes a significant question and one which deserves resolution. The amendment we have presented seeks to address that concern in a manner consistent with our church polity.

Done in Classis, September 23, 2009

Rev. Dennis W. Royall, Clerk of Classis Southern Ontario
URCNA

Overture #3

Classis Southern Ontario overtures Synod 2010 to change Article 66 of the Church Order to read:

> "…If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the synodically approved Consistories of the Federation, after which they shall take effect. The time-frame for ratification shall be determined by synod."

Grounds:

1. The current delay to changes in the Church Order creates confusion rather than good order among the churches. Confusion is created under our current practice because Consistories and Councils have spent time discussing the benefit and necessity of the change before synod and revisited the matter again after synod, yet are then asked to ignore the change for two years.
2. The process of ratification by two-thirds of the Consistories is a sufficient safe guard against changes to Church Order being done against the will of the Consistories of the federation.
3. Article 66 tells us that changes to Church Order are made "that God may be more honored and the churches better served." Realizing that any change must be made for these reasons, why would the better service of the churches and the greater glory of God be delayed?
4. The only benefit to the delay in our current system is that it allows an appeal to be heard by a future synod regarding a change to the Church Order that is "forthcoming." Because this change does not take effect until *after the next synod* in our current system, it could be argued that

London 2010 could receive an appeal and *veto* a change in the Church Order that was adopted at Schererville in 2007. Since the change voted upon at Schererville in 2007 has not yet actually taken effect London's *veto* would not be changing an Article of Church Order, and thus not require the ratification by the Consistories or even a 2/3 majority vote in the London synod (instead, only a 50%+1 vote would be needed to prevent a change to Church Order adopted by Schererville and ratified by the Consistories.

In response to this "benefit," we must ask if this is really a "benefit." Should a future synod be able to over-rule an approved change to Church Order that has been approved by a 2/3 vote at a former synod *and* been ratified by 2/3 of the Consistories of the federation? Even further, should this future synod be able to do this simply with a 50%+1 majority, with no further accountability to the Consistories who approved the change initially? The "benefit" hardly seems to be beneficial, while the proposed change would honour the decisions of the past synod and the ratification of the churches, requiring any changes proposed to likewise require a 2/3 vote at synod and the further ratification of 2/3 of the Consistories, since changes made to the Church Order by previous synods (Schererville) would already be in effect by the next Synod (London).

Overture #4

Classis Eastern U.S. overtures Synod to exempt the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) from the term limit set in the Regulations for Synodical Procedure. This exemption will allow the Classes of our federation to extend the "term of service" of a CECCA committee member beyond the limit of two consecutive three-year terms if they so desire.

Background

The process by which members become part of CECCA has changed over the years, as well as the length of terms. In the beginning, they were nominated at and approved by Synod.

At Synod Escondido (2001), Synod approved a type of rolling retirement and nomination process which created "staggered terms for the sake of continuity." The terms then covered "through two synods."

At Synod Calgary (2004), Synod approved the current method whereby each Classis appoints a member for CECCA, as well as an alternate. Synod also decided to allow committee members to serve up to two additional terms, bringing the total to three (Acts of Synod, Article 68.D) Finally, Synod once again, agreeing with the need for continuity on the committee, agreed to an extension for two members beyond the two terms.

At Synod Schererville (2007), Synod did not change the accepted procedures, but did extend Rev. Royall to a third term as a member at-large (Acts of Synod, Article 34).

Grounds:

[1] The work of the CECCA committee is unique since of necessity it involves the development of a personal knowledge of and experience with the churches and federations with which the URCNA has (or is seeking to establish) Ecumenical Contact and/or Ecumenical Fellowship. These churches and federations are all geographically distant from us, thus limiting our opportunities for personal interaction.

[2] It is, therefore, desirable – if not essential – to avoid, as much as possible, frequent turnovers on the committee. All too frequently (unavoidably) such turnovers mean that the CECCA committee must 'train' members for whom the work is new. This is a lengthy process and means that such members can not be expected to be 'fully contributing' members of the committee for a significant period of time.

[3] This exemption will allow the Classes of our federation more latitude in extending the term of service of a member whose continued presence on the committee is desirable – if not essential – for the ongoing fruitful labors of CECCA as it seeks to give concrete expression to the ecumenical task of the URCNA.

Overture #5

Classis Eastern US overturse the URCNA Synod 2010 to change the Proposed Joint Church Order Articles 44 and 45 in the following ways:

1. That Article 44 of the Proposed Joint Church Order read as follows:

The Church's Mission Calling

a. Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to *make disciples through evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching; to preach the gospel to all persons and all people groups; to witness to the risen Lord in both Word and Deed; and to attend to the spiritual and physical needs of God's people globally.*

b. *According to God's call, this shall be accomplished by missionaries who are ministers of the Word as well as church members.*

c. *Ministers of the Word are* called, supported and supervised by their respective consistories. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments, *and teach local church leaders and members to take full responsibility for the growing church and kingdom demands in all areas of life.*

d. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that obeys *the great commission of the Lord*.

[Italics indicate phrases not found in Article 44 of the PJCO.]

Grounds:

1. Scripture provides a rich variety of descriptions for the church's missionary calling. They include making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), preaching (Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:27; Romans 10:14,15), witnessing (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; 1 Thessalonians. 1:7), teaching (Ephesians 4:1-16; 2 Timothy 2:2) and attending to the spiritual and physical needs of God's people (Matthew 25:37-40; Acts 6:1-7). Whereas Article 44 of PJCO mentions only preaching, this overture suggests the variety, and therefore the broad scope, found in scripture. This broad scope may include theological education, publishing Christian literature, Bible translation and distribution, and participating and training in diaconal relief.

2. Scripture includes the names of people who fulfilled the church's mission calling but were not ordained ministers of the word. They include Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60), Philip (Acts 8:4-12, 26-40), and Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3, 24-28; Romans 16:3). Whereas Article 44 of PJCO says that church's the mission calling "shall be

carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word," this overture provides for other gifted people to take part in the church's varied missionary calling (cf. grounds 1).

3. Missiologists speak in a positive way of evangelizing people in the world rather than in the negative way of preaching to the unconverted (see PCJO Article 44), non-Christians, unbelievers, and impious. They stress the well-meant offer of the gospel as Jesus did when he referred to "those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). The Canons of Dort use similar language in Second Head, Article 5: "Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to *all persons promiscuously and without distinction*, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel" (italics added). Whereas PJCO Article 44 refers to preaching the Word of God to the unconverted, this overture stresses that the church's mission calling sends the church to all peoples (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

2. That Article 45 of the Proposed Joint Church Order read as follows:

The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence *and throughout the world*. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes affiliating with His church through profession of faith.

[Italics indicate phrase not found in Article 44 of the PJCO.]

Ground:

1. The Overture suggests a change which reflects the truth that evangelism (declaring the good news) constitutes a world-wide activity of the church.

Appendix: We append Articles 44 and 45 of PJCO here to help delegates in comparing them with the overture. This appendix does not belong to the overture.

2010 PJCO Article 44

The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their respective consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have been converted to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that assists in fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

2010 PJCO Article 45

The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes being joined to His church through profession of faith.

Overture #6

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2010 to re-assign the CERCU committee with the mandate of exploring real or perceived differences of emphasis within the covenant theologies of the respective URC and CanRC federations with the goal of discerning whether the two are compatible and, if they are compatible, suggesting possible guidelines to avoid theological conflict and confusion. This work shall be done with the understanding of the importance of regular reports to the churches through the appropriate channels.

Grounds:

1) The labors of CERCU have not adequately fulfilled the mandate for *Phase One of Ecumenicity* by bringing "mutual understanding" to "sig-

nificant factors in the two federations'… theology" especially in, but not limited to, the question of baptized membership within the covenant of grace.

2) A historical survey of our respective URC and CanRC traditions, both prior to and subsequent to 1944, reveal a very real difference in the general emphasis within covenantal theology. In the past, these differing emphases have created great conflict and confusion within the Dutch reformed churches and will likely continue to create confusion in a future merger, or perhaps upset any future merger, unless the churches gain a common understanding through mutual dialogue and explanatory guidelines.
3) The 2007 URC Synodically adopted "nine points," especially point 6, appears to be at odds with the commonly understood CanRC view of covenantal membership necessitating further clarification. At present, URC consistories are to "open the pulpits" (*Phase Two of Ecumenicity*) to CanRC ministers while rejecting "the errors of those who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way…" ("Nine points" of Synod 2007).

Overture #7

Background

To begin some aspect of cohesion for the federation in regards to missions, Synod 2001 adopted the following: "That synod ask the Council of Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI, to implement Proposal 2 of Report 4." (Acts, 2001, pp. 12-13 – C. 1. e.) Proposal 2 of Report 4 states "That the URC publish a denominational semi-annual missions update." (Acts, 2001, p. 112)

Overture

Classis Michigan of the URCNA overtures Synod 2010 to relieve Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI, of its oversight and publication responsibilities of the federation missions newsletter – "The Trumpet."

Grounds:

1. Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI, has faithfully fulfilled this request for the past nine years.
2. In a continuing effort to serve the needs of its members and those of neighboring Reformed congregations, Cornerstone has initiated and

added a new ministry (Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling) to its oversight responsibilities.
3. Cornerstone maintains its oversight of the continually growing ministry of Reformed Youth Services.
4. Diversifying the responsibilities of oversight of programs that serve our federation strengthens the federation.

Overture #8

Classis Michigan of the URCNA overtures Synod 2010 to evaluate the need for a part/full time position of URCNA Missions Coordinator with this position functioning under the authority and oversight of a specific consistory and *one* of his responsibilities would be edit and publish the federation's mission newsletter.

Grounds:
1. The URCNA has realized substantial growth in the scope of the mission activities of its member congregations and classis since the inception of the newsletter in 2001.
2. While the URCNA stands as one "in spirit and truth," there exists to a degree a sense of "standing alone" among many of our members due to the distances between many member congregations.
3. The URCNA's need for this position is further evidenced by the following needs/responsibilities/opportunities which should constitute a major part of his job description:
    a. Encourage communication between missionaries, church planters, URC councils, and congregations and serve all as a liaison when needed or requested.
    b. Obtain updates from the missionaries and church planters for publication in the missions newsletter.
    c. Maintain the "missionsURC.org" website and utilize it to post prayer requests and other matters relevant to the URCNA membership—e.g. when and where missionaries are "home" and available for speaking.
    d. Ascertain and remain abreast of the disparate financial needs of missionaries (location, family, nature & needs of particular ministry).
    e. Assist in the coordination of work service projects and trips with the newly formed Reformed Missions Services.

4. Synod may wish to consult the RYS form of consistorial supervision which has demonstrated to be an effective model.

Overture #9

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2010 to instruct the Stated Clerk to make the information in the directory available to one or more organizations for the publication of the directory in a booklet format.

Grounds:
1. The Stated Clerk currently declines to release this information for publication.
2. This information has historically been published, e.g., Directory of the United Reformed Churches in North America, February 2004, distributed by Reformed Believers United.
3. Note every church has the ability to publish this information locally in a booklet format.
4. Reformatting the current format into a booklet format takes considerable time and effort and the duplication of this effort is a waste of time. Viewing on line will not be a problem if it is set up to 200% zoom.
5. Any information that should not be publicly distributed can be deleted. For example a missionary who is serving in a country persecuting Christians.

Overture #10

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2010 with the following change to the Rules for Synodical Procedure:

1. That Synod adopt the following in place of 5.3.2.c: c. Terms: The members of a standing committee shall serve **according to terms approved for that specific committee. If a standing committee has no specific terms approved by Synod members shall serve** no more than two consecutive three-year terms, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointement. Members who have completed (***strike*** two consecutive) **their** terms are eligible for reappointment after one year.
2. That Synod return the terms of service for CERCU and CECCA that were adopted at Synod 2004.

Grounds:
The terms of service agreed to at Synod 2004 was maximum of three terms each three years long. These terms of service were approved in recognition of the importance of continuity in these committees after advice from fraternal delegates was received. Other standing committees may have similar need

for continuity and even longer terms may be appropriate. Some committees are more administrative in nature and the same people on the committee for years may be beneficial.

Overture #11

Adopted by Classis Central US of the URCNA
Meeting at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella on March 16-17, 2010
Overture RE Church Order Art. 32 & Appendix 4

Background

There have been occasions when a church is seeking admittance into our federation (URCNA), and a debate arises as to what Church Order Article 32 requires for admittance and if there is a particular order of meeting such requirements.

Article 32

> *Any church may be admitted into the federation provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with this Church Order, and its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation. Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod.*

One could say the Church Order has three requirements for admittance: 1) its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity; 2) its office-bearers agree with this Church Order; 3) its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis.

This leads to the question of proper order. Is the minister examined first, because if he does not sustain the examination, there is no need to vote on admittance. Or, is the vote for admittance first, because if that would fail, there would be no need to examine the minister.

There is also the question of whether the minister sustaining an examination is essential to recognizing a properly constituted consistory.

When these things are discussed on the floor of classis meetings, it is evident our Church Order should speak more clearly on this matter, enabling us to consider these matters decently and in good order, thereby glorifying God.

Overture

Therefore, Classis Central US respectfully overtures Synod 2010 to make the following changes to the URCNA Church Order:

Article 32

Any church may be admitted into the federation **upon the recommendation of a consistory and** provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with this Church Order**.** ~~and its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis,~~ Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod. **Any of these office-bearers who are ministers, shall be examined before being declared a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America,** according to the regulations adopted by the federation. **(See Appendix 4)**

Appendix 4

Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum

For ministers who have been ordained outside the federation and are seeking to be admitted to serve a congregation within the federation. (Article 8)

1. *CREDENTIALS: two letters of request and information relating to the background and circumstances of the relationship, one from the examinee and one from the sponsoring Consistory.*
2. *PROCEDURE*
   a. *The calling Consistory must invite classis to participate in a colloquium doctum.*
   b. *The examinee is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of his sponsoring Consistory.*
   c. *Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare the minister eligible to be called by the sponsoring Consistory as a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.*

For ministers who have been ordained outside the federation and are office-bearers of a congregation which has been provisionally accepted into the federation. (Article 32)

1. ***CREDENTIALS: three letters of request and information relating to the background and circumstances of the relationship, one***

from the examinee, one from the examinee's Consistory and one from the recommending Consistory.

2. ***PROCEDURE***
   - ***a. The recommending Consistory must invite classis to participate in a colloquium doctum.***
   - ***b. The examinee is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of the recommending Consistory.***
   - ***c. Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare him a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.***
3. *CONTENT*

   The two areas to be covered in this exam are (1) biblical and confessional commitment, and (2) ministerial competence. The former regards the prospective candidate's knowledge of and loyalty to Scripture and the Confessions; the latter investigates his theological and ministerial knowledge and ability. This exam should, therefore, investigate the following specific areas:

   (1) Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, and evangelism.

   (2) Church polity: the history and principles of Reformed church polity, and the content of the Church Order.

   (3) Confessional knowledge: the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, concerning the prospective candidate's willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.

   (4) Reformed doctrine: the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine (Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology).

   (5) Ethics: the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to various contemporary moral problems.

Grounds

1. *All matters which come before classis must originate with a Consistory (C.O. Art. 25) therefore the addition of "***upon the recommendation of a consistory***" would be required for a classis to consider this matter.*
2. *Church Order Article 21 states each congregation shall have a consistory, which can be properly constituted without a minister of the Word.*

3. *The content of a colloquium doctum is the same for ministers seeking admittance to serve a congregation within the federation (C.O. Article 8) and for ministers who are members of a church which has been admitted (C.O. Article 32). The Credentials and Procedures need to be specified differently.*
4. *Admitting a church to the federation and the act of declaring a man a minister of the Word and sacraments among the URCNA are different in content and focus. Therefore, it would set a proper tone and focus in deliberating each on its own merits, thus being done decently and in good order in service to our King.*

Overture #12

Adopted by Classis Central US of the URCNA
Meeting at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella on March 16-17, 2010
Overture RE Procedure for Voting on Classis Exams

Background:

Our consistory has great appreciation for the procedure employed by our churches when a man is examined for the ministry of the Word and sacraments. The care taken by the presenting consistory and delegates to classis is indicative of our love for our Lord, His Word, and His church. Even more, such care is indicative of His administration of His flock (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 21). Our consistory has noted that our federative process of examination evidences that care practically by time spent, by discernment and persistence in listening to long examinations, by examiners being well prepared, and by a deliberative process of weighing the answers of the examinees.

But our commitment to "the church always being reformed according to the Word of God" has also caused us to see that one aspect of our procedure of examinations has sometimes evidenced weakness. Specifically, what we have noticed is that the procedure for voting on the exam in toto has sometimes resulted in a less than whole-hearted approbation by the delegates to classis. More than once many delegates mentioned that an examinee was *somewhat*, or even *very* weak in his performance on one or more sections of the exam. But when that section or those sections were compared to his *overall* exam performance the classis opted to give him a passing grade, though with reservations.

Some classes have sought to rectify this undesirable condition by changing their rules of classical procedure to *in effect* define what certain words in the

church order mean. Terms such as *sustaining the exam* and *the satisfaction of the classis* then come to mean different things **practically** in different classis. For example, a man could pass his candidacy exam in one classis based on how that classis interprets the church order and, were the exact same exam to take place in a different classis he would fail **based on how that classis interprets the wording of the church order by their rules of classical procedure**.

So our consistory has noted and seeks to resolve two problems: One, passing a man who has not done a comprehensively good job in his examination and; two, differing standards of judging the success of an examination.

Overture:

Classis Central US overtures Synod 2010 to amend the procedure by which a man is declared to have sustained the candidacy and ordination exam, and the Colloquium Doctum as follows:

A) Each specific area[1] of the relevant exam must receive a particular vote of approbation.
B) In the case of the candidacy exam the particular vote of approbation of each specific area will be given by both the consistory and by the delegates to classis.
C) In the case of the ordination exam and the Colloquium Doctum the particular vote of approbation of each specific area will be given by the delegates to classis.
D) The consistories of the classis shall determine via the rules of classical procedure the particular methodology by which the vote of approbation of each specific area will be taken.[2]
E) When a certain methodology is determined by the action of the classes the intent of this overture must be carried out; namely, that the classis actually vote on each specific area of the exam to state that the examinee has passed that specific area.
F) An exam may only be declared as sustained after a particular vote of approbation of each specific area has been received by either this or a previous classis.

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1 This is as exact as the language is in the relevant appendices of the church order. It may be well for the federation to better clarify what we wish to call these "specific areas". Perhaps "sections", or "locus" or some other term would be of help here.

2 An example methodology which is in accord with the details outlined in our church order is attached.

Grounds:

1) The amended procedure seeks to integrate into the Church Order a particular working interpretation of articles 4, 6 and 8 as found in several of our classes.

    a) This working interpretation, stipulated in the rules of classical procedure of these classes posits that "sustain" and "satisfaction" respecting the performance of a man in an exam may only be declared via a particular voting practice (wherein each specific area of the relevant exam must receive a particular vote of approbation) not currently included nor currently implied in the church order. Therefore, these particular voting practices found in the rules of classical procedure serve to regulate and bind the church order.

    b) Since the activity of examinations falls under the purview of the entire federation the amended procedure will allow for uniformity across the classes of the federation in the manner by which the approbation of the exams are adjudicated.

2) The amended procedure will enhance the ability of the consistories and the delegates to classis to make a more careful approbation about each specific area which will:

    a) Facilitate these bodies in giving prospective candidates and candidates careful and helpful guidance to overcome any area(s) of weakness.

    b) Facilitate these bodies in ensuring the purity of the churches by helping to send to the churches well-rounded and well-equipped men for the gospel ministry.

3) The amended procedure will enhance and facilitate the peace of mind of the consistories and delegates to classis that the man they passed did truly sustain and satisfy every area of the exam. For:

    a) Several examinations have occurred in the classes of our Federation where the peace of the body respecting a man's performance has not been broad and deep after employing the standard of the current wording of the church order respecting "sustain" and "satisfied."

    b) The consistories and congregations of the federation should expect that a man receives the robust and fulsome approbation of those

men charged by Christ with the blessed duty of adjudicating an examination.

Necessary church order changes:

In order for this overture to take effect the following changes to the church order will be needed.

A) Add to the end of Article #4 the following sentence: "The declaration of having sustained the exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the consistory and delegates to classis."

B) In Article #6 add a second sentence prior to "*(see Appendix 3)*" to whit: "The satisfaction of the delegates to classis shall be based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation."

C) In Article #8 add a second sentence prior to "*(see Appendix 4)*" to whit: "The satisfaction of the delegates to classis shall be based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation."

D) In Appendix 2.2 (Procedure) letter "d." be renamed "e." and a new letter "d." be added which shall read, "A declaration by the consistory that the candidate has sustained the exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the consistory along with the delegates to classis."

E) In Appendix 3.2 (Procedure) letter "d." be renamed "e." and a new letter "d." be added which shall read, "A determination that the candidate has sustained this exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the delegates to classis."

F) In Appendix 4.2 (Procedure) letter "c." be renamed "d." and a new letter "c." be added which shall read, "A determination that the minister has sustained this exam shall be made based upon each specific area of the exam having received a particular vote of approbation from the delegates to classis."

An example of the procedure as practiced by Classis Central United States:

VI. PROCEDURES FOR EXAMINATIONS

A. For Candidacy Examinations:

1. Following the examination and the decision of the man's consistory, the delegates will enter executive session. The following motion will be made at the appropriate time:
   "We are satisfied that the examinee has sustained the _____ area of the examination."
2. After discussion of each area, a vote will be taken by ballot (see attached sample). The ballots will be tallied after voting on all areas has been completed. If the delegates are satisfied with all of the areas, the man may continue the process toward admission to the Ministry of the Word in the URCNA.
3. If the delegates are not satisfied with any particular area(s) of the examination, the examinee may return to classis within 13 months to be examined in that/those area(s) only. He need not undergo the entire examination again if he returns within that time period.

B. For Ordination Examinations and *Colloquia Docta*:

1. Following the examination, the delegates will enter executive session. The following motion will be made at the appropriate time:
   "We are satisfied that the examinee has sustained the _____ area of the examination."
2. After discussion of each area, a vote will be taken by ballot (see attached sample). The ballots will be tallied after voting on all areas has been completed. If the delegates are satisfied with all of the areas, the man may continue the process toward admission to the Ministry of the Word in the URCNA.
3. If the delegates are not satisfied with any particular area(s) of the examination, the examinee may return to classis within 13 months to be examined in that/those area(s) only. He need not undergo the entire examination again if he returns within that time period.

C. In the event that a man does not sustain an entire examination at classis:

1. The Classis shall remain in the Executive Session declared for the purpose of discussing and voting on the examinee's performance in his examination.
2. A delegate from the examinee's Consistory shall be sent to explain what is going to happen next (see #3 below), and accompany the examinee back into Executive Session and to the front of the assembly.

3. The Chairman, on behalf of Classis, shall:
   - acknowledge and give thanks to God for the examinee's success by identifying that/those area(s) of the examination that he sustained; and
   - encourage and instruct him in how he may proceed to pursue the goal of becoming a minister of the Word in the URCNA (e.g. returning, at the request of his Consistory, within 13 months to be examined in that/those area(s) of the examination which he did not sustain.)
4. The accompanying delegate from his Consistory shall offer a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication on behalf of the examinee.
5. The Chairman, before ending Executive Session, shall ask the examinee if he would prefer to remain as an observer when General Session is resumed, or be excused from the Classis before the General Session is resumed.
6. Upon resuming General Session, the Chairman shall announce the outcome of the examination and the broad outlines of the Classis' dealings with the examinee (see #3 above).

Overture #13

Adopted by Classis Central US of the URCNA
Meeting at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella on March 16-17, 2010
Overture to Conclude the Work of the URCNA's Phase 3 Unity Committees

Background:

This overture aims to conclude the work of the "unity committees" which have been laying the groundwork for full federative unity between the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches. This overture calls us to express appreciation for the work that has been accomplished by these committees while acknowledging that our federations are not yet ready to enter into Phase Three of our Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.

Two Essential Principles

However, before proceeding further, we wish to set forth two principles with absolute clarity.

First Principle: We believe that the Lord of the Church does call His people to pursue unity of heart, mind and purpose (Eph. 4:1-6; John 17:20-23).

However, a combination of sinfulness and cultural distinctions sometimes prevents or indefinitely delays *complete* unity among like-minded groups of believers. *We should never be satisfied with such a situation.* But neither should our longing for fuller expressions of unity cause us to sacrifice the unity the Lord already has granted within our existing federations.

Second Principle: We love and respect our Canadian Reformed brothers, and we regard their congregations as like-minded sister churches. *Please do not read anything in this overture as a contradiction of this*.

Since the inception of the URCNA, we have appreciated the encouragement, fellowship and example of our brothers in the Canadian Reformed Churches. We consider the Canadian Reformed Churches to be a federation of true churches which serve the Lord faithfully and admirably. We desire to continue serving the Lord alongside of them, just as we serve alongside our brothers in the Reformed Church in the United States and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (with which we also enjoy Phase 2, or "sister church," relationships).

Division in the Process of Uniting

But, after nearly a decade of struggling to find a way to merge the URC and the CanRC into a single federation, we believe that the process is having a detrimental effect on both federations, as well as on their relationship with one another. In fact, we have become convinced that continued efforts to merge *at this time* will result not in *one* federation, but *three* – because a substantial number of congregations from both existing federations seem almost certain to refuse to remain in a merged federation.

Surely, that unwillingness to manifest a greater degree of federational unity is due *in part* to our sinfulness. But whose sin is it? Time and again, we find ourselves unable to answer that question. We believe the question is unanswerable because many of our differences are rooted not in sin, but in historical and cultural differences. These differences have left both federations with perspectives to which we hold tenaciously – not because of sinful pride, but because we truly believe that our perspective reveals the proper course for the churches to follow.

An excellent example is presented for us in the *Joint Report of the Theological Education Committees of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches* from November, 2009. This report bears witness to an admirable degree of unity concerning our convictions about theological education. However, it also reveals some deep disagreements

which are unlikely to be reconcilable in the near future. As a result, the committee reports that it is unable to propose a model of theological education which is likely to garner the support of both the URC and the CanRC. It is not *sin* which prevents complete unity in this matter. The roadblock arises from the differing perspectives of each federation, which are borne of their unique historical experiences. Each federation has a standard for theological education that serves its churches well. Each believes that its model for theological education includes components which are necessary for the well-being of the churches. And yet at least a few of those components are irreconcilable with components of the other federation's model.

Overcoming such hurdles, we believe, can only be accomplished by living and growing closer to each other over time, without the polarizing pressure of forced compromises.

History of the Unity Process

How did this process begin? Why the URC and the CanRC? And what has made the process seem so urgent? A brief recap of the history of the URC's ecumenical relations will help us to understand the issues we're facing today.

From the URC's first synod in 1996, we have placed a priority on developing close relationships with faithful Reformed church federations. The creation of an Inter-Church Relations Committee (precursor to today's CERCU) was a fruit borne of that first synod in Lynwood.

Within a year, the committee was renamed the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU), and it was given a list of 12 Reformed and Presbyterian federations with which it should pursue ecumenical relations. High on the list were the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches – the OPC because they took the initiative to encourage and invite our relationship; and the CanRC because of our similar histories and unity of confession.

The reports of the CERCU to our earliest synods reveals a strong commitment to pursuing complete federative unity among the true and faithful churches of Christ. This admirable commitment was borne of a strong conviction that the truths we confess in Belgic Confession Articles 27 through 29 are absolutely true and call the churches to manifest the unity of Christ's church to the greatest extent possible.

Thus it was that Synod Escondido 2001 approved a CERCU proposal to enter Phase 2 – Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed

Churches. Our *Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity* at the time said the intent of Phase 2 was: "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." To that end, three committees were appointed to prepare for integrating the church order, songbook, and theological education of the two federations.

The Difficulty of Uniting by Committee

Those committees have continued their work to the present day – but not without encountering substantial difficulties.

The Theological Education Committee came to Synod Schererville 2007 reporting that it was at an impasse in talks with the corresponding CanRC committee. The committee was given more direction to help it complete its work – yet two years later, the committees remain unable to craft a model of theological education which will appease both the URC and the CanRC.

Meanwhile, the Songbook Committee was redirected by Synod Schererville 2007 to focus its efforts on the production of a new URCNA Psalter-Hymnal, while also continuing to dialogue with the CanRC's Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise. This effectively placed the Songbook Committee's unity efforts on the backburner by emphasizing the priority of producing a new songbook for the URCNA alone.

And the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee has now produced a new revision of the PJCO which has raised a substantial amount of concern among many URC consistories. These consistories fear that some of the PJCO's provisions are hierarchical and will improperly grant to broader assemblies functions and authority which should be exercised by the consistories.

It should be noted that these committees continue to function only because of a special exception granted by Synod Schererville 2007. That synod adopted a substantial revision of the *Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity* which relocated the work of such unity committees to Phase 3 – Church Union. Since our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches has only reached Phase 2, the synod approved an exception to "allow the current unity committees of the URCNA (whose work properly belongs to phase 3A) to continue working with their corresponding Canadian Reformed committees while the two federations continue to function in Phase 2" (Acts of Synod 2007, Art. 93).

What will happen next is unclear. It appears that a workable unity of mind

and practice remains elusive with regard both to a joint songbook and to the theological education of ministers. Our Proposed Joint Church Order Committee seems to be having greater success in creating a joint form of government – but the form which they have created is raising substantial amounts of concern, and even animosity, among the churches.

The Need for a New Path to Unity

Despite the best efforts of godly men from both federations, the work of the unity committees does not seem to be drawing us closer to the Canadian Reformed Churches. If anything, the committee reports and status updates seem to be creating a pressure that feeds irrational fears and is encouraging some of our churches to retreat further from the idea of uniting with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Meanwhile, the true progress in uniting our federations is happening at a less-formal level, as both leaders and laymen from our federations interact.

Therefore, we believe the churches of both federations would be better served *at this time* by removing the pressure of our attempts to develop the formal structures of a united federation, which attempts belong to a later stage of the unity process.

Meanwhile, we already acknowledge one another as faithful churches of Jesus Christ. Let us be intentional about assisting one another in the maintenance, defense and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity and discipline. Let us continue accepting one another's members at the Lord's Table; opening our pulpits to each other's ministers; receiving ecclesiastical delegates to our broader assemblies; and encouraging our members to interact with one another. Let us find ways to help one another to pursue the lost, disciple the found, and encourage the saints. And let our CERCU members continue to assist the churches to find ways to dispell fears and increase our mutual recognition of the unity our federations already have, so that future efforts to enter Phase Three might be received with the enthusiastic support of the churches.

And may the Lord would use these informal, face-to-face contacts to bind together our hearts, such that our eventual unity of federations will arise as a natural product of our knowledge of and love for each other.

Overture:

Classis Central US overtures Synod London 2010:

1. To explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed

Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow-workers in the Kingdom;

2. To express our thanks to the members of our unity committees, as well as the members of the corresponding committees in the Canadian Reformed Churches, for their faithful service;

3. To conclude the current mandates of the unity committees which have been laying the groundwork for integrated federative church unity between United Reformed and Canadian Reformed federations, by:
   a. Continuing the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a URCNA Psalter Hymnal,
   b. Declaring that the mandate of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee has been fulfilled, and
   c. Dissolving the Theological Education Committee.

4. To instruct the Committee for Ecumenicity and Church Unity to continue facilitating opportunities for both leaders and laymen of the URCNA to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Grounds:

1. **The Need for True Unity:** True unity cannot be forced. It arises from a mutual recognition of the unity we have in Christ, by the Spirit, in accord with the truth we confess (Eph. 4:3-6). But that recognition cannot be merely academic. It must abide in our pews, among our people, as they gain a knowledge of and appreciation for the Canadian Reformed Churches. By taking this action, we remove the threat of imminent, drastic changes, which in many cases are preventing our people from seeing the unity of heart and mind they already share with their Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters.

2. **Polarization in Our Current Process:** Our current unity process is becoming counter-productive, polarizing consistories along pro-unity and anti-unity lines. By removing the pressure created by this process, we can clear the way for our members and congregations to develop relationships with CanRC members and congregations, as has begun to occur in many places with the OPC and RCUS.

3. **Limitations of Unity Committees:** Unless we attain to unity that arises from the heart, all of our efforts are for naught. Yet our unity committees can only lay the groundwork for an external, procedural unity. Until we have grown to trust one another more fully and to love one another more truly, such efforts to create external unity will continue to cause

friction and bitterness. However, such committees are not essential to the process of increasing unity between the URC and the CanRC.

4. **Likely Outcome of Our Current Process:** At this point, it seems very likely that the current process will result in three federations rather than one, thereby further splintering Christ's church. This would be a tragedy and a sin – especially if we can avoid such an outcome simply by refocusing our efforts from *committees* to *communion of the saints*. It would be wiser to remain in our distinct federations *for now*, while recognizing one another as likeminded fellow-servants – like Joab and Abishai, encouraging and aiding one another as we both fight for the King (1 Chronicles 19).

5. **The Unity We Already Have:** Remaining in our distinct federations for the foreseeable future need not prevent us from manifesting a substantial degree of the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17:20-23. Because we acknowledge one another as sister federations in ecclesiastical fellowship, we have committed to acknowledge each other as true churches, to hold one another accountable, and to assist each other in defending and promoting the faith. *This involves a great deal of the unity for which Christ prayed*, even without sharing one another's songbooks, seminaries, and broader assemblies.

6. **The Use of Our Resources:** Neither the United Reformed Churches nor the Canadian Reformed Churches is a large federation of churches. We have limited resources to devote to this important work of uniting our federations. By concluding *for now* the work of these unity committees, men who are passionate about our calling to manifest the unity of Christ are made available to pursue the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built.

7. **The Opportunity of the Present:** Despite the fears and disagreements that exist in some of our consistories, progress is being made toward increasing unity, understanding and sympathy between the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches. By removing the perceived threat which the unity committees have become, we will create an environment more conducive to gaining mutual understanding of and appreciation for one another, that our eventual federative unity might rest on a unity which our people recognize and appreciate.

Overture #14

Adopted by Classis Central US of the URCNA
Meeting at the URC of Wellsburg on November 10-11, 2008
Overture to Define Synodical Statements

Background:

As a federation of churches, the URCNA has shown a slightly conflicted view of its synods. On the one hand, we have said clearly and repeatedly that the church is governed by (local) elders, not by broader assemblies (Church Order Art. 21 and 25; *Foundational Principles of Church Government* 5.-7.). However, even as we say this, our synodical agendas frequently include a number of requests that the assembly adopt statements or make affirmations regarding various points of doctrine or life which would seem to bind the consistories.

There is some confusion here – but of an entirely understandable form.

We agree that the Word of God alone ought to guide our churches in seeking unity of faith and confession (*Belgic Confession of Faith* Art. 5, 7, 29, 32). It is because of their agreement with the Word of God that we regard our creeds and confessions as "forms of unity." Indeed, in all areas, our churches agree that we should strive to ensure that "all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledge as the only Head of the Church" (*BCF* Art. 29).

Yet despite our agreement that Scripture alone should serve as our standard and rule, disagreements about doctrine and differences in practice continue to arise among us. Such diversity has been experienced by the church throughout the ages, both in matters relatively benign (different song books) and matters central to the faith (heresies and significant errors). Such diversity is sure to arise among federations comprising men whose backgrounds vary and whose surrounding cultures differ. Federational diversity is made even more certain – and more ominous – by the presence of sin.

Therefore it is understandable that the assemblies of the churches sometimes desire to study questions of common concern in greater depth, or even to issue statements of pastoral advice. Such statements can be helpful for alerting the churches to threats, clarifying points of doctrine, and generally helping the churches "to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors in the broader assemblies" (*Foundational Principles of Church Government* 9.).

However, it is imperative that we understand the significance of statements made and reports received by our assemblies. In our short history, we have adopted a statement of affirmation concerning the teaching of Scripture on creation (*Acts of Synod Escondido 2001*, Art. 43) and a statement of pastoral advice incorporating a series of rejected errors (*Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Art. 72), along with several statements of affirmation concerning the doctrine of justification (see *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Art. 67). Our synods also have heard a number of appeals and have appointed a study committee to examine a recent theological movement.

What is the status of the statements we have adopted? What is the significance of adopting "pastoral advice"? When our study committee reports, what will its conclusions mean?

We do well to determine the answer to these questions now, while there are no emotionally charged issues at stake. By adopting a series of definitions, we can answer these questions and make plain to our synodical delegates – as well as to our churches and our sister federations – the import of the actions we are taking.

The other alternative is to leave these matters undefined, allowing them to cause discord between those who would regard all decisions as absolutely binding and those who regard only Scripture and the confessions as such. We believe this would be harmful to the peace and unity of the churches.

Overture:

Classis Central US overtures Synod London 2010:

1. To adopt the following definitions regarding the status of advice and affirmations, findings of study committees, and determinations of judicial appeals; and

2. To incorporate these definitions into the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

1. Synodical Pastoral Advice & Doctrinal Affirmations

1.1. From time to time, synods of the URCNA may deem it advisable to issue statements of "pastoral advice" or doctrinal "affirmations" to the churches.

1.2. Such statements should be received with reverence and respect, as they represent the wisdom of the majority of the delegates of a

given synod. They should not be directly contradicted in preaching, since it is unwise to deal from the pulpit with controversial matters which are not clearly specified in the confessions.

1.3. Synodical statements of pastoral advice are not to be regarded as an "extra-confessional binding" on the members or office-bearers of the federation. Such advice does not have the status of our creeds or confessions.

1.4. Synodical statements of pastoral advice cannot be used as grounds in any charges of false teaching brought against any office-bearer. Only Scripture and the confessions may be used for such grounds.

1.5. A synodical statement of pastoral advice may be appealed to a subsequent synod.

2. Study Committee Reports

2.1. In response to overtures from the churches, synods have the right to appoint committees to investigate and evaluate particular problems, ideas, or courses of action.

2.2. The findings of study committee reports shall not be "adopted" by synod, thereby to avoid the appearance of adopting extra-confessional bindings.

2.3. When a synod is satisfied that a study committee has fulfilled its mandate, its findings shall be "referred to the churches for study."

2.4. The effectiveness and authority of the findings of a study committee will derive from its adherence to Scripture and the cogency of its arguments – not from its origination with an assembly of the church.

2.5. The official position of the federation on a given subject is to be found only in its creeds and confessions. Additions to the creeds and confessions should never be made unilaterally, but only in cooperation and coordination with our sister federations and denominations.

3. Determinations of Judicial Appeals

3.1. It belongs to the ministerial role of synods to render judgment regarding appeals to decisions of the narrower assemblies (Church

Order Art. 29 & 31). Such appeals may address charges brought against individuals or general decisions of the assemblies of the federation.

3.2. The determination of an appeal shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that it is in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. Because they are in agreement with the Word of God, the determinations of such appeals are to be received with respect and submission.

3.3. The judicial determination of an appeal shall be binding only for the case involved.

Grounds:

1. These definitions would clarify the nature and significance of the work produced by our synods.

2. In the interest of doing all things decently and in good order (1 Cor. 14:40), it is wise for the churches to understand the significance of the decisions they ask their synods to make.

3. A significant amount of unrest could be avoided if we openly agree that the work our synodical delegates perform is not intended to impose extra-confessional bindings upon the churches.

4. These definitions also would clarify for our sister federations the significance of the decisions our synods have made.

Overture #15

Classis Southwest U.S.
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
Office of the Clerk

March 13, 2010

To the Stated Clerk of the Federation of United Reformed Church in North America,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Classis Southwest U.S. met in Twin Falls, Idaho, on June 12-13, 2007. At that meeting, we adopted the attached overture. We submitted it for consideration to Synod 2007, but it was disallowed due to the tardiness of our submission.

Therefore, we request that it be included in the agenda for Synod 2010.

In His Service,

Rev. Stephen Donovan, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Classis Southwest U.S.
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
Office of the Clerk

Overture to Amend Church Order Article 29 and 31

Background
The right of appeal has long been a principle found in reformed church polity. It is one of the "checks and balances" of presbyterial church government. Our Church Order makes reference to this right in two separate articles. Article 31 deals with the right of an *individual* to appeal to a broader assembly, "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." Article 29 deals with the right of an *assembly* to appeal to the broader assembly. It says, "If any assembly complains of having been wronged by the decision of another assembly, it shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies." However, Article 29 also includes the following sentence about an individual's appeal, "An individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly". This sentence seems to belong more properly to Article 31 than Article 29, and its current placement has lead to some confusion in appeal cases.

Therefore, Classis Southwest U.S., respectfully overtures Synod London, Ontario, 2010:

To remove the second sentence of Article 29, "An individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly," and to move it to become the second sentence of Article 31.

Grounds:
1. This is in keeping with the different appellants addressed in each article.
2. This would help clarify the first step when an individual decides to make an appeal.
3. Nothing will be lost by making this change.

In His Service,
Rev. Stephen Donovan, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture #16

Classis Southwest U.S.
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

Overture:
Classis Southwest US overtures Synod London, Ontario 2010 to create a procedure whereby congregations that desire to federate with the URCNA according to Church Order, Article 32, may be received, by doing the following:

1) Adopting the "Application for Church Membership into the United Reformed Churches in North America" (attached);
2) Posting this "Application" prominently on the URCNA's website;
3) Including any such applications heretofore into the agenda of Synod to provide the church with information about the provisionally received congregations of the various Classes before a vote is taken on their ratification.

Background:
Over the past several Synods, one of the ways the United Reformed Churches have grown is by outside congregations deciding to unite with us. These congregations are provisionally accepted as members of the federation in each respective Classis, and then at each Synod, these congregations are ratified for membership (Church Order, art. 32). While a cause of joy, these ratifications occur without the majority of congregations having much information about each church. Because of this, the overture is made.

Grounds:

1) This will provide a means of outreach via the internet to interested churches.
2) This will provide a standardized way for the Classes and Synod to receive new congregations.
3) This will provide the member churches with necessary information on each church being ratified at each Synod.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Stephen Donovan - Stated Clerk
1850 N. Broadway
Escondido, CA 92026

Application for Church Membership into the United Reformed Churches in North America

We are very happy that you have expressed interest in affiliating with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). We are churches that take seriously our dual tasks of preserving and promoting the biblical and Reformed faith. We would be happy to have you join us in the fulfillment of this task God has given to His Church. Enclosed is a copy of the Three Forms of Unity to which we subscribe, as well as our Church Order.

In order to facilitate your desire to be part of the URCNA, we would kindly request that you fill out the following questionnaire and follow the Procedure for Application below.

Name of Church

History

1. When did your church begin?
2. Where is your church located?
3. What is your past/present denominational affiliation?
4. How familiar is your church with the URCNA? Explain.

Theology

1. How well does the church understand the Reformed faith?
2. How familiar is the church with the Three Forms of Unity?
3. What level of commitment is there to the Three Forms of Unity?

Worship

1. Do you currently hold worship services on the Lord's Day? If so, when?
2. Describe your manner of worship.

Church Government

1. How is your church presently governed?
2. How well does your church's council (session, church board, steering committee) understand the Church Order of the URCNA?
3. What level of commitment is there to the Church Order?

Shepherding

1. What specific major problems, if any, have been part of the history of the church?

Finances

1. What is the financial condition of your church? (Please tell us of the giving patterns of the congregation, any debt on the property, the current budget, etc.)

Future

1. What are the specific goals and plans for the ministry of the church?

Procedure for Application

1. The completed application is to be sent to the Interim Committee of Synod (info inserted here).
2. Upon receipt of the completed application the Interim Committee shall arrange for an interview between a neighboring church council and the applicant's governing body.
3. Upon a satisfactory interview the neighboring council shall provide assistance to the church/group making application, and shall report their labors to the next Classis meeting.
4. The neighboring council shall see that the provisions of the Church Order are followed in the church/group making application, that the church/group members are convinced of the Reformed faith, that appropriate training and instruction take place for the church/group membership where such is needed, that adherence to the Creeds and Confessions as well as the Church Order is insured, that the appropriate steps for possible reception of the pastor(s) are followed, that a report of its activities in this regard are reported to each meeting of Classis, and that it brings an appropriate recommendation concerning the church's reception to Classis when all is in order.

For the Consistory,

, Clerk

Overture #17

Classis Pacific Northwest of the URCNA overtures Synod 2010 regarding timely, effective, and user-friendly communications for the churches, as follows:

1. To mandate the printing and distribution of the Acts of Synod within 90 days of the close of business of the synod and to have the Acts of Synod fully indexed.

Grounds:

1. The Acts of Synod need to be distributed in an indexed and readable format, within sufficient time for the churches to respond to requests for ratification of specific decisions.
2. It is noted that the Acts of Synod Schererville of July 2007 in complete form with reports and index were not available to the churches until approximately 18 months later.
3. The printed Acts of Synod need to be indexed in a manner that allows individual reports and overtures to be traced through the Acts.

Rev. Kevin Efflandt
Stated Clerk, Classis Pacific Northwest

Overture #18

Classis Pacific Northwest of the URCNA overtures Synod 2010 to thank the Joint Church Order Committee for their extensive work to date; and it requests that the committee be disbanded and the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) be received for information.

Grounds:

1. We believe the current URCNA church order provides a better framework for ruling and guiding the local church of Christ and relating the local congregation to the federation of churches for purposes of accountability.
2. We believe the PJCO contains provisions that adversely affect "rule by elders" in the local church by unnecessarily subjecting the original authority from Christ vested in local elders, to the decisions of broader assemblies, thereby encouraging hierarchical governance arrangements in the churches.
3. We cite the following areas of concern that remain unresolved as of the writing of this overture. Original authority in the Church of Christ, where it resides, how it is exercised, and what aspects can be delegated to assemblies for the churches in common lie at the heart of our concerns. We believe that the PJCO significantly confuses original authority and derived authority, particularly as follows:
    a. Article 28: We do not believe that the introduction of regional synods really enhances governance of the church. Instead we believe it simply adds levels of bureaucracy and a sense of hierarchy to the federation.

b. Article 29 (but also referenced in other articles): We do not believe it is appropriate to appoint men with only derived authority to advise broader assemblies as Deputies of Regional Synod. We believe the potential for abuse of office and "lording it over" will increase with this type of appointment.
c. We believe the articles dealing with the calling of a Minister of the Word tend to confuse who really supervises him, consistory or classis.
d. Articles 25 and 30: We believe that the delegates to the broader assemblies should be selected or appointed by the consistories of the churches from their own number. We believe that the lawful constitution of a synod consists in a gathering of all the churches and therefore it should be constituted by men delegated from each church in the federation. This enables each congregation to participate in the broader assemblies, helps guard against the danger of assemblies that are disconnected from the local churches, and prevents broader assemblies from taking up matters that are best finished in the local churches.
e. Article 35: We believe that the liturgy in the local church should effectively be regulated by the consistory using principals of biblical and reformed worship, including the selection and setting of Psalms and Hymns in worship.
f. Article 36: We believe that the local consistory is responsible for permitting men to fill the pulpit to deliver the full council of God, and to exhort the congregation. We consider the prior approbation of classis an unnecessary encumbrance to the occasional need to supply the pulpit using men who have demonstrated their love for biblical preaching and the Reformed Confessions to the local consistory.

4. We are persuaded by the wisdom of the following: "The order under which the churches live is regulatory but does not work by compulsion. It should prescribe matters exactly so that there may be no deviation from Scripture and the Confession. Yet the application of this principle must leave a great deal of freedom in church life."[3]

Rev. Kevin Efflandt
Stated Clerk, Classis Pacific Northwest

3 See J. Jansen, Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordering, (1st ed., Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1923), quoted in Bound Yet Free Readings in Reformed Church Polity, in a paper by J. Van Dalen entitled "The Scriptural Principles of Church Polity" Dr. J. De Jong editor, Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1995.

Appeal to Synod 2010
From Hills United Reformed Church
Regarding the "Nine Points" of Synod Schererville 2007

Background:

When Synod Schererville 2007 convened, one of the items of business on its agenda was Overture 5 from Classis Michigan urging the adoption of a report from the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS).

Specifically, this overture asked the assembly to adopt six resolutions (see Appendix A). The first resolution was a reaffirmation of "the truth of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, including the imputation of the active obedience of Christ as a necessary element in our righteousness before God, as it is expressed in the Three Forms of Unity." The next three resolutions expressed judgments concerning the teachings of a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. The fifth resolution would have made the RCUS report available to all the churches of the URCNA and to the denominations and federations with which we have fraternal relations. And the sixth resolution would have expressed thanks to and agreement with the RCUS.

This overture was entrusted to an advisory committee, which then brought recommendations to the assembly for answering this overture. Each of these recommendations was adopted. (See *Acts of Synod Schererville*, Art. 67 & Art. 72.)

The first action taken in response to this overture was to "not accede to Overture 5, which overtures Synod 2007 to adopt the report of the Reformed Church in the United States regarding justification" (Art. 67). The assembly had determined not to adopt the RCUS report as its own.

The delegates then adopted, without dissent, two brief statements. Together, these two statements summarized and affirmed what we confess in the Three Forms of Unity concerning the doctrine of justification by faith alone, including the imputation of the active obedience of Christ as a necessary element in our righteousness before God – a clear answer to Overture 5's first resolution.

The adoption of these statements was followed by the adoption of a reminder and an encouragement to the individuals and churches of the URCNA "that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52,

55, 61, 62) for addressing theological error" (Art. 67). This seems to have answered the second, third and fourth resolution from Overture 5. While the assembly had decided not to accede to the overture, it had answered its requested resolutions.

Later that day, however, the advisory committee returned with additional recommendations for addressing Overture 5. Most of these concerned the appointment of a study committee "to examine by the Word of God and our Confessions the teachings of the so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justification" (Art. 72). This action would result in the creation of a report similar in concept to the RCUS report – an apparent answer to the overture's overall intention.

However, the advisory committee also recommended that synod adopt a statement comprising nine rejections of error, to be presented to the churches "as pastoral advice" (Art. 72). This statement is nowhere found in Overture 5 or the RCUS report it brought to the synod, nor does it directly answer any of the six resolutions advanced by Overture 5. Prior to the evening of July 12, 2007 – when delegates debated and adopted the statement – the "nine points" statement had not been seen, studied or discussed by the delegates to Synod Schererville or the consistories which sent them.

Since that time, this "pastoral advice" statement has prompted a significant amount of discussion and concern, both within the URCNA and among its sister federations. There seems to be little clarity concerning its origins, its purpose, or even its status within our churches.

Appeal:

The Consistory of Hills United Reformed Church in Hills, Minnesota, appeals to URCNA Synod London 2010 to declare that Synod Schererville 2007 erred in adopting the so-called "pastoral advice" recorded in Article 72; and to declare that action null and void.

Grounds:

1. The consideration and adoption of this statement of nine points occurred in violation of Church Order Art. 25.

    a. CO Art. 25 states that all matters considered by a broader assembly "shall originate with a Consistory and be considered by classis before being considered by synod."

    b. However, this statement of "pastoral advice" with its detailed

rejections of error neither originated with a consistory nor received endorsement by any consistory or classis before its consideration by Synod Schererville.

2. The statement of nine points does not address a specific request in Overture 5.

    a. The two brief statements and the brief reminder and encouragement recorded in Art. 67 of *Acts 2007* directly addressed the resolutions sought by the overture.

    b. The study committee appointed in Art. 72 corresponds directly to the request made by the overture.

    c. But the "pastoral advice" statement has no concrete basis in the overture which was legally before the synod.

3. The statement of nine points itself is of questionable status.

    a. The statement was adopted as "pastoral advice," which would seem to not be binding.

    b. However, the rejections which comprise this "advice" repeatedly cite articles from the Three Forms of Unity for support, implying that the statement is confessional – even in places where it departs from the language of the confessions.

    c. This necessarily leads to confusion concerning the status of this statement and whether office-bearers and churches of the URCNA legitimately can disagree with its formulations.

Done in Consistory on _____, 2008

The Consistory of Hills United Reformed Church

Rev. Doug Barnes, Chairman
Elder Dan Top, Clerk

Appendix A: ***Overture 5 to Synod Schererville 2007***

Classis Michigan overtures the 2007 URCNA Synod to adopt the REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO STUDY JUSTIFICATION IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT JUSTIFICATION CONTROVERSY presented to 258th Synod of the Reformed Church of the United States on May 10-13, 2004 as our own by adopting the following resolutions:**

Resolution 1: That we reaffirm the truth of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, including the imputation of the active obedience of Christ as a necessary element in our righteousness before God, as it is expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, specifically in those passages highlighted in the RCUS report.

Resolution 2: That we find that Rev. Norman Shepherd for many years has taught a confused doctrine of justification, contrary to the Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt as specified in the RCUS report.

Resolution 3: Therefore, we also resolve that the teachings of Norman Shepherd on justification by faith are another gospel.

Resolution 4: That the United Reformed Churches in North America recognize these Romish, Arminian, and Socinian errors for what they are and urge our brethren throughout the world to reject them and to refuse those who teach them.

Resolution 5: That the RCUS report, along with the supplementary material, be made available to the churches of the URCNA and to all denominations or federations in fraternal relations with us.

Resolution 6: That we express our thanks to the RCUS for their work on this matter and inform them of our agreement with them on our common confessional understanding of these matters.

**Note: Resolutions 1-5 accurately reflect the decisions and conclusions of the RCUS and have been modified only by changing RCUS to URC where necessary. Resolution 6 has been added as a matter of courtesy.

GROUNDS

1. Synod Calgary (2004) made a clear statement about the "active obedience" of Christ (see "Background" above). This report on justification

gives Scriptural and Confessional support for that statement.

2. The URC is seeking closer federative relations with the RCUS making it necessary that the two federations be in agreement on all things essential. The doctrine of justification is of the very essence of the Reformed Faith, therefore the URC and the RCUS cannot "Walk together unless they agree" on that doctrine (Amos 3:3).

3. Although prepared and adopted by a body outside of our federation, this document and its conclusions are biblically and confessionally correct and therefore we do not have to assign a committee of our own men to spend much time, money, and energy, only to arrive at the same conclusions. We can and may adopt this work as our own.

Signed: Rev. W. H. Oord, clerk of classis.

Appendix B: ***Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*****, Article 67**

Advisory Committee 6 (continued from Art. 42)

Recommendations:

1. That Synod 2007 **not** accede to Overture 5, which overtures Synod 2007 to adopt the report of the Reformed Church of the United States regarding justification.

2. That Synod 2007 reaffirm the statement of Synod 2004, "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" (*Acts of Synod 2004*, Article 66).

Adopted without dissent

3. That Synod 2007 affirm that the Scriptures and confessions teach that faith is the sole instrument of our justification apart from all works (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 61, "Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only." Cf. Belgic Confession Articles 22,24).

Adopted without dissent

4. That Synod 2007 remind and encourage individuals and churches that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) for addressing theological error.

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 6 continued in Art. 72.)

Appendix C: *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Article 72

Advisory Committee 6 (continued from Art. 67)

Recommendations:

1. That Synod 2007 present the following statement to the churches as pastoral advice:

   Synod 2007 affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod 2007 rejects the errors of those:

   a. who deny or modify the teaching that "God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness," able to perform the "commandment of life" as the representative of mankind (HC Q&A 6, 9; BC 14);
   b. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the "commandment of life" given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC Q&A 19, 21, 56, 60);
   c. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
   d. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC Q&A 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
   e. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the

covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);

f. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29);

g. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the "instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness" (BC 22-24; HC Q&A 21, 60, 86);

h. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than "leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified" or "a certain knowledge" of and "a hearty trust" in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC Q&A 21);

i. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC Q&A 52; BC 37).

Adopted

2. That Synod 2007 appoint a study committee to examine by the Word of God and our Confessions the teachings of the so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justification; and present a clear statement on these matters to the next synod for the benefit of the churches and the consistories.

Adopted

3. That Synod 2007 appoint the following men (two from each classis) to this committee:

Eastern US – Rev. Mark Stewart; Rev. Steve Arrick
Southern Ontario – Rev. Dick Wynia; Rev. Christo Heiberg
Michigan – Rev. Brian Vos (secretary); Rev. Rick Miller
Classis Central US – Dr. Cornel Venema; Rev. Patrick Edouard (chair)
Classis Pacific Northwest – Rev. Chris Gordon; Rev. Kevin Efflandt
Classis Western Canada – Rev. Bill Pols; Rev. Eric Fennema
Classis Southwest – Dr. Mike Horton; Rev. Marcelo Souza

Adopted

4. That Synod 2007 instruct this study committee to submit its report to the stated clerk by July 1, 2009.

Adopted

5. That Synod 2007 declare this to be its answer to Overture 5.

Adopted

PERSONAL APPEALS

Two personal appeals were submitted for inclusion in the Agenda for Synod 2010. The convening consistory determined that one appeal was only partially in order, i.e. of three parts submitted, two were no longer properly before us. In the other case, the document submitted could not be classified as an appeal but did contain matters of a serious nature. In both appeals the subject matter and contents were of a nature that could not be shared publically.

Therefore it is the opinion of the convening consistory that both of these appeals be given to a small committee of pre-advice who can then make a judgement on how to handle these sensitive matters.

The General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Burlington, Ontario, Canada May, 2010

To the United Reformed Churches in North America and to the General Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America meeting from July 27 -30, 2010 in London, Ontario, Canada

Esteemed Brothers,

We greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and wish to inform you that, as your brothers in the Lord, it is our fervent prayer that the King of the church will richly bless the work of your General Synod of London.

We are taking the somewhat unusual step of writing to you about the state of our discussions in pursuit of ecclesiastical unity. In this way we hope to share our views and hopes with you.

Brothers, be assured that we do not want to come across as being overly aggressive or insensitive in these matters. We realize full well that we should not rush into a merger of our respective churches but that we need to be patient with one another in our efforts to grow closer.

In the 1990's representatives from our respective churches met over a considerable period of time to discuss a wide range of issues and came to a Statement of Agreement in 2001. This Statement served at both the General Synods of Neerlandia and Escondido as the background for entering into Phase 2 of merger discussions.

To date these discussions have borne mixed fruit. Our Songbook and Forms & Prayers subcommittees have made little or no progress. The Theological Education sub¬committees have produced a report with a number of conclusions and recommendations that have met with a mixed reaction. The Church Order Committee, composed of members from both federations, has been the most successful in coming to both our Synods with an extensive report recommending, among other things, the adoption of a new Joint Church Order.

At our General Synod of Burlington, our churches have reacted to these committees and the progress of their work (or the lack of it) by sending us numerous letters expressing support, concerns, as well as objections to various points and recommendations.

At the same time it needs to be noted that not one Canadian (American) Reformed Church has urged us to cease the discussions or to put the matter of a future merger on hold. We interpret this as a sign from our churches that there continues to be broad support for this road on which we are traveling together.

Of course, we would not want to give you the impression that there are no concerns on the part of our churches. These are certainly present. And yet there lives in our churches a deep desire to be faithful to the prayer and will of our common Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Canadian Reformed Churches have always tried, with many shortcomings, to take the high priestly prayer of our Lord as recorded in John 17, with great seriousness. Our Lord prays there for Himself, for His followers and even for future believers. About the latter, He prays that "all of them may be one" (v. 21), indeed, that they may be as one as are the Father and the Son.

Some people see this as being a reference to spiritual unity with little or no implications for organizational, structural or visible unity. We respectfully disagree and are convinced that while being spiritual in character, this unity should come to concrete expression as well. Part of our Lord's prayer includes this sentence, "may they (the believers) be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (v.23)

It is thus our calling as churches of Christ not only to recognize the unity that exists, but also to express this unity in concrete and discernible ways. We should let the world know and see that we are one.

Besides the fact that this is our calling, we also believe that it is not by accident that the Lord has caused our paths to cross and to come this far on the road of church unity. Obviously He sees that we would benefit from one another.

As a relatively new federation, we can benefit from your drive, enthusiasm and boldness to take the Reformed faith into new areas and places as evidenced by your numerous church plants. We can learn from your doctrinal struggles. We can learn from your deeper understanding of our North American culture and how best to meet its challenges.

At the same time we may have a few beneficial things to offer you in the areas of federation building, church polity and foreign missions.

Hence we believe that with our respective strengths and weaknesses, we complement each other and can be of great service to one another. There is a real sense in which we need each other and can be a real blessing to one another.

There is more, for we also need to be sensitive to the fact that this is not just about us. This is also about the North American continent that we share and its headlong descent into secularism. The church scene around us is deteriorating rapidly and both American and Canadian societies are becoming more and more hostile to the gospel. In such an environment we need each other's help, support and encouragement.

Our calling also relates to the world and the cause of advancing the

Reformed faith internationally. Brothers, we live in exciting and challenging times. Many new and struggling churches in other parts of the world are discovering the deep riches of the Reformed faith and they are looking to us as faithful Reformed churches in North America for help and guidance. They want to know more about our Confessions, to adopt our polity and to steep themselves in our heritage. As a result we as Canadian Reformed Churches are being inundated with cries of "come over and help us" from believers in China, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, and other countries. We believe that the same pressures are being felt and experienced in your midst.

The international opportunities are thus boundless but at the same time we also believe that they place us under an additional obligation when it comes to church unity. We can hardly teach others with credibility and be a good example to them if we can no longer muster the desire and determination to deal with our remaining differences and achieve unity.

Yes, and there are some differences between us that still need work. We, from our side, would urge you to join with us in re-appointing the Joint Church Order Committee to finalize its work. We have decided to adopt provisionally the Proposed Joint Church Order. At the same time we have passed on to it several matters that require resolution. You may well decide to do the same with some of your concerns.

We would also ask you to give serious consideration to appointing a new Theological Education Committee that would find ways to incorporate the principle our churches hold dear – that the churches are responsible for the training for the ministry – as we apply that principle in Hamilton. At the same time we see the importance of continuing to be sensitive to, and supportive of the needs and concerns of the seminaries that have served your churches so well.

With respect to the work of the Songbook and the Forms and Prayers committees, we have decided to re-appoint them in the hope that they will assist our churches as we prepare for unity.

Coming to a different but related matter, it may also be beneficial if more ways were found to build bridges between our churches, and then in particular between your churches in the United States and our churches in Canada. At present there is a great deal of interaction between the churches of both our federations in Canada. Local gatherings, ministerial meetings, youth rallies, joint evangelistic efforts and pulpit exchanges are common. The same is not happening in the United States, and it may never happen seeing that there are very few of our churches south of the border. Still, there are ways to address the challenges of distance and geography and one of them is for classes to link up and to develop a practice of sending and receiving fraternal delegates whenever there is a classical meeting north or south of the border to bring greetings, answer questions and promote fellowship.

In conclusion, brothers, we would appeal to you not to place the unity discussions on hold or to terminate them. We fully realize that the road ahead is still filled with a number of challenges, but we would remind you that much has already been achieved. From our side we can honestly say that we have learned and gained a great deal from our joint discussions over the past number of years. If there are still specific matters that make you hesitant, we would ask you to formulate them and pass them along to us for our consideration.

Thankfully and humbly, we do not labour in our own strength nor are we pursuing our own agenda. The Head and King of the church has prayed for our unity and wants us to be one, so let us soldier on with good confidence in Him and in the power of His Spirit. May the Lord bless our joint efforts and give us the vision and boldness to work now for what will one day come to us in perfect measure, namely a church of Jesus Christ that is truly and eternally one, gathered from all the tribes, nations and peoples of the earth. To Him be the glory!

With brotherly greetings,

For the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, on this 20th day of the year of our Lord 2010.

(Signed by all the members of Synod)

General Synod Burlington Ebenezer 2010
Linked in Faith

June 7, 2010

To the General Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
Meeting from July 27-30, 2010 in London, Ontario, Canada

Esteemed Brothers,

Greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. General Synod Burlington 2010 of the Canadian Reformed Churches in dealing with the relationship between our federations made the following decision:

To request Synod London of the URCNA to clarify the status of the Nine Points of Schererville as a whole and to give a further explanation of Point 6 in particular.

In the considerations that led to this decision General Synod Burlington 2010 noted that Synod Schererville of URCNA in article 72 adopted a 9 point statement and presented it to the churches as "pastoral advice." Seeing that the expression "pastoral advice" is not explained, questions have arisen in our churches as well as at Regional Synod East of the CanRC about the character of this advice. There is need to ask General Synod London of the URCNA to clarify the nature of this decision. Is it confessionally binding or not? It would be beneficial if Synod London at the same time would clarify point 6. Several of our churches view this point as being directed at the CanRC and, according to them, it seems to be in conflict with the Reformed view of the covenant that was upheld by the Liberation of 1944 in The Netherlands.

Wishing you the blessing of the Lord on your work as General Synod,

On behalf of General Synod 2010,

Rev. Douwe G.J. Agema, second clerk

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Report to Synod London

Esteemed Brethren,

As a Committee we are grateful for the privilege of serving the churches of our federation in the cause of the unity of Christ's church. How good is the Lord that we do not have to stand alone in fighting the good fight of faith! What an encouragement to labour shoulder to shoulder with true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus who share with us the same convictions concerning the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline for punishing sin. How blessed are we to enjoy the brotherhood of those who love to sing psalms and faithful hymns, hold to the regulative principle of worship, practice Word-centred mission and evangelism, cherish rule of the household of God by elders, set apart Sunday as the Lord's Day, and value Christian education for our children. Ecumenical relations are a Scriptural, confessional, spiritual, and practical reality, and we benefit from them on a daily basis far more than we realize!

Faithful Reformed, Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis are increasingly rare in polytheistic North America, so we prize it where ever we find it, and yearn to treasure the fellowship we have with churches of like precious faith and practice. For this reason the URCNA has been eager to pursue ecumenical relations from its inception, and has mandated our committee to do some leg work in this cause.

As churches we recognize that unity of the Body of Christ is created through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and discovered in our common confession with other Christian churches and believers. The unity which those in the true church enjoy begins with their being joined, by faith, in the Spirit, to Christ, her Head and Husband. The primary foundation of that unity is not to be found in the externalities of organizational or institutional structures. It is a reality we already have with one another and with other faithful churches of the Lord Jesus.

Our task, and our desire as churches indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is to make every effort to express that unity of faith in visible ways, *keeping* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The churches may appoint a committee as a vehicle to assist in the dialogue between federations, but unity is the gift and task that Christ has given to the churches to practice locally, regionally, and internationally. We are called by God to develop ways to serve, edify and deepen our fellowship with one another in order that our enmity toward one another may be resolved, our distance removed, and our mutual

love and submission increased. As this happens, we may look for a natural and organic development toward federative unity. Let us give ourselves to one another as Christ gave Himself to us!

As you read this report of our committee's labours and of the faith of the churches with whom we are in ecumenical relations, we hope that this will encourage each congregation's yearning for the unity of the Body and help to facilitate ways of working together with other churches for the coming of God's kingdom.

Exercising, developing and enjoying the gift of fellowship with the 10 federations and denominations named by previous synods serves the cause of Christ's Church and kingdom in very important ways. (a) It shows the world that the God and His Son are one. (John 17:22-23) (b) As we love one another we show the world that we are disciples of Christ who first loved us. (John 13:34-35) (c) Striving side by side in the cause of the Gospel strengthens believers and churches in contending for the Gospel. (Phil. 1:27-28) (d) Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace honours the unity of the Trinity, of the body of Christ, and of the true faith. (Eph. 4:1-6) (e) harmony between believers and churches with different backgrounds magnifies the power of Christ's blood to reconcile into one new man two who were at enmity. (Eph. 2:13-16)

To summarize, the glory and power of the visible, tangible unity of the Church of Christ is great, and worthy of pursuit! May the Lord bless our work to that end.

I. Committee Mandate and Guidelines

The following is the mandate given to us by Synod Hudsonville (1999):

> **COMMITTEE 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.

CERCU seeks to honour this mandate according to the following guidelines as revised by Synod Schererville (2007). A few editorial changes (indicated by strikethrough and underline) are proposed for the sake of clarity, for which we seek the approval of synod:

> **COMMITTEE GUIDELINES**
> 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.
>
> ***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 federations' 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 desir-

able. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in acknowledgment of the desirability of 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 phase shall be accomplished in two steps:

Step A – <u>Development</u> of [1] ***the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union***

Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful churches, the federations shall make preparation for and a commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of 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~~[2] 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

Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by <u>a majority of</u>

the consistories as required in Church Order, Art. 36.

Step B – Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union
This final step[3] shall only be taken when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of ecclesiastical union. Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order, Art. 36.

Grounds for editorial changes:

1 What the federations are committing to do under Step A is *develop* a plan of union since there is as yet no plan in place.

2 These words were retained from the pre-2007 edition but actually belong now under Step B where they are already found in substance.

3 The word *step* was inadvertently left out by Synod Schererville.

The guidelines are reproduced below incorporating the proposed editorial changes:

COMMITTEE GUIDELINES
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.

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 federations' 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 acknowledgment of the desirability of 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
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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 Article 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 phase shall be accomplished in two steps:

Step A – Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful churches, the federations shall make preparation for and a commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of ecclesiastical 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

Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by the consistories as required in Church Order Article 36.

Step B – Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union
This final step shall only be taken when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of ecclesiastical union. Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order Article 36.

For the purpose of reference we have appended to this report the pre-2007 synodical Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. (See Appendix 1)

II. Committee Membership, Terms, and Budget

a. Committee membership and Terms

At Synod Calgary the structure of committee membership was changed such that that committee consists of 3 members-at-large and 1 representative of each classis. The current make-up of the committee is:

Classical representatives:

a) Rev. Todd Joling — appointed in 2004
Classis Central United States

b) Rev. Jeremy Veldman — appointed in 2009
Classis Eastern United States

c) Rev. Casey Freswick — appointed in 2004
Classis Michigan

d) Rev. Gary Findley — appointed in 2007
Classis Pacific Northwest

e) Rev. John Bouwers — appointed in 2004
Classis Southern Ontario

f) Rev. Greg Bero — appointed in 2007
Classis Southwest United States

g) Rev. Ralph Pontier — appointed in 2009
Classis Western Canada

Members at large:

a) Rev. Harry Zekveld — appointed by Synod 2004
b) Rev. Peter Vellenga — appointed by Synod 2007
c) Rev. Bill Pols — appointed by Synod 2007

The Regulations for Synodical Procedure *provisionally* adopted by Synod Schererville stipulate that *the members of a standing committee shall serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointment. Members who have completed two consecutive terms are eligible for reappointment after one year*. (5.3.2.c.)

This means that the terms of Revs. John Bouwers, Casey Freswick, Todd Joling, and Harry Zekveld end in 2010. Synod will need to appoint one

new member-at-large to replace Harry Zekveld, and Classes Central United States, Michigan, and Southern Ontario will need to appoint new classical representatives sometime this year.

Because the work of ecumenicity is long term and requires long term commitment and involvement, we recommend to Synod that the Regulations for Synodical Procedure be altered to return to the decision made by Synod Calgary which allow the members of CERCU to serve three consecutive 3-year terms, in which case the 4 brothers listed above would be eligible to be appointed for one more 3-year term. The current policy would also require a major turnover of members this year – 4 out of 10. We do not think this is wise or healthy.

In addition, we propose that the matter of the terms for classical delegates be left to the discretion of each respective classis. This would serve the concern the churches had for broad, regional representation on the committee when Synod Calgary 2004 introduced the practice of classical representation. It would also serve the need for experience and continuity on the committee in the ongoing development of its contacts with other bodies.

b. Budget

The annual budget for CERCU set by Synod Schererville is $3,500.00. We have made every effort to be stewardly with the finances allotted to us, but due to the number of members on CERCU with the classical structure and the number of federations that have been assigned to us, we find it very difficult to meet as a committee once every 18 months and visit the various synodical assemblies annually or bi-annually and stay within our budget. Your committee requests synod to increase the annual budget allowance for CERCU from $3,500.00 to $6,000.00.

III. Reports on Churches in Ecumenical Relations

a. List of Churches in Ecumenical Relations

According to synodical decision, there are presently 10 federations assigned to the committee for the pursuit of ecumenicity. We list them here in the ecumenical relationship Synod Schererville (2007) determined for these bodies. Eleven are listed, but through Synod Schererville's invitation, the OCRC has united with the URCNA, for which we praise God. We will include this in our report under #6.

Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
2. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
3. Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
4. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

Churches in Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations*

5. Église Reformée du Québec / Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ)
6. Federation of Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)
7. Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA)
8. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

Churches in Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

9. Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)
10. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
11. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

b. Churches in ecumenical dialogue

1. ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church began in 1782 when the Associate Presbytery and the Reformed Presbyterians joined together to found the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Both are of Scottish background. Some of the second group did not join, and are today's RPCNA. Today the ARP is composed of 35,000 communicant members in 296 churches and mission congregations. While the denomination is concentrated in the southeast, it also has congregations in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, California, and Canada. World Witness, the foreign mission board of

the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, has missionaries in Mexico, Pakistan, Germany, Turkey, Spain, Wales, Scotland, Ukraine, and among Persians. Especially worthy of note is the blessing of the Lord upon the ARP mission in Pakistan.

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In 1991 the ARP noted that the Three Forms of Unity are a good expression of the Reformed Faith.

We note with rejoicing that the ARP is not only promoting the faith outside her walls, but also contending for the faith within. There has been much discussion across the denomination about Erskine College and Seminary which are owned and operated by the denomination. Most of this discussion revolved around the leadership of the College and Seminary, the Christian commitment of the College, and two PCUSA professors at the Seminary. The 2009 ARP Synod created a commission to investigate these concerns and to report back at the 2010 Synod. In addition, the Synod voted this year to end its fraternal ties with the PCUSA, noting with regret the PCUSA drift from biblical Christianity. The ARP continues its Fraternal Fellowship (similar to our Phase 2) with the CRCNA, however. For the first time in many years a CRC delegate attended this year's ARP Synod. The delegate was challenged by the Synod concerning the direction of the CRC.

We give thanks that fraternal relations between the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America continue to move forward and hope to see this continue. One of the fruits of these ongoing discussions is revived interest in psalm singing in the worship of ARP congregations.

Along with NAPARC, the ARP is a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches and the World Reformed Fellowship. North American Churches in fraternal Fellowship with the ARPC are the Korean-American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), and the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA).

No face-to-face meetings have been held with the ARP Interchurch Relations Committee since our last Synod except through our annual meetings with them around the NAPARC table. We are encouraged by the evidence of the Lord's

work in and through the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Your committee recommends that as a member in NAPARC alongside the URCNA we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

2. HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS (HRC)

Since the last synod our committee has taken opportunity twice to attend and address the Classis of the Heritage Reformed Congregations. The classis functions as a synod for the 10 congregations and preaching stations within the Heritage Reformed Congregations. We give thanks for the blessing of the Lord upon their congregations, including the mission work in Harrison, Arkansas. In an area where the Reformed faith is virtually absent, the Lord has blessed this work to the extent that three other preaching stations are being considered in Northwest Arkansas. The HRC also has three men serving as missionaries in South Africa and Zambia.

Our fellowship with the HRC can be described as warm and brotherly. They always manifest delight in the privilege of fellowship with like-minded Reformed churches and express desire for greater unity to be manifested between our churches. As a denomination they are confessionally unique on the North American continent. They subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, and recently adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as a 4th doctrinal standard. May the Lord enrich them spiritually through this blend of confessional traditions.

The HRC organized out of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in the early 1990s as a result of a conflict led by Dr. Joel Beeke, currently pastor of the Heritage reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids and President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, in defense of the doctrines of grace and the free offer of the Gospel of Christ to sinners. The HRC continues to emphasize a ministry of Reformed, experiential preaching.

Considerable effort and resources are given by the Heritage Reformed Congregations to oversight of the denominational seminary, the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. The seminary serves more than 100 students from North America and around the world through the labours of 4 full-time professors and many adjunct professors.
Following their October, 2008, classis, Rev. John Bouwers reported:

> They had on their agenda a recommendation from their committee to enter

into Level 1 (correspondence relations) with the URCNA – which is a limited contact. It passed unanimously. It was good to be in their midst. They received greetings also from the FRC (they are in a level 3 relationship with each other) as well as the Free Church of Scotland Continuing – and the Presbyterian Reformed Church. Their level 1 is a somewhat less involved relationship than our phase 1. Their level 2 would correspond with our Phase 1. But we're thankful for the steps they've taken, for the unanimous decision and for the warm welcome I received there.

In their Report to NAPARC 2009 the HRC delegates stated that the HRC is *actively pursuing fraternal relationships with the following denominations: The Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the United Reformed Churches, the Southern Presbyterian Church of Tasmania, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (the Restored Reformed Church) in the Netherlands.*

May the Lord continue bless the HRC as it seeks the coming of the Kingdom in North America and around the world. Your committee recommends that we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Heritage Reformed Congregations.

3. THE KOREAN AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (KAPC)

Synod Schererville asked CERCU to pursue ecumenical relations with the KAPC, and to return with recommendations. Our recommendation to Synod this year is that we enter into *Corresponding Relations* with the Korean American Presbyterian Church and with all other denominations in NAPARC with whom we are not already in *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* (Phase 2). See the report on NAPARC below.

The KAPC, established in 1978, currently consists of about 70,000 members in 24 presbyteries and 600 local churches ministered by 1,200 ordained ministers. At the most recent General Assembly, 21 candidates were announced as having successfully sustained the pastoral candidacy exam and were presented on the floor. Ministerial candidates are examined by an examination committee prior to the General Assembly, using a standardized pastoral candidacy exam for all seeking to be ordained for ministry.

As of 2009, they had commissioned 77 missionaries through World Missionary Society, a sending agency commissioned by the General Assembly. Also 16 men are currently serving as chaplains in the US military at home

and abroad. They recently received into their fellowship the Pacific Presbytery consisting of the churches in the Philippines.

The KAPC is an immigrant Presbyterian Church comprised of Christians coming to North America from South Korea over the last 50 years. It is predominantly a Korean-speaking denomination. As time passes, more and more English-language ministries are being established in their congregations. There is much concern within the KAPC about losing the younger generation to the world. It is hoped that English-language ministry will curtail that trend. They request our prayers in this challenge they face.

The KAPC confesses that *the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only inerrant, perfect rule of faith and deed.* The pastors, elders and ordained deacons must acknowledge the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms which clearly and correctly expound the Holy Bible. In addition to these the KAPC has adopted a Creed summarizing the articles of the Christian faith in 12 statements which all officebearers must acknowledge. The Creed of the KAPC includes the following statement:

> *All believers shall dutifully join in church membership with instruction, have fellowship with one another among the believers, observe the sacraments and other ordinances, obey all the laws of the Lord, pray always, observe the Lord's Day holy, assemble with believers to worship the Lord and listen attentively to the preaching of the Word of God, render offerings as God provides us abundantly, share with one another the mind of Christ, share also the same mind with all other people, endeavor to promote the expansion of the Kingdom of Christ upon the whole world, and wait expectantly for the appearance of the Lord in His glory.*

In May, 2008, CERCU member Rev. Adam Kaloostian attended a portion of the 32nd General Synod of the KAPC meeting in Los Angeles and was given opportunity to greet them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of the United Reformed Churches. After giving a brief introduction to the URCNA, Brother Kaloostian encouraged the KAPC brethren, alongside of us, *to continue to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).*

Your committee recommends that as a member in NAPARC alongside the URCNA we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Korean American Presbyterian Church.

4. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (PCA)

The Presbyterian Church in America is by far the largest denomination in NAPARC. The PCA delegates to NAPARC 2009 reported that at the end of 2008 the PCA counted 340,000 members across 1693 congregations in 76 presbyteries in North America. (Exact numbers are hard to determine because about half of the churches do not report to update their statistics.) Other than through our growing awareness of one another through our newly developed contacts at NAPARC, the committee has had very little contact with representatives of the PCA.

Coming out of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, the PCA was established in 1973. The Presbyterian Church in America describes itself has having *strong commitment to evangelism, missionary work at home and abroad, and to Christian education.* The denomination's purpose, from its beginning, is to be *faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.*

The PCA website states: *We believe the Bible is the written word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error in the original manuscripts. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth and is infallible and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice.* 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 **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 Presbyterian Church in America has a denominational seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO, and a liberal arts college, Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, GA. It is very active in home missions through its agency, *Mission to North America* which has over 50 church planters, and in missions abroad, through *Mission to the World* which has 594 long-term missionaries. (taken from PCA Report to NAPARC 2008)

Currently there is considerable debate in the PCA concerning the role of women as commissioned, unordained deaconesses, to serve in the ministry of mercy as assistants to the ordained deacons. Last year's General Assembly of the PCA heard a judicial complaint against the practice of commissioning

deaconesses. This issue has yet to be resolved. The current stance of the PCA is that it does not allow deaconesses, whether ordained or commissioned.

Your committee recommends that as a member in NAPARC alongside the URCNA we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Presbyterian Church of America.

c. churches in Corresponding Relations

5. ÉGLISE RÉFORMÉE DU QUÉBEC (ERQ) – REFORMED CHURCH OF QUEBEC

The Reformed Church of Quebec continues to labour faithfully in its difficult, secular context. Its two urban congregations, Montreal and Quebec City, experience growth in numbers, thanks in particular to the growing influx of immigrants, as well as young people from sister congregations moving to the urban centres for post-secondary education. The three suburban and regional congregations have recently faced difficulties. Two pulpits were vacated. The third congregation has experienced a slow, but steady decline in membership, particularly as their youth either abandon the faith or move to the urban centres for study and work. In spite of the difficulties, however, the ERQ rejoices in the spiritual growth evident within the congregations. In his report to NAPARC 2009, Pastor Bernard Westerveld stated:

> *The ministry of the Word is faithfully maintained in each of our pulpits. Catechism classes as well as dynamic youth groups prepare our covenant youth to profess their faith in Jesus Christ, to be received at the Lord's Table, and to take a more active place in the ministry of the body.*

Particularly gratifying for the ERQ was the reception of the Rev. Christian Adjémian from the RPCNA as a minister of the Word and faculty member of the Farel Reformed Theological Seminary last year.

Over the past several years your committee has been working through the discussion points of Ecumenical Correspondence with the ERQ Interchurch committee. Having discussed the subject matters listed under Phase 1, we heartily recommend to synod that we enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase 2 of ecumenical relations) with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ). Below is a summary of our discussions which demonstrate that notwithstanding our differences this denomination is of like precious faith, a true and faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture, Confession, and Subscription

We reported to Synod Schererville:

> *With respect to the view and place of the Scriptures in the ERQ, we were informed that the office bearers subscribe to the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession. The ERQ uses the original Westminster Confession, and therefore, they make exceptions in the binding to a statement in the Confession on consanguinity, and on the requirement that the government call the council of the churches. On the confession about the inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures, they maintain a full Reformed commitment to the Scriptures and their place in the church's life.*

In addition, the ERQ *Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline of the Reformed Church of Quebec, Revised 1993* (ODE) states: *Equally we accept the Reformed confessions of faith such as the Confession de la Rochelle, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt.* (ODE, Introduction) While they *subscribe* only to Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism as confessional standards, the above named confessions of faith are *accepted* as articulating faithfully Reformed biblical doctrine.

The ERQ does not practice confessional membership. However, care is taken to see to it that before becoming communicants, the children of the church and others seeking membership receive adequate training in the teachings of Scripture. The ERQ synod recently adopted this question for the public profession of faith: *Do you believe wholeheartedly that the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God, the only infallible rule for your faith and life, and that its doctrine of salvation is taught faithfully in this Christian Church?*

Confessional subscription is required of ministers and elders. The ERQ Church Order states: *More precisely, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession constitute the official expression of our beliefs which all office bearers (elder, minister of the Word, deacon) must adhere to.* (ODE, Introduction). All candidates to the ministry of the Word as well as elder candidates are examined (doctrine, Biblical knowledge, Church history, pastoral care, etc.) by the ERQ synod before their ordination. (See ODE 2.2.2; 2.3.4). In their ordination vows, the pastors and elders answer affirmatively to the following question: *Do you adhere to the doctrinal texts of the ERQ, namely the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, as being in accord with the doctrine taught by the Holy Scriptures?* They sign their consent at the next synodical meeting.

It should be noted that the no formula of subscription exists such as is used

in the URCNA. The Synod has mandated its Liturgy Committee to study a proposal to adopt a formula of subscription similar to ours.

History, Theology, and Ecclesiology

According to the ERQ committee report, its formation stems back to the late 1970s when individual churches of Reformed confession and practice sought to work cooperatively as a French-speaking mission to Quebec. The churches involved included the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC), and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). On November 6, 1988 the individual churches formed a separate denomination, *Église réformee du Québec (ERQ)*, in order to better serve the coming of God's kingdom among the French-speaking populace. The nearly formed church subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, and adopted its own form of government. (Details about the formative years of the ERQ can be found at www.erq.qc.ca/english/ourhistory.html)

Our denomination, reported the ERQ brothers, *from its conception, has been penetrated by both continental Reformed and American Presbyterian teachings and traditions. Today, we can say that the ERQ is a church of Reformed-Presbyterian doctrine and practice. The ERQ grew together in large part because of its missionary context. Small in number, and sharing the same language and culture, the local churches realized that they needed each other in order to grow and survive. They shared a vision to establish one French-speaking Reformed church in the province of Québec. Furthermore, they sought to obey the command of our Lord who prayed that his Church would be one.* As evidence of this diversity, ERQ ministers as well as the theological school are supported by PCA, OPC, CanRC, and URC congregations.

The ERQ doctrine of the church is also influenced by this mixture of Presbyterian and Reformed flavours. We reproduce for you the first 4 articles of the ODE:

> ***Chapter 1 - The Church***
> 1.1 The Church is the body of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12: 5; 1 Cor. 12: 27; Eph. 1:23, 5:30), who is the supreme Head of it. This Church is made up of all the faithful, living and dead, who are "born of water and the Spirit" according to the Word of God (John 3:5). It is a people of kings, of priests, and of prophets (Ex. 19:5,6; Joel 2:28, 29 (or 3:1,2); Titus 2:14; I Peter 2:9). In space and time, the Church takes a visible form (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Revelation 1:4, 1).

1.2 This visible Church is an assembly where, according to the ordinance of Jesus Christ, the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and heard, as well as taught and obeyed, where the sacraments of the Lord are legitimately administered and received and where Biblical discipline is maintained and respected. This visible Church shares the human condition. Therefore it must submit without ceasing to the Word of God, so that it will be able to reform and renew itself, and each member is called to be holy as the Lord is holy. (1 Peter 1:15, 16)

1.3 The Holy Spirit allows the Church to accomplish its calling, dispensing to it the necessary gifts for evangelization, proclamation, teaching, worship, praise, pastoral work, hospitality, help to the needy. (Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 12;1 Peter 4:9-11) All the believers share in this universal priesthood. (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10)

1.4 To facilitate its mission, the visible Church is organized according to the needs of the time and of the place. The Reformed Church of Quebec, denoting the regional church, is a part of the visible Church which is spread out over and limited to the mission field constituted by the francophone communities of North America. This regional Church is made up of mission churches and established churches, along with elders.

Church order and polity

The Church Order of the ERQ, the ERQ Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline (*Ordre et discipline ecclésiastique*, ODE),
does not strictly follow the Reformed or the Presbyterian Church polity tradition. In its document, Our Structure, the ERQ states as its foundational principle of church government:

Jesus certainly doesn't desire that the Church be lacking in organisation and direction. Although we do not find a detailed reference to this subject in the Bible, we can nevertheless extract a broad outline from it.

a) Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the Church and no one else has the right to take this position. The Bible is the only infallible and decisive rule for the life of the Church. Through it, Jesus speaks to His people. Other rules established by Church tradition may be useful and even important, but must always be evaluated and, if necessary, reformed in the light of the Bible's revelation.

b) The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of all those who with their children are called by Him and who answer this call with a living faith.

c) Jesus Christ groups His own together on a local and regional level, and He directs His Church on these levels through the elders. The

council of elders has the right to pass judgement in the name of Jesus Christ.

d) *The Church also recognizes the ministry of deacons.*

Thus, the ERQ recognizes only the offices of Elder and Deacon. At a practical level they acknowledge a distinction, by way of giftedness, between Elders of the local church who *rule* and Elders of the local church who are called to *teach and preach*. Among the Elders who are gifted to teach and preach, a further distinction is made between the *Pastor* whose duties consist *mainly in the edification of the already established local Church, providing the preaching and teaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and pastoral aid*; and the *Evangelist* whose principal duty *is to form and to organise new local churches.*

In ERQ polity, deacons do not exercise any ecclesiastical authority in the local churches. "The primary function of deacons is to serve the Church and the world in the name of the Lord, according to Scripture." (ODE 2.4.1). Consequently, the office of deacon is open to all professing members of the local church, including women.

Because of its small size, the ERQ maintains only two levels of church government: local council and synod. The synod, composed of two delegates per congregation (one pastor and one elder, or else two elders), meets 3-4 times per year to hear reports of the local congregations, discuss issues brought before the synod by a local council, to examine candidates to the ministry and for eldership, as well as hear reports from regular standing committees: Ministerial, Education, Mission and Interchurch Committees. Since the local councils are small, life-time elder candidates are examined by the synod in order to provide greater consistency (ODE 2.2.2). The English translation of the ODE can be found at www.erq.qc.ca.

Liturgy and Liturgical Forms

With respect to the worship of the ERQ we would describe the situation as developing. Each congregation has its own structure and style, some more traditional, others more contemporary. Nonetheless, the necessary elements of biblical worship are present: invocation, confession of sin, song, reading and preaching of Scripture, offerings, blessing. The majority of their songs arise from the contemporary worship from the 1970s to the present. Musical accompaniment includes pianos, guitars and other instruments. Some use songbooks from Reformed or Evangelical communities in France.

Since 2003, the ERQ has mandated an ad-hoc liturgy committee to prepare

vows for the baptism of covenant children, the profession of faith, the baptism of adults, and the ordination of officers (pastors, elders, deacons). Suggested liturgies were also to be prepared, while the vows would remain the same in all our churches. To date, the ERQ synod has adopted vows for the baptism of covenant children and the profession of faith. The Interchurch committee views the development of these liturgies a maturing step for the ERQ which will promote greater unity. The ERQ Interchurch Committee sought advice from our committee on an early draft of their baptismal form. The committee members formulated a united response for the brothers. (see Appendix 2 for the English translation of the recently adopted *Form for Infant Baptism*).

Preaching, Sacraments and Discipline

The preaching of the Word of God is viewed as a means of grace within God's covenant and as the net by which Christ gathers His Church. The sermons are generally expositional with the purpose of leading the believers into the study and comprehension of the text. Catechism-based preaching is not practiced in the ERQ since only one service is held each Lord's Day. Catechism instruction is typically done in small groups with the young people or with the entire congregation before the worship service.

The ERQ practices baptism of believers and of their children during the regular worship services. Parents are encouraged to present their children for baptism shortly after their birth.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated monthly in the congregations. Since no official liturgy has been adopted by the synod, some variety of practice exists among the congregations. Typically some instruction related to the supper is given by the pastor, followed by a prayer for the blessing of the Spirit upon the elements and the participants. A verbal invitation and warning are addressed to the congregation before the elders distribute the elements. The reception of visitors at the Lord's Supper has caused significant debate within the ERQ over the past several years. At this point the issue has not been resolved. One congregation requires visitors to be received at the table by the local elders. The others practice what might be described as open communion.

General church discipline is exercised among all members and special discipline for officebearers. (Further information about ERQ can be found on its website www.erq.qc.ca.)

6. FEDERATION OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES (OCRC)

Synod Schererville made the following decision with respect to the OCRC: *To invite the OCRC federation officially to unite with the URCNA in federative union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order. As part of this invitation, we humbly but forthrightly ask them to unite with us on the basis of the URCNA Church Order. Should the OCRC federation decide to accept this invitation, they will be received immediately into the federation, without conducting a* colloquium doctum *for their ministers.*

Following the invitation to union extended by Synod Schererville to the OCRC, Rev. Bill Pols addressed the OCRC Synod 2007 (Kelowna, BC) with the following words:

> It may accurately be said that we are in fact, closer together than our official statements and achievements would indicate. As you are aware from the overture before you today from Nobleton, it was in 1999 that the United Reformed Churches extended an invitation to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches to unite with us on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the URCNA church order. URC Synod 2007 has now decided to re-extend this invitation. This means that no other procedural steps would be required for full unity with you than the ratification of this decision by our churches, and your acceptance of this invitation. We could write piles of paper about our agreement in the faith, but this invitation speaks volumes of our recognition of you as true churches of Jesus Christ.
>
> We hope, brothers, that this invitation also communicates to you our love and trust. We realize that our invitation is asking the OCRC to make sacrifices for such a union. You have your own church order with its own details which have been hammered out over a longer history than our own. Some of that work may appear to be lost by joining us. You have position papers on important subjects which would not have official standing in a new federation. Our invitation is indeed "forthright", but we trust it is also "humble."
>
> It is an invitation to you to contribute your strengths to us, as well as receive the benefits of wider church fellowship and cooperation. We not only share common commitments, we recognize common dangers. The United Reformed Churches have identified evolutionary teaching as among those dangers, and have affirmed their commitment to maintain-

ing discipline according to the church order if the Scripture or confessions are violated by this threat. The United Reformed Churches have also recently affirmed the teachings of Scripture and our confessions regarding justification by grace alone through faith alone, with the imputation of Christ's merits as our righteousness before God. URC Synod 2007 also appointed a study committee to address the errors of the so-called Federal Vision teaching that has arisen in recent years. Synod 2007 has also affirmed the Bible's definition of marriage over against so-called same sex marriages. These are some of the issues concerning which we must contend for the faith. There are differences in the way our federations have addressed these concerns, but we trust your commitment to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. We sincerely hope that you may see solid reason's to extend that same trust to us.

With joy and thanksgiving we may report the merger of the Federation of Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches with the URCNA in response to the invitation extended to the OCRC by Synod Schererville! We extend a hearty welcome to the **Bowmanville, ON, OCRC**; the **Burlington OCRC** in Washington state; the **OCRC of Kelowna**, BC; and the **Immanuel OCRC in Nobleton**, ON. May it please the Lord to enrich our worship, fellowship and testimony through their participation within our federation. We take note of one congregation of the OCRC, the OCRC of Cambridge, ON, which at the final OCRC Synod abstained from voting on the overture to accept the URCNA merger invitation, and remains an independent congregation. We are thankful that the Cambridge OCRC continues to fellowship with Classis Southern Ontario by sending observer delegates. We pray that the Lord of the Church will prosper this congregation with His grace and Holy Spirit and cause us to grow in fellowship with one another.

7. FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA (FRCNA)

Our churches have been in Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Free Reformed Churches since the decision of Synod Hudsonville (1999). Subsequently and correspondingly the Free Reformed Churches in their 2000 Synod have also recognized our churches at their level of Limited Contact, their first level of ecumenicity. The Free Reformed Churches seek to maintain and develop the experimental Calvinism of the Afscheiding (or Dutch Secession of 1834). Their emphasis on experiential preaching and piety has limited our mutual contacts with the FRC, but has caused their fellowship with the Heritage Reformed Congregations to flourish, for which we give

thanks to the Lord.

At NAPARC 2009 the FRCNA delegates reported:

> *Our membership is up just slightly over last year. As of October 31, 2008, we have 4,466 members. Almost one-half are baptized members, children and young people. 78 people made confession of faith, and 124 were baptized. We have 19 congregations, and two preaching stations. Most of our churches are in Canada, but we also have several congregations and one preaching station in the United States. We have 16 ministers in active service, one missionary/ instructor, three retired ministers and now one professor of theology. The need for more labourers is felt, especially by the vacant congregations.*

The Free Reformed Churches continue to partner with the Heritage Reformed Congregations in theological education via board membership and a professorship at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. One of their members, Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes is full time theological instructor in Old and New Testament at PRTS. In the FRC Professor of Theology is a distinct office in the church whose task is to defend the true interpretation and doctrine of the Bible over against heresies and errors.

The Free Reformed Churches are engaged in mission work in Cubulco, Guatemala. The work has changed over the last years. A number of pastors and evangelists from North America and Holland have finished their years of service there and have returned to their own countries. They see the need for and are seeking from the Lord an indigenous pastor to labour in Cubulco. One of their ministers, Rev. Ken Herfst, teaches in the Presbyterian Seminary in San Felipe and Western Theological Seminary in Quetzaltenango, both in Guatemala. The FRC also broadcasts the Gospel over radio and through internet in the English and Punjabi languages. Rev. Kuldip Gangar is currently doing a series in Punjabi on the Gospel of John. (check the website at truepathtogod.org.) This website is getting hits from India and Pakistan, but also from Britain and other places where Sikhs are living. May the Lord of the harvest redeem many through these missionary efforts.

Since the previous Synod a sub-committee of CERCU has had the privilege of meeting twice with a sub-committee of the Free Reformed External Relations Committee. Our committees agreed that the statements of agreement on History, Church, and Covenant are now completed and ready for review by the churches of both federations. We have communicated these earlier, but reproduce them here:

1. History

We believe that the Secession of 1834 out of which our federations of churches grew, was an act of obedience to God's Word and our confessions, especially articles 28 and 29 BC. Although we may disagree whether the Union of 1892 was premature as important church-orderly and doctrinal differences were not resolved, we do agree that the subsequent development of some aspects of Kuyper 's teachings so continued to divide the newly formed Gereformeerde Kerken that the Synod of 1905 drafted a compromise statement, the "Conclusions of Utrecht," in which especially Kuyper's doctrine of presumptive regeneration was judged to be "less correct" than the view held by his opponents. As it turned out, however, this compromise, did not settle the matter, with the result that the new federation remained embroiled in doctrinal controversy for many years. Fearing just such developments, some of the 1834 Secession churches decided to continue the Secession tradition rather than go along with the merger. Because some of the controversial teachings of Abraham Kuyper had significant impact upon the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Free Reformed immigrant fathers could not feel at home there, and, as a result the Free Reformed Churches were organized, standing in full correspondence relationship with the original Secession churches in the Netherlands, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken. To this day, the FRC believes the doctrine of presumed regeneration contradicts scripture, and is a dangerous error with far reaching consequences. Though both groups share common roots in the Great Reformation and in the Dutch Secession of 1834, the history of the United Reformed Churches as a federation is more recent. When in the early 1990s it became more and more clearly evident that the Christian Reformed Church was departing from its commitment to the authority of the Word of God many officebearers, congregations, and members saw their obligation before the Lord of the Church to separate from this sinful direction and return to the Word as summarized in the faith confessed by our fathers in the Three Forms of Unity. Since the United Reformed Churches federated in 1996 these churches have sought to uphold a high view of Scripture and a strong commitment to confessional integrity. In the gracious providence of God, we recognize as federations that our common heritage and common confessional commitments compel us to pursue ecumenical fellowship with one another today.

2. Doctrine of the Church

We believe that the Church is a community of believers and their children whom the Lord Jesus Christ, from the beginning to the end of

time, calls out of the world by His Word and Spirit. The Church, therefore, belongs to Christ. Moreover, the Church is also the work of the Triune God (1 Peter 2:10; Ephesians 2: 22 and 4:12). The growth and edification of those who have come to a saving union with the Lord Jesus Christ takes place in the fellowship of the Church, through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments by the working of the Holy Spirit. We believe that neither individual believers nor congregations can grow in isolation but that each is dependent upon what is supplied by every part of the body when it works effectually. We believe that all this is implied in the prayer for the unity of the Church as expressed by the Lord Jesus (John 17). Within these parameters, we wish to be churches conforming to and organized by biblical principles, in which the redeemed members may thrive and flourish, rejoicing in what the Lord has done for them.

3. The Covenant

We believe that God's relation to man is always one of covenantal fellowship, unilateral in origin and bilateral in application. God's grace is shown to man who, having violated through disobedience the relationship God first established in Paradise (sometimes referred to as "the Covenant of Works" or "the Adamic Administration"), and having been placed under the Lord's covenantal judgment, is now set in a new covenant relation - the Covenant of Grace, of which, according to Hebrews 8:6, the Lord Jesus Christ is Mediator. We believe that this covenant is made with believers and all their children and that in this gracious arrangement that God establishes with them, He promises them salvation through the way of faith in Jesus Christ and requires of them a life of faith and obedience.

4. View of the Congregation

We believe that the congregation of Christ is the covenant people of God comprising believers and their children who are set apart from the world by holy baptism. To this congregation belongs the gracious promises of redemption through the blood of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the author of faith, as well as the obligation to embrace the promises of God in Christ through a lively faith and to manifest that faith with lives of gratitude in new obedience. With sadness we also recognise that there are *hypocrites mixed in the church with the good* [Belgic Confession 29] who do not respond to the promises of God in true faith.

A statement on the "View of the Congregation" is still in process. Revs. Bouwers and Zekveld wrote a discussion paper "Thoughts on the 'View of the

Congregation'" for one of our meetings with External Relations Committee. The discussion paper is appended to this report. (See Appendix 3.) It was received with appreciation by and discussed at length with the Free Reformed brothers. Much of the discussion pertained to the matter of what it means to view the congregation through the lens of the promises of God's covenant. This is the proper, biblical perspective on the congregation as long as it is understood that these promises are realized through the appropriation of faith. With thanksgiving we recognize that committee papers and discussions cannot in themselves produce unity between two federations, but as we do our assigned task and present our work to the churches it is our hope that the fruit of our discussions will encourage the churches and help to build fellowship with our Free Reformed brethren for a growing expression of Reformed solidarity in North America.

8. REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA (RPCNA)

The RPCNA enjoys a long history on our continent. With roots in Scottish Presbyterianism, the Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized in North America 212 years ago in 1798. Last year, at its 178th Synod, the RPCNA celebrated 200 years since the meeting of its first Synod in 1809. At this year's Synod, celebrations are planned for the 200th anniversary of its theological school, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, in Pittsburgh, PA. The RPCNA also conducts theological education at the Ottawa Theological Hall, in Ottawa, Canada, and Kobe Theological Hall, in Kobe, Japan. These seminaries are committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and to the Reformed Faith as summarized in the Westminster Standards and in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The RPCNA also owns and operates a liberal arts college, Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA, which is now 162 years old. We rejoice with the RPCNA in the faithfulness of God Who has preserved this denomination through times of joy and trial, and for the evidence of a renewed zeal for Reformed orthodoxy in her midst over the past several decades.

For many years the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America experienced decline in orthodoxy, witness, and numbers. For the last 30 years, however, God, by His grace, has reversed this trend with new appointments of solid, Reformed men at RPTS, by raising up ministers and elders who are convicted preachers and guardians of the everlasting Gospel, and through renewed focus on Reformed missions and evangelism. Since then the RPCNA has witnessed a 25% increase in membership. The RPCNA numbers close

to 7,000 members in approximately 80 congregations and 10 church plants. The vast majority of these congregations are in the United States and Canada; a few of its congregations are abroad, in Japan, Ireland, and Cyprus. The RPCNA is divided into seven Presbyteries: Alleghenies Presbytery, Atlantic Presbytery, Great Lakes - Gulf Presbytery, Japan Presbytery, Midwest Presbytery, Pacific Coast Presbytery, and St. Lawrence Presbytery.

For several years now your committee has been blessed to be able to meet with the Interchurch Committee. We have always been received with brotherly love and respect, and our discussions have been warm and friendly. There is among the brothers of the RPCNA evidence of deep piety undergirded by a wholehearted commitment to the Reformed Faith.

At Synod Calgary 2004 our churches voted to enter into *Corresponding Relations* with the RPCNA. Subsequently at their own 173rd Synod, meeting that same month at Taylor University in Upland, IN the RPCNA reciprocated with a parallel decision from their side to welcome the URCNA into their own category of *Corresponding Relations*. At their following 174th Synod held in June of 2005, the RPCNA took a decision to invite the URCNA into *Fraternal Relations* with them, a relationship similar to our Phase 2 - *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*.

Having worked our way through the discussion points of Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) we lay before Synod London the fruit of our discussion, and heartily recommend that we move forward into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase 2) with the RPCNA.

<u>View and Place of the Holy Scriptures:</u>
When asked about their view of Scripture, the RPCNA Interchurch Committee provided the following statements concerning their doctrine of the Scripture:

- Inspired by God, authoritative, inerrant, infallible (WCF.I.1)
- All 66 books inspired, nothing added (WCF.I.2)
- These Scriptures are the Word of God (WCF I.4)
- They are applied by the Holy Spirit (WCF I.5)
- The Scriptures include the whole counsel of God (WCF I.6)
- The rule of Scriptures' interpretation is Scripture itself (WCF I.9)

They write: *Our beliefs all stem from a full commitment to the authority of the Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God. This means that we believe in the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We acknowledge our total inability to save ourselves and, in faith, depend on Christ alone as our Savior. We acknowl-*

edge Him as Covenant Lord in every area of life, and we vow together to advance His Kingdom on earth. We rejoice in this commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to its application in all of life.

Creeds and Confessions

The RPCNA submits to the teachings of the Word of God as summarized in their doctrinal standards: the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger Catechism, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

In addition, the RPCNA subscribes to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America*, which seeks to apply Scripture and the Confessions to contemporary situation. In its published format, the Testimony is placed in a column parallel to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

With most of the Testimony we find ourselves in hearty agreement. There are a few areas which are cause for concern. First and foremost is the teaching that Christ covenants with the nations of this earth, and the nations are obligated to covenant with Christ. While we recognize the Lordship of Christ over all nations in His mediatorial reign and the duty of the civil magistrate to protect the sacred ministry that the kingdom of Christ may be promoted (Heidelberg Catechism, QA 50-51; Belgic Confession, Article 36), we are not convinced that nations of this earth are called to covenant with Christ. This doctrine is applied variously within the RPCNA. There is substantial disagreement within the RPCNA on this issue and does not seem to be applied rigorously. The Interchurch Committee indicates that fundamental principles of this point of the Testimony, while different in formulation, are in agreement with the teaching of Belgic Confession, Article 36. These underlying principles are still valid and required in the RPCNA.

Another concern is the ordination of deaconesses. In the RPCNA the office of deacon is an office with a kind of ecclesiastical authority, though the deacons do not serve together with the elders in the ruling of the church. Further attention is given to the authority of deacons below, under *Church Order and Polity*. While many in the RPCNA disagree with this position of the Testimony, it is still practiced to a small degree and is not likely to be altered in the near future.

A third area of concern, requiring abstinence from the use of alcohol and tobacco (Testimony, Chapter 26:5-6), and a vow to that end among office-bearers, has been removed. A recent Synod of the RPCNA decided that this requirement went beyond the bounds of Scripture. While abstinence from the use of alcohol is still encouraged, members and officers are no longer

required to refrain from beverage alcohol. Similar restrictions—for example, ones on the use of tobacco—have also been revised or removed.

Formula of Subscription to the Confessions

Concerning vows for communicant membership, members are asked, in part*, to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.* (Membership, Query 4) When a new congregation is to be instituted, all communicants are expected to take the vows of communicant membership and to make the following pledge: *Do you solemnly covenant with God and with one another that you will live together in brotherly unity as an organized congregation on the basis of the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; that you will be obedient to the courts that are over you in the Lord; and that you will, by a godly life, seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole?*

Officebearers must answer the following the question in the affirmative: *Do you believe in and accept the system of doctrine and the manner of worship set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures?* (Ordination, Query 4) Ruling elders, teaching elders, and deacons are examined as to soundness of faith and commitment to the RPCNA Testimony. (*Directory of Church Government* 3.I.E.1.c, 3.II.E.3.b.3, 3.III.E.1.3)

Subscription includes not only the Westminster Standards but also the RPCNA Testimony as equal in authority (see Chapter I, Article 12; the Testimony is available on the RPCNA website). The Testimony takes precedence over the Westminster Standards whenever there is a discrepancy between the two. At certain points the Testimony will expressly reject small portions of the Westminster Confession of Faith (eg., 23.18, 24.21).

Significant factors in history, theology, and ecclesiology

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America holds the doctrines and principles of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and, in particular, testifies to the duty of public covenanting by churches and nations. *Reformed Presbyterians have also been referred to historically as Covenanters because of their identification with public covenanting in Scotland, beginning in the 16th century. This act was a protest for Christ's crown rights over the state and the recognition of Christ as King over the Church without interference from the government. Our roots also include those referred*

to as the Seceders, who share in the testimony for Christ's Crown and Covenant. (from website)

Following the example of the nation of Israel which made binding covenants with God in the days of Josiah, Hezekiah, and Nehemiah, Presbyterians in Scotland, England, and Ireland covenanted together in 1643 to follow the Lord in the *Solemn League and Covenant*, a treaty with English parliamentarians, to uphold the "crown rights" of Christ as King over the church as well as the state, and to protest government interference in the life of the church.

In later years of the 17th century, the governments of these nations would ignore this covenant and many Presbyterians, called Seceders, became dissenters, refusing to accept this new governmental and ecclesiastical situation. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ over church and state failed to be officially recognized in 1691, when Presbyterianism became the Established Church in Scotland. As a result, the early Covenanters formed the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and also in Ireland, where many fled to avoid persecution. Later many immigrated to the American colonies where they organized covenanter churches. The history of dissent continued long into the 19th, and even into the 20th centuries. Reformed Presbyterians bound themselves to refrain from voting in national elections and swearing oaths of public office and military service as long as the government of the United States did not officially recognize the crown rights of King Jesus over the nation in its constitution.

A significant aspect of RPCNA history is *The Covenant of 1871*, officially called *The Covenant Sworn and Subscribed by the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 21, 1871 and by the several congregations*. This document belongs to the RPCNA Constitution and is part of the membership and ordination vows of every officebearer and communicant member. (cf. *Directory for Public Worship*: 4.3) Prefaced by a confession of ecclesiastical and national sins in the American context, RPCNA members and officebearers swear by this covenant

- *to receive for ourselves and for our children the Lord Jesus Christ as He is offered in the Gospel to be our Saviour* and *to live for the glory of God as our chief end*;
- to understand and uphold more fully the doctrine, government and worship set forth in the *Westminster Standards*, *Form of Government*, and *Directory for Public Worship*;
- *to pray and labor for the peace and welfare of our country, and for its reformation by a constitutional recognition of God as the source of all power, of Jesus Christ as the Ruler of Nations, of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme*

rule, and of the true Christian religion; and we will continue to refuse to incorporate by any act, with the political body, until this blessed reformation has been secured;

- to *pray and labor for the visible oneness of the Church of God in our own land and throughout the world, on the basis of truth and of Scriptural order*.
- to *dedicate ourselves to the great work of making known God's light and salvation among the nations, and to this end will labor that the Church may be provided with an earnest, self-denying and able ministry.*
- to *bear true testimony in word and in deed for every known part of divine truth, and for all the ordinances appointed by Christ in His kingdom; and to tenderly and charitably, but plainly and decidedly, oppose and discountenance all and every known error, immorality, neglect or perversion of divine institutions.*

There is much in this document that is edifying and essential to the welfare of the true church of Christ. We commend it to our churches for study and reflection.

Consistent with past history, the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over church and state continues to be upheld as a foundational principle of the RPCNA. *We reject the view that nations have no corporate responsibility for acknowledging and obeying Jesus Christ.* (*Testimony*: 23.5) *We reject the idea that Christians should not seek the establishment of Christian civil government.* (*Testimony*: 23. 8) Both the Christian and the church also have the duty to maintain public witness against national sins and for biblical justice. To this end the General Synod has a standing committee to appeal to the civil governments of Canada and the United States to witness against national sins, to promote biblical justice, and to seek a constitutional amendment recognizing the Lord Jesus as King of the nation. At times in her history her political distinctives threatened to overshadow the preaching of Christ and Him crucified.

In the last 50 years or so, the emphasis on political dissent and a constitutional amendment has waned, and there has been evident recovery of the church's task to preach the Gospel as God's holy, spiritual nation living amongst the temporal nations of the earth along with a renewed emphasis on faithful worship. In his *Foreword* to the 2005 republication of W. Melanchthon Glasgow's The History of the Presbyterian Church in America, first published in 1888, Nathaniel Pockras writes:

> *In 1888, if a Covenanter minister were asked to name the most distinctive principle of his church, the response would surely deal with political dissent—an issue about which many members know little today. If a similar question were asked of an RP minister today, the response would surely deal*

with worship—a matter relatively little debated then.

The RPCNA continues to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to strive to maintain the pure worship of God. At its 177th Synod, in 2008, the Synod by a unanimous vote

> *declared solidarity with Reformed brethren in rejecting the "New Perspectives on Paul" and "The Federal Vision." The delegates reaffirmed their commitment to the biblical, historical, and confessional doctrine of justification. The Synod recommended the study reports on the matter of the PCA, OPC, RCUS, and Mid-America Reformed Seminary for use within its churches.* (RPCNA Report to NAPARC 2008)

Church order and polity

The Testimony traces the idea of authority from Christ through the members of the church to the officebearers:

> *The Lord Jesus Christ has clothed His Church with power and authority. This authority is vested in the whole membership of the Church, which has the right to choose its officers from among those of its own members who possess the scriptural qualifications.* (25:6)
>
> *Christ has appointed in His Word a particular form of government for the visible church. It is government by elders (Greek: presbyters) and is therefore called presbyterian. Each congregation should be ruled by a session of ordained elders, elected by the membership of the congregation.* (25.7)

The congregation is required to meet annually. It *shall elect its own chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and treasurer, although the treasurer may be elected by the board of deacons.*(*Form of Government,* 2:13) *The congregation and its officers are under the oversight of the session.* At its meeting the members of the congregation elect elders to rule them, and deacons to minister mercy in their midst.

The officebearers of the church are elders and deacons: *The permanent officers to be set apart by ordination are elders and deacons. The office of elder is restricted in Scripture to men. Women as well as men may hold the office of deacon. Ordination is a solemn setting apart to a specific office by the laying on of the hands of a court of the Church and is not to be repeated. Installation is the official constitution of a relationship between one who is ordained and the congregation.* (25:8)

RPCNA polity recognizes a distinction between two types of elders: teaching and ruling. (25:9) They are also distinguished by their vows of ordination. The ruling elders promise *to watch over the spiritual growth of the members*

of the congregation, to endeavor to win others to Christ, to visit the afflicted and to attend the meetings associated with [their] office. The ministers, as the teaching elders are also called in RPCNA polity, promise *to bring to [their] congregation the fruits of earnest study of the Word, to maintain a testimony for the Kingdom of God, to endeavor to minister to others and win them to Christ,* and *to watch for souls as one[s] who must give account.* (*Queries for Ordination, Installation, and Licensure*: 8)

At the same time, the testimony asserts that *[a]ll elders are equal in the government of the church. This office is referred to in Scripture by two terms used synonymously: elder, and bishop or overseer.* [25:9] In RPCNA polity, the teaching elder/pastor is a member of the congregation and his ministerial credentials are held by the presbytery. (*Form of Government* 2.1)

Another distinction is made between the authority of the elder and of the deacon. The elders alone have authority to rule in the courts of the church: *The elders are organized in courts (the session, the presbytery and the Synod) to which is committed the power of governing the church and of ordaining officers. This power is moral and spiritual, and subject to the law of God.* (25:10) The authority of the deacon is not the same as that of the elder; the deaconate is subordinate to the session of the church: *The diaconate is a spiritual office subordinate to the session and is not a teaching or ruling office. The deacons have responsibility for the ministry of mercy, the finances and property of the congregation, and such other tasks as are assigned to them by the session.* (Testimony: 25:11) The Form of Government (2.1) recognizes the oversight of the elders when it defines a local congregation as *a fully organized congregation…made up of a group of members with a session of elders for the oversight of the congregation and a board of deacons responsible chiefly for the ministry of mercy and stewardship*.

Sessions send certified delegates to each meeting of Synod, which also meets annually. The Synod is referred to as *the highest court of the church, and is the body of organic union, cooperation, and mutual helpfulness, between the presbyteries. It is responsible for the continuing reformation of the church in maintaining the subordinate standards of the church in harmony with the Scriptural truth and order. Its decisions are final, but its authority is limited by its subordinate standards.*

Liturgy and liturgical forms

The worship of the RPCNA is set forth in the *Directory of the Worship of God* (1945) and its denominational songbooks, *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (1973) and the recently published *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (2009),

a thoroughgoing update and revision of the previous songbook. A revision and updating of *The Directory of the Worship of God* is nearing completion. The revised *Directory* remains faithful to the Reformed principles of worship spelled out in the earlier version, and in the doctrinal standards.

The doctrine of worship is beautifully and succinctly summarized in the opening article of the *Directory*: *Christian worship is the expression of the soul's love for God, dependence on God and joy in God. God alone, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is the object of worship. Worship is to be offered only in accordance with His appointment, and in harmony with the Scriptural principle that whatsoever is not commanded in the worship of God is forbidden. Worship is acceptable only as it is offered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.* (1.1)

The Directory does not require a particular order of worship, but does stipulate the biblical elements that belong to divine worship. *The parts of public worship named in the Word of God are: praise; prayer; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word of God; the presentation of offerings; the benediction; and the administration of the sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. To these may be added special ordinances, as fasting, thanksgiving and public covenanting.* (*Directory*: 1.8). In 1.9 the Directory helpfully suggests an order to follow but forbids the church to establish an *unchangeable order of public worship.*

The *Directory* gives substantial attention to singing in worship, requiring that only the psalms be sung, without instruments. It states: *The singing of praise is an ordinance of worship and is expressed in words set to music. The Psalms of the Bible, by reason of their excellence and their Divine inspiration and appointment are to be sung in the worship of God, to the exclusion of all songs and hymns of human composition. They are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, inasmuch as these are not authorized in the New Testament.* (2.1)

Set liturgical forms are not used within the RPCNA. With respect to baptism the *Directory* simply states: *The minister shall give a brief explanation of the meaning and purpose of the Sacrament.* (3.5) However, a consecration formula must be spoken prior to the baptism [*"Bless so much of the element of water as shall be used upon this occasion, which we hereby, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, set apart from a common to a sacramental use."* (3.6)] and the following baptismal formula is stipulated: *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God over all, blessed forever. AMEN."* (3.6) Vows to be made by the parents are also required and provided in the *Directory*. A congregational vow

following the baptism is suggested.

More detailed directions are given for the administration of the Lord's Supper, including words that are to be spoken before, during, and after the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Marriage vows and other key elements of a Christian marriage are also set forth by the *Directory*.

Preaching, sacraments, and discipline

The Form of Government and Directory for worship does not require RPCNA congregations to hold two services on the Lord's Day. It is the common practice to assemble twice for worship on Sundays, but in some places where members are scattered over a large area, only one service is held. The second service is usually less formal than the first.

In each service, the Word of God is preached. The Directory for Worship defines preaching in the following way:

> *The sermon is a discourse based upon a passage of Scripture, unfolding the truth taught, and applying it to the hearts and consciences of the hearers, including the children. Its purpose is to convict and convert sinners, to lead them to Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, to build them up in the most holy faith, and to fill them with zeal for the Kingdom of God on earth, that they may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The minister is ordained to bear witness for the whole truth as it is in Jesus Christ and against all error, wrong, and injustice, without respect of persons.* (2.11)

Hearing the sermon also receives attention:

> *The worshipers in the fact and manner of their attention have a part in the preaching. They should attend upon it "with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in their hearts, and practice it in their lives" (Shorter Catechism, Answer 90).* (2.13)

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are faithfully observed. The *Directory* requires that *[b]aptism is to be administered to those who make a credible profession of their faith in Christ and to their children.* (3.4)

The Lord's Supper is administered only to communicant members who have made a credible profession of faith and have assented to the Covenant of Communicant Membership. Frequency is not prescribed; the Lord's Supper is to be *observed at stated intervals, as often as the session may decide.* (*Directory*:

3.8) Observance of the Lord's Supper in Reformed Presbyterian congregations ranges from twice a year to every week.

The congregation must be exhorted to engage in self-examination prior to the celebration. Regarding the supervision of the Lord's Supper, a wide variety of practices is used. In order to commune, non-members must be members of an evangelical church, and give a credible confession of faith to the Session. Some sessions would require that a quorum of elders is needed to examine candidates for communion; other sessions would allow several elders to meet with candidates and report back to the session. The *Directory* states:

> *a. The Lord's Supper is to be administered only to those who have been baptized, and are communicant members in good standing in some true branch of the visible church.*
> *b. No person should be admitted to the Lord's Supper whose manner of life is notably inconsistent with his Christian profession or who is unknown to the session in charge of the Table. Casual visitors are not to be invited to commune.*
> *c. Every session must guard the purity of the Sacrament by exercising diligent and continual oversight of those under its care, never assuming that church membership alone is sufficient basis for admission to the Sacrament. Those who seek to commune but are not under care of the session must be examined.* (3.10)

The *Directory* adds an interesting note: *The use of tables, which has come down from the past, has helped to guard the purity of the ordinance and should not lightly be set aside.* (3.13)

The discipline of the RPCNA is clearly spelled out in a recent version of *The Book of Discipline*, adopted by the General Synod in 2003. The Book of Discipline opens thus: *Discipline is a vital element in discipleship, and discipleship, in turn, is based upon a call by Jesus involving a personal allegiance to Him in love and obedience… The purpose of Christian discipline is to bring about a redemptive change, and a continuing growth toward holiness in the life of a Christian. Although we all fall into sin, as Christians we must still become involved in every process which produces righteousness and leads an individual toward growth in grace. Thus, Christians must set a good example of encouraging each other in love and in good deeds (Heb. 10:24).* (Book of Discipline, *Introduction*)

Several purposes for Church Discipline are listed: *primarily, to reclaim a sinning member; then to deter others from similar offenses; to maintain the honor of Christ and the purity and peace of His Church; to maintain the truth of the*

gospel; and to avoid the wrath of God coming upon the church. (*Discipline*, 1:3)

Formal discipline is exercised in accordance with the pattern outlined by Christ in Matthew 18, and takes the following course: *admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication.* (*Discipline*: 4.1) Suggested forms are provided in *The Book of Discipline* for each step. Deposition applies only to office-bearers. Members may be excommunicated without the involvement of presbytery; suspension, deposition and excommunication of officebearers is under the jurisdiction of the presbytery. Provision is made for a special judicial commission to adjudicate a trial in place of the session, presbytery or general synod. A judicial commission is permitted to bring to trial officebearers and members whom the session refuses to try.

When discipline is exercised officially, the session functions as a "court." If they are convinced that they have been wronged, members may appeal to the "higher" church courts (Presbytery or Synod).

Theological education for ministers

In order for a man to become a teaching elder or minister in the RPCNA, the following steps must be taken:

a. *He must present himself to his session as one desiring to prepare himself to become a teaching elder.*
b. *If the session supports his intentions they shall request presbytery to take him under care.*
c. *In ordinary cases he shall complete a bachelor's degree or its equivalent before undertaking specific theological education.*
d. *Upon completion of his collegiate degree or its equivalent and his reception by presbytery as a student of theology, he shall be expected to complete the course of seminary instruction required by his presbytery leading to a Master of Divinity or its equivalent.*
e. *Under ordinary circumstances he shall be expected to attend at least one full year in a Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.* (*Form of Government*)

The RPCNA has its own seminary, called the "Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It has five full-time professors and eight adjunct professors. Students can obtain a Master of Divinity or a Master of Theological Studies degree there. The Seminary is under the direct control of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and is governed through a Board of Trustees, elected by that body.

In addition, there are two other institutions controlled by the RPCNA

which, though not accredited, offer a diploma. These are the Ottawa Theological Hall, in Ottawa, Canada, and Kobe Theological Hall, in Kobe, Japan. After receiving a diploma from these institutions, students can pursue further studies at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh to obtain the required degree.

d. churches in ecclesiastical fellowship

9. CANADIAN AND AMERICAN REFORMED CHURCHES (CanRC)

At the beginning of 2009, the membership of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches was 16,570 persons gathered in 54 congregations across Canada and the United States. Fifty congregations are in Canada; the remaining 4 are in the United States. By God's grace, they could report at NAPARC with thankfulness that *the LORD allows us to live with a great degree of harmony.*

The Lord continues to bless their seminary, the Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario. This year marked the fortieth anniversary of its existence. This past September, three students graduated. Currently there are about eighteen students over a four year program. A new instructor in dogmatics, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, has been appointed to replace Dr. N.H. Gootjes who is on indefinite sick leave.

The next triennial General Synod of the CanRC is scheduled to convene on May 11, 2010, in Burlington, ON. Of particular note is the major revision of the 150 Psalms in terms of updating the language. Fourteen additional hymns are proposed, raising the total number of hymns in the Book of Praise from sixty-six to eighty. There is also a proposal to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RPCNA.

We rejoice that the Canadian Reformed Churches were approved by the synodical assemblies of the NAPARC churches and received as a member of NAPARC in 2008. We recognize that this is an important step involving a two-way handshake. On the one hand, the NAPARC churches are inviting the Canadian Reformed into ecumenical fellowship, and, on the other hand, the Canadian Reformed are inviting the NAPARC churches into ecumenical fellowship. May the Lord bless their participation in NAPARC.

Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches at the local level continues to flourish in many parts of the URCNA, particularly in Canada.

In a variety of ways – as we worship and break bread together, pray for one another, transfer members, engage in pulpit exchanges, exchange greetings at classis meetings, hold joint officebearer conferences, work together in evangelism and mission efforts, cooperate in building and maintaining Christian schools, and enjoy conversations along the pathway of life – we find ourselves at home with our Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters. Yes, there are differences of history and practice that present challenges, yet our fellowship with one another gives us many opportunities to encourage and admonish one another for the building up of our churches and members.

As a committee we see the process of expressing and enjoying unity between our respective churches and members is a long-term commitment. We serve the federation in helping to facilitate and encourage communication between the URCNA and the CanRC in the ways assigned to us by Synod, but expressing visibly the unity we have in Christ remains the task of each and all of the churches, where true, tangible unity must have its roots. As a federation, we have been working together with the Canadian Reformed Churches in Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* since the decision of Synod Escondido (2001) was ratified by the consistories of the federation in January 2002. Committees were appointed by that Synod and have been working ever since for the production of a common songbook, a church order, and developing a model for theological education. These projects have been and continue to be helpful not only in expressing our common confession, but they have also injected a healthy dose of realism into the unity process. In God's providence we are able to see more concretely the implications of and challenges to worshiping and serving the Lord together. Unity is not a journey that can be imposed by any committee or synod, but it is a calling in which we as churches must be willing to proceed in faith, leaving the timing to the Lord. There is no deadline; there is only the call to press on fearlessly, patiently, and humbly in the effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (cf. Eph. 4:2-4)

Concerns Related to Synod Schererville (2007)

a. Commitment to Unity

The decisions of Synod Schererville presented significant challenges in our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Nine Points against the Federal Vision, the decision to give priority to producing a URCNA Psalter Hymnal, and the revision of our ecumenical guidelines left many in the Canadian Reformed Churches wondering about our commitment to the pursuit of federative unity. While we may differ in our views on the decisions

of Synod Schererville, we recognize that in God's providence challenges are a test of faith and obedience. We must trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. As we work through these tests in dependence on God's Word, allowing the Reformed Confessions to direct our understanding of that Word, we know that in the long run this will strengthen our unity in the true faith, enabling us to stand as one man in the ministry of the Gospel and service of Christ. It is also a reminder that our decisions have direct impact not only on us, but also on churches with whom we enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship. Out of brotherly love our churches must always live and serve in that awareness.

Since the last synod we have held two full committee meetings with the Canadian Reformed Coordinators for Ecclesiastical Unity (CEU), and a few subcommittee meetings as well. The Churches of both federations have received the reports of the two full committee meetings. One of the purposes of our meetings was to hear their concerns with respect to the decisions of Synod Schererville. Another purpose was to help facilitate dialogue with our Classis Southwest US in answer to a series of questions raised by that classis a few years ago concerning Canadian Reformed doctrine. As always, we are grateful for the honest, thoughtful, and charitable friendship we have been able to enjoy with these brothers as we encounter hurdles on the road to deepening fellowship.

The brothers raised the concern about our revised ecumenical guidelines. Synod 2007 changed the wording under Phase 2 – Ecclesiastical Fellowship from being a phase of working *in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity* to a phase in which we acknowledge *the desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity*. Has our commitment to the Canadian Reformed changed mid-stream by this revision? Your committee stated that the new wording softens the language of commitment to federative unity, but does not remove that commitment. Our synodical mandate remains the same, namely, that we have a view toward *complete church unity*. We acknowledge that the URC is in *ecclesiastical fellowship* with more than one federation (besides the Canadian Reformed Churches, also the Reformed Church in the United States and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and the prospect of federative unity differs with each one. The new language reflects such diversity. The United Reformed brothers noted that the URC has not changed its commitment to the Canadian Reformed Churches, even though we acknowledge that the pathway to organic union is not as simple as many had hoped.

At a later meeting the Canadian Reformed brothers stated they would like

to see our upcoming Synod reaffirm its commitment to the agreement both federations accepted in 2001. We pointed out that the last URCNA synod reaffirmed their commitment to the work of the unity committees, even though there is now an extra step - see Article 93.c.d. of *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007* which employs language of commitment to the agreement of 2001. Article 93 is here quoted (highlight added):

> *That by way of exception to the adopted guidelines for Ecumenical and Church Unity, Synod 2007 allow the current unity committees of the URCNA (whose work properly belongs to phase 3A) to continue working with their corresponding Canadian Reformed committees while the two federations continue to function in Phase 2.*
>
> Grounds:
>
> a. This would be consistent with decisions already made by Synod 2007, in mandating the PJCO, the Liturgical Forms Committee, and the Theological Education Committee to continue their work with the Canadian Reformed committees.
> b. Whenever (at a future synod) a decision may be approved by the two federations to enter into Phase 3A, though the process of developing a plan of union has already begun, the plan will still need to "outline the timing, coordination and/or integration of the broader assemblies, the translation of the Bible and the confessions, and the missions abroad."
> **c. This would reinforce our commitment toward possible eventual integrated federative church unity in the midst of the clarifications Synod 2007 has made with regard to the understanding and implementation of the approved phases for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.**
> d. This would honor the commitments the URCNA made in 2001 to our Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters by virtue of beginning these committees.

b. Status and Meaning of the Nine Points

Another significant issue has to do with the standing of the *Nine Points* against the teachings of the Federal Vision, and their meaning. Of particular concern is Point 6: *Synod rejects the error of those who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29).* Read against the background of the Liberation in 1944, these words appear to some to be a direct assault on

views of the covenant prevalent among the Canadian Reformed. In the context of 1944, ministers were placed under suspension for rejecting the view of Abraham Kuyper who taught that the covenant of God is made only with the elect, presumed to be regenerate at baptism; the non-elect do not truly receive baptism and the promises of God. Some taught that there are two different covenants – an internal covenant for the elect, and an external covenant for the non-elect. Many in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands protested these teachings of Kuyper. The Liberated churches emphasized that there is one covenant of grace, and all believers and their children are brought into that covenant through baptism, truly receiving the promises of God's covenant in Christ Jesus as well as its obligations to live in faith and obedience . The elect, like Jacob, are given the Spirit to respond in faith and to enter into the personal possession of what has been granted in promise. The non-elect, like Esau, are covenant-breakers who reject the promises and obligations of God's covenant.

Your committee responded by saying that Synod Schererville addresses the proponents of Federal Vision who speak as though in baptism a person is granted every spiritual gift, including saving faith, the grace of conversion and justification. The statements were made to uphold the doctrine that a man is justified *through faith alone* and God will never reverse His gracious declaration concerning the believing sinner. Point 6 of the Nine Statements of Schererville does not deny that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace. What Point 6 denies is that all baptized persons are in the covenant in *precisely* the same way *such that* no distinction is made between those who have the promises by covenant and those who receive by faith what is promised. It should be read in the context of Point 5 which rejects the error *that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness.* (underline added)

Regarding the question of the status of the Nine Points, your committee agreed that there may be some ambiguity in the status of the Nine Points. On the one hand they were *presented to the churches as pastoral advice*, while on the other hand they were formulated as a *rejection of errors*. On balance, however, the status of the 9 Points in the United Reformed Churches is clear. They are binding on the churches as a decision of Synod, but they are not extra-confessional statements to which officebearers must subscribe. We subscribe only to the teachings of Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. These points are helpful in alerting us to doctrinal errors which deviate from our doctrinal standards. If a minister asserts what they

deny he should be asked to explain himself further to see whether his convictions fit within the confessions, but any charge leveled against an officebearer must be adjudicated only in terms of Scripture and the confessions. In fact, Synod Schererville chose to *remind and encourage individuals and churches that, if there are officebearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order(Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) for addressing theological error.* (Minutes: Article 67) We stated that the intent of the 9 points is not to tie anyone down to a particular theological formulation but to raise underlying concerns in order to help us remain faithful to our subscription.

Discussions relating to Questions from the Churches

a. discussion on the URCNA doctrine of creation

The Coordinators for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches were instructed by the Canadian Reformed Synod to ask the CERCU about the position of the URCNA on the Framework Hypothesis. Your committee responded with a letter, stating: *We are unable to give you such a position since synod has not formally declared itself on the Framework reading of Genesis 1. The closest thing we have to such a position would be the statement on creation adopted by Synod Escondido 2001*. Your committee sent a copy of the statement of Synod 2001 on creation to the CEU.

b. discussion with Classis Southwest U.S.

Canadian Reformed office bearers and committees are generally hesitant to speak for the federation on doctrinal matters when the federation itself has no official position. They do not want to bind one another to extra confessional positions. For this reason when our Classis Southwest posed 16 questions some years ago concerning Canadian Reformed thinking on specific doctrinal issues, our Canadian Reformed brothers were uncertain about the wisdom of speaking to matters not directly addressed by the Reformed Confessions or by a Canadian Reformed Synod. Your committee urged the Coordinators for Ecclesiastical Unity to find a way to address the concerns raised by Classis Southwest, preferably in a face-to-face discussion.

In January, 2010, Dr. Jason Van Vliet and Dr. Gerhard Visscher, professors at the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario, attended Classis Southwest to engage with the brothers in a doctrinal discussion similar to a *colloquium doctum*. The exchange was edifying and fruitful,

we believe, and we hope that through it we may be enabled all the more to stand shoulder to shoulder in contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. Trusting one another requires knowing one another, and knowledge is best developed through direct communication. (A transcript of the doctrinal discussion was published in the March 10 & 24, 2010 issues of Christian Renewal.) We encourage other classes who have questions or concerns regarding the doctrine or practice of the Canadian Reformed Churches to invite representatives to a similar type of doctrinal discussion. Your committee is willing to help with arranging such an event.

c. proposed discussion with Synod London

Aware that other churches have similar concerns as the ones raised by Classis Southwest U.S. our committee proposes to Synod London that adequate time be given to the Canadian Reformed fraternal delegates on Tuesday evening to answer questions presented in advance by URCNA councils. In December, and then again in February, we sent out a letter to all of our churches inviting councils to submit questions for the Canadian Reformed delegates by March 15. We have received submissions from several churches and have forwarded them to the Canadian Reformed CEU. Since the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches will be held in May, 2010, D.V., this will give their Synod opportunity to review our questions. The questions from our councils are appended to our report. (See Appendix 4.)
In a parallel arrangement, the Canadian Reformed CEU have already made the same request of their churches regarding questions and concerns about the doctrine and life of the URCNA. Making provision for such consistorial feedback as well as allowing for a time of dialogue with URC fraternal delegates at their synod is something the deliberative nature of a Canadian Reformed synod already accommodates. CERCU will also be asking the Coordinators for Ecclesiastical Unity to forward to us the questions they have received from their churches.

We seek the Lord's blessing for the way ahead, asking that He keep us faithful, and we look forward to what He has in store for us as we follow His command to love one another deeply, from the heart. Some may wish we were further along in the process of ecumenical relations, others may want to put on the brakes, but let us remember to be thankful for what we have already been able to give to and receive from one another as members together of one Body. *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! (Psalm 133:1)*

10. ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Synod Schererville voted to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship – Phase 2 – with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a decision ratified by a majority of the councils in January, 2008.

Since that time we have had two meetings (via subcommittee) with the OPC Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR). The OPC continues to experience the Lord's blessing in faith, mission, service, and growth. In its report to NAPARC 2009, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church noted a growth of 1.22 % bringing membership to a total of 29,095 souls gathered in 325 particular and mission congregations, and served by 477 ministers, 1054 ruling elders, and 779 deacons. Foreign mission work in behalf of the General Assembly continued in Asia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Quebec, Suriname, Uganda, and Uruguay. Twenty new home mission works began receiving denominational assistance during this period. Promising inroads for ministry were made among Indonesian, Liberian, and Hispanic communities, an encouraging development.

In 2011 the OPC will celebrate the 75th anniversary of her founding with a special agenda to be proposed for the 78th General Assembly, the Lord willing.

Also worthy of thankful note is the fact that a new Psalter hymnal, to contain all 150 Psalms, is in production. A revised Directory for Public Worship, after 42 years of reflection, discussion, and debate, was approved by the General Assembly in 2009. The Directory is currently before the Presbyteries for their approval. As per our agreement in Phase 2 that the churches *shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted*, the CEIR explained the revised document. The changes do not represent a departure from Reformed doctrine and liturgy. The revised Directory is the same in substance, yet is more specific and gives more directions. The membership vows have an additional vow declaring belief in the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. The changes also signify a move toward liturgical forms. There is lively disagreement over this direction within the OPC. It seems they will continue to require the use of the forms as they have in the past – following their content, but not necessarily their formulations. Among the grounds provided by the General Assembly in seeking the approval of the presbyteries, the following were included:

- *The Final Proposed Revision (FPR) more consistently explicates the implications of the fact that public worship is "divine" (II.4) and that it is "before all else a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people" (II.2).*

- *The FPR more explicitly states the regulative principle of worship.*
    - *The FPR shows greater conformity to the fact that, according to our Standards, baptized covenant children are members of the church, albeit non-communicant members.*
- *The FPR shows greater care in its allusions to Scripture.*

The CEIR expressed to us its concern about the direction of the GKN-V (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – Liberated) and urged caution in developing ecumenical ties with this federation. CERCU passed this concern along to our Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA). The CEIR also urged caution to our Synod in the way we express ourselves doctrinally. While they did not express disagreement with the substance of the Nine Points of Synod Schererville, they were concerned about formulations that could harm our fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

11. REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS)

Since the decision of Synod Calgary (2004), followed by the ratification of a majority of the consistories, the URCNA has been in Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase 2) with the Reformed Church in the United States. We continue to thank the Lord for the blessing of our partnership with the RCUS in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the faithfulness of the RCUS in preserving and propagating the Reformed faith as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. They *remain committed to God-centered worship, historic biblical orthodoxy, confessional Reformed theology, Christian missions, and Presbyterian government.* Truly, our fellowship in the Gospel as communities of churches is an encouragement as we serve Christ the King together in North America!

The Reformed Church in the United States traces its roots back to 1747 when several congregations of German immigrants in the Philadelphia area were organized as a German Reformed Synod under the authority of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. In 1791 they became an independent Synod which later gave in to liberalism. In 1934 one classis seceded from what had been the Reformed Church in the United States and since that time this classis has multiplied under the Lord's hand of blessing into 6 classes across the United States. To date the RCUS numbers about 3800 members in 43 congregations, including 5 church plants. They struggle with the need for ministers and students in order that vacant congregations may be supplied with pastors. We pray that the Lord will favour them by supplying their need for ministers.

In the area of Foreign Missions they continue to support and work with the Free Reformed Church of Kenya and the Evangelical Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo. One of their ministers, Rev. Thomas Mayville, serves with the OPC mission in Uganda as a teacher at the Knox Theological College. They rejoice in this blessing of sending out their first foreign missionary.The RCUS also has contact with Reformed churches and pastors in the Philippines.

The RCUS is in fraternal relations with the OPC, the RPCNA, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated), the CanRC and the URCNA.

Since Synod Schererville a URCNA representative has attended each of their annual synods. Rev. Larry Johnson attended and addressed the RCUS Synod in May, 2009. In his report on that meeting he stated:

> *I emphasized our growing unity with the RCUS, especially in the northwest Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota area where churches from the URC and RCUS labor in close proximity. I reminded them of our work together in arranging for the URC to begin a church plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I pointed out that a recent death in Doon affected 4 ministers and 3 churches in the RCUS in the Midwest. This was because our families are very comfortable joining RCUS churches when they move to cities or towns where there are no UR Churches.*

Two face-to-face meetings have been held with the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee in conjunction with our annual meetings at NAPARC. The main concern at both meetings was the impending reception of an independent congregation in Carbondale, PA, into URCNA Classis Eastern United States. The members of this congregation had previously left the RCUS Carbondale congregation over a discipline matter. The continuing RCUS congregation has since become an RCUS home mission near Carbondale. The concern of the RCUS was in connection with our NAPARC agreements relating to the transfer of members and congregations (*Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations*) and the proximity of home missions among NAPARC denominations (*Golden Rule Comity Agreement*). Both agreements are appended to this report. (See Appendices 5, 6.) When we met with the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee at NAPARC 2009, they gave the encouraging report that reconciliation was in the works.

We are thankful to report that the Carbondale congregation, its pastor, Classis Eastern United States, and the RCUS have been working through these issues in a harmonious way, so that in receiving the Carbondale congregation we are also able to honour our agreement with the RCUS as a denomination

in Ecclesiastical Fellowship and as a NAPARC church. In a recent letter to Classis East, the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee (Covenant East Classis) chairman James Sawtelle wrote:

> *We want to relay to you our recent action in responding to the Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church of Carbondale , PA. We have sent a letter of resolution to them regarding some matters that have been between us for some years. We are grateful for the outcome of this issue to this date, and hope we can make progress as the Lord grants strength to us all....We cherish our fraternal relationship with you brothers, and hope out of this experience we can work ever closer with you in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

May the Lord of the Church be pleased, in spite of our sins and weaknesses, to bring continued healing and blessing upon the RCUS and URCNA congregations in that area. It is a good reminder to us all that in the ministry of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline towards repentance we work together as co-labourers with churches of like precious faith in guarding and extending the Church of Christ which He is building against all the assaults of the evil one.

IV. NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL (NAPARC)

a. membership and annual meetings

Since Synod Schererville, members of CERCU have met at NAPARC three times: November 13-14, 2007, in Newark, New Jersey (hosted by the KAPC); November 11-12, 2008, in Greenville, South Carolina (hosted by the OPC); and November 17-18, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan (hosted by the HRC).

Two new federations have been added to the membership of NAPARC since our last synod: The Canadian Reformed Churches in 2008, and the Presbyterian Reformed Church in 2009. Churches are welcomed into membership by a 2/3 majority of the synods of the member churches. Since most churches have annual synods or general assemblies, the PRC and CanRC had the required majority to be received without the vote of the URCNA. Because some of the member churches do not meet annually in synodical assembly, three years are allotted for the ratification process to be completed. To signify our agreement with the actions of the other NAPARC members, we recommend to Synod that we approve the membership of the Canadian

and American Reformed Churches and the Presbyterian Reformed Church in NAPARC.

This brings the total number of NAPARC churches to 12. Current member churches are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), L'Église Reformée du Québec (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC), the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Because of the number of churches in NAPARC, the annual dues have been reduced from $500 to $300 per year.

Until now when Synod mandates us to pursue ecumenical relations with a particular federation or denomination we have dialogued with their ecumenical relations committee before recommending to synod to enter into Phase 1. Since the basis of NAPARC indicates already a good degree of shared faith, we recommend to Synod that all churches of NAPARC not already in Phase 1 or 2 relations, be considered in Phase 1, Corresponding Relations.

The NAPARC Constitution describes NAPARC as *a fellowship that enables the constituent churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.* NAPARC thus offers a unique opportunity on our continent for churches of like precious faith to meet face-to-face through official representatives, and this opportunity grows as more and more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches become members. Part of the attraction of NAPARC is that it is practical ecumenism in low-gear. There is real interaction among the federations and denominations without date-setting for organic union. The majority of the time at NAPARC is spent in hearing reports concerning the synodical actions, missionary efforts, and general life and concerns of each member church. It is a good venue in which to hear from the churches, and also from which to be able to report back to our churches as we do also in this report to Synod. If our churches have concerns about developments in any of the NAPARC churches the NAPARC meeting is a good avenue to voice these concerns. Although NAPARC itself may not be the vehicle to unite 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.

Another important aspect of interaction between NAPARC churches are NAPARC's annual foreign and home mission consultations. In these meetings the churches' representatives share with each other the joys and struggles of the mission field, and discuss their plans for future endeavours. You can read some of this in the appended reports written by our Foreign Mission delegate, Rev. Ray Sikkema. (See Appendix 7.) CERCU has asked Rev. Sikkema to represent our churches at these meetings because of his involvement on the missions committee of the ICRC (International Council of Reformed Churches) as well as his membership on the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA). If any officebearer would like to participate in the foreign or home mission consultations as a URCNA representative and report to the churches, please contact the secretary of CERCU.

From a practical standpoint, meeting together at NAPARC also presents a good opportunity to the member churches to hold ecumenical meetings with individual church committees. This year at NAPARC our committee members were able to have individual meetings with the OPC, the RPCNA, the ERQ, and the RCUS.

So there is a sense in which not a lot of big things happen at NAPARC, but a lot of small things do, and we ask the Lord to bless the series of small happenings in such a way that each federation/denomination is strengthened, and at the same time the unity of all is advanced. Where the Lord leads NAPARC we do not know, but we trust that the ministry of reconciliation within our churches will be made the more effective as we work together in harmony as a Council of North American Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

The next meeting of NAPARC is scheduled to be hosted by the Free Reformed Churches in Pompton Plains, New Jersey, on November 16-17, 2010. A committee of review was formed to review the constitution, goals, activities, and meetings of NAPARC and to make recommendations for the future direction of NAPARC in light of its purpose and function. (The NAPARC Constitution is appended.) The committee members are Rev. Bartel Elshout (HRC), Rev. Bernard Westerveld (ERQ), Mr. Mark Bube (OPC), Rev. David Reese (RPCNA), and Dr. Riemer Faber (CanRC). If any council has suggestions for this committee, please contact the secretary of CERCU.

b. the Presbyterian Reformed Church

CERCU has pursued ecumenical relations and made recommendations only with respect to denominations and federations assigned to it by our synods. However, our recommendation to synod that we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with all churches of NAPARC not currently in Phase 2 places us in the situation of making a recommendation to Synod London with respect to the Presbyterian Reformed Church – the only denomination in NAPARC that has not been assigned to us by a synod.

The Presbyterian Reformed Church is a group of churches in North America continuing historic Scottish Presbyterian orthodoxy in doctrine, worship, government and discipline, on the basis of a conviction that these principles and practices are founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God. There are 5 congregations in the United States and Canada and 1 in England.

The PRC website offers a brief account of the history of the Presbyterian Reformed Church:

> *The Presbyterian Reformed Church was formed on November 17, 1965, by two congregations in the Province of Ontario, Canada. Each congregation had been established by Scottish and Irish Presbyterians about eighty years before. The creation of the presbytery took place largely at the instigation of John Murray, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, who had a long relationship with the two founding congregations. Murray composed the proposals leading to the union, and also the constitution which served as the Basis of Union.*

The Church officers are required to pledge strict subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It is a denomination committed to the simplicity and purity of worship, and to the presbyterian form of church government.

Your committee recommends that as a member in NAPARC alongside the URCNA we enter into Corresponding Relations (Phase 1) with the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

(See the appropriate section of the above report for the rationale or grounds of the following recommendations).

1. That Synod approve the editorial changes proposed in the synodical guidelines for ecumenical relations.
2. That Synod extend the allowable time of service of a CERCU member to three 3-year terms.
3. That Synod appoint or re-appoint three members-at-large. Revs. Bill Pols, Peter Vellenga and Harry Zekveld are eligible for reappointment. *[Note: If recommendation 2 is not adopted, Rev. Harry Zekveld is not eligible for reappointment.]*
4. That Synod declare that the matter of term limits for classical representatives be considered a classical prerogative and remind the classes to appoint or reappoint classical representatives to CERCU as required.
5. That Synod increase the budget for CERCU to $6,000.00 per annum.
6. The Synod grant the floor to the Canadian Reformed ecclesiastical delegates for one hour on Tuesday evening, July 27, to answer questions submitted to them by URCNA councils.
7. That Synod establish *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* – Phase 2 – with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ), and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Article 36 of the Church Order.
8. That Synod establish *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* – Phase 2 – with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA), and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Article 36 of the Church Order.
9. Recommendations with regard to NAPARC:
    a. That Synod ratify the decision of NAPARC to welcome the Canadian Reformed Churches into the membership of NAPARC.
    b. That Synod ratify the decision of NAPARC to welcome the Presbyterian Reformed Church into the membership of NAPARC.
    c. That Synod instruct the Stated Clerk to communicate these decisions to the NAPARC Secretary.
    d. That Synod take note of the reports submitted by Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema concerning the NAPARC Foreign Missions consultation. These reports are found in Appendix 6.
10. That Synod consider all member denominations and federations of NAPARC which are not already in Phase 1 or 2 of ecumenical relations to be in Phase 1 – Corresponding Relations. This includes the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Heritage Reformed Congregations, the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in

America, and the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

11. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the committee chairman and secretary when committee matters are being considered.
12. That Synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. John A. Bouwers, chairman
Rev. Harry Zekveld, secretary

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Ecumenical Relations – Pre-Synod 2007

GUIDELINES FOR ECUMENICITY AND CHURCH UNITY
United Reformed Churches in North America
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

Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories.

Appendix 2 – ERQ Form for Infant Baptism

FORM FOR INFANT BAPTISM (adopted by ERQ Synod)

(Note: The elements, order, and text of this liturgy are suggested and may be modified according as needed by the pastor and local counsel/session. The questions for the vows that have been adopted by the synod of the ERQ cannot be modified except by the synod in order to preserve the unity of the church.)

INSTITUTION

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Let us listen to how our Lord instituted baptism: (quote Matthew 28.18-20)

Obedient to this command, the Church baptises believers and their children.

INSTRUCTION

Let us recall the meaning of Christian baptism. Let us take this opportunity

to remember our own baptism whose importance is not limited to the moment of its administration. Its significance embraces the entire life of every child of God and of the Christian assembly.

1. Baptism reminds us that we and our children are born sinful. We are consequently under the judgment of God and we merit his holy anger (Eph.2.3). The water of baptism reminds us of our need to be born again and to have our sins washed away.

2. Baptism is a testimony of the goodness of God. The water has no power in and of itself. However, through baptism, the Lord demonstrates visibly his grace to us and confirms to us his promise. He places his name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, on us and calls us to himself.

   The Father receives us into his covenant, promising to adopt us into his family and to make us heirs of the promise: "I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Gal.3.26-29; Rom.8.17; Heb.8.10)

   The Son promises to purify us from our sins through his sacrifice on the cross and to make us participate in the new life of his resurrection. (Rom.6.4; Col.2.12)

   The Holy Spirit promises to regenerate us, to make us participate in all the spiritual blessings found in Christ and to cause us grow in this new life, until we are made perfect on the day Jesus Christ returns. (Jn.3.3, 5; Ti.3.5)

3. Baptism invites us to assume our responsibilities within the covenant. The Lord Jesus calls us and our children to place our confidence in him, to love him with all our heart, and to live this new life with love, obedience and justice. (Eph.4.22-24).

   If, through weakness, we become guilty of sin, we must not remain discouraged by doubting the grace of God, but rather repent and firmly believe his promises. For, baptism is a testimony, worthy of faith, of the eternal covenant that God concluded with us. If, however, we close our hearts to the grace of God, we bring upon ourselves his anger and righteous judgment.

4. Baptism is administered to children of believers. Our heavenly Father, after having received us into his covenant, also wants to receive our children into his covenant, even if they do not yet understand what it means. For, since they, without their knowledge, share in Adam's condemnation, they also, without their knowledge, share in the promises of God and of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. (Ac.16.31)

Although the essence of the covenant promise is the same in the old and new covenants, the grace of God to comfort believers is more clearly manifest in the new covenant. (Jer.31.33-34; Heb.8.6-13; 2 Tim.2.11-13) Therefore, God does not limit the promise of the covenant to believers only, but he confirms it again to the children of believers when the apostle Peter declares:

> *"The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."* (Ac.2.39)

What God said to Abraham, the father of all believers, therefore remains true for us and for our children:

> *"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."* (Gen.17.7)

For this reason, in the old covenant, God ordered the circumcision of little children. Circumcision was the sign and seal of the righteousness received by faith. (Rom.4.11) In the new covenant, baptism replaced circumcision. (Col.2.11-12) Christ himself took children in his arms and blessed them, for they are heirs of the kingdom of God. (Mr.10.16). Through their baptism, the promises of the covenant are announced and guaranteed to the children. They are received into the Christian community and are separated from the children of the world. (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 74)

Christian parents have therefore the responsibility to present their children for holy baptism and to promise publicly to educate their children in the Christian faith. (Eph.6.1-4) They must faithfully teach their children that they have been set apart by their baptism to be the precious children of God and to be united to the believers of the Church. The parents will read to them the Word of God and instruct them in the principals of the Christian faith. They will pray for them and with them. They will give them an example of godliness in order to teach them to love the Lord, to trust him and to serve him.

Each child, as he grows up, is responsible to respond to the call of God. By responding with faith, he will know the blessings promised in Christ. However, if he turns away and refuses to respond, he will bring upon himself the curses of the covenant.

PRAYER

In order that this sacrament may be administered to the glory of God and for the edification of the Church, let us seek his blessing in prayer.

PROMISES OF THE PARENTS

Dear _____,

You have just heard that baptism is an institution of God that attests the promise of his covenant: *"I will be your God, and you will be my people."* Since you have asked that your child, _____, should be baptised, will you please respond wholeheartedly, in the presence of God and of his Church, to the following questions.

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your only Lord and Savior? Do you believe the promises of the Word of God, and do you affirm that its doctrine of salvation is taught faithfully in this Christian Church?
2. Do you believe that _____, who is sinful by nature and under the judgment of God, is nonetheless set apart in Jesus Christ to be a member of his covenant, and therefore he (she) must be baptized?
3. Do you promise, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the support of the Church, to instruct _____ in the Christian faith, to pray regularly for and with him (her), to encourage him (her) by your example of godliness, and to invite him (her) to believe in Christ and to live as his disciple?

-- Yes, with the help of God.

RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

Dear brothers and sisters of this Church,

Since the children of believers belong to the covenant of God and the promises of our Lord are equally for them, will you please respond to the following questions:

1. Do you receive _____ with love as a member of the Church according to the covenant promise?
2. Do you promise to help his (her) parents by praying for this family and by contributing to the Christian instruction of this child?
3. Do you promise to encourage him (her) to live as a disciple of the Lord within the communion of believers?

-- Yes, with the help of God.

OR

EXHORTATION TO THE CHURCH

Dear brothers and sisters of this Church,

Since there is one Lord, one faith and one baptism, receive this child in Christian love as a member of the covenant people. Pray for this family and contribute to the instruction of this child in the Christian faith. Encourage him (her) to live as a disciple of the Lord within the communion of believers.

ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM

_____, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

According to the commandment of Christ, _____ is now received into the Church of Jesus Christ and is called to confess his (her) faith in Christ and to be his (her) faithful servant.

PRAYER

Let us pray for this covenant child.

BLESSING

Numbers 6.24-26

SONG

Appendix 3 – URC-FRC Discussion Paper: *Thoughts on "the View of the Congregation"*

Thoughts on "the View of the Congregation"
In ecumenical dialogue between FRC and URC Unity Committees
September 2007

Having benefited together already from several fruitful discussions regarding our common confession and convictions regarding the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have agreed together that it might be helpful were we to seek to focus our discussion on how God's assembled people ought to be viewed. Indeed, the way the congregation of God's people is viewed will have

great bearing both in regard to pastoral approach as well as with regard to homiletical method.

It is obvious first of all that the pastoral matter of the view of the congregation is a matter that needs to be addressed from the historical perspective of our own experience, that is to say, covenantally. While the Scripturally taught, comforting and God-exalting reality that God "knows who are His" in terms of His eternal decrees certainly has relevance (even ultimate relevance) to the matter at hand, it is also true that we are presently not in any position to see the church "as God sees it." No officebearer today is afforded a peek into the Lamb's Book of Life. *The secret things belong to God but the things revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law* (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Historically, practically, covenantally our view of the congregation needs to be based not on what God *sees*, but on what God *says* in His Word. In His Word He has declared and promised over and over to His people in the language of the covenant – *I will be your God, and you shall be My people.* And this promise, the Lord reiterates again and again, *is to you and to your children* (Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39). And so we have confessed from out of the Scriptures, the congregation is the community of God's covenant consisting of believers and their children who have been incorporated into the Christian Church through baptism and are recipients of His gracious promises. (HC QA 74; BC.34). In the congregation, then, as regards to what is promised, all such are to be viewed as being included in the covenant and church of God: they are His people. The sign and seal of that promise that God declares belongs also to the children of believers is *not an empty or meaningless sign so as to deceive us*. (BC.33). The fact that children of believers are thereby comprehended in this covenant of grace, and are to be seen as holy by virtue of this covenant, affords unspeakable comfort to godly parents when it pleases God to call their children out of this life in their infancy. (CD 1.17). God's covenant promise is sure and certain.

This does not exclude the fact that we and our children are *conceived and born in sin*. (HC 7) *We are so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil.* (HC 8) *According to God's righteous judgment we deserve punishment both in this world and forever after.* (HC 12). *It is necessary for us to be born again* in order that we might in true faith embrace the cleansing and newness of life which are ours in Christ by God's gracious covenant. We stand in need of the work of the Spirit of God to strengthen, but also to create, faith in our hearts so that we may share in Christ and all His blessings. (HC 21, 65). Thus, through the water of baptism, the Lord speaks to us con-

cerning the impurity of our souls and the need to loathe ourselves, and also calls us to seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves. (Form for Baptism). The need for cleansing and renewal through Christ's blood and Spirit is true for the whole congregation all the time, for *in this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of obedience* to God. (HC 114). The longer we live, the more we come to know our sinfulness. (HC 115).

However, the water of baptism speaks to us not only of our frightful, natural condition. Rather than lead us to despair, baptism teaches us to view the congregation of God's covenant as set apart from the unbelieving world for salvation in Jesus Christ. Believers and their children *are promised the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.* (HC 74). The good tidings announced to the Philippian jailer by the apostle Paul also come to us: *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.* (Acts 16:31). Thus the congregation must always be viewed through the lens of the promise of God. Far from giving anyone reason to presume he or she is regenerated and saved, baptism reminds and assures us that God's free gift of salvation in the crucified and risen Christ is ours to embrace, trust, and delight in all our lives. Looking at the congregation through the lens of the promise means also that we stand under the warning of God's covenant, namely, if we do not embrace with a lively faith the promises which covenantally sanctify us, we incur God's covenant wrath.

Therefore, in our view of the congregation it is essential to distinguish between possessing the promises of salvation and appropriating the salvation promised. This is not a matter of dividing the congregation into groups, but of recognizing the calling of every member to receive Christ's righteousness and make it his own by faith alone. The promise of God's covenant will not profit us unless it is mixed with faith in those who hear it. (Hebrews 4:2) Even so, the believing response which God requires of us is not at all owing to the powers of our free will. In order that we who are dead in sin might obey the call to believe, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith which embraces Jesus Christ and all His merits. (BC 22) Pervading the inmost recesses of man through the Gospel, He marvellously and mysteriously changes our rebellious wills, softens our hardened hearts, and breaks down our pride. (CD III/IV.11,12,17) Powerfully and sweetly He awakens in us the sacrifice of a broken spirit and produces both the will to believe and the act of believing. (CD III/IV.14; RE 4). In this way *the Holy Spirit imparts to us that which we have in Christ*. (Form for Baptism). He makes us *partakers of Christ and all His blessings*. (HC QA 53).

It is the nature of a covenant that what is granted in the promises must also

be appropriated and embraced. It must be the desire of the church to pray and work in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to see to it that those who have been given the promises come to rest in those promises, finding God faithful; that they come by faith to embrace the Saviour and live out of the blessing of knowing God (Jeremiah 31:34; John 17:3).

Because the Holy Spirit works with the Word in the congregation when and how He pleases, we must be sensitive to a variety of spiritual conditions among the members. By the grace of God many may come to know and enjoy the comfortable assurance of persevering; in some a living faith in Christ and assured confidence of soul are not yet strongly felt; others are seriously seeking after God, making diligent use of the means God has appointed; some through neglect are backsliding; it may be that some *give themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh and are not seriously converted to God* (CD,1.16; 5.4-13). We must not be naïve about the fact that there may be *hypocrites mixed in the church with the good* (BC.29) who do not respond to the promises of God in true faith. It is the task of the church in its preaching and discipline to warn all those who live in unbelief and hypocrisy that the anger and eternal condemnation of God rest on them, and it is the task of the church to call all and everyone to repentance and faith (HC QA 84).

When the impenitent plainly give evidence that they are not of Christ, then, in the hope of repentance, steps must be taken to remove the evildoer from the congregation (HC QA 85). By such discriminating preaching and discipline the elect are gathered, the unrepentant are driven away, and the Body of Christ is built.

Even though great infirmities remain in them, the members of the Church or congregation may be known by the marks of Christians: they continually take refuge in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, fight against sin, follow after righteousness, and love the true God and their neighbour. (BC.29).

While ever holding Christ before God's covenant people, we should then seek to view and embrace the congregation in the spirit of charity which our confession commends: following the example of the apostles, we are to think in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives, for the inner chambers of the heart are unknown to us. (CD 3/4.15)

Appendix 4 – Questions from URCNA for Canadian Reformed Ecumenical Delegates

Questions and Concerns from URC Consistories and Councils to be addressed by Canadian Reformed Fraternal Delegates to Synod London

Creation

1. What is the CanRC position regarding creation? How do you view the Framework Hypothesis? What is the view promoted in the Theological College and held by pastors and members in the CanRC? Are there any ministers or professors who hold to the Framework theory or any kind of theistic evolution? Are the CanRCs concerned about the views on Creation held within some URCs?

Covenant

2. We have sometimes been left with the impression that there is a rather widespread problem among the youth of the CanRC churches with respect to lifestyle (for example: drinking and/or partying among the youth, inappropriate language and conduct at hockey tournaments, etc.). While we acknowledge that the URCs also have moral behaviour issues within its young people the questions we would have are these: How are the covenantal responsibilities of the youth and the call to holy life dealt with in terms of preaching, pastoral care, and church discipline in the Canadian Reformed Churches? Are parents held accountable for the promises they made at the baptism of their children? How is the doctrine of the covenant practically applied? Are the youth instructed in *both* the blessings *and* the demands/curses of the covenant? Are the attitudes of the youth a reflection of what lives in the hearts of the adults?

Preaching

3. It has been our perception that there has been a tendency over the years in Canadian Reformed preaching to neglect the preaching of the first use of the law, coupled with a clear call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

4. It has also been our perception that the need for the new birth (as the beginning of new life in the human heart) is not really emphasized in their theology and preaching in general.

5. And lastly, it has been our perception that challenging applicatory preaching has been lacking quite a bit in many of their pulpits.

6. What kind of preaching is promoted and taught at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches? Does the redemptive-historical approach in the CanRC also encourage practical application and the call to godly living? Does it demand repentance and faith? Does it proclaim and witness to all unbelievers and such as do not sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted (Lord's Day 31)? Is the preaching of the Word directed not only to the heads but also the hearts and consciences of the members of the congregation?

Ecclesiology

7. It has been the experience of many of our members, that the attitude of our Canadian Reformed Churches and its members, with regards to us as United Reformed believers, changed for the better only once the URCNA was formally accepted by their synod as a sister church. This raises the serious question whether the attitude of the majority of Canadian Reformed people is determined by synod decisions and the letter of the Church Order, or by the Word and Spirit of Christ. It has been our perception over the years, that the Canadian Reformed Churches see only themselves and churches with which they have ecclesiastical fellowship, as true churches of Christ.

8. Are the Canadian Reformed churches in accord with or accepting of our current practice of fenced communion?

9. Are distinctions regarding the nature of the church that are identified by such terms as visible and invisible, local and universal, organization and organism, militant and triumphant generally accepted in Canadian Reformed circles? What are the benefits or dangers of using such language and assuming the concepts they represent? Are there dangers in not appreciating the concepts represented by such language?

10. What are we to understand about how the Canadian Reformed understand the nature of the church when members leave a Canadian Reformed congregation for another reformed church and an announcement is made to the effect that they have "left the true Church"?

11. If a member of a CanRC congregation would date or marry a member of another Reformed church (for example, a member of a Free Reformed congregation, or PCA congregation) would the consistory approve the marriage? We have a copy of a pastoral letter written by the consistory of a Canadian Reformed Church regarding "courtship with those who

do not belong to a sister church". When the pastoral letter was written (January 2000) there was "as yet no mutual recognition of each other as sister churches" therefore courtship with a member of a URC was very strongly discouraged. The document even states that such a relationship "would not be right. It would also be wrong for our member to attend the church services of the URC". Is this view commonly held by Consistories in the Canadian Reformed Churches? (Note: the above quotations are taken directly from the Pastoral letter). If such a marriage takes place, and the Canadian Reformed member leaves her church to join the Reformed church where her husband is a member, is it a common practice to publish a note in the bulletin(s) stating that the member has "left the church of Jesus Christ"?

12. It has come to our attention that the Canadian Reformed Churches permit church members to withdraw their membership rather than follow the steps of discipline as is practiced in the United Reformed Churches. How would you defend this from Scriptural, confessional, and church orderly perspectives?

13. Does unity require uniformity? For example: should the URCs and the CanRCs decide to federate do you believe all the churches must sing out of the same hymnal/Psalter? Must we all practice the same process for allowing visitors to the Lord's Table? Is it important that we all use the same version of the Bible? Must candidates for the ministry come from one theological seminary?

Ethics

14. It has been our perception over the years that a casual attitude towards the use of alcohol, particularly in public, and even regarding intoxication, has been tolerated by some consistories, to the detriment of their Christian witness the world.

15. It's has been our conviction that modesty in dress, particularly among the ladies, could be stressed much firmer in Canadian Reformed circles in general.

16. It has also been our perception that there is a fairly widespread tendency among Canadian Reformed worshippers in many of their churches, not to reach out in love to strangers and visitors in their midst on Sundays.

Appendix 5 – NAPARC Agreement on Transfer

NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations

(*From the Minutes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Adopted November 11th, 1987.*)

Recognizing that the churches of NAPARC have on occasion unintentionally received members or ordained officers who were under various states of discipline in another NAPARC church, thus creating tension between the churches, and at the same time recognizing the need for mutual freedom and openness on the part of the churches, we agree to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of the other denominations as follows:

1. Regular Transfer of membership.
   That in the regular transfer of membership between NAPARC churches, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis not receive a member until appropriate document of transfer is in the hands of the receiving church.

2. Transfer with Irregularities.
   a. That upon request for a transfer of membership by a person under discipline, the sending session/consistory or presbytery/classis inform the receiving body of the nature and extend of the disciplinary procedure before implementing the requested transfer, thus enabling informal consultation between the pastors and elders of both churches.

   b. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church has taken into serious account the discipline of and the information supplied by the sending church.

   c. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church is satisfied that proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been seriously attempted.

   d. That a "fugitive from discipline" who is no longer a member of a church or who is no longer on the roll of a presbytery shall not be received until the former judiciary/assembly has been contacted to determine if proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been attempted.

3. Recourse and Appeal.

   Where communication or action regarding the sending/receiving of a member or ordained officer/office bearer does not satisfy either the dismissing or receiving judiciary/assembly, communication may be submitted to the interchurch relation committees of the denominations involved with a view to mediation of the problem. If this proves unsatisfactory, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis may register its concern to the appropriate judicatory/assembly of the other denomination.

4. Congregational Transfer.

   That a congregation seeking to leave a NAPARC church to become affiliated with another NAPARC denomination be received only after it has complied with the requirements of the form of government of the church from which it is separating, and the receiving church shall be responsible to see that this is done.

Appendix 6 – NAPARC Comity Agreement

NAPARC Golden Rule Comity Agreement

(*From the Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, Atlanta, GA, adopted October 26th 1984 and as amended at the Eleventh Meeting of NAPARC meeting November 20th, 1985 in Atlanta, GA).*

Comity has meant different things to different people. The representatives of the home missions agencies and committees or boards of our denominations resist territorial statements on comity in light of the social and cultural complexity of North American society and the great spiritual need of our many countrymen who are apart from Jesus Christ. Our of a concern to build a Church of Jesus Christ rather than our own denominations and to avoid the appearance of competition, we affirm the following courteous code of behaviour to guide our church planting ministries in North America.

1. We will be sensitive to the presence of existing churches and missions ministries of other NAPARC churches and will refrain from enlisting members and take great care in receiving members of those existing ministries.

2. We will communicate with the equivalent or appropriate agency (de-

nominational missions committee or board, presbytery missions or church extension committee, or session) before initiating church planting activities in a community where NAPARC Churches or missions ministries exist.

3. We will provide information on at least an annual basis describing progress in our ministries and future plans.

4. We will encourage our regional home missions leadership to develop good working relationships.

Appendix 7 – NAPARC Foreign Mission Consultation Reports: 2008, 2009

NAPARC Foreign Missions Consultation November 25-26, 2008

To CERCU

Dear Brothers,

On November 25 and 26 2008, I attended (at your request) the annual meeting of the Mission Executives of churches belonging to NAPARC. As was the case with previous meetings which I attended, we had a good, beneficial and informative meeting. This year there were representatives from five federations present, as follows: from the OPC, Mr. Mark Bube and Rev. Douglas Clawson; from the ARP, Dr. Frank Van Dalen; from the RPCNA, Dr. Jonathon Watts; from the HRC, Mr. John Beeke; and from the URCNA, Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema.

I. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

As per our usual Agenda, each person in turn reported on the 'status' of the mission work carried on by the federation he represents. First to report this year was Dr. Frank Van Dalen of the ARP. Some highlights:

1. The ARP supports a Mobile Theological Training Team. "This is a team of three doctoral level teachers who support seminaries in the Third world (especially Africa) so that students are able to receive the same quality of teaching there that they would receive if they came to the US". *
2. The ARP has 45 fully supported missionaries (singles, husbands and wives) and 15 cooperative missionaries (ARP's who work in

other locations). The ARP work is concentrated especially in Pakistan (5 families), Turkey (5 families) and Mexico (4 families).

3. Since the 'cooperative missionaries' work in a variety of locations, the issue of "teams vs. individual families" working in a given area was discussed. The OPC men (again) explained that their commitment is to a team ministry. Their 'modus operandi' includes (a) once a field has been chosen and the initial workers on-field are in place, new team members can only be added by a (concurring) vote of the team already on-field. And (b) in order to prevent, as much as possible, intra-field conflict, the Mission Board encourages the Presbyteries (involved in that ministry) to visit on-field with a view to establishing and maintaining relationships of trust – before there is a problem. It is also recognized (c) that pastoral oversight is not to be neglected, and that pastoral care must be given also to the wives of the missionaries (perhaps also by the wife of the pastoral visitor).

The Heritage Reformed Church

Mr. John Beeke gave a brief report on the work of the HRC. Some highlights:

1. The 8 congregations constituting the HRC publish a quarterly mission magazine: *Glad Tidings*.
2. The mission work of the HRC is concentrated primarily in Zambia at Covenant College – (a seminary that has 22 students where the Rev. Kees Mollenaar is teaching) – and in South Africa at the Mukhanyo Theological College (which also operates an AIDS clinic). The HRC is also hoping to work (in cooperation with Word and Deed) on Sumba, Indonesia where "a single pioneer missionary" is presently working.
3. The 'oversight' of the mission work of the HRC is done by both – the Mission Committee of the federation, and by individual congregations. The Mission Committee has 'monthly oversight' which it exercises via sub-committees of three people each. The whole committee meets twice per year. The 'oversight' exercised by a congregation is especially a matter of establishing a relationship with, and provide support for one missionary – as much as possible.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The OPC is by far the largest federation of churches involved in the NAPARC Mission Executives meetings – operating with a Mission Budget of 1.6 million dollars. "Prayer Cards" with pictures of the missionary families are regu-

larly distributed to the OPC congregations – with a reminder to both the pastors and the members of the congregations to be faithful in praying for the missionaries. Some highlights:

1. Uganda is the largest field – it includes a theological college, a medical ministry (it is anticipated that a doctor will be in Karamoja which should strengthen the work of outreach there) and other outreach ministries.
2. In China the OPC ministers at Yanji, where a college attracts also foreign students, especially from Korea, and provides a good opportunity for college-age students from North America to become involved in a TESL ministry. It was noted that an applicant must be a communicant member of a NAPARC church.
3. The work in Eritrea has had to be 'suspended' because of severe persecution – of both the Christians there and of the missionaries who were active there.
4. A denomination in Columbia inquired about establishing an 'organic union' with the OPC. After studying the matter, the OPC decided that it would not "expand the boundaries of the US presbyteries to include overseas presbyteries". Rather, it encourages that ecumenical relations be exercised via the ICRC.
5. Relating to point 4 (above), it was noted that "the focus of the OPC is on the union of denominations to Christ and through Him to each other. 'The primary foundation of that unity is not to be found in the externalities of organizational or institutional structures', (said the OPC men). However, the OPC will also provide help (theological and diaconal) to needy churches so that they can be 'more consistent in their implementation of Reformed doctrine and life and be more effective (in the) practice of Presbyterian polity.'"

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America

Dr. Jonathon Watts presented the work of the RPCNA. Some highlights:

1. The RPCNA conducts missionary work in Japan (where there is presently no missionary pastor in Kobe, Japan); in Cypress (where one missionary pastor works, be it independent of the ministry of MERF); and in Sudan (where the missionary work force has increased to five missionary families, including one who concentrates exclusively on diaconal ministry.)
2. Additionally, the RPCNA has over 20 short-term teams (100 people) which go out every summer, a program now supervised (for the first time) by a full-time worker.

3. Its ministry budget (of 500 K) is gathered from two sources: 50% from congregational offerings, and 50% from an endowment.
4. The RPCNA has changed the name of its "Foreign Missions Board" to RP "Global Missions".

The United Reformed Churches in North America

Rev. Sikkema, not being a 'Missionary Executive' in the URCNA, spoke briefly on behalf of the churches constituting that federation of churches. The following matters were presented:

1. Though many churches are involved in and/or are supportive of mission outreach, much of the money collected for the work of missions is sent to ministries/organizations which are not connected with the URCNA and/or are not directed/supervised by either the federation or congregations of the federation. (A careful check of the many and varied ministries supported by the congregations as listed by the churches in the Year Book will verify the point.)
2. The churches which have called and sent out missionaries do not always have the expertise in missionary work to properly evaluate the work that is being done. E.g. what constitutes 'success'? How is that to be 'judged'? What goals may/can/must be set? Etc.
3. The need for a federational involvement in the work of missions – either via a Mission Board or a Missions Committee of the federation (either of which should include former missionaries)– was briefly discussed.
4. In that connection, the issue of a Board vs. a Committee was discussed. It was noted (a) that a Board could give the appearance of somehow working independent of the churches, whereas a Committee clearly works 'under authority' of the churches. (However, it was noted that e.g. the ARP 'Board of Foreign Missions' is fully under the authority of the ARP Synod). Moreover, (b) it is important that there be at least one person appointed (by either the Board or the Committee) who can provide long-term continuity. And (c) that a Board/Committee should focus on policy, whereas its 'Executive' is to focus on management, implementation, and execution of policy. Finally, (d) it was noted that the term for membership on the Board/Committee need not necessarily be limited. (In one instance, the Committee members serve two-year terms but the Chairman is permitted to serve many years. In another instance, no terms for service on the Missions Committee is set; there is, nevertheless, a good balance between 'fresh blood' and 'long term' membership on the committee.

It was decided that at the next "Missions Executives" the participants will focus on "Dependency Issues".

Brothers, I thank you again for permitting me to attend the NAPARC World Missions Executives meeting. Should you so decide, I will gladly serve again as your 'delegate'.

Humbly submitted, in the service of the King of the Church,

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema

* Note, Where quotation marks are used, I have made use of the "provisional Minutes" – as recorded during the meetings. A final draft of the Minutes is expected; however, to date such have not been provided. When recently I inquired about the issuance of those Minutes, I was informed that they may be forthcoming, but that I should not wait for them to be sent out before sending this report. So here, finally, is my report. Rev. RJS

NAPARC Foreign Missions Consultation September 17-18, 2009

TO: CERCU

Dear Brothers,

Herewith my report to CERCU on the NAPARC Missions Executives Meeting which I attended September 17-18, 2009 at the OPC Headquarters in Willow Grove, Pa.

In attendance were the following: from the ARPC: Rev. Frank Van Dalen; from the CanRC: Dr. Adrian J. De Visser; from the FRCNA: Mr. Rick Postma; from the HRC: Mr. John Beeke and Mr. Brian DeVries; from the OPC: Mr. Mark Bube and Rev. Douglas Clawson; and from the URCNA: Rev. Raymond Sikkema. One Observer was present: Rev. Leonard Pine, of the BPC. The Rev. Paul Kooistra of the PCA and Dr. Jonathan Watt of the RPCNA sent communications that that they would not be able to attend this meeting of the NAPARC Missions Executives.

We followed the usual Agenda, to wit: each 'representative' reported on significant developments in his federation and alerted the "Missions Executives" to the challenges and concerns faced by his federation on the various

mission fields world-wide. After each such report, one of the brothers was asked to remember the mission work reported on (and such needs as had been alerted to) in prayer.

The Rev. Frank Van Dalen of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) reported on the mission work the ARPC is conducting in the following countries:

In Pakistan: In Pakistan the "Muslim work" of the ARPC includes work both in hospitals and in schools. The hospitals treat about 30,000 patients per year. Patients are ministered to by Pakistani pastors. Part of the goal is to demonstrate the difference between the way that patients are treated by Muslims and the way they are treated by Christians. The synod there has approximately 100.000 members. There are five mission families. Current staffing is transitioning from retiring members to new families. With regard to indigenous construction, the ARPC rule is that it does not help with more than 50% of a building project on this field. (On another field they have a policy of helping only with roofs, windows and doors.)
Historically the first missionaries to Pakistan were all pastors who also functioned as ruling elders and deacons. The indigenous church modeled this example – essentially resulting in a one office church. They are now working to correct this. This, it is now understood, underscores the need for sending not only ministers but also elders and deacons to mission fields.

In Iran: The ARPC work in Iran includes working out of a broadcasting station located in Cyprus. They are also conducting a school there in coordination with the PCA. There are three families serving on this field.

In Turkey: There are five families serving in Turkey. They are trying to move the indigenous church in a Reformed direction.

Additionally, the ARPC has ministries **in Israel, Mexico, Ukraine, Korea and China.**

In the USA: The FMC of the ARPC partners with Christian Education in a four-step process to prepare young people for missions. Local churches are sending short-term workers: 100 to Appalachia, 100 to Wales and 20 each to Germany and Spain, The work is with the PCA in Scotland, Wales, Germany and Spain.

Dr. Adrian De Visser of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) reported that the CanRC has three mission projects, as follows:

In Brazil: There are three missionary families working in the Recife area.. There is a seminary on-field and training is provided for those outside the Reformed Church.

In Papua, New Guinea (or Tasmania): There are three or four mission families

In China: A Chinese minister, trained in Canada and called by a church there, has organized trips to China to do training there for the last 10 years.

Additionally: there are a few smaller projects. There is a ministry to Native Americans in BC
and some individual churches support other works such as a work in East Timor, Indonesia.
The history of the church is that missions are conducted by the local church. Therefore, there has been little coordination. Churches are conducting mission conferences where they bring their respective expertise together.

Mr. Rick Postma of the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) reported that the FRCNA has a Missions Committee which works under the oversight of the Synod. The mission work of the FRCNA is conducted

In Guatemala: The work in Guatemala was begun in 1991 among the Quiche people. The missionary began his work in a village – eventually expanding that to work also in the mountains. Today, the missionaries conduct a Bible Institute one week per month. They build the church in this way and hope to ordain men next year. The man who began the work is now teaching in the seminary of the Presbyterian Church of Guatemala (in the second largest city). There is a translating team working in Cubulco translating the Bible into Quiche. They are also teaching the people to read the Quiche language and read the Bible on the radio in that language. They have expanded the work of education among the indigenous population, working with the government to replace the public school teachers with indigenous Christian teachers. They have a man there who is training the teachers and supplementing their understanding with a Christian world view, hoping eventually to start a Christian school in Cubulco.

In Ecuador: There is a diaconal work being done by a family in Ecuador where the FRCNA is working with a Presbyterian church to develop a Reformed world view. They are also engaged in the work of counseling. One challenging situation was occasioned by four pastors who had been trained

in North America and returned to pastorates in Ecuador. Though initially this went well, eventually they adopted a "my-way or the highway" approach which resulted in a major split in the churches.

Additionally: the FRCNA is also working in co-operation with both MINTS and Word and Deed Ministries.

Mr. John Beeke of the Heritage Reformed Church (HRC) reported that the HRC has a Missions Committee which reports and makes proposal to the Synod of the federation. Each congregation is encouraged to support a mission work. The missionary work of the HRC is located

In Zambia and South Africa: Seminary work is done in both countries, Mr. Brian De Vries (who was present at our meeting) has been appointed to serve as the Principal of the Theological College at Mukhanyo in South Africa. The staff at the College comes from a number of Reformed denominations. The school wants to be broader in its outreach; to that end, it is adopting a distance training program. Mukhanyo offers a DVD program to mentors, who watch it with other pastors and then lead a discussion. They are developing a whole curriculum using materials such as those used by Dr. Jack Whytock (ARPC).
In addition to teaching theological subjects, Mukhanyo also offers teacher training. There are not enough qualified teachers in SA, so the goal is to bring the teachers to government standards but with a Christian world view. A former head of education is working with them. They hope eventually to be able to train 200 to 300 teachers and offer theological education at the same location. The College is also working with Word and Deed Ministries in ministering to people with AIDS and TB.

Additionally: The HRC has a MAF couple in Haiti. There is a work **in Samba, in Mexico, in Bali and in Cambodia**. The HRC is looking into ways to respond to a request that a seminary be opened **in Sudan**. Closer to home, there is a work **in**

Arkansas and there is a **Mexican outreach** to migrant workers who come to work **in Canada** (the Niagara Peninsula) which provides a service to them in Spanish.

Mr. Mark Bube of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) began his report by referring to some books for recommended reading, including: *The Diary and Journal of David Brainerd*, Jonathan Edwards; *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower,* Michela Wrong; and *The Nevius Plan*

for Mission Work in Korea, Charles Allen Clark. He also distributed a booklet listing the mission works of member churches of the ICRC. Additionally, he distributed the 2009 OPC brochure which highlights the goals of OPC mission work. He reported that the OPC conducts Mission work in the following countries:

In China: There are two missionaries on the border of North Korea who are planning to begin a work in NK, in Pyongyang. They see one to two dozen conversions per year.

In Eritrea: The OPC missionaries were forced to leave Eritrea some while ago; they have not yet been able to return to the country. There are about 3000 Christians in prison there. The OPC maintains contact with the church in Eritrea.

In Ethiopia: There is no full-time OPC missionary in Ethiopia. A part-time missionary goes to Ethiopia two times per year. There are three pastors with a number of congregations. Recently a 110.000 member denomination has approached the ERPC with the 'overture' that they join.

In Haiti: the OPC continues to see the work grow there. They work in conjunction with solid PCA men and a CanRC couple.

In Japan: the work there was reduced four years ago. There is a church rebuilding work going on. The OPC is waiting to see what the RCJ is going to do.

In Korea: the OPC's work in Korea was ended as of this year. The last work was a missionary training institute which has now been turned over to the Korean church.

In Suriname: The OPC made the painful decision to close the work in Suriname earlier this year. Two families who had previously been working there left the field. After 20 years there were still no indigenous office-bearers. Because of health reasons (and perhaps burn out, and in light of financial considerations) the OPC decided that the time had come to leave the field.

In Uganda: The OPC has a theological college with two OPC men and one RCUS man located in Mbale. Part of that work includes men from Kisii, Kenya connected with the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. There is also a work among the Karamojong. They are a people related to the Masaii. There are two evangelists, a medical clinic and diaconal work. Materials are being

produced by the Karamojong. They are conducting village evangelism, looking for men who will be willing to read evangelism materials aloud in the indigenous language to the people of the village when the missionaries are not there. There is also a doctor at the village.

Additionally: The OPC has a work **in Ukraine** conducted by an OPC man who is working with MTW, and is beginning work **in Uruguay**. Only one missionary family is presently on field. Generally one person is sent to establish a "beachhead", then other people are sent to join him. Presently, however, given the economic situation in the US, it is considered to be too financially stressful to send a team. The OPC has recently received a license to travel to **Cuba**; they would like to visit the churches there on a quarterly basis. The OPC is also developing a Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps. This developed out of a request from a group in Columbia calling itself the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Columbia. The MTM Corps will send men in pairs – in order to hold one another accountable.

The OPC does not have team leaders on field. Decisions of a spiritual/theological nature are made by the ministers and elders with the deacons. (Deacons act as advisors but do not have voting power.) Broader decisions are made by the whole body of missionaries, (including the wives and others who have been on the field laboring with them.) The field chairman only functions as the moderator of the meetings.

The Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema reported on the mission work of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Since the URCNA does not function federationally in conducting world missions (there is no 'federational' Mission Board or Mission Committee) there are no mission fields where the URCNA is active as a federation; hence no report on any such field could be made. The following was reported:

There is currently no joint structure for conducting world missions. A consistory either decides on a field where it will conduct mission work and solicits support-funds from other (neighboring) congregations – or it decides what work of another church – URCNA or otherwise – it will support. As is typically true with regard to the support of para-church ministries, there is no oversight by a 'contributing' church of the use of the funds it has provided nor of the ministry being conducted via a neighboring Consistory/church. A look at the many and varied ministries supported by congregations of the URCNA reveals (1) that many churches support mission work that is conducted by other than Reformed (let alone United Reformed) churches; and (2) that many churches support mission 'projects' over which they can not

and do not exercise any oversight – financial accountability, ministry goals, objectives achieved. An Overture will be presented to a Classis requesting that the URCNA Synod investigate the wisdom of establishing a federational Mission Committee. (Note: This Overture was roundly defeated.)

There is a new proposed joint Church Order (PJCO). Article 44 of that proposed CO encourages Consistories to establish churches – both 'at home' and abroad – through missionaries. (Note: only ministers of the Word are referred to as missionaries; non-ordained members of the congregation are encouraged to assist in the work of missions, but they will not be seen as missionaries). The work of missions is to be done through the local Consistories – there is to be no federational Board or Committee to oversee this work. Consequently, there typically is little or no experience in setting goals or evaluating the work (and the people involved in the mission work) or indeed to offer insightful support to those working on field.

The Rev. Leonard Pine of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) was welcomed as an Observer. He is the director of the mission agency that oversees the Home and Foreign Missions work of the BPC. Rev. Pine briefly described the changes that have taken place in the BPC, explaining that many congregations were lost over the issue of moving back to a relationship with the OPC. They now have 15 remaining congregations which are very committed to the work of Foreign Missions – supporting 8 missionaries on 5 fields, as follows:

In China: The field in China is the only mission that is not directly oriented to church planting. There is a woman there who has been working on field for 9 years. She began by teaching English and has also been teaching church history and serves as a resource person for most of the missionaries in the area. She is translating Bridges commentary on Psalm 119 into simplified Chinese, is involved in evangelizing and discipling women in house churches and is pleading for someone to come and plant a church in the ex-pat community in Beijing.

In Australia: In Australia a church is being planted by people from Singapore. Most of the members are Chines – presently numbering +/- 100. Rev. Pine expects to minister on this field once the current missionary retires.

In Cambodia: Cambodia is a new field. The missionary (a single man) began with teaching English, but is now also teaching Bible courses in Phnom Phen. The work has grown steadily; there are about 100 people gathered; work has also been started in another village. The missionary is using his

business skills to encourage micro-enterprises in a country that is poverty-stricken.

In Myanmar and Bolivia: The BPC is supporting national pastors in both Myanmar and Bolivia – contributing a commensurate salary on a reducing scale after the first couple of years. Since it is easy for the nationals to request support from various mission agencies, the BPC is demanding transparency, making it clear that if the supported churches receive money from other churches than the BPC will no longer offer support.

Elders have been ordained in Myanmar. The BPC seeks to educate the national pastors (who are members of presbyteries in the US) in theology and Presbyterian practice. This makes it possible to create a structure to offer oversight to create accountability and offer advice. (Note: there is also an 'Associate Presbytery' structure to allow local oversight.) The BPC has worked in Myanmar for 5 years.

In addition to Agency Reports, the Missions Executives discussed Dependency Issues, including the following:

"Word and Deed" came to realize that the (a) Mission should not be seen as a lending/financial institution. Such was a practice in the past, which now raises the question: How do we get away from that?

Salaries are also a problem – not only in the way that the missionaries live, but also in the way people on field are paid (both the nationals and the people who have moved on field from NA).

It was noted that some missionaries take a certain 'economic ability' with them to the mission field and then build houses that distance their lives from those to whom they minister.

The BPC doesn't allow missionaries to own houses or cars on field. All ARP missionaries start at a base salary, plus housing. After so many years of service they are given an increase. On top of this, after a specified number of years on field, ARP missionaries are 'bumped' to a point that will prepare for their eventual retirement in NA. Housing allowance is adjusted to prepare for retirement. The ARP also uses the services of ORC for missionaries on field to adjust income in relation to costs on field. Missionaries come to the field as volunteers – (usually) with the goal of (eventually) returning to their 'home land'. While on field, foreign workers are paid at the standards of that nation. It must be recognized that, since the missionaries will (usually) not

remain on field indefinitely, the national church will (eventually) have to pay (and be able to pay) for this work.

A number of books were presented, including: When Helping Hurts, an important and helpful resource.

The next NAPARC Mission Executives meeting is scheduled for September 21 and 22 in Philadelphia at the OPC offices. On the Agenda for that meeting will be a continuation of the discussion on Dependency issues and a discussion on short-term missions.

Brothers, I thank you again for the privilege and opportunity to attend this meeting of the NAPARC Missions Executives. Much appreciated. Let me tell you that I am prepared, DV, to attend the next meeting of the NAPARC ME. I am also willing however, at your request, to discuss with CECCA the possibility/advisability of CECCA becoming responsible for 'monitoring' the URCNA presence at these meetings in the future, since it does, to a large extend, involve work with churches outside of NA. Give it a thought.

Humbly submitted, in Christ's service,
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema

Report of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee to Synod London 2010

A. Mandate

Synod Schererville adopted the following **Protocol Provisions** for the ongoing work of the JCO (now PJCO) committee (Acts of Synod Shereveille, 2007, Article 65, Recommendation 8, pages 34-35):

a. That the URCNA members of the JCO Committee be appointed as the PJCO Committee, mandated to receive, collate, and evaluate all official communications regarding the PJCO, and on that basis to recommend for consideration a revised PJCO to Synod 2010.
b. That official communications regarding the PJCO proceed from and through consistories to the PJCO Committee.
c. That the PJCO Committee compile a list of all official communications and individual communications processed through the consistories, which are to be received by March 1, 2009, together with a summary of the content of each communication and an explanation of committee action relating to the communication, all of which is to be sent to the consistories by June 1, 2009.
d. That Synod 2007 authorize the PJCO Committee to hold no more than eight (8) regional conferences (perhaps in connection with scheduled meetings of the Classes) throughout the federation.
e. That Synod 2007 mandate the PJCO Committee to prepare, circulate, and finalize for publication a number of expositions of various provisions of the PJCO, including their biblical principle(s), historical background, and practical considerations.
f. That Synod 2007 mandate the PJCO Committee to prepare a report for Synod 2010 and to recommend for consideration a revised PJCO for Synod 2010.
g. That Synod 2007 stipulate that a report of the PJCO Committee regarding all communications received from consistories, together with a summary of the content of each communication and an explanation of committee action relating to the communication, be presented to Synod 2010.
h. That Synod 2007 stipulate that a revised Proposed Joint Church Order be presented to Synod 2010 for consideration.

B. The Committee and its activities

The committee members are Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, and Mr. Harry VanGurp. Since Synod Schererville 2007 the committee met three times by itself and four times with the Church Order Sub Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Canadian Reformed committee members are Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten. The committee enjoyed an excellent working relationship both internally as well as with the brothers of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The committee continued to work closely with the Canadian Reformed Church Order Sub Committee appointed by Synod Neerlandia 2001 (and continued by Synod Chatam 2004 and Synod Smithers 2007). Since Synod Shererville, the combined committees met twice in Burlington, Ontario (a one day meeting and a two day meeting), once in Chino, California (a three day meeting), and once in Dutton, Michigan (a three day meeting). Most often there was full attendance. At these meetings Dr. Kloosterman functioned as chairman. A single set of minutes was kept and common press releases published. Each meeting could be concluded with thanks and praise to our heavenly Father for the brotherly manner in which the combined committee could proceed with its work.

C. Protocol Provisions a, b, c, & e

Both United Reformed and Candadian Reformed churches were invited to respond to the PJCO 2007 as submitted to Synod Schererville and General Synod Smithers. Fifty-two submissions were received, fifteen of which came from United Reformed Churches. Two of the fifteen submissions were received after the March 1, 2009 deadline set by Synod Shererville 2007. Late submissions were reviewed to see if any issues brought up in them had not yet been considered when dealing with the input that was received on time. Input was received from the following United Reformed Churches:

Bethel, Aylmer
Bethel, Smithers
Bethel, Woodstock
Covenant, Byron Center
Grace, Leduc
Grace, Waupun
Immanuel, Jordan

Immanuel's, Salem
Living Waters, Brantford
Providence, Strathroy
Providence, Winnipeg
Trinity, Lethbridge
United Reformed, Escondido
United Reformed, Rock Valley
Zion, Sheffield

The OPC (via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations) also reviewed the PJCO and gave valuable input.

The committee is thankful for the communications from the churches, many of which showed careful work in their evaluation of the PJCO and in communicating their concerns. Some of the communications registered approval or disapproval of various articles without further comment. Others gave well-considered grounds for their concerns, and proposed thoughtful alternatives.

The process for evaluating these communications and taking action on them involved meeting together as the URC committee, and after reaching agreement among ourselves, making recommendation to the joint committee regarding this input. (The Canadian Reformed brothers followed the same process regarding input from their churches.)

The committee discovered that with the deadline for submitting communications (March 1, 2009), and the amount of work involved in summarizing their content and explaining joint committee action regarding them, it was impossible to finish this work and report on it by June 1, 2009. With regret, the committee sent a letter to the churches explaining this in June, 2009. Efforts to finish by October 1, 2009 were also unsuccessful.

Many of the churches made suggestions for editorial changes for clarity, or improvement in matters of minor concern. Rather than list churches with their specific suggestions of this nature, such changes have simply been made as evident in the two-column document comparing PJCO 2010 to PJCO 2007. Attached to this report is also a document called "Comments on PJCO 2010" in which the committee offers explanatory comments regarding input received, and changes made to the PJCO since 2007. This document not only registers concerns and committee responses pertaining to URC communications, it also shows how the committee interacted with matters raised by Canadian Reformed Churches. In order to promote mu-

tual understanding and to serve the goal of unity, the committee thought it wise to report the kinds of concerns coming from both federations, with the joint committee's interaction with them.

Among the more serious concerns raised by many URC communications, the most common was a perceived hierarchical tendancy in the PJCO. This was frequently expressed in connection with the use of regional synods and deputies, a classically delegated synod, and the general increase in the involvement of classis in matters left up to the consistories in the current URC Church Order. Besides addressing these concerns in connection with specific articles, our "Comments on the PJCO" also includes a couple of key formulations drafted by the joint committee after much deliberation regarding the important issues of the nature of the authority of broader assemblies, and the rationale for regional synod and deputies. A rationale for the PJCO's use of the termonology, "consistory with the deacons," is also given.

Regarding PJCO 36, Psalms and Hymns, Synod Shererville expressed a strong preference for the minority position while General Synod Smithers expressed a strong preference for the majority position. Both synods of 2007 received a minority report without receiving a majority report on this matter. To rectify this omission, a majority report has been included with this submission, and the minority report is once again enclosed.

D. Protocol Provision d:

The joint committee arranged for four sets of Regional Conferences, seeking to give as many churches of the federations as possible the opportunity to attend a conference.

The first conference was held in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada on April 18, 2008.

The second set of conferences was held in Western Canada: on October 25, 2008 in Abbotsford, British Columbia; on October 27, 2008 in Edmonton, Alberta; on October 28, 2008 in Lethbridge, Alberta; and October 29, 2008 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The third set of conferences was held in Iowa-Michigan, USA: on March 11, 2009 in Rock Valley, Iowa; on March 12, 2009 in Lynwood, Illinois; on March 13, 2009 in Wyoming, Michigan.

The fourth set of conferences was held in California, USA: March 23, 2009

in Visalia; and March 24, 2009 in Chino.

At each of these conferences the committee took the opportunity to highlight and explain significant provisions of the PJCO to the churches. The joint committee deliberately did not get into a "defence mode," but instead sought to listen to and record the sentiments expressed. This proved to be a very beneficial mode of operation.

Although attendance at these regional conferences was not always as significant as hoped, the joint committee received much positive feedback from attendees about holding these conferences, and received much valuable input with which to work.

E. Protocol Provisions f, g, & h:

After reviewing all the input from the churches, received both via correspondence and via the regional conferences, the joint committee was able to revise PJCO 2007 and craft a new document which we have labelled PJCO 2010.

With a sense of humble gratitude to the Lord for blessing our efforts we present to Synod London 2010:

1. The revised Proposed Joint Church Order called PJCO 2010;
2. A two-column document comparing PJCO 2010 to PJCO 2007;
3. Comments on PJCO 2010;
4. The Press Releases of the meetings;
5. The Majority Report re. PJCO 36, Psalms and Hymns;
6. The Minority Report re. PJCO 36, Psalms and Hymns;

To facilitate the dissemination of the PJCO and the 4 column comparison document to the churches, the committee set up a web site to which it also posted the Press Releases and some other matters. The address of this website is http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco/. On this website there is also a link to a bookstore which from time to time carries the very important 1941 Church Order Commentary written by Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma. The joint committee has found this English commentary very helpful particularly because of how it provides historical context and background. The committee encourages the consulting of this commentary to aid in the understanding and evaluation of the PJCO.

F. Conclusion

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

G. Recommendations

In concert with the Church Order Sub Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Church Order Committee of the URCNA recommends that:

1. Synod thank the committee for the work it has completed;
2. Synod receive the committee report and the PJCO 2010 (with the two-column document comparing PJCO 2007 and PJCO 2010 as an appendix as well as the Majority and Minority Reports on PJCO Article 36);
3. Synod adopt the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches;
4. Synod take note of and act on the need to develop Forms for Discipline for a joint federation.
5. Synod reappoint the current committee for the sake of continuity, with the mandate to continue working closely with the Church Order Sub Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address matters yet unfinished (such as PJCO Article 4).

Respectfully submitted,
Harry VanGurp
Nelson D. Kloosterman
Raymond J. Sikkema
Ronald Scheuers
William Pols

Comments on PJCO 2010

Prefacing Comments

We composed this document to assist the reader in evaluating PJCO 2010.

Before getting into the substance of this document, the reader should be aware of our "modus operandi" as joint church order committee.

Since the general synods of 2007 we received a large amount of input from the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches. Each member of the joint committee received a copy of each item of correspondence received. Every item of correspondence received before the March 1, 2009 deadline as set by the general synods was carefully considered. The United Reformed brothers carefully considered and drafted recommendations regarding all matters raised by the United Reformed Churches, and the Canadian Reformed brothers did the same regarding all matters raised by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Correspondence received late was scanned for issues not already brought up in previous correspondence. Recommendations for these issues were then also drafted.

Recommendations for changes to PJCO 2007, both from the Canadian Reformed brothers and from the United Reformed brothers, were then deliberated and decided upon by the joint committee. These specific deliberations and decisions form the basis for the comments made in this document.

This document, therefore, is not at all exhaustive: such would require a substantial commentary. Rather, this document is meant as a walk through PJCO 2010 which highlights some of the rationale for the changes made to PJCO 2007 in response to the input from the churches.

The reader will wish to read through this document with the two-column document at hand.

Status and Placing of the Documents Around the Church Order Proper

Before getting into the articles of the church order itself, we should consider the status and placement of documents around the church order proper.

We received questions and expressions of concern regarding the status of

the Introduction, the Foundational Statements (called "Foundational Principles" in PJCO 2007), and the Ecclesiastical Examinations (called Examination Appendices in PJCO 2007).

In our deliberations we considered a number of matters:

1. Some general considerations:
   - While Scripture and the Confessions are normative documents, the church order is regulative.
   - The unique regulative character of the Church Order itself as compared to the Introduction, Foundational Statements, the Ecclesiastical Examinations, and the Credential Forms should be highlighted. Mere "proceduralism" should be avoided in the handling of the Church Order.
   - Instead of referencing specific appendices or regulations number, the PJCO itself should simply name the appendix or the regulation to prevent it from assuming a "procedural" flavor.
   - This unique regulative character of the Church Order itself will not be compromised by putting all the documents together in one booklet. In fact, particularly the Introduction and the Foundational Statements will serve to underline the unique regulative character of the Church Order.

2. Some considerations regarding the nomenclature and status of the Foundational Statements:
   - The term "Foundational Statements" rather than terms such as e.g. "Biblical References" avoids Biblicism.
   - The term "Foundational Principles" could be construed as too strong: the statements should not be considered as of the same level and character as our confessional standards, or serve as another basis of appeal besides Scripture, the Confessions, and the Church Order. Hence the term "Foundational Statements" is preferable, and the reference to "Foundational Statements" in PJCO 59 should be removed.
   - The introduction to the Foundational Statements is as follows: "The following list of foundational statements, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis for and source of our Church Order." This introduction helps to clarify the status of these statements, highlights that they are didactic, and serves to concretize important principles that need to be kept in mind when working with the Church Order.
   - The Foundational Statements should be placed up front to avoid

the notion that they were crafted as an "after the fact support" for the Church Order.

3. Some considerations regarding the Introduction:
   - The phrase "Biblical and Confessional Basis" in the Introduction does not impart to this introduction a confessional status;
   - The introduction attaches an important connection about what we believe and how we implement it. Providing this introduction will serve to prevent the Church Order from being treated as a haphazard document;
   - An introduction by its very nature belongs at the beginning.

4. Some considerations regarding the Ecclesiastical Examinations:
   - These regulations (as well as the Credential forms) are actually applications of the church order. They are "procedural" in nature and thus should be kept separate from the Church Order proper.
   - Including particularly the ecclesiastical examination regulations with the Church Order, however, will serve to promote good order across the federation. They deal with admission to the pulpit, and thus are very important. They should not end up becoming a "wax nose" which can be modified willy-nilly.

Given such considerations we decided to:

1. Change the nomenclature "Foundational Principles" to "Foundational Statements;
2. Change the nomenclature "Examination Appendices" to "Ecclesiastical Examinations;"
3. Remove reference to the Foundational Statements" from PJCO Article 59, The Observance and Revision of the Church Order;
4. No longer specify in the Church Order the exact examination number but simply use the title of the examination in question;
5. Order the documents as follows: Introduction, Foundational Statements, Church Order, Ecclesiastical Examinations, Credential Forms. In due time synodical regulations could also be added;
6. Recommend that all the documents listed be printed along with every reprinting of the Church Order.

Introduction

We deemed as fitting the suggestion to add the words "the spread of the gospel" to the second paragraph of the section called "Biblical and Confessional Basis."

In the same sentence to which we added the words "the spread of the gospel" we also referenced I Corinthians 14:40 for reasons explained in the comments on PJCO Article 1.

We did not make any changes to the Historical Background. Other than the change of name from "Foundational Principles" to "Foundational Statements" we only made one change to these statements: we added the reference of Ephesians 4:3-4 to the fourth Foundational Statement since it fits very well with the mention of "spiritual unity."

PJCO Article 1, The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

We corrected an enumeration error in the PJCO 2007 version of this article.

In the PJCO 2007 version of this article, I Corinthians 14:40 was explicitly referenced in connection with the mandate to maintain proper ecclesiastical order. We decided to remove this reference from the Church Order proper and place it in the introduction since many provisions of the church order could be referenced in this way. Such referencing in the church order proper is not necessary particularly given the inclusion of the Foundational Statements with the Church Order.

I. OFFICES

PJCO Article 2, The Three Offices

We changed the first words of this article from "Christ has instituted three distinct offices in the church:…" to "The offices of the church are…" The reason for this change lies in the well known debate regarding whether Christ has instituted two offices or three offices in the Church. While the stronger language of saying that Christ instituted three distinct offices in the church could be helpful in addressing the wrong tendency of speaking of "the office of evangelist," "the office of church musician," etc., such language also says more than Articles 30 and 31 of the Belgic Confession.

We added to this article the stipulation that none shall exercise an office without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity" in order to remove the necessity of repeating this stipulation three times over in the articles dealing with the office of minister, office of elder, and office of deacon. This also leaves it in the freedom of the churches as to whether the subscription form

is actually signed just prior to or just after actual ordination.

With regard to the stipulation that no one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation, we received the suggestion that "cooperation" should be changed to "affirmation" or support. We decided not to take over that suggestion so as to in no way diminish the vital importance of congregational involvement in this matter. Such necessity of congregational involvement is rooted in the office of all believers.

PJCO Article 3, The Duties of the Minister

We decided to add to the list of duties of the minister the matter of "visiting members in their homes" and "comforting the sick with the Word of God." This fits with Acts 20:20 and the Form of Ordination, and is also in line with PJCO Article 17, The Duties of Elders.

We also decided to expand the phrase "catechizing the youth" to "catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of scripture." We noted that the term "catechizing" nicely connects to the Heidelberg Catechism, while the new formulation at the same time does not restrict instruction to just one of the confessional statements and nicely highlights the goal of the instruction.

We received expressions of concern regarding the phrase "watching over his fellow office-bearers," particularly since PJCO 2007 had this terminology only in this article and not in the article about the elder (Article 17). Many find that the terminology has the flavor of "lording." This language, however, is in the Dort Church Order and does fit with the concept of "overseer." A suggestion was made to use the language of "ensuring that they faithfully carry out their office," but this does not capture the point of this stipulation. We decided to retain the language of "watching over" in this article but also to include this same language in the article about the elder (Article 17) in order to preclude that the minister has a higher office than the elder.

PJCO Article 4, Preparation for the Ministry

We received much input here particularly from Canadian Reformed Churches (both in submissions and in the Regional Conferences) requesting the inclusion in PJCO Article 4a a provision that the churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. Following are some of the grounds given for such an inclusion:

- this is in line with the principle stated by Synod Chatham of the

Canadian Reformed Churches (Article 98, 5.16.3) which stated that there should be at least one federational seminary;

- theological education should be "by the churches, for the churches." A federational seminary is the fullest way to express the principle that the churches take full responsibility for training for the ministry (II Tim 2:2);
- Both Synod Smithers 2007 (Article 103, 3.3) and Synod Scherville 2007 (Article 52) agreed with the following six points:
  - 1. It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
  - 2. Ministers of the churches must receive sound Reformed theological training;
  - 3. As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
  - 4. Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;
  - 5. 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;
  - 6. The churches, i.e., the URCNA and CanRC, should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches;
- The positive history of a federational seminary in the Canadian Reformed history;

When the input from the churches started coming in we decided to simply flag this matter and leave it alone until we would receive word from the Theological Education Committee regarding what recommendations it would be making to the General Synods of 2010. At the Regional Conferences we also explained that while PJCO Article 4a does not speak of a federational seminary, it at the same time does not preclude it either: it remains an article that needs work.

When we ascertained that we would not be receiving any input from the Theological Education Committee then we considered the following:

- From the beginning we always said that we cannot really address this. The fact that the Theological Education Committee has not come through with anything does not change this.
- For us now to seek to address this issue could come across as presumptuous.

We decided, therefore, to continue to leave this article unchanged, but also highlight to the synods that this matter is not yet complete given that the

synods (with their theological education committees) have not yet resolved this matter.

We also modified the last sentence of PJCO Article 4a to: "This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis." The following considerations came into play:

- There are two concerns here: the financial needs of the student must be met; the churches need to support the man while he is in seminary.
- The phrase "if he has need" could be used by the churches to really skimp. At the same time, it is important that a student does not unduly and unnecessarily burden the churches.
- There has been an overture at the United Reformed synods to adopt the language "help him ensure" as opposed to "ensure" in order to put the onus on the student.
- The phraseology "this consistory" clarifies which consistory is meant, namely the one from which he originates and not the one to which he might move in order to attend seminary.

Regarding PJCO Article 4b (Licensure) we modified the last sentence to clarify which consistory is the supervising consistory. Concern was expressed that restricting the length of the licensure to just the time of studying for the ministry could raise problems for a licentiate after graduation from the seminary and before he receives a call. We decided, however, that no change is needed since it is clear that declaration of candidacy includes licensure or authorization to preach in the churches.

PJCO Article 5, Calling a Candidate

We removed the stipulation that elders too must participate in the "laying on of hands," considering that Dort does not have this stipulation and that a case can be made that this laying on of hands belongs specifically to the office of the minister.

PJCO Article 6, Calling a Minister Within the Federation

We removed the word "ordained" from the title of this article since a minister is by definition ordained. We also reformulated the first sentence for clarification purposes.

Given the following considerations, we decided to add the stipulation that

"Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding the call. He may accept the call only with their consent.":

- This stipulation is found in the Dort Church Order;
- While a stipulation like this can be abused by a minister in hiding behind this provision to not seriously consider a call, and by a consistory in imposing its will, such abuses do not negate the merit of the stipulation itself;
- Historically the freedom of ministers to consider a call has been treated with great respect by Reformed consistories which are aware of the weight of a call from a church of Christ;
- It would be exceptional for a consistory to prevent its minister from accepting a call elsewhere, and the avenue is open for a minister to appeal such a decision of his consistory;
- Ministers are sinful men and thus not above seeking to bypass their consistory in deliberating a call;

For the sake of clarity we expanded the second paragraph to include 3 sections about how classis is to ensure the good order of the calling process, namely by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

a. the consistory of the church from which the minister is departing;
b. the classis in which he last served; and
c. the consistory of the church to which he is joining.

These three sections do not given an exhaustive listing of all the documents required, but highlight the three parties from which testimonies are needed.

We received the suggestion that testimony of an honorable release from classis was not needed. We maintained this provision, however, since classis has a role to play in the reception and departure of ministers within the classical region. The consistory releases a minister from service in the congregation while classis releases him from service within the classis. In this way good order in the calling process is promoted. This is not a matter of classis placing itself above consistory, but rather a matter of mutual help and accountability for doing things properly.

PJCO Article 7, Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

We changed the title of this article to reflect more accurately its content, namely that of calling a minister from outside the federation. Article 7 of PJCO 2007 did not contain any provisions for the calling of a minister from a federation with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. This was rectified

by adding another paragraph which now serves as the opening paragraph in this article. We also substituted the phrase "ordained minister" with simply "minister" (also in PJCO Article 38) since a minister is by definition ordained.

Regarding a minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, we regarded as proper to add the stipulation that such a minister must first become a member of a congregation in the federation. We also deleted the words "to the satisfaction of classis" since "sustaining an examination" implies this. We noted that the examination regulations will ensure that the deputies for Regional Synod are present at this examination.

We were questioned about what would determine "adequate period of consistorial supervision." This would depend upon circumstances which the supervising consistory would have to consider in its determination of "adequate period." We decided to add the words "determined by his consistory" to make clear that the consistory will determine what is an adequate period.

PJCO Article 8, Bound to a Particular Church

The phrase "All ministers shall remain subject to the Church Order" was changed to "each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order" in order to maintain consistency with the title of this article and since this terminology fits better with the subscription form.

To pre-empt the broadening of the concept of "other ministerial task" to include positions such as Bible instructor at a high-school (for which there is no reason for a man to retain his status as minister), we decided to add the words "such as chaplains and professors of theology." This will serve to limit and clarify what is meant by "some other ministerial task."

PJCO Article 9, Bound for Life

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 10, Support and Emeritation of Ministers

For the sake of clarity we decided to change the first sentence from "Each church shall provide honorably for the minister…" to "Each church shall provide honorably for its minister…"

We received input favoring the establishing of a denominational fund for the support of retired ministers. In discussing this we noted that the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches currently have different practices. We concluded that the responsibility for emeritation ought to be retained by the consistory of the church in which the minister last served, but that the other churches are obligated to help where this is necessary. We also discussed whether we should stipulate that this help should come from the churches in the classical region, but opined that this would perhaps be "over-regulation." We settled on the wording, "…the church which he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary."

PJCO Article 11, Temporary Release

We saw merit to the view that the time period of "four months" was too restrictive in the sentence "If the duration of the release is greater than four months, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis." Hence we changed the time period from "four months" to "one year."

PJCO Article 12, Exceptional Release of a Minister

We received conflicting input regarding the "up to two years" time period for adequate support of a minister released as per this article. A number of Churches suggested that the stipulation should be "up to three years" in order to give adequate opportunity for a minister to receive a call who perhaps needs some time for recovery and who strives to continue diligent labour in ministerial tasks. At the regional conferences, however, voices were heard suggesting that "up to two years" was too long. To address the possibility of the good circumstance of a released minister labouring diligently and being able to convince his consistory that released him of the merit of seeking more time to receive a call, we decided to adopt the following wording: "This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years."

PJCO Article 13, The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The first line of this article in PJCO 2007 stated, "The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office." Since this could come across as if the consistory itself has to provide the actual instruction, this line was

modified to "The consistory with the deacons shall provide instruction and training of elders and deacons."
For the sake of clarity we changed the phrase "who indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription" in the paragraph that begins with the word "First" to "who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription."

Regarding the stipulation that "ordinarily the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies" input was received suggesting that this be removed particularly given smaller churches where this would be impossible and given churches that practice life-time eldership. We decided to retain the stipulation as a safeguard against self perpetuation while at the same time noting that "ordinarily" gives the flexibility needed.

In the paragraph that begins with the word "Second" we added the stipulation of announcing the names of the nominees on two Sundays before the date of election to ensure congregational approbation in the whole process. Speaking of "announcements," we changed "two weeks prior to entering office" to "two Sundays prior to entering office."

For the sake of clarity we specified the regulations as "local regulations."

PJCO Article 14, The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

We discussed adding a stipulation to the effect that as much as possible a proportionate number of elders and deacons shall retire each year. We noted, however, that the case can be made that "term eldership" is actually abnormal and we need not "over-regulate."

PJCO Article 15, Subscription to the Confessions

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 16, Parity Among Office-bearers

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 17, The Duties of Elders

Under PJCO Article 3 (The Duties of the Minister) we already explained the reasoning behind the first change in this article.

We decided to change the ambiguous phrase "confessionally Reformed

Schooling" to "schooling…that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity."

We received input to the effect that while the Christian nurture of covenant children belongs to the pastoral supervision of the elders, the promotion of schooling is not an ecclesiastical calling associated with the office of elder. While the matter of Reformed Schooling is important, it is too specific a matter to be included in this list of general matters pertaining to the offices. The matter of promoting Reformed schooling is but one matter of many in the pastoral work done in the congregations as office-bearers guide the congregation in preparing the youth of the church for a life of service. We considered this input and decided to leave the wording as is considering that "promotion of schooling" is not the same as "promoting specific schools," and that promoting of education of children in the ways of the Lord is a very strong scriptural mandate, given particularly to the leaders of the people.

We also received objection to the words "at all levels" within the phrase "promote confessionally Reformed Schooling at all levels." The input argued that these words seem to bind the consciences of office-bearers to promoting the establishment and attendance of Reformed colleges and universities, and mandates them to fulfil a role that is properly the concern of the school society or home-schooling organization. Our considerations for leaving the language "as is" are as follows:

- It is arbitrary to speak about the promotion of confessionally Reformed Schooling only at the primary and secondary levels of education while not at the tertiary level.
- The article does not speak about the establishment of schools per se.
- This provision addresses a prevalent dualistic notion that the Church is the kingdom of God, and schooling belongs to the secular realm.
- The phraseology expresses the need for leadership in this matter.

Regarding the location of this article within the church order, we received input stating that Scripture teaches that the responsibility for godly training of covenant children belongs to parents. This leads parents to enrol their children in a Reformed school or to teach them at home, depending on communal and/or individual circumstances. The place for an article on Reformed education in the Church Order, therefore, is not in PJCO 17 (The Duties of Elders) but in PJCO 38 (The Baptism of Covenant Children). We decided to leave the matter as is since the Dort Church Order also has an article on schools (Dort 21) which is apart from the articles on baptism.

We added the stipulation that elders shall engage in annual home visits to

ensure regular visitation, something that perhaps has merit particularly in our time.

PJCO Article 18, Protecting Doctrinal Purity

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 19, The Duties of Deacons

We changed the stipulation of the deacons giving a "monthly" account of their work to a "regular account" since "monthly" is not found in the other church orders (Dort, CanRC, URCNA) and over-regulates.

PJCO Article 20, The Civil Authorities

We made no changes to this article.

II. THE ASSEMBLIES

We received numerous communications, particularly from United Reformed Churches, regarding the perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. In response to this the following was drafted:

PJCO committee statement on the authority of broader assemblies.
The PJCO committee has received numerous communications from churches which have raised questions or registered concerns over a perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. At the heart of these concerns lies the desire to defend the authority of the consistory against encroachment upon that authority by a classis or a synod.

The following statements on the nature of broader assemblies are understood by the committee to underlie the Reformed church polity of the church order of Dort, and are thus reflected in the PJCO according to the committee's mandate to follow the principles of Dort.

1. The authority that Christ gives to His church rests with the consistory (PJCO Article 22, cf. Foundational Statement 6). Therefore when broader assemblies are convened they do not take over or replace the authority of the consistories.

2. The churches give broader assemblies the jurisdiction (i.e., the mandate to make decisions) only to deliberate and to make decisions

on all matters lawfully placed before them (PJCO Article 21.d.). The Church Order, as agreed to by all the churches (PJCO Article 58), stipulates what matters are lawfully placed before the broader assemblies.

3. Members of broader assemblies are those who have been delegated by narrower assemblies (PJCO Article 21.c.). Once a broader assembly is constituted, the delegated brothers become members of that assembly. Therefore, each member of a broader assembly serves the good of all the churches with respect to the matters lawfully placed before that assembly, rather than represent the interests of his sending body.

4. Broader assemblies are deliberative in nature (PJCO Article 21 a). Whereas a consistory may give input and direction concerning overtures on the agenda to the men it delegates, it may not bind their votes. Rather, it should write a letter to the assembly concerning its conviction. Binding votes would negate the need for deliberative reflection on the issues, and consistories could then simply send in their votes by written ballot. The size of broader assemblies should not impede careful reflection and deliberation, by being either too large as to make broad participation in such deliberation by its members unwieldy and impossible, or too small as to lack in depth and breadth of wisdom.

5. By common consent the churches agree to abide by the decisions of a broader assembly because a matter to be decided upon at the broader assembly has been lawfully placed before it by way of a consistory's request or an appeal.

6. The decisions of a broader assembly must be considered settled and binding, and must therefore be implemented, unless found to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order (PJCO Article 21 e).

PJCO Article 21, Ecclesiastical Assemblies

In the section of this article dealing with "delegation" (c.) we removed the stipulation in PJCO 2007 which required "each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription" considering the following:

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- The issuing of proper credentials guarantees the good standing of the minister and the elders according to the terms of their office, including PJCO Article 15 (Subscription to the Confessions). According to the credentials delegates are authorized to transact mat-

ters only in faithfulness to the Three Forms of Unity.

- The Churches delegate the men: hence the assemblies themselves have no authority to ask this question or to discipline those who might be at odds with the form of subscription.
- To require indication of agreement with the Form of Subscription also at the broader assemblies becomes a matter of redundancy: vow upon vow – and each is the same.
- "Agreeing with the form of subscription" could be taken narrowly to agreeing with the form in and of itself.

We also removed the words "as required in Appendix X" given that Credential Forms are not really part of the Church Order proper but are "forms" used for the working out of the Church Order stipulations.

In the section of this article dealing with jurisdiction (d.) we replaced the last paragraph of this section as found in PJCO 2007 with the following wording, "All matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly." This should help ensure that a classis, for example, does not just "pass along" an overture from a consistory to a regional synod, but also actually supports the overture (perhaps with some modifications or additional grounds).

In the section of this article dealing with decisions (e.) we changed the terminology from "the Reformed Confessions" to "The Three Forms of Unity" for the sake of clarity.

Article 21 in PJCO 2007 had a section called "Proceedings" and another called "Records." We combined all the material under "f. Proceedings," thereby putting all the tasks of the officers of classis in one article and making more clear that not only the duties of the clerk but also of the chairman and the vice-chairman cease when the assembly itself ceases.
Speaking of the officers of classis, we received comments suggesting confusion between a clerk of an assembly, and a clerk working under the supervision of a convening church. These two functions are not the same.

In the section of this article dealing with censure (g.) PJCO 2007 stipulated that admonition for those who demonstrated unworthy behaviour be given particularly at the close of the assembly. This time reference was dropped as unnecessary and perhaps even a hindrance to more timely admonition.

PJCO Article 22, The Consistory

Particularly from the Canadian Reformed sources we received input that the deacons should be considered part of the consistory to prevent the danger of hierarchy by the elders over the deacons. The input appealed particularly to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession which includes the deacons under the term "council" and speaks of the work of the council in terms of governing. We decided, however, not to add the deacons to the consistory since the office of deacon is not one of ruling or governing the church. This is also in line with the Church Order of Dort.

Regarding the term "council" in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, the original Dutch version does not call it "the council" but says that it functions as a council (als een raad) of the town. The term "council" itself has reference to "civic bodies of government (cf. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma in The Revised Church Order Commentary, p. 111 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967)). The Belgic Confession, therefore, as a confession of testimony to the outside world, compares the government of the church to a civil government for illustrative and explanatory reasons. To use the terminology of this comparison to suggest that therefore the deacons too have a ruling office is improper. In fact, consistency in using this comparative terminology to say that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession stipulates that the office of deacon includes "governing" necessitates saying that Article 30 also stipulates that the office of elder includes ensuring "that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need." Both matters are found in the same context. Scripture, however, is clear: governing belongs to the office of elder, and caring for the poor belongs to the office of deacon.

In PJCO 2007 we used the term "council" throughout the articles of the Church Order, and further specified in Article 22 that "the term council designates not an assembly of the church, but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory, at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the Church Order or as assigned by the consistory." We reverted back to the terminology of "consistory with the deacons" given what is stated in the paragraph above about the term "council" as well as the following considerations:

- Though the terminology "consistory with the deacons" is perhaps more cumbersome than the term "council," it is less confusing;
- The terminology fits with the terminology used in the Dort Church Order;
- The term "council" gives credence to the mistaken view that the deacon's office is a ruling office;

- The popular conception of the authority of "the council" as the highest governing body in the church, even over the consistory, is a concern. In times past the deacons were considered part of the consistory, and had a lot of power.

PJCO Article 23, Small Number of Office-bearers

In line with what is stated above under PJCO Article 22, we received input particularly from the Canadian Reformed side objecting to the provision which speaks of the deacons merely giving advice instead of being added to the consistory in situations where there are a small number of office-bearers. We remained with what we previously decided, however, since the office of deacon is not one of ruling or governing the church.

PJCO Article 24, Instituting a New Church

For the sake of clarity we changed the wording of this article. We also changed the words "the neighbouring consistory" to "a neighbouring consistory" in order to give the necessary flexibility in situations where the nearest church might not be the most able to provide supervision.

PJCO Article 25, Classis

To preclude any notion of a broader assembly being a continuing body, we deleted the definite article from the title of this article so that it now reads "Classis" instead of "The classis." For the same reason we changed "The Regional Synod" in the title of PJCO Article 28 to "Regional Synod," and "The General Synod" in the titles of PJCO Article 30 to "General Synod." In line with this we also changed "The" to "A" in the first sentences of the second paragraphs of PJCO Article 28 (Regional Synod) and PJCO Article 30 (General Synod).

Regarding section c (Convening), PJCO 2007 stipulated that the churches shall take turns providing a chairman from their delegation. For practical reasons we reverted back to the stipulation of Dort 1920 which states that the assembly shall choose one to preside.

In section d (Mutual Oversight) we removed the adverb "wholeheartedly" in the phrase "and confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted." We did this for the sake of consistency with PJCO Article 17 (The Duties of Elders), and since the adverb improperly highlights the matter of "confessionally Reformed schooling" even over the other matters in the list.

PJCO Article 26, Church Visitors

We received input wondering about the practicality and principle of appointing elders as church visitors. Following are some of the considerations received:

- Since elders normally serve in their office for a term of three years, how will the two-year appointment of elders as church visitors function well? Classis needs to know quite well the elders whom it appoints as church visitors, but can only appoint those whose term still has at least two years.
- Since ministers sign the classis subscription form, and elders do not, it is understood that ministers will serve in certain capacities within churches of the federation other than their own local church. Elders do not sign the classis subscription form and hence do not generally serve beyond the bounds of their own local church. Once elders are made to serve classis churches on a broader level, as this article proposes, then subscription at the classis level would be necessary.

The joint committee considered these matters and decided to leave this stipulation as is given the following considerations:

- Currently in the Canadian Reformed Churches only ministers sign the subscription form at classis, while in the United Reformed Churches both ministers and elders do. Neither the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches nor the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, nor the PJCO, however, stipulates that office-bearers need to sign the form for subscription at classis.
- Elders should not be precluded from this task simply because of the practice of term eldership.
- It is possible to have appointment of church visitors each year: in one year they would be appointed for half of the churches and in the other year for the other half.
- In United Reformed practice the elders that serve as church visitors often have it stated that this task ceases when their term as elder ends.

Given the stipulation in Article 44 of the Church Order of Dort, Article 27 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches, and Article 46 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we decided to add as a duty of the church visitors to "admonish those who have been negligent." We also took out some of the archaic wording in PJCO 2007.

PJCO Article 27, Counselors

For the sake of clarity we slightly modified the wording of this article.

PJCO Article 28, Regional Synod

For the sake of clarity we changed the word "via" to "by the way of" in the phrase "The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via classes…" We did the same in PJCO Article 30 (General Synod).

Particularly from the United Reformed Churches we received a lot of input questioning and objecting to Regional Synods and Regional Synod Deputies. We therefore crafted the following rationale:

1. Historical. Although regional synods have not been used in some Reformed denominations in North America, traditional Reformed church polity around the world (including North America) has acknowledged and generally employed regional synods as part of church government. Throughout most of its history, the Christian Reformed Church in North America made provision for regional synods in its Church Order, but never implemented those provisions. It is worth reflecting about the developments within the CRC in the decades after removing these provisions from its Church Order. In Europe, South Africa, and Canada, regional synods have functioned meaningfully.

2. Juridical. Perhaps the most important (though not the only) function of regional synods consists in adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures in a timely manner. Usually the general synods meet once every three years, a time period that is not adequate for adjudicating appeals. The absence of regional synods virtually requires annual general synods if justice and pastoral care are to be administered properly in the church.

    2.1 In this connection, the concern and warning that regional synods will increase hierarchy must be met with the observation that precisely the absence of regional synods invests general synods with such a degree of urgency and responsibility that the general synods tend to exhibit the features of hierarchy and domination. Moreover, the evil of hierarchy is not inherent in a system of broader assemblies, for hierarchy can be manifest within consistories as well.

    2.2 The use of regional synods for adjudicating appeals and reviewing

overtures helps to prevent these matters from escalating into federation-wide controversy, because they are reviewed and addressed in their regional context rather than a national or international context.

2.3 The use of regional synods for reviewing overtures will ensure that the overtures that come to general synods have already been deliberated and enjoy the support of a larger number of consistories. Conversely, overtures that do not gain support would then come to general synod only by way of appeal, if necessary.

3. Broader, not higher. Today's pervasive need for historical awareness within the church can be met only when we seek to understand why our spiritual ancestors applied the Bible to the life of the church as they did. Fundamental to this application was the notion that beyond the local congregation, church assemblies are not higher but broader in character. As broader assemblies, they seek to ensure and safeguard the federation's shared interests, including the most frequent role of their deputies, which is to ensure the following of regularized procedures for entering and leaving the office of minister of the Word and sacraments. Particularly the minister's office, though exercised within local congregations (note the plural), is not restricted in its exercise to a single local congregation. For this reason, in order to protect both the minister and the congregations, because ministerial ordination authorizes a federation-wide exercise of office, the procedures and standards for entering and for leaving this office must be regularized. To construe or represent this oversight as a form of hierarchy is seriously mistaken and erodes the continued unity and well-being of the federation.

PJCO Article 29, Deputies of Regional Synod

In addition to what is stated above regarding deputies of regional synod, we note two changes to this article. Firstly, for the sake of clarity the wording of the second paragraph of this article was revised. Secondly, both for the sake of clarity and to prevent any impression of a Regional Synod being an ongoing body, we changed the words "regional synod" to "the next regional synod" in the final paragraph so that the sentence now reads, "They shall submit a report of their actions to the next regional synod…"

PJCO Article 30, General Synod

To be consistent with the terminology of the articles on classis (Article 25) and regional synod (Article 28), and to reflect that once seated as members of

a broader assemblies the brothers are not there as delegates from their sending body but rather as members of the current body, we changed the first phrase of the article from "A general synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the classes…" to "A general synod, consisting of those delegated by the classes…"

We also deleted the words "at least" as superfluous from the phrase "shall meet at least every three years" in the opening sentence: the following sentence already provides for an earlier convening of General Synod if necessary.

PJCO Article 31, Appeals and Procedure (Article 55 in PJCO 2007)

In PJCO 2007 this article was placed under the Discipline section of the Church Order. It fits better, however, under the section of Assemblies, and thus we moved it into this section and logically placed it right after the article regarding General Synod.

In order to avoid any connotation of hierarchy, we decided to remove the word "level" from the first line which stated "When all avenues for settling a dispute at the consistory level have been exhausted…" It now reads "When all avenues for settling a dispute with the consistory have been exhausted…"

For the sake of clarity regarding standard, we replaced the words "The Reformed Confessions" with "The Three forms of Unity" in two places in this article.

PJCO Article 32, Ecumenical Relations (Article 31 in PJCO 2007)

We repackaged the content of this article considering the following:

- Input from the churches made clear that greater clarity was needed;
- Stipulating that local relations should have federative unity as its goal will properly encourage progress in the relationship and provides rationale for federational involvement before advancing to preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

Several churches expressed the wish to remove the stipulation that a church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper. They find the stipulation restricts the local consistory and in effect puts the supervision of the pulpit and the Lord's Table in the hands of synod. In considering these sentiments the joint committee noted the following:

- our ministers must undergo rigorous examinations at classis in order to fill the pulpits and our licentiates and candidates must be

"certifiably" Reformed in doctrine and life;
- the PJCO does not thereby put supervision of the pulpit and the Lord's Table in the hands of synod. There is no infringement on the authority of the consistory to agree as churches to common standards for our pulpits and the Lord's Table.

To clarify in the paragraph about local ecumenical relations that classical decisions about local ecumenical relations pertain only to that local church which has requested classis to grant approbation for the local ecumenical relations to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper, we decided to change the wording from "a church" to "each church" in the phrase "…each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Table."

We replaced the phrase "the Three Forms of Unity" with "the Reformed Confessions" in the first part of this article in light of the fact that both the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches have significant ecumenical relations with faithfully Reformed Churches whose creedal formulations are not identical (e.g. the Orthodox Presbyterian Church).

PJCO Article 33, Admitting a Church (Article 32 in PJCO 2007)

We changed the terminology "agree with the Church Order" to "agree to abide by the Church Order" since that is really the issue.

We decided not to replace the phrase "gifts of gratitude" with "Christian offerings for the poor." While it is true that Lord's Day 38 uses such language, the phrase "gifts of gratitude" covers more. It was also noted that even though Lord's Day 38 also mentions the sacraments, that does not mean that the sacraments have to be celebrated in every service: the same applies to the matter of "offerings for the poor."

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES

PJCO Article 34, Regular Worship Services (Article 33 in PJCO 2007)

For the sake of consistency with the titles of the proceeding articles, we deleted the definite article from the title.

We did not take over the suggestion that this article should state that the law must be read each Lord's Day since the items listed in this article are not meant to be exhaustive. If we would want to be exhaustive then we should also list matters like the reading of scripture, the benediction, etc.

PJCO Article 35, Special Worship Services (Article 34 in PJCO 2007)

We decided to change the wording of this article given the following considerations:

- PJCO 2007 only stipulated that special worship services "may" be called in observance of the redemptive historical events listed. A Church Order should not merely stipulate what "may" be done: a Church Order does not need to mention that a consistory may call the congregation together for a special worship service.
- The point really is not "may be called" but "shall be commemorated." In the phraseology of PJCO 2007 these events need not even be commemorated.
- We have to keep in mind, for example, that we don't know in which time of year Christ was born, and thus to say we must celebrate Christmas on Dec 25 is something we cannot do.

PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns (Article 35 in PJCO 2007)

While not entirely consistent, many Canadian Reformed Churches expressed strong support for the provision that the lyrical renditions of the Psalms and hymns be "approved by general synod," and many United Reformed Churches expressed strong disagreement. The joint committee regrets that the general synods of 2007 received a "minority report" without also receiving a "majority report" that would have explained the rationale for the majority position. The joint committee therefore decided to ensure that in the submissions to the general synods of 2010 the majority report would be included and the minority report would once again also be submitted.

For the sake of precision we modified the phrase "…the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms…" to "…the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms…"

PJCO Article 37, Admission to the Pulpit (Article 36 in PJCO 2007)

For the sake of consistency we changed the first line of this article from "Consistories shall permit men to administer the Word and the sacraments…" to "Consistories shall permit men to preach the Word and administer the sacraments…"

In PJCO 2007 this article stipulated that only ministers, licentiates, and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship may be allowed on the pulpit, granting exception only occasionally, only to those who faithfully subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis. This "exception clause," though having no precedence in the Dort Church Order, was crafted considering the reality that there are faithful churches that we do not officially recognize and that at times exist in erring federations. It was also crafted so as to be quite restrictive. Numerous Canadian Reformed Churches, however, expressed reservations about this exception clause out of concern for the safeguarding of the pulpit. The article was revised to remove students and candidates from even being considered for an exception, and to clarify that an exception can be granted to a church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions.

A number of churches also wished to remove the word "prior" in the phrase "prior approbation of classis" so that the granting of permission by a local church would appear on the credential to classis "after the fact." Given the vital importance of admission to the pulpit, however, we refrained from deleting the word "prior."

PJCO Article 38, Administration of the Sacraments (Article 37 in PJCO 2007)

We deleted the definite article "the" in the title of PJCO 38 (as well as 39 and 40) for the sake of consistency.

PJCO Article 39, Baptism of Covenant Children (Article 38 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 40, Public Profession of Faith (no counterpart in PJCO 2007)

Many United Reformed Churches questioned why PJCO 2007 contained no article regarding public profession of faith. Since public profession of faith is an important act in the church and is referred to elsewhere in the PJCO (Article 43) we decided to add this article.

PJCO Article 41, Baptism of Adults (Article 39 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 42, Administration of the Lord's Supper (Article 40 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 43, Admission to the Lord's Supper (Article 41 in PJCO 2007)

Many Canadian Reformed Churches submitted input regarding this article and the joint committee again deliberated extensively on the matter. Following are some of the concerns expressed:

- Reference should be made also to the practice of using a letter of testimony or attestation.
- The article should reflect the principle that it is the responsibility of the elder, not the individual himself, to bear witness to a person's godly doctrine and life.
- PJCO 2007 has a double standard regarding admission of people to the Lord's Supper. For members of the local church the standard is "public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life", while for visitors the standard is "confirmation of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk of life." For visitors a Reformed confession is not demanded as it is of members, and thus the standard is lesser. Does this not wrongly allow for partiality (Deut 1:17, Prov 24:23, and 1 Tim 5:21)?
- It is improper for members to be admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis that the elders know their doctrine and life while visitors could be admitted on the basis of their own testimony.
- It is not essential for visitors to participate at the celebration of the Lord's Supper should it happen to be celebrated on a Sunday when the visitors are in the area. Therefore it is incumbent on the guests, who wish to participate when visiting another church or congregation, to show proof of having made public profession of faith and lead a godly life. Such proof can easily be supplied by an attest signed by two elders of their home congregation. Modern technology even allows for this via fax and other means should an unexpected situation arise.
- The terminology "as much as possible" is subjective and open to various interpretations.
- The term 'biblical' is much too broad and is open to interpretation and argumentation. The formulation of PJCO 2007 could be used to allow people to the table who even out-rightly reject the confes-

sions of the Reformation, which would contravene what we confess in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

- If we allow persons of non-Reformed confession to participate in the Lord's Supper, which is to participate in the body of Christ and is an expression of unity with the local body of Christ, how can we refuse them membership in the church?
- In refusing people from other churches at the table we are not rendering a judgment about these particular churches, i.e. whether these churches are true or false. In fact, precisely by denying admittance to everyone without distinction who happens to come from churches with which we are not in ecclesiastical fellowship, we refrain from making such judgments.

Following are some considerations of the joint-committee:

- For the Canadian Reformed Churches this matter is a "flash point."
- The article crafted does not mean visitors will be admitted on their own testimony: the phrase "as much as possible" implies that testimony will normally be there.
- One can argue whether indeed we ought to have exactly the same standard for visitors as for members. It is much more serious if a consistory fails to discipline its own members than if it wrongly allows a visitor at the Lord's Table.
- We have to keep things in perspective: the norm remains that the Lord's Supper is given in the local church for its own members. Having visitor present is an "exception" that we seek to regulate.

We adopted new terminology that removes the words "as much as possible."

PJCO Article 44, The Church's Mission Calling (Article 42 in PJCO 2007)

We received input suggesting that PJCO Articles 44 and 45 go far beyond the scope of what a Church Order article should include, and has the flavor of suggesting that it is now the job of the consistory to ensure that each member has filled a certain quota of evangelism or mission type tasks. In our deliberation about such sentiments we considered that to say or suggest that the mission calling belongs only to the ministers of the Word and not to the members creates a false dilemma: while maintaining the importance of the office of missionary, the mission mandate, particularly after Pentecost, is an important mandate given to the Church. Also in response to the concerns articulated (e.g. "a certain quota"), we changed the first line of PJCO Article 45 to highlight the necessity of engaging in evangelism relying on the Holy Spirit.

For the sake of clarity we changed the phrase "…and supervised by their consistories…" to "…and supervised by their respective consistories…"

Considering how regeneration is the work of God (Lord's Day 32) we decided to change the wording "those who have come to the faith" (which could be taken to imply an action of man) to "those who have been converted to the faith."

For the sake of economy of words we shortened the phrase "labor and service" to simply "service."

We received input suggesting that the PJCO should include regulations for the matter of church plants. Following are some of the items of discussion on this matter:

- Since there is nothing in the Church Order, various United Reformed classes have said, "This is the path you have to follow."
- In the Canadian Reformed Churches there is a general synod decision about this having to be dealt with on a local level.
- Could a Church Order really address and explain how to go about church planting? Whatever we might put in will likely not answer the real questions people have. No Church Order or synodical stipulations can prescribe exactly how church planting should be done given how local situations can be extremely varied. The Church Order ought not to include anything beyond what is already stated in PJCO 24 (Instituting a New Church).
- It is noteworthy how the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America each have a "Mission Order."
- Would not classis be the place for churches to address various questions and work together on issues of Church Planting?

We decided, therefore, to not add anything into the PJCO for church plants beyond what is already stated in PJCO Article 24 (Instituting a New Church).

PJCO Article 45, The Church's Evangelism Calling (Article 43 in PJCO 2007)

We received objections to having a separate article for evangelism. Following are some of the objections

- There is no precedent for this in Reformed Church polity;
- The article lacks a governance flavor and sounds more like a mission statement which, though good in itself, does not belong in a church order.

We decided to keep the article, however, noting the following:

- The difference between the Church's Mission Calling and Evangelism Calling is a difference between the official activity of the church and the witnessing and more personal, ongoing activity of Christians. While Mt 28 does not provide for this distinction, it does cover it.
- Evangelism should be in the church order because it specifies the task of the consistory as that of calling to promote the involvement of church members in this important work.
- The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland has added an article on evangelism.
- It is important, particularly in our time, to stipulate the necessity of people joining the church: this should be clearly stated.

We also decided to change the terminology "…affiliating with His church…" to "…being joined to His church…"

We revised the opening wording of this article somewhat for clarity and to highlight the necessity of going about this task in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, which sets Reformed evangelism apart.

PJCO Article 46, Marriage (Article 44 in PJCO 2007)

We changed the phrase "instruct and admonish" to "instruct and exhort" due to the modern negative connotation of "admonish." We chose the word "exhort" due to its "appeal" nuance.

PJCO Article 47, Funerals (Article 45 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 48, The Church Records (Article 46 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

IV. DISCIPLINE

Particularly at the Regional Conferences, and particularly from United Reformed Churches, this section of the PJCO received praise for its clarity and direction.

PJCO Article 49, The Nature and Purpose of Discipline (Article 47 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 50, Consistory Involvement (Article 48 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 51, The Reconciliation of a Member (Article 49 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 52, The Discipline of a Member (Article 50 of PJCO 2007)

Our attempt made in PJCO 2007 to deal with the discipline of communicant and the non-communicant member together proved confusing and unworkable. The term "mature non-communicant member" as used in PJCO 2007, for example, suggests legitimacy for a member to be mature without professing his faith and also makes it impossible to censure a "not yet mature non-communicant member." We therefore divided this article into two parts. Part A pertains to a communicant member and part B to a non-communicant member. In the process we reformulated some of the terminology in order to have uniformity of language within the two parts of the article.

Regarding Part A, PJCO 2007 had as first line under "Silent Discipline" the following: "a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from all the privileges of church membership, including using the sacraments and voting at congregational meetings." We changed this to "a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing." We made this change given the following considerations:

- The sacraments are a means of grace: this sets them apart from e.g. privilege to vote;
- The Church Order of Dort also mentions only the Lord's Supper;

- Communicant membership in and of itself does not entitle one to vote.

Regarding Part B, we were asked from the United Reformed side why PJCO 2007 had no stipulations regarding "exclusion" in the disciplinary process. The category of "exclusion" is operative in the United Reformed Churches to refer to what the Canadian Reformed Churches know as "excommunication of non-communicant members." This language of exclusion is also found in the old CRC Church Order. We did not adopt the language of exclusion in the Church Order given the following considerations:

- The term "excommunication" can be understood covenantally (excluded from the community) or sacramentally (excluded only from the sacraments). For a communicant member excommunication is both sacramental and covenantal; for a non-communicant member excommunication is covenantal only;
- While it sounds contradictory to speak of "excommunication of a non-communicant member" the point of "excommunication" is not simply "barring from the Lord's Supper table" but more comprehensively "barring from the communion of the Church";
- The term "excommunication" highlights the severity of discipline.

While working on this article we also decided to note that a united federation of churches will need forms for discipline.

PJCO Article 53, The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person (article 51 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 54, No Lording it Over (article 52 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 55, Mutual Censure (Article 53 of PJCO 2007)

We added the words "and encourage" in order to highlight the positive intent of this article.

PJCO Article 56, The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer (Article 54 in PJCO 2007)

We were questioned why the deacons are not included in this article, espe-

cially since they are involved in appointment to office. We did not change this provision noting that suspending and deposing is a matter of special discipline that belongs particularly to the office of elder. Just because deacons are involved when office-bearers are admitted to office does not mean that they must be involved in discipline. Once again the important point is "office." We also noted that Article 79 of the Church Order of Dort speaks of "the preceding sentence of the consistory" (not "the consistory with the deacons") when it comes to suspension and deposition of office-bearers.

Turning to the first paragraph of this article, we removed the word "temporarily" in the phrase "temporarily suspended" since the concept of "temporarily" is already implied in the word "suspension."

We considered as valuable the suggestion to add to the fourth paragraph the provision that "No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer." We considered adding this provision to PJCO Article 21 d (Ecclesiastical Assemblies, Jurisdiction), but noted that deposing of office-bearers by a broader assembly has nothing to do with "jurisdiction" but would be nothing less than "power grab."

We modified the last paragraph of this article which addresses the matter of reconsideration for office by adding the stipulation that reconsideration for office may only be done with the involvement of the consistory that deposed the man. We discussed whether the classis involved in the deposition should also be involved in the reconsideration, but this would be impossible: classis in not a continuing body. At the same time, in the case of a minister the stipulation that "the regular procedure for entering office shall be followed" will ensure classis involvement.

PJCO Article 57, The Reception and Departure of Members (Article 56 in PJCO 2007)

Regarding section a. (The Reception of Members) we changed the terminology of "shall be received" and "shall be admitted" to "may be received" and "may be admitted" since otherwise the stipulation could be taken to mean that the consistory has no choice in this matter (even when a testimony is not good).

We further specified "testimony" to "letter of testimony" from the former consistory in order to ensure decency and good order in the matter of receiving members. We noted that the term "attestation" could be an adequate term here as well, but the term "letter of testimony" is more descriptive and

more widely used.

We received input suggesting that we stipulate that this letter be signed by two. We did not adopt this suggestion since the point is not "signed by two" but "official testimony of the entire consistory." Dort also speaks of one signature if the letter is sealed, and today official letterhead also has bearing.

We received input expressing the desire to see a stipulation included that requires announcements to the congregation of the names of those wishing to join the church prior to their actual admission, whether these persons come from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship or not. In this way there would be prior congregational approbation. In dealing with this we decided to add the stipulation that both the reception and departure of members shall be appropriately announced: engaging the congregation in the reception and departure of members is fitting. We also considered, however, that it would not be proper to require prior congregational approbation in the case of members coming from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship since such would undermine the significance of our mutual recognition. At the same time it would be proper for members coming from other churches. The current wording of the article which speaks of "appropriately announced" is generic enough to meet both situations.

Moving on to section b. (The Departure of Members), quite a number of Canadian Reformed Churches expressed the conviction that letters of testimony for communicant members should not be sent directly to the church to which the member is moving, but rather should be given to the member(s) himself who in turn shall give it to the consistory of that church which he hopes to join. After all, the responsibility of joining a new church when moving to a new location remains the responsibility of the member, who should therefore himself give the letter of testimony to the new consistory. Following are considerations of the joint committee on this matter:

- In the United Reformed Churches most consistories do not issue letters of testimony directly to the members to enable them to join another church, but send such letters to the destination consistory;
- Even if an attestation is forwarded from consistory to consistory, the individual involved still has responsibility in the whole matter: he has to submit a written request to the consistory requesting this to happen;
- The conviction that the member submits himself to the office-bearers (and thus he should give the attestation) fits with the office of all believers. At the same time, the conviction that a consistory ought to send an attestation to another consistory at the request of

the member fits with the elders being undershepherds who do not entrust the care of the sheep to themselves, but to other undershepherds;
- To rely on the members themselves to forward the letter of testimony to the destination consistory has lead to members "quietly withdrawing" and "falling between the cracks";
- It indeed is important that members know the content of a letter of testimony issued.

Given the above, we decided to include a stipulation that a copy of the letter of testimony be given to the member.

As already mentioned above, we added the stipulation that also "the departure of members shall be appropriately announced. This contends with the reality that a member may be involved in a Mt 18 situation. Announcing the request for a letter of testimony in order to join another church ensures that the consistory is able to grant such a letter with full confidence and in clear conscience.

We discussed adding a provision to PJCO Article 57 regarding "temporary membership" for e.g. students studying elsewhere, but decided that a church order need not cover every situation imaginable.

In PJCO 2007 this article also had a "c" and a "d" section which we decided to delete.

The "c" section, called "The Withdrawal of Members," stimulated much input and deliberation. In the end we decided to eliminate reference to "withdrawal" from the PJCO altogether and to simply specify in the article that all receptions and departures of members should be appropriately announced. Following are some of the considerations for this decision:

- Having a provision for withdrawal in the Church Order has no precedent in Reformed Church Polity.
- Having such a provision would also mean trying to specify or defining exactly what withdrawing actually is.
- It is true that "withdrawals" is very much a sinful reality of our day. In spite of much discussion we have not been able to draft anything that is satisfying. We can distinguish between one who leaves to join another church (e.g. Baptist) and one who leaves for other reasons. We can speak of "sinful withdrawal" and "non-sinful withdrawal." "Non-sinful" could still be "unwise."
- PJCO 2007 simply sought to stipulate <u>appropriate</u> announcement

of a withdrawal. This single line in PJCO 2007, however, only served to raise questions at the conferences.
- Specifying that all departures of members be appropriately announced would address this need for appropriate announcing withdrawals.
- If we drop the mention of withdrawal, then we are saying that it is a matter of local regulation.
- We cannot address everything in the Church Order, and mere mention of something can inadvertently legitimize the practice.

The "d" section was called "Letter of Testimony." This section is no longer needed since the provision of a "letter of testimony" is now mentioned in the first section of this article.

PJCO Article 58, Property (Article 57 of PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 59, The Observance and Revision of the Church Order (Article 58 of PJCO 2007)

As mentioned above in the section about the status of the documents, we deleted the reference in this article to the Foundational Statements.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

Each of the examination regulations stipulates that members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of examination. Having discussed this matter further, we decided to clarify that after each area of examination, classis will vote to proceed to the next section without thereby indicating that the examinee has sustained this section.

The Licensure Examination

In PJCO 2007, this examination regulation stated that the license to exhort in the churches shall be valid "as long as [the student] continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, subject to annual review by the licensing classis." We deleted the words "subject to annual review by the licensing classis" as unnecessary.

The Candidacy Examination

We decided to delete the term "whole-hearted" in PJCO 2007 Appendix 2, B, 8, c (as well as in Appendix 4, part 2, B, 9 and Appendix 4, part 2, B, 10 (2 occurrences)) in line with the Biblical requirement that our "yes be yes" and our "no be no."

We also decided to change the stipulation of "nine months of full-time work" to "six months of full-time work" given the following considerations:

- Churches expressed concern that "nine months" was too much, especially if the seminary program is only three years long;
- Stipulating "nine months" could result in students getting their practical experience after graduation, which is not desirable.

Under "required documents" we changed "a medical certificate of good health" to "a medical report of health." To specify a "certificate of good health" over regulates: a classis will have the good sense to know what to do with a man's health, whether good or bad. Chronic illness does not necessarily preclude one from serving well in the ministry.

Several United Reformed Churches expressed the desire for the option of classis waiving the requirement for an ordination examination for an examinee who does very well in his candidacy examination and who ends up accepting a call to a church in that classis. This practice is currently allowed in the United Reformed Churches, contends with the fact that the Candidacy Examination is much weightier than the Ordination Examination, and would save a classis work (without sacrificing the safeguarding of the pulpit). Hence the following stipulation was added to the Regulations for the Candidacy Examination: "If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examined him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision."

The Ordination Examination

Other than the change mentioned under "Ecclesiastical Examinations" above, no changes were made.

The Examinations for those who already are Ministers

In PJCO 2007 The Examination for Ordained Ministers had three parts in order to cover various scenarios which would call for examination of men

who wish to be ordained or who have already been ordained in other federations. For the sake of clarity we changed this so that we now have:

1. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church With Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship (cf. Article 7 part 1);

2. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who is Seeking Eligibility for Call to a Church of the Federation (cf. Article 7 part 2);

3. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who, Together with his Congregation, is Seeking Entrance into the Federation (cf. Article 33).

We fixed up the terminology in the first of the above three examinations to reflect that the examinee in this case has already been ordained. We also fixed up the terminology in the third of the above three examinations to reflect that the examinee in this case does not become eligible to be admitted to the ministry, but to be admitted "as minister of his congregation in the federation."

We added to the examination of a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship a component called "Church Polity" since some federations with whom we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship have a significantly different church order and church political practices.

Credential Forms for Broader Assemblies

These were not included in PJCO 2007 since at that time we had not yet finalized our composition of them. These are forms: in an actual credential the blanks in the forms would be filled in and typically it would appear on stationary with the letterhead of the sending body.

Majority Report of the Joint Church Order Committee

1. Background

In the Joint Church Order (JCO) Committee Report to Synod Smithers 2007 and Synod Schererville 2007 the churches received a minority position on Article 35 of the JCO by two of the committee members. This article, which in the revised Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) is Article 36, reads:

> **Article 35 (New PJCO 36) Psalms and Hymns**
> The 150 Psalms shall have the principle place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renditions of the psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Although the committee had not anticipated that the synods would interact with the minority position as presented in the "Minority Report" (without also having before it the position of the majority of the committee) this is in fact what happened. It is therefore important that the churches receive the rationale from the majority of the committee for including the proviso: "provided they (the psalms and hymns) are approved by general synod". Hence we submit this "Majority Report."

The Church Order Committees of the URCNA and the CanRC were mandated by their general synods to propose a common church order in the line of the Church Order of Dort. As we move together to a new Reformed church federation, we endeavor to reflect our common heritage in the Church Order. In line with many other Reformed churches, we seek to embrace and maintain our historical roots by encoding a Reformed principle and practice that has served the churches well throughout the centuries – also with respect to her singing.

Our report will focus first of all on the reasons why the churches are best served by synodically approved songs and, secondly, on the reasons why leaving the selection of songs to individual churches is not desirable.

2. Why the churches are best served by synodically approved songs

2.1 Since the committees were mandated to formulate a Church Order in the line of the Church Order of Dort, the historical precedent that synod

approve the songs we sing in the worship service is significant. Dort Article 69 on Psalms and Hymns clearly stipulates:

> In the Churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer before the sermon shall be sung.

NB: Synods both in the Netherlands (Middelburg, 1932) and (Grand Rapids, 1930) recognized that the position of Dort on the singing of hymns was too restrictive – and moved to broaden the *selection* of hymns which could be sung in the worship services. Nevertheless, it was then, and ever continued to be the principled position of those churches – both in the Netherlands and in North America – that it is the responsibility of a Synod *to approve* the songs that may be sung by the churches in the worship services. To regulate otherwise removes a strong historical precedent, a precedent that has served the Reformed churches well throughout their history. (Cf. The Church Order Commentary, [the MCMXLI edition] of Van Dellen and Monsma, pp. 282-284.)

In keeping with this precedent, Reformed church federations worldwide have Church Orders that stipulate synodical involvement in approving not only the Psalms but also the hymn selections. (See e.g. RCNZ, CO Art. 66; FRCSA, CO Art. 69; FRCA, CO Art. 64; CanRC, CO Art. 55; GKNv, CO Art. 67; and GKSA, CO Art. 69). Therefore, a proposal that the matter of song selection be left to the freedom of each consistory removes an important and vital historical precedent. We note, therefore, that the proposal that the matter of song choice be left to the freedom of each consistory violates this CO principle of Dort, and must be rejected.

2.2 Having synodically approved renditions of the psalms and synodically approved hymns fosters unity and peace within the federation. It adheres to the principle "one Word" and "one faith" (cf. Eph. 4:3-5) in the church of Christ, for the adage holds true: "the church confesses as she sings". The songs we sing during the worship services have to do with the teaching and the confessing of the church. Therefore, the provision that the churches together approve the songs that may be sung in the worship services promotes a common commitment to the Confessions and promotes unity in the church of Christ.

2.3 Leaving the song selections to the freedom of the churches, even if regulated by synodically adopted standards, opens the door to disputes

in the churches about congregational singing. There is ever the tendency to yield to what is judged to be popular for the moment while being less than cognizant of un-Reformed influences in such songs. Additionally, leaving the choice of songs to the freedom of the churches inevitably opens the door to excessive influence of personal tastes and preferences, especially on the part of ministers. History has shown that where there is this freedom, questionable songs do come into usage. Agreeing to sing synodically approved songs will help serve the unity of the churches for years to come. Their selection/adoption is, therefore, a matter of mutual concern for the churches.

2.4 Maintaining the principle of synodically approved songs also shows a care for churches that may need, and indeed may benefit from, more regulative direction on this subject than others might require. We recognize that this may not be a popular idea in our day and age. Nevertheless, the fact cannot be denied that the desire/need to provide regulative guidance lies behind many of the regulations of Dort. Neither can it be argued that we have outgrown the need for such regulative guidance – especially in the selections of songs which may properly be sung in our worship services. The fact is, we are weak and prone to err. Therefore, standing together on the ever so important matter of song selection is not only for our mutual protection, it will also provide help to the weaker churches – and therein is an exercise of Christian love within the fellowship of Christ's church.

2.5 Given the propensity to be sentimental and pragmatic regarding the issue of song selection, it is important to ensure that the long-term welfare of the churches *as a united federation* determines our starting point. The fact that the churches need to seek synodical approval for the songs that are sung in the worship services does not take this matter out of the hands of the consistories; rather, it makes this a matter that the churches work on together.

It should be noted also that Dort regulated the matter of the approval and adoption of songs in the same way that it regulates the use of e.g. the Liturgical Forms that were to be used in the worship services. Such continues to be done in Reformed church federations to this very day – without anyone thinking or suggesting that that constitutes an interfering with the authority of a consistory.

3. Why leaving the selection of songs to individual churches is not desirable

The Majority of the committee was not persuaded by either the force or indeed the correctness of the arguments which were presented at our meetings

by the Minority and subsequently drafted in their Minority Report. We will, therefore, at this point touch on/respond to some of the points raised in our meetings and reflected in the Minority Report.

3.1 The Minority asserts that there is insufficient "Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent which (would) require that the general synod, rather than the local consistory, must approve all music used in the local churches". Surely, that is overstating the case – especially in light of the principle so succinctly articulated in the expression: "as a church sings, so she confesses". Additionally, as was noted in point 2.2 above, having synodically approved renditions of the psalms and synodically approved hymns adheres and gives expression to the Scriptural principle: "one Word" and "one faith" (cf. Eph. 4:3-5).

Moreover, even if there were not to be found a specific "Scriptural precept, principle or precedent" the argument of the Minority is really a moot point. After all, if such a line of argumentation were judged to be valid, it would necessitate the removal of several other articles presently in the Church Order. For example, where is the "Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent" that would require that there be a meeting of Classis every four months, and/or that a Classis examine students for the ministry, and/or that a church be faithful in the use of the synodically approved Liturgical Forms. However, our churches have agreed that it is wise that such practices be adhered to as regulated by the Church Order.

3.2 The Minority Report (in its second point) contends that requiring synodical approval of the songs that may be sung in the worship services of our churches "places an impractical restriction on the local church which wishes to reach other cultures with the Gospel." We recognize that there is the challenge of ministering to people "who do not all speak English…." However, it should be noted (a) that such a situation is the exception, not the rule; (b) that the exception may neither destroy nor may it negate the rule; and (c) that there are ways to deal with the exception without violating the rule – e.g. in exceptional circumstances, churches ministering to non-English speaking peoples could be permitted to use a number of hymns with the understanding that they will place such hymns before Synod for approval. Nevertheless, the 'norm' would still be that the churches present such hymns for approval prior to their use in such a ministry.

3.3 A second "practical" issue is raised in point 5 of the Minority Report. After correctly acknowledging (a) that "both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a

deep and broad history among Reformed churches" and (b) that "usually this principle and practice are defended with an appeal to preserving unity among the churches" the Minority argues: "Nevertheless, given the current circumstances that exist among the churches we seek to serve with this Church Order, one very foreseeable and probable consequence of codifying this requirement in the current Church Order will be the fracturing of the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations".

It should be noted, however, that the Church Order seeks to reflect what we as churches agree is *normative*. If maintaining faithfulness to *the norm* is seen as a threat to "the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations", then it is the task of the federation to defend among its member-churches what *faithfulness to the norm* demands/requires of the churches. The threat of a potential "fracturing of the unity" of the churches may never be used to coerce the church to forsake what it confesses to be *the norm* for her life and action.

3.4 Contrary to the minority view with respect to the matter of (a possible) fracturing of our unity, we are of the opinion that unity will be enhanced by singing from a common songbook the songs the churches have jointly adopted as Scriptural songs. As churches we want to sing the best songs possible during the worship services so as to obtain the highest standard in God's service. To that end we need the wisdom of many counselors – a principle we apply also in Foundational Statement #10. Therefore we believe that there is great merit in having the churches agree on the songs approved for singing during the worship services. NB, this does not in any way prevent a consistory from analyzing songs it deems appropriate for worship – only, let a church submit to "the wisdom of many counselors" the song selection(s) which it would have the churches include in the songbook of the churches.

3.5 As was noted earlier, the "Minority Report" properly affirms that "both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a deep and broad history among Reformed churches". It is our sincere desire to promote that "historical principle and practice" since it is our conviction that it has served the churches well. We are of the conviction that the issue therefore is not "a (possible) restricting or constricting of the responsibility of a consistory to exercise leadership and oversight in the congregation". Rather, the issue is: Do the churches recognize that they express their unity *precisely in their use of what they adhere to in common*, namely: their Creeds, their Church Order, their Songbook, their Liturgical Forms? Surely, the churches would not tolerate a practice where each consistory would claim the freedom to write its own Creed(s), Church

Order or Liturgical Forms – with the argument that in its unique ministry such a practice was (is) necessary. We submit that the Songbook issue falls in the same category. If that is clearly understood and accepted, the unity of our churches will be enhanced – for the glory of the Lord and our wellbeing.

3.6 We submit, therefore, that the argument presented by the Minority in its 3rd point is fallacious. Though we recognize that the matter of the choice of Bible translation is not an insignificant matter – as a matter of fact, many Reformed church federations recommend, if not approve, Bible translation which the churches are 'free to use' as they may choose – we maintain that it is not "inconsistent with what we expect" of the consistory that the churches regulate in the Church Order what songs may properly be sung in the worship services. As stated above, the churches' Songbook is (and has historically been understood to be) in the same category as the Creeds, the Liturgical Forms and the Church Order.

3.7 The argument presented by the Minority in its fourth "ground" is specious. The fact is: any church may propose a song for inclusion in the next issue of the Songbook of the federation by simply following the time-honored ecclesiastical way. We recognize that this does take time; and it is true that a new edition of the Songbook is not a frequent occurrence. However, there are several ways to deal with such concerns, e.g. (a) the federation could, from time to time, publish a supplement; or it could (b) publish its Songbook in a spiral binder; or churches could (c) make use of an overhead projector when newly approved songs are to be sung.

The Majority respectfully requests (a) that Synod give careful thought to the material presented in points 2 and 3 above; and (b) that Synod adopt Church Order Art. 36 to read:

> The 150 Psalms shall have the principle place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renditions of the psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Humbly submitted,

Gijsbert Nederveen
Gerard J. Nordeman
William Pols
Raymond Sikkema
Harry Van Gurp
John Van Woudenberg
Art Witten

A Minority Report of the Joint Church Order Committee, re. PCO 35.

Background

It has been a privilege for us to serve our federation by functioning on the Joint Church Order Committee with brothers from both the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our presentation of this minority report in no way indicates any personal differences with these brothers. It does indicate a difference of perspective on a very specific matter. We support the vast majority of the Proposed Church Order which is a thoughtful, careful, and hopefully helpful work which will assist in bringing our two federations together.

Objection

Our objection is centered on Article 35: **Psalms and Hymns.** It says, "The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod." We agree with this article with the exception of the last phrase, "by the general synod." Our present church order (Article 39, *Church Order of the URCNA*) indicates that the congregation may sing "hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity…, provided they are approved *by the consistory*." We believe that the "150 Psalms should have the principal place in the singing of the churches." There is adequate Biblical principle and precedent to use the Psalms prominently in the churches. We fully agree that any hymns sung in the worship of the churches must "faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity." This is in keeping with the Biblical principle that our singing in worship must truly conform to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. We do, however, disagree that the *general synod* needs to approve all music sung in the churches. Rather, we are convinced that our singing ought to contribute to the unity of the newly formed federation by the use of a synodically approved set of standards for music which shall be applied on the local level by the wise decision of the consistory of each church.

Reasons for the Objection

There are several reasons for our objection.

1. We have not been persuaded that there is sufficient Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent which requires that the general synod,

rather than the local consistory, must approve all music used in the local churches.

2. Mandating the general synod to approve all music used in the local churches places an impractical restriction on the local church which wishes to reach other cultures with the gospel. A number of our churches are located in areas where people do not all speak English, or who communicate better in another language. To mandate that the local church cannot use any other songs than those approved in the English language hymnal, effectively and sadly conveys an attitude that we are not interested in having any other than English speaking Reformed Christians as part of our federation. To suggest that the federation will produce a hymnal in various languages is impractical and costly. It is much more practical to permit each local consistory, which is sensitive to the local needs of other cultures, to approve of songs appropriate for these congregations.

3. To mandate the general synod, rather than the local consistory, to approve of all music used in the worship of the churches is rather inconsistent with what we expect of our consistories. In Article 33: **The Regular Worship Services**, the Proposed Church Order states that the "consistory shall regulate the worship services," one item of which is the singing of the congregation. Our synod does not require the churches to use a specific Bible translation. We expect our local consistory to choose a reliable and faithful translation of the Bible, something very crucial for the life and instruction of the churches. We have entrusted to the local consistory this important responsibility. Yet, by suggesting that the local consistory cannot and should not make evaluated and wise decisions about appropriate music in the churches is inconsistent with what we expect of them. At each service we expect the elders to determine whether the sermon preached was in accord with Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. If not, the consistory is expected to deal appropriately with the concern. Yet, removing the task of approving music from the consistory's responsibility, as is indicated in the Proposed Church Order, conveys the idea that the local consistory cannot and should not be entrusted with this responsibility.

4. To remove from the local consistory the responsibility of approving the churches' music, and to place this in the hands of the general synod, effectively denies the churches any opportunity to use any other music than that which is contained in the current song book

of the federation. This means that no church in the future may use any old music now contained in the 1976 Blue *Psalter Hymnal* which did not make it into the new federation hymnal. This means that no church may use any music which meets the criterion for entry into a new federation hymnal, but for reasons of space did not make it into the new hymnal. This means that any Psalm tune now contained in the *Book of Praise* but which will not make it into the new federation hymnal may not be sung in the future. The long standing practice of a church singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" on Resurrection morning would have to cease, because this chorus likely would not be included in the federation hymnal. If a church uses any other music than that contained in the new song book, that church will be out of compliance with the Church Order.

Furthermore, to mandate that only the general synod may approve of music used in the worship of the churches effectively puts an end to the use of any *new* Biblically, Reformed, well-written, beautiful music. The last time any changes were made to the music in the *Songs of Praise* hymnal was in 1983. The URCNA currently uses the 1976 edition of the *Psalter Hymnal.* Such books cannot be frequently updated. It is too costly and time consuming. Nor would we expect the federation to do so. Under our present Church Order, the churches could purchase the *Trinity Hymnal*, for example. If this article of the Proposed Church Order is adopted, however, this fine hymnal may not be used.

5. Both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a deep and broad history among Reformed churches. Usually this principle and practice are defended with an appeal to preserving unity among the churches.

   Nevertheless, given the current circumstances that exist among the churches we seek to serve with this Proposed Church Order, one very foreseeable and probable consequence of codifying this requirement in the current Church Order will be the fracturing of the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations. This fracturing of unity would arise from restricting what many have come to believe is the liberty, given by God through Scripture to the consistory, to determine, in accordance with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, which songs may be used in the congregation's public worship.

   This liberty is in principle related to the liberty which a consistory exercises regarding the choices (1) of Bible version for public worship, (2) of catechism and Sunday School materials for youth

nurture, (3) of vacation Bible school materials, and (4) of Bible study materials for use by groups sponsored by the consistory. The proposed Church Order fully recognizes the consistory's prerogative in all of these latter areas. To refuse the exercise of this same prerogative with regard to songs sung in public worship seems inconsistent and harmful.

Recommendation

In view of these objections, we wish to recommend to the synod the following wording of the Proposed Church Order Article 35:

"The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by the consistory in accord with a synodically adopted standard."

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman

Rev. Ronald L. Scheuers

The Proposed Joint Church Order
(Synod 2010)

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 fully agree with 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, the spread of the gospel, and order in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:40). 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 ecclesiastical assemblies 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 Statements

The following list of foundational statements, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis 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, 4:3-4; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9

5. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal 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.
   Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22-23; Acts 14:23; 20:28-32

6. The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to His church by which the churches are to be governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer.
   Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

7. 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

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. 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;
   I Corinthians 16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10;
   Revelation 1:11, 20

10. 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 are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the adopted Church Order.
    Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10;
    II Timothy 3:16-17

11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and by administering the sacraments in the congregation.
    Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8;
    Acts 2:38-39; I Corinthians 11:17-34; II Corinthians 5:18-21

12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely, ministers, elders, and deacons, 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 properly qualified 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 in reverence and awe 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; Hebrews 12:28-29; 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. The church's evangelistic and missionary calling consists of preaching and teaching the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing new churches or expanding existing churches. This calling is fulfilled by ministers of the Word ordained to be missionaries, and by equipping the congregation to be the light of the world

    Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 2:14-16; I Peter 2:9-12; I Peter 3:15-16

17. 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

18. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted, becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the consistory of the church.

    Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

Church Order

Article 1
The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order, the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

I. Offices	(Articles 2-20)
II. Assemblies	(Articles 21-33)
III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies	(Articles 34-48)
IV. Discipline	(Articles 49-59)

I. OFFICES

Article 2
The Three Offices

The offices of the church are the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation and without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity.

Article 3
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, visiting the members in their homes, comforting the sick with the Word of God, catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture, 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 4
Preparation for the Ministry

A. Theological Education

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. This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.

The JCO considers this article incomplete; see our report to Synods

B. Licensure

A man 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 the prescribed Licensure Examination as conducted by his classis. Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his theological training. All his work as a licentiate shall be conducted under the supervision of the consistory where the work is performed.

C. Candidacy

At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct the prescribed Candidacy Examination. 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.

D. Exceptional Circumstances

Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for the prescribed Candidacy Examination. In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.

Article 5
Calling 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 consistory with the deacons of a man who has been declared a candidate after sustaining the prescribed Candidacy Examination, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.

Second, the prescribed Ordination Examination which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs.

Third, the public ordination before the congregation shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, and prayers, followed by the laying on of hands by the minister(s), with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 6
Calling a Minister Within the Federation

A minister within the federation shall be called in a lawful manner by the consistory with the deacons. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent.

The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

a. the consistory of the church from which he is leaving concerning his doctrine and life, his ministerial service, and his honorable release from his service in that church;
b. the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis;
c. the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

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

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

Article 7
Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

A minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article 8
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, such as chaplains and professors of theology. Each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order.

Article 9
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 consistory with the deacons and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 10
Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for its minister 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 dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which
shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 11
Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the consistory with the deacons. If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Article 12
Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a consistory with the deacons may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
b. This release shall occur 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;
d. This release requires the approval by classis of the provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The church from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years.

Article 13
The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The consistory with the deacons shall provide for the instruction and training of elders and deacons. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the consistory with the deacons shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the congregation may be invited to direct attention to suitable men. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after announcing the names of the nominees to the congregation on two Sundays, and with public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the local regulations adopted for that purpose.

Third, the consistory with the deacons shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation on the two Sundays prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory.

Article 14
The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a specified term, and having been appointed by the consistory with the deacons, shall be ordained with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 15
Subscription to the Confessions

Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal, shall be deposed from office.

Article 16
Parity Among Office-bearers

Among the office-bearers, parity shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

Article 17
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. The elders, together with the minister, shall watch over their fellow office-bearers, and ensure that they 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 schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in annual home visits, 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.

Article 18
Protecting Doctrinal Purity

To protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct, ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition, in the ministry of the Word, in Christian teaching, and in family visiting.

Article 19
The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of performing and supervising works of Christian mercy in the congregation. The deacons

shall do this by acquainting themselves with congregational needs, exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy, gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, distributing these offerings according to need, continuing in prayer, and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render a regular account of their work to the consistory. The deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.

Article 20
The Civil Authorities

As the task of civil government includes protecting the freedom of the Christian church, so it is the responsibility of the church to respect the government as instituted by God. In order that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, and that the witness of the gospel may be protected and advanced, the office-bearers must lead the congregation by their admonition and example. They shall ensure that prayers for the government are regularly offered and that members render due honor and lawful obedience to the civil authorities, thereby living as good citizens under Christ and promoting the true welfare of the land in which they live.

II. ASSEMBLIES

Article 21
Ecclesiastical Assemblies

A. Identification:

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. Convening

Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.

C. Delegation

Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.

D. Jurisdiction

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 matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.

E. Decisions

All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order.

F. Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a clerk. 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 proper order and decorum. It is the vice-chairman's duty to assist the chairman. It is the clerk's duty to keep an accurate record of the proceedings for approval by the assembly. These assembly duties shall cease when the assembly itself ceases.

G. Censure

Admonition shall be given to those who demonstrate unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.

H. Archives

Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.

I. Press Release

Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.

Article 22
The Consistory

In each church there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.

Article 23
Small Number of Office-bearers

Where the number of elders is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. This shall invariably be done where the number of elders is fewer than three. Where the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. This shall invariably be done where the number of deacons is fewer than three.

Article 24
Instituting a New Church

A church shall be instituted with its first consistory only under the supervision of a neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

Article 25
Classis

A. Composition

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.

B. Frequency

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.

C. Convening

The churches shall take turns convening classis. The assembly shall choose one of its members to preside. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church

and determine the time and place of the next classis.

D. Mutual Oversight

The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistorial 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 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.

E. Delegation to Regional and General Synod

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. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

F. *Classis Contracta*

A minimum of three churches may convene as a *classis contracta* exclusively to approbate a call, or to release a minister who has accepted a call, and to appoint a counselor for the ministerial vacancy.

Article 26
Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or elders 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, and they shall admonish those who have been negligent, so that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things to the peace, edification, and profit of the churches.

Upon the request of a consistory, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

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

Article 27
Counselors

The consistory of a church with a ministerial vacancy shall request classis to appoint the minister specified by that consistory to serve as counselor. His task is to help the consistory follow the provisions of the Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the consistory with the deacons, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28
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.

A regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

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

Article 29
Deputies of Regional Synod

In order that proper unity, good order, and sound doctrine be safeguarded, each regional synod shall appoint two deputies and an alternate for each classis, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of a classis, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request a judgment from regional synod.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the next 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 30
General Synod

A general synod, consisting of those delegated by the classes, shall meet once every three years. 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.

A general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes and the regional synods, with lawful appeals, and with reports which were mandated by the previous synod. It shall also determine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

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

Article 31
Appeals and Procedure

When all avenues for settling a dispute with the consistory have been exhausted, and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three forms of Unity, or the Church Order.

Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

A member who desires to object to a decision of general synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, shall bring the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 32
Ecumenical Relations

A. Local ecumenical relations

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Reformed Confessions. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church

must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

B. Ecclesiastical fellowship

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

Article 33
Admitting a Church

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree to abide by the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES

Article 34
Regular Worship Services

The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day.

The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.

Article 35
Special Worship Services

Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consis-

tory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In addition special worship services may be called in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

Article 36
Psalms and Hymns

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Article 37
Admission to the Pulpit

Consistories shall permit men to preach the word and administer the sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Any exception to this requirement shall be granted to any church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.
b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

Article 38
Administration of the Sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by a minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

Article 39
Baptism of Covenant Children

The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

Article 40
Public Profession of Faith

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Article 41
Baptism of Adults

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

Article 42
Administration of the Lord's Supper

At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 43
Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview regarding their proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership.

Article 44
The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their respective consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim

the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have been converted to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that assists in fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 45
The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes being joined to His church through profession of faith.

Article 46
Marriage

Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and exhort those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture, using the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage adopted by general synod.

Article 47
Funerals

A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

Article 48
The Church Records

The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

IV. DISCIPLINE

Article 49
The Nature and Purpose of Discipline

Ecclesiastical discipline, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities. The purpose of ecclesiastical discipline is that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church, and one's neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

Article 50
Consistory Involvement

When a member's sin in doctrine or life is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed. A private sin from which the sinner repents after having been admonished by one person alone, or subsequently in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be brought to the consistory.

When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

Article 51
The Reconciliation of a Member

The reconciliation of a member, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 52
The Discipline of a Member

A. A communicant member

A member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:

1. Silent Discipline: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be

made public by the consistory.

2. Public Discipline: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.
    a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.
    b. In the second step, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation.
    c. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date.
3. Excommunication: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ, using the synodically approved liturgical form.

B. A non-communicant member

A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set at which the excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 53
The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 54
No Lording it Over

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 55
Mutual Censure

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort and encourage one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 56
The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in short, all sins which would warrant the discipline of any other member.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required. No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer.

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only with the involvement of the consistory which deposed him, after a sufficient period of

time, and upon evidence of genuine repentance. The regular procedure for entering office shall be followed.

Article 57
The Reception and Departure of Members

A. The Reception of Members

Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship may be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a letter of testimony from their former consistory regarding their doctrine and life. Others may be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required. The reception of members shall be appropriately announced.

B. The Departure of Members

Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall send a letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the members. The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.

Article 58
Property

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the consistory with the deacons of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

Article 59
The Observance and Revision of the Church Order

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

The Licensure Examination

(cf. Article 4)

A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. A letter from the student's consistory which
   a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
   b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text.
4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the

classis for those delegated to classis.

5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis.
6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas:
   a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes);
   b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes);
   c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes).

   Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.
7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

The Candidacy Examination

(cf. Articles 4 and 5)

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of <u>six</u> months of full-time work.
3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:
   a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,
   b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
4. A medical report of health.
5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three

Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
   a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
   b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
   c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
   a. Practica*:* the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
   b. Knowledge of Scripture: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).
   c. Biblical Exegesis: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
   d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

g. Church History: the prospective candidate's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
   a. the affirmative vote of classis,
   b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
   c. his promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.
9. If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examines him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision.
10. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

The Ordination Examination
(cf. Article 5)

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. A letter of call.
2 A letter of acceptance of the call.
3. A written declaration of candidacy.
4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which:
    a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
    b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
    a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
    b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).

c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section without thereby indicating that the candidate has sustained this section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:
   a. the affirmative vote of classis,
   b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
   c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination.
9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again, in whole or in part, by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church With Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship (cf. Article 7 part 1)

A. Documents:

1. A letter of call
2. A letter of acceptance

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
   a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
   b. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
   c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

d. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

e. Church Polity: the prospective applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his examination, and is therefore eligible to be installed as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:
   a. the affirmative vote of classis,
   b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
   c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon installation.
9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who is Seeking Eligibility for Call to a Church of the Federation. (cf. Article 7 part 2)

A. Documents:

1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which:
   a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
   b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
   a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
   b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
   c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
   a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and

preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).

b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).

c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).

d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.

8. Classis shall decide whether the applicant:
   a. has sustained the examination and need not undergo a period

of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or

b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or

c. has not sustained the examination.

9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
   a. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
   b. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.
10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
    a. the affirmative vote of the classis,
    b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
    c. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.
11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who, Together with his Congregation, is Seeking Entrance into the Federation. (cf. Article 33)

A. Documents:

1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
   a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
   b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
   c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
    a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
    b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).
    c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
    d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
    e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
    f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).
    g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).
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    Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

    Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

    An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be re-

examined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the above examination.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained the examination for ministers, and is therefore eligible to be admitted as minister of his congregation in the federation, upon:
   a. the affirmative vote of classis,
   b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
   c. the applicant's promise to sign the Form of Subscription.

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

The Consistory of _____ *(church)* at

_____ *(place)* has on _____

(date) delegated the following brothers:

Delegates	Alternate delegates (in order)
	1

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 fully agree with 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

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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 ecclesiastical assemblies 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

churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life, the spread of the gospel, and order in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:40). 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.

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Foundational Principles

The following list of foundational principles, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis 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. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal 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.

Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22-23; Acts 14:23; 20:28-32

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5. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal 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.

6. The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to His church by which the churches are to be governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer,

Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

7. 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

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. 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; I Corinthians 16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20

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Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; I Corinthians

10. 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 are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the adopted Church Order.

Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17

11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and by administering the sacraments in the congregation.

Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38-39; I Corinthians 11:17-34; II Corinthians 5:18-21

12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely, ministers, elders, and deacons, 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 properly qualified 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

16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20

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Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1-2, 6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:28-29; 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. The church's evangelistic and missionary calling consists of preaching and teaching the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing new churches or expanding existing churches. This calling is fulfilled by ministers of the Word ordained to be missionaries, and by equipping the congregation to be the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 2:14-16; I Peter 2:9-12; I Peter 3:15-16

17. 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

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Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

Article 1.
The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order (I Corinthians 14:40), the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

I. Offices (Articles 2-19)
II. Assemblies (Articles 20-32)
III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles 33-46)
IV. Discipline (Articles 47-58)

Hebrews 12:7-11

18. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted, becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the consistory of the church.

Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

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I. Offices (Articles 2-20)
II. Assemblies (Articles 21-33)
III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles 34-48)
IV. Discipline (Articles 49-59)

I. OFFICES

Article 2.
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 with the cooperation of the congregation.

Article 3.
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-bearer, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 4.
Preparation for the Ministry

a. Theological Education: 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, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.

b. Licensure: A man aspiring to

I. OFFICES

Article 2
The Three Offices

The offices of the church are the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation and without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity.

Article 3
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, visiting the members in their homes, comforting the sick with the Word of God, catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture, 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 4
Preparation for the Ministry

A. Theological Education

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. This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the

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 in Appendix 1. 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. Candidacy: At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct a candidacy examination, as required in Appendix 2. 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.

d. Exceptional Circumstances: Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for a suitable candidacy examination (see Appendix 2). In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.

Article 5.

Calling a Candidate

The lawful calling to the office

churches of classis.

The JCO considers this article incomplete; see our report to Synods

B. Licensure

A man 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 the prescribed Licensure Examination as conducted by his classis. Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his theological training. All his work as a licentiate shall be conducted under the supervision of the consistory where the work is performed.

C. Candidacy

At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct the prescribed Candidacy Examination. 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.

D. Exceptional Circumstances

Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for the prescribed Candidacy Examination. In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have as-

of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:

First, the election by the council of a man who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed in Appendix 2, 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 3.

Third, 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 synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 6.
Calling 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 ecclesiastical testimonies of his doctrine and life, of his ministerial service, and of his honorable release from the

surance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.

Article 5
Calling 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 consistory with the deacons of a man who has been declared a candidate after sustaining the prescribed Candidacy Examination, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.

Second, the prescribed Ordination Examination which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs.

Third, the public ordination before the congregation shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, and prayers, followed by the laying on of hands by the minister(s), with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 6
Calling a Minister Within the Federation

A minister within the federation shall be called in a lawful manner by the consistory with the deacons. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent.

The classis shall ensure the good

church and classis he last served.

Upon receipt of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the synodically approved 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 7.

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 as set forth in Appendix 4, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article 8.

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 9.

Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and

order of the calling process by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

a. the consistory of the church from which he is leaving concerning his doctrine and life, his ministerial service, and his honorable release from his service in that church;
b. the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis;
c. the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

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

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

Article 7

Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

A minister from a church with whom the federation does not

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 10.
Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for the minister 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 dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support.

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 11.
Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the council. If the duration of the release is greater than

maintain ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article 8
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, such as chaplains and professors of theology. Each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order.

Article 9
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 consistory with the deacons and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

four months, the council shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Article 12.
Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a council may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;

b. This release shall occur 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;

d. This release shall require the approval by classis of the council's provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

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, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office.

Article 13.
Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction

Article 10
Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for its minister 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 dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 11
Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the consistory with the deacons. If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

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. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be 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.

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.

Article 14.
The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Before entering upon their work, 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 with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 12
Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a consistory with the deacons may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
b. This release shall occur 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;
d. This release requires the approval by classis of the provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The church from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years.

Article 13
The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The consistory with the deacons

Article 15.
Subscription to the Confessions

Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal, shall be deposed from office.

Article 16.
Parity Among Office-bearers

Among the office-bearers, parity shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

Article 17.
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 ensure 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, enshall provide for the instruction and training of elders and deacons. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the consistory with the deacons shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the congregation may be invited to direct attention to suitable men. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after announcing the names of the nominees to the congregation on two Sundays, and with public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the local regulations adopted for that purpose.

Third, the consistory with the deacons shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation on the two Sundays prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory.

Article 14
The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a specified term, and having been appointed by the consistory with the deacons, shall be ordained with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

gage 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.

Article 18.
Protecting Doctrinal Purity

To protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct, ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition, in the ministry of the Word, in Christian teaching, and in family visiting.

Article 19.
The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of performing and supervising works of Christian mercy in the congregation. The deacons shall do this by acquainting themselves with congregational needs, exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy, gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, distributing these offerings according to need, continuing in prayer, and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the busi-

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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. The elders, together with the minister, shall watch over their fellow office-bearers, and ensure that they 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 schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover, they

ness pertaining to their office, and they shall render a monthly account of their work to the consistory. The deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.

Article 20.
The Civil Authorities

As the task of civil government includes protecting the freedom of the Christian church, so it is the responsibility of the church to respect the government as instituted by God. In order that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, and that the witness of the gospel may be protected and advanced, the office-bearers must lead the congregation by their admonition and example. They shall ensure that prayers for the government are regularly offered and that members render due honor and lawful obedience to the civil authorities, thereby living as good citizens under Christ and promoting the true welfare of the land in which they live.

shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in annual home visits, 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.

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also be considered.

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II. ASSEMBLIES

Article 21.
Ecclesiastical Assemblies

a. Identification: 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. Convening: Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.

c. Delegation: 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. These assemblies shall require each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.

d. Jurisdiction: In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall

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B. Convening

Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.

C. Delegation

Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.

D. Jurisdiction

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 exer-

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.

e. Decisions: All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order.

f. Proceedings: 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 proper order and decorum.

cise 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 matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.

E. Decisions

All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order.

F. Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a clerk. 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 proper order and decorum. It is the vice-chairman's duty to assist the chairman. It is the clerk's duty to keep an accurate record of the proceedings for approval by the assembly. These assembly duties shall cease when the assembly itself ceases.

G. Censure

Admonition shall be given to

g. Records: In every assembly a clerk shall keep and distribute an accurate record of the proceedings. In all broader assemblies these functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.

h. Censure: 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.

i. Archives: Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.

j. Press Release: Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.

Article 22.
The Consistory

In each church there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises direct authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ. The term council designates not an assembly of the church, but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory, at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the Church Order or as assigned by the consistory.

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H. Archives

Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.

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In each church there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.

Article 23
Small Number of Office-bearers

Where the number of elders is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. This shall invariably be done where the number of elders is fewer than three. Where the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. This shall invariably be done where the number of deacons is fewer than three.

Article 24
Instituting a New Church

A church shall be instituted

Article 23.
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Article 24.
Organizing a New Congregation

A congregation shall be organized under its first consistory only under the supervision of the neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

Article 25.
The Classis

a. Composition: 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.

b. Frequency: 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

with its first consistory only under the supervision of a neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

Article 25
Classis

A. Composition

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.

B. Frequency

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.

C. Convening

The churches shall take turns convening classis. The assembly shall choose one of its members to preside. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.

D. Mutual Oversight

The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistorial

warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

c. Convening: The churches shall take turns convening classis and providing a chairman from their delegation. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.

d. Mutual Oversight: 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.

e. Delegation to Regional and General Synod: 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 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 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.

E. Delegation to Regional and General Synod

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. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

F. Classis Contracta

A minimum of three churches may convene as a classis contracta exclusively to approbate a call, or to release a minister who has accepted a call, and to appoint a counselor for the ministerial vacancy.

Article 26
Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or

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. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

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Article 26.
Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or elders 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. Upon the request of a consistory, they elders 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, and they shall admonish those who have been negligent, so that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things to the peace, edification, and profit of the churches.
Upon the request of a consistory, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

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

Article 27
Counselors

The consistory of a church with a ministerial vacancy shall request classis to appoint the minister specified by that consistory to serve as counselor. His task is to help the consistory follow the provisions of the Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the consistory with the deacons, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28
Regional Synod

A regional synod, consisting of

may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

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

Article 27.
Counselors

The consistory of a church with a ministerial vacancy shall request classis to appoint the minister it specifies to serve as counselor. His task is to help the consistory follow the provisions of the Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the council members, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28.
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, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

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

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.

A regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

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

Article 29
Deputies of Regional Synod

In order that proper unity, good order, and sound doctrine be safeguarded, each regional synod shall appoint two deputies and an alternate for each classis, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of a classis, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request a judgment from regional synod.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the next regional synod and, if so required,

Article 29.
The Deputies of Regional Synod

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

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request the deputies to report the matter to regional synod for decision.

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 30.
The General Synod

A general synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the classes, shall meet at least once every three years. 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 general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and the regional synods, with lawful appeals, and with reports which were mandated by the previous synod. It shall also determine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

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

Old Article 55 has become Article 31

Article 31
Appeals and Procedure

When all avenues for settling a dispute with the consistory have been exhausted, and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by major-

termine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

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

PJCO Article 55 was moved to this location and becomes Article 31.

Article 55.
Appeals and Procedure

When all avenues for settling a dispute at the consistory level have been exhausted, and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order.

Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

A member who desires to object to a decision of general synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, shall bring the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 32
Ecumenical Relations

A. Local ecumenical relations

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summa-

the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 31.
Ecumenical Relations

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. A church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

Article 32.
Admitting a Church

rized in the Reformed Confessions. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

B. Ecclesiastical fellowship

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

Article 33
Admitting a Church

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree to abide by the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined according to Appendix 4.

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES

Article 33.
The Regular Worship Services

The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day.

The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.

Article 34.
Special Worship Services

In the manner decided by the consistory, special worship services may be called in observance of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. Special worship services may be called also in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

Article 35.
Psalms and Hymns

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the

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Article 35
Special Worship Services

Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In addition special worship services may be called in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

Article 36
Psalms and Hymns

The 150 Psalms shall have the

churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Article 36.
Admission to the Pulpit

Consistories shall permit men to administer the Word and sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
c. Any exception to either of these requirements shall be granted only occasionally, only to ministers, licentiates, and candidates who faithfully subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.

principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Article 37
Admission to the Pulpit

Consistories shall permit men to preach the word and administer the sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Any exception to this requirement shall be granted to any church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.
b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

Article 37.
The Administration of the Sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by an ordained minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

Article 38.
The Baptism of Covenant Children

The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

Article 39.
The Baptism of Adults

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

Article 40.
Administration of the Lord's Supper

At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 41.
Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall ad-

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The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by a minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

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The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

Article 40
Public Profession of Faith

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

mit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that, as much as possible, the consistory has secured confirmation of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk of life.

Article 42.
The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have come to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in labor and service that assist fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 43.
The Church's Evangelism Calling

Each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God and relying on

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Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

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At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

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The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview regarding their proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership.

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Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who

the Holy Spirit, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes affiliating with His church through profession of faith.

Article 44.
Marriage

Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture, using the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage adopted by general synod.

Article 45.
Funerals

A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

Article 46.
The Church Records

The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their respective consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have been converted to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that assists in fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 45
The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes being joined to His church through profession of faith.

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Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and exhort those under their spiritual care who are considering mar-

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A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

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The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

IV. DISCIPLINE

Article 47.
The Nature and Purpose of Discipline

Ecclesiastical discipline, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities. The purpose of ecclesiastical discipline is that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church, and one's neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

Article 48.
Consistory Involvement

When a member's sin in doctrine or life is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed. A private sin from which the sinner repents after having been admonished by one person alone, or subsequently in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be brought to the consistory.

When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

Article 49.
The Reconciliation of a Member

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When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

Article 51
The Reconciliation of a Member

The reconciliation of a mem-

whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 50.
The Discipline of a Member

A communicant member, or a mature non-communicant member, whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:

a. Silent Discipline: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from all the privileges of church membership, including using the sacraments and voting at congregational meetings. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.
b. Public Discipline: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the member's offense and failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation

ber, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 52
The Discipline of a Member
A communicant member

A member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:

1. Silent Discipline: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.

2. Public Discipline: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval

may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

1. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

2. In the second step, the consistory shall seek the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation.

3. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date.

c. Excommunication: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, using the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 51.
The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges

between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

b. In the second step, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation.

c. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date.

3. Excommunication: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ, using the synodically approved liturgical form.

B. A non-communicant member

A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 52.
No Lording it Over

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 53.
Mutual Censure

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 54.
The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be temporarily suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in

The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set at which the excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 53
The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 54
No Lording it Over

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

short, all sins which would warrant the discipline of any other member.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required.

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only after a sufficient period of time, only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and only through the regular procedure for entering office.

Article 55 is now Article 31

Article 56.
The Reception, Departure, and Withdrawal of Members

a. The Reception of Members: Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a testimony regarding their doctrine and life. Others shall be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required.
b. The Departure of Mem-

Article 55
Mutual Censure

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort and encourage one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 56
The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in short, all sins which would warrant the discipline of any other member.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required. No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer.

bers: Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory, which shall send a letter concerning their doctrine and life to such church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.

c. The Withdrawal of Members: The withdrawal of a member shall be appropriately announced.

d. Letter of testimony: If a letter of testimony concerning doctrine and life is requested by a member, the consistory shall furnish such a letter.

Article 57.
Property

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only with the involvement of the consistory which deposed him, after a sufficient period of time, and upon evidence of genuine repentance. The regular procedure for entering office shall be followed.

Article 57
The Reception and Departure of Members

A. The Reception of Members

Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship may be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a letter of testimony from their former consistory regarding their doctrine and life. Others may be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required. The reception of members shall be appropriately announced.

B. The Departure of Members

Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall send a letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a

federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the council of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

Article 58.
The Observance and Revision of the Church Order

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been drafted in accord with the Foundational Principles and adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

copy thereof to the members. The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.

Article 58
Property

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the consistory with the deacons of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

Article 59
The Observance and Revision of the Church Order

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

Appendix 1

The Licensure Examination
(cf. Article 4)

A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation.

2. A letter from the student's consistory which

a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and

b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a

Ecclesiastical Examinations
The Licensure Examination
(cf. Article 4)

A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation.

2. A letter from the student's consistory which

a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and

b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a

previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text.

4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis.

6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas:

a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes);
b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes);
c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments, subject to annual review by the licensing classis.

previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text.

4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis.

6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas:

a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes);
b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes);
c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

Appendix 2

The Candidacy Examination (cf. Articles 4 and 5)

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.

2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of nine months of full-time work.

3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:

a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,

b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

4. A medical certificate of good health.

5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of

The Candidacy Examination (cf. Articles 4 and 5)

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.

2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of six months of full-time work.

3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:

a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,

b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

4. A medical report of health.

5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be

classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:

a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and

placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:

a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office

practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).

b. Knowledge of Scripture: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).

c. Biblical Exegesis: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).

d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

g. Church History: the prospective candidate's knowledge of

with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).

b. Knowledge of Scripture: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).

c. Biblical Exegesis: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).

d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

g. Church History: the prospec-

church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his whole-hearted promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

9. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may re-

tive candidate's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

9. If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examines him, the ordination exam may be waived. The clas-

quire another examination.

Appendix 3

The Ordination Examination (cf. Article 5)

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.

A. Required Documents:
1. A letter of call.
2 A letter of acceptance of the call.
3. A written declaration of candidacy.
4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which:
a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination.

B. Procedure and Content:
1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the

sis that examined him may make such a decision.

10. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

The Ordination Examination (cf. Article 5)

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.

A. Required Documents:
1. A letter of call.
2. A letter of acceptance of the call.
3. A written declaration of candidacy.
4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which:
a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination.

B. Procedure and Content:
1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the

provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
c. Knowledge of the Creeds and

provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
c. Knowledge of the Creeds and

Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination.

9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section without thereby indicating that the candidate has sustained this section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination.

9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again, in whole or in part, by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

Appendix 4

The Examination for Ordained Ministers
(cf. Articles 7 and 32)

Requirement for Ecclesiastical Examinations of Ordained Ministers: Ordained ministers who seek admission to the ministry within the federation who come from churches with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship or who come from churches with whom we do not maintain such fellowship, are required to undergo an ecclesiastical examination to become eligible for a call from the churches of the federation. One of the following three examinations shall be conducted as applicable.

I. A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship:

A. Documents:
   1. A letter of call
   2. A letter of acceptance

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Five weeks prior to the

Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship.
(cf. Article 7 part 1)

A. Documents:
   1. A letter of call
   2. A letter of acceptance

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the applicant's per-

classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
b. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
d. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
e. Church Polity: the prospective applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions af-

the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

d. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination.

9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

ter each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his examination, and is therefore eligible to be installed as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon installation.

9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

Appendix 4
(part 2)

II. A minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking eligibility for call to a church of the federation:

A. Documents:

1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ordained ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request,

2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which:

a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and

b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and

4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the ap-

Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking eligibility for call to a church of the federation.
(cf. Article 7 part 2)

A. Documents:

1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request,

2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which:

a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and

b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.

3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and

4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the ap-

sis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:

a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics;

plicant the following:

a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the vari-

and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).

c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).

e. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

f. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

g. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

h. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

i. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christ-

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c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).

d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral

tian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.

8. Classis shall decide whether the applicant:

a. has sustained the examination and need not undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or
b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or
c. has not sustained the examination.

9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the concurring advice of the

problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.

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b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or
c. has not sustained the examination.

9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and

deputies of Regional Synod, and

b. the applicant's whole-hearted promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's whole-hearted promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the affirmative vote of the classis,

b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and

c. the applicant's whole-hearted promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this

b. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:

a. the affirmative vote of the classis,

b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and

c. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this request classis may require another nation.

request classis may require another examination.

Appendix 4
(part 3)

III. A minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who, together with his congregation, is seeking entrance into the federation:

A. Documents:
1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ordained ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:
1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.

Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who, together with his congregation, is seeking entrance into the federation. (cf. Article 33)

A. Documents:
1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:
1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the clas-

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:

a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.

5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.

6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).

3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.

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a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
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b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics;

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c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).
g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).

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h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both

h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the above examination.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained the examination for ordained ministers, and is therefore eligible to be admitted to the ministry as minister of his congregation in the federation, upon:

a. the affirmative vote of classis,
b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
c. the applicant's promise to sign the Form of Subscription.

to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

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a. the affirmative vote of classis,

b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and

c. the applicant's promise to sign the Form of Subscription.

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

The Consistory of _____ *(church)* at

_____ *(place)* has on _____

(date) delegated the following brothers:

Delegates	Alternate delegates (in order)
	1
	2

to the Classis _____ *(region)* which

is to be held on _____ *(date)* at _____

_____ *(place).*

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Classis. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

The Consistory with the Deacons, on their part, promise to abide by all decisions which have been taken in accordance with the above conditions.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,
For the Consistory

Chairman:_____

Clerk:_____

REGIONAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____*(region)* of the _____

_____ *(federation)* held _____

(date) has delegated the following brothers:

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2
		3	3
		4	4

to the Regional Synod _____ *(region)*

which is to be held on _____*(date)* at _____

_____ *(place)*, in accordance with Article 25e of

the Church Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Regional Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ *(date)*

Chairman:_____

Clerk:_____

GENERAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____ *(region)* of the _____

_____ *(federation)* held _____

(date) at _____ *(place)* has delegated the

following brothers:

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2

to the General Synod which is to be held on _____

(date) at _____ *(place)*, in accordance

with Article 25e of the Church Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this General Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ *(date)*

Chairman:_____
Clerk:_____

Press Release of the
meeting of the combined committees of the
Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches
to propose a common church order
held November 11-12, 2008
at the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed in Burlington, ON

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gurp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Romans 13:1-7, and prayer.

The minutes of the August 22-24, 2006 and October 27, 2007 meetings were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next two days.

The respective 2007 General Synods of the two federations had adopted the recommendation to present to the churches the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the four-column comparison report for discussion and evaluation. Official communications regarding the PJCO is to proceed from and through consistories to the PJCO Committee. Further, that the Committee be authorized to hold no more than eight regional conferences to present and discuss various provisions of the PJCO. So far, the Committee received letters from seven Canadian Reformed churches and two United Reformed churches. Regional conferences have been held so far in Ancaster, ON; Abbotsford, BC; Edmonton, AB; Lethbridge, AB; Winnipeg, MB. All conferences were well attended with good representation from consistories and interested members of both the URCNA and CanRC. Requests were received from consistories in the United States for similar conferences to be conducted there.

Most of the time of the two day-meeting of the combined committee was dedicated to the letters received from the nine consistories and the comments and feedback from the conferences. It was decided to set up and maintain a two-column document with the original 2007 PJCO in the one column and a proposed 2010 PJCO in the second column for easy comparison. The second column would reflect changes made as a result of input from the churches. The input received covered a wide spectrum of the PJCO and it is not possible in a press release to provide all the details of the discussions and decisions. The following are some of the main points.

The status and function of the Foundational Principles were questioned. It is to be understood that they function as a basis for the Church Order and are also meant to be didactic in nature. To prevent the suggestion that they also have a quasi confessional function it was decided to change the name to "Foundational Statements", and to change the first line in Article 58 to "These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently." Scripture references were added to other articles in the Foundational Statements and some factual and spelling errors were corrected.

The requirement of subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by office bearers was added to Article 2 and removed from the individual articles dealing with the offices.

Article 4a, Theological Education, may require revision, but it is impossible to finalize this article at this time. The Theological Education Committee will need to provide input.

Article 7, An ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation, was changed to make a distinction between ministers coming from a federation with which ecclesiastical fellowship is maintained and those from federations not in ecclesiastical fellowship.

The provisions in articles 17 and 25d regarding the duties of the elders to "promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels", and for classis to inquire whether "confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted" resulted in a considerable reaction and requests for clarification. Other than to drop the adjective 'wholeheartedly' from art. 25d, it was decided to leave the wording as is. The phrase 'at all levels' is to be seen as a general directive. It is arbitrary to restrict to a specific level of education such as primary or secondary.

Article 21c included the requirement for each delegate to broader assemblies "to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription." It was agreed to delete this sentence from the article. It is to be considered that the churches delegate these men. The broader assemblies do not have the authority to ask this question nor to discipline those who might be at odds with the Form of Subscription.

In order to clarify the intent of Art 31 Ecumenical Relations, it was decided to divide the article into two sections. The first section deals with ecumenical relations on the local level, while the second deals with ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations.

Regret was expressed that both Synod Smithers 2007 and Synod Schererville 2007 expressed an opinion regarding Article 35 Psalms and Hymns without the benefit of the rationale of a majority report.

Several consistory letters questioned the wording of Article 41 Admission to the Lord's Supper. Also at the conferences this article received a

lot of attention. All feedback was duly considered by the committee and some changes were agreed to. The article now reads: "The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview, regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership."

It was agreed that Article 55 Appeals and Procedures does not belong in the section dealing with discipline. It will be put under the division of Assemblies. This will result in a renumbering of the subsequent articles. Also specific references to appendices by number will be removed from the church order.

The wording in several other articles were changed to provide clarity and to prevent misinterpretation, without changing the original intent of those articles. The committee has been made aware of additional correspondence coming from the churches which may result in further changes to the PJCO.

Some discussion took place about the appropriateness of organizing churches as a corporation. It is not clear if this belongs to the mandate of the committee. Since it is of concern among the churches this matter deserves the attention of CERCU and the coordinators of the CanRC. They will be informed accordingly.

Work on regulations for synod, credentials for delegates to broader assemblies, and appendices was assigned and will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the committee.

To complete the mandate given by the respective synods, the committee agreed to dates for additional regional conferences. The churches that requested these conferences will be contacted.

The committee set up a web site which has the Proposed Joint Church Order and the 4-column comparison report available for downloading in preparation for the regional conferences. The address is http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the work that could be accomplished in brotherly harmony Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

For the committee

Gerard J. Nordeman

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the
Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches
to propose a common church order
held March 24-26, 2009
at the First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gurp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Jonah 1, and prayer.

The minutes of the November 11-12, 2008 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.
The respective 2007 General Synods of the two federations had adopted the recommendation to present to the churches the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the four-column comparison report for discussion and evaluation. Further, that the Committee be authorized to hold regional conferences to present and discuss various provisions of the PJCO. Thus far the Committee received thirty-two letters from Canadian Reformed churches and thirteen letters from United Reformed churches. In addition to the regional conferences in Central and Western Canada in 2008, conferences were held in Iowa, Illinois and Michigan (March 11-13, 2009) and California (March 23 and 24, 2009).

The PJCO committee has received numerous communications from churches which have raised questions or registered concerns over a perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. At the heart of these concerns lies the desire to defend the authority of the consistory against encroachment upon that authority by a classis or a synod.
The following statements on the nature of broader assemblies are understood by the committee to underlie the Reformed church polity of the church order of Dort, and are thus reflected in the PJCO according to the committee's mandate to follow the principles of Dort.

PJCO committee statement on the authority of broader assemblies.

1. The authority that Christ gives to His church rests with the consistory (PJCO 22, cf. Foundational Statement 6). Therefore when broader assemblies are convened they do not take over or replace the authority of the consistories.

2. The churches give broader assemblies the jurisdiction (i.e., the mandate to make decisions) only to deliberate and to make decisions on all matters lawfully placed before them (PJCO 21.d.). The Church Order, as agreed to by all the churches (PJCO 58), stipulates what matters are lawfully placed before the broader assemblies.

3. Members of broader assemblies are those who have been delegated by narrower assemblies (PJCO 21.c.). Once a broader assembly is constituted, the delegated brothers become members of that assembly. Therefore, each member of a broader assembly serves the good of all the churches with respect to the matters lawfully placed before that assembly, rather than represent the interests of his sending body.

4. Broader assemblies are deliberative in nature (PJCO 21 a). Whereas a consistory may give input and direction concerning overtures on the agenda to the men it delegates, it may not bind their votes. Rather, it should write a letter to the assembly concerning its conviction. Binding votes would negate the need for deliberative reflection on the issues, and consistories could then simply send in their votes by written ballot. The size of broader assemblies should not impede careful reflection and deliberation, by being either too large as to make broad participation in such deliberation by its members unwieldy and impossible, or too small as to lack in depth and breadth of wisdom.

5. By common consent the churches agree to abide by the decisions of a broader assembly because a matter to be decided upon at the broader assembly has been lawfully placed before it by way of a consistory's request or an appeal.

6. The decisions of a broader assembly must be considered settled and binding, and must therefore be implemented, unless found to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order (PJCO 21 e).

Most of the available time was used by the committee to deal with many of the letters received from the churches and the comments and feedback from the conferences. While each member of the combined committee had been given copies of all correspondence, the CanRC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the URC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the United Reformed Churches. These proposals were discussed in detail by the combined committee and, where deemed necessary, changes were made to the PJCO. It is not possible in this press release to provide all

the details of these discussions and decisions. However, the following are some of the main points.

In order to clarify the language and to be more specific in its wording, minor changes were made to articles **PJCO 2, PJCO 10, PJCO 21.d, PJCO 24, PJCO 25.c, PJCO 26, PJCO 29, PJCO 30, PJCO 31, PJCO 36,** and **PJCO 43.**

More substantial changes were incorporated as follows:

PJCO 3 -To included with the duties of the minister the following phrase: "visiting the members in their homes," and to change "catechizing the youth" to "catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture."

PJCO 4.a -The committee agreed that the last sentence regarding theological students needed clarifying. It now reads "The consistory with the deacons of his church shall help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis."

PJCO 7 -Regarding an ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation it was further stipulated that he may be declared eligible for call only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining an examination conducted according to the regulations adopted by the federation in the applicable examination regulations. Appropriate changes were made in the respective examination regulations to clarify that such a man should be installed, and not ordained.

PJCO 11 -The committee agreed that it is more appropriate to require classis involvement only when the temporary release of a minister is of a time period greater than one year.

PJCO -14 -In this article as well as many others the term council is used. This may have led to confusion since council is not one of the four recognized assemblies in the church order. The PJCO attempted to clarify this in Art. 22. It is at times argued that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the work of council as governing. However, a careful reading of Article 30 indicates that the church is governed by the polity taught by Christ, whereas it is only the elders together with the minister who are commissioned to rule in Christ's church. The three distinct offices and tasks are clearly defined. In this discussion it is important to begin with the concept of office. The office of elder and the office of deacon are distinct and each office has its own duties. (cf. articles 17 and 19 respectively) The duty of oversight and ruling belongs to the task of the elders. They shall ensure that their fellow-elders, the minister(s), and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. The office of the deacon is not one of governing the church. Just because the deacons are involved when office-bearers are admitted to office

that does not mean that they should be involved in discipline, e.g. Art. 54. Suspension and deposition are matters of discipline, which belongs to the office of elder. This does not make the office of deacon any less of an office. Deacons have their own tasks and need to serve the church in that capacity.

When PJCO 23 speaks about churches in which there are small numbers of elders, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. The deacons do then not become elders. Similarly, when then the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. The elders do then not become deacons, they only offer advice. The deacons continue to be responsible for their tasks, as do the elders for theirs.

In view of the above, the committee agreed to change the wording in the PJCO to "consistory with the deacons" where currently the word "council" is used.

PJCO 17 The phrase "promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels" was found to be somewhat ambiguous. It has been changed to: "and promote schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity."

PJCO 21.g The section dealing with the task of the clerk and record keeping was incorporated in section f.

PJCO 50 -The Discipline of a Member was also the topic in many of the letters and discussions at the conferences.

The meaning of the words 'mature non-communicant member', the 'privileges of the church', and the concept of the excommunication of a non-communicant member were not clear. It was decided to have one article about discipline with two sections: one for communicant members and the second for non-communicant members. To change the opening sentence in the first section to start with: "Any member, whose sin is properly made known to the consistory," and to adopt the following wording for the sub-section Silent Discipline: "A member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory."

The discipline of a non-communicant is now dealt with in a separate section with the following wording:

> *A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.*

The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set for the excommunication, excluding him from the Church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

PJCO 54 To further guard against hierarchy the words "No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer" was added to the third paragraph of the article, The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer.

PJCO 56 In connection with this article the committee was persuaded to change the heading to read: "The Reception and Departure of Members", and to delete both section 'c' and 'd' from this article. A reference to members 'withdrawing' may tend to legitimize such action, while in fact it is a sinful act.

The **Appendices** will be referred to by name in the relevant PJCO articles, e.g. Examination Regulation, and Form for…., and together with the Introduction they will be included in every printing of the PJCO. In **Appendix 2** the words "A medical certificate of good health" was changed to: "a medical report of health". Br. Witten was asked to develop a proposal for credential forms for delegates to each of the three broader assemblies for the next meeting of the committee. These, when finalized, will then also be included in the appendices.

Some time was spent at the end of the last day on the function and importance of Regional Synod in the spectrum of broader assemblies. While this concept is new to the UNRNA, it has been part of CanRC ecclesiastical life from the beginning. They function in particular in speeding up the appeal process. Would the federation suffer without the benefit of regional synods? It is decided to revisit this matter at a future meeting.

It is clear that much work has been accomplished and significant changes were made in response to the feedback received from the churches. It must be remembered that these changes are not the final product and could be subject to further change as the committee deals with the remainder of the correspondence at the next combined meeting. This meeting has been scheduled for July 27-30, 2009 D.V., in the Grand Rapids, MI area.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the work that could be accomplished in brotherly harmony Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web site: http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco.

For the committee - Gerard J. Nordeman

Press Release of the
meeting of the combined committees of the
Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches
to propose a common church order
held July 28-30, 2009
at the Dutton United Reformed Church, Dutton, MI

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gurp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Gal 4:1-7, and prayer.

The minutes of the March 24-26, 2009 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

As part of unfinished business from the previous meeting several matters were finalized: A proposed format and language was discussed and adopted for three ecclesiastical credentials: **Classical Credential** in which a consistory names the brothers delegated to a meeting of classis and authorizes them to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Classis. And with the stipulation that they are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order. The Consistory with the Deacons, on their part, promise to abide by all decisions which have been taken in accordance with the above conditions. A **Regional Synod Credential** and a **General Synod Credential** in which the delegating classis names the brothers delegated to these respective assemblies and authorizes them to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been brought legitimately to these assemblies. These credentials also contain the same stipulation as in the credential for classis.

In the Appendices the opening paragraph for the Examinations for Ordained Ministers was rewritten in more concise language to cover three possible situations:

1. An ordained minister of a church with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship.
2. An ordained minister of a church federation with which we do not have ecclesiastical fellowship.
3. An ordained minister who together with his congregation wishes to join the federation.

Throughout the PJCO the term 'council' was replaced with the words 'consistory with the deacons' recognizing that council is not one of the assemblies recognized in the church order. The popular concept of the authority of the council as the governing body in the church is problematic. The notion that the council is an ecclesiastical body is not correct according to historic Reformed definition. The use of *council* in the Belgic Confession, Article 30 is not intended to identify the governing body of the church. The direct authority within the congregation lies with the consistory

Most of the available time was used by the committee to deal with the letters received from the churches and the comments and feedback from the conferences. The Committee received thirty-three letters from Canadian Reformed churches and sixteen letters from United Reformed churches as well as some correspondence from individuals. A number of these letters had come in after the deadline set by the committee. However they were still perused for matters that needed further attention. The combined correspondence from the churches interacted with 52 out of the 58 articles of the PJCO as well as with the Introduction and Appendices. While each member of the combined committee had been given copies of all correspondence, the CanRC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the URC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the United Reformed Churches. These proposals were discussed in detail by the combined committee and, as a result of the feedback received from the churches and the regional conferences, changes were made to 41 of the 58 articles proposed. It is not possible in this press release to provide all the details of these discussions and decisions. In many instances the changes proposed are minor and serve only to improve the language in order to clearly convey the intent of the article. In other cases the changes are more substantive. It should be noted that Article 55 Appeals and Procedures, has been repositioned and is now Article 31 with the resulting renumbering of the subsequent articles. Also in response to feedback received a new article has been added dealing with Public Profession of Faith (Art. 40) namely:

"Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the yeas of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper."

This again resulted in the renumbering of the articles that follow this new addition.

The need for, and function of Regional Synods and Deputies Regional Synod was an issue that received considerable attention from the committee. After much deliberation it was agreed to maintain the provision for regional synods as one of the recognized assemblies in the church, together with the related functions that come with it. The committee's rationale for this decision is as follows:

Among the items being proposed in the joint Church Order, perhaps the one most discussed among URC respondents is the matter of regional synods.

The rationale for regional synods include the following considerations.

1. Historical. Although regional synods have not been used in some Reformed denominations in North America, traditional Reformed church polity around the world (including North America) has acknowledged and generally employed regional synods as part of church government. Throughout most of its history, the Christian Reformed Church in North America made provision for regional synods in its Church Order, but never implemented those provisions. It is worth reflecting about the developments within the CRC in the decades after removing these provisions from its Church Order. In Europe, South Africa, and Canada, regional synods have functioned meaningfully.

2. Juridical. Perhaps the most important (though not the only) function of regional synods consists in adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures in a timely manner. Usually the general synods meet once every three years, a time period that is not adequate for adjudicating appeals. The absence of regional synods virtually requires annual general synods if justice and pastoral care are to be administered properly in the church.

    2.1 In this connection, the concern and warning that regional synods will increase hierarchy must be met with the observation that precisely the absence of regional synods invests general synods with such a degree of urgency and responsibility that the general synods tend to exhibit the features of hierarchy and domination. Moreover, the evil of hierarchy is not inherent in a system of broader assemblies, for hierarchy can be manifest within consistories as well.

    2.2 The use of regional synods for adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures helps to prevent these matters from escalating into federation-wide controversy, because they are reviewed and

addressed in their regional context rather than a national or international context.

2.3 The use of regional synods for reviewing overtures will ensure that the overtures that come to general synods have already been deliberated and enjoy the support of a larger number of consistories. Conversely, overtures that do not gain support would then come to general synod only by way of appeal, if necessary.

3. Broader, not higher. Today's pervasive need for historical awareness within the church can be met only when we seek to understand why our spiritual ancestors applied the Bible to the life of the church as they did. Fundamental to this application was the notion that beyond the local congregation, church assemblies are not higher but broader in character. As broader assemblies, they seek to ensure and safeguard the federation's shared interests, including the most frequent role of their deputies, which is to ensure the following of regularized procedures for entering and leaving the office of minister of the Word and sacraments. Particularly the minister's office, though exercised within local congregations (note the plural), is not restricted in its exercise to a single local congregation. For this reason, in order to protect both the minister and the congregations, because ministerial ordination authorizes a federation-wide exercise of office, the procedures and standards for entering and for leaving this office must be regularized. To construe or represent this oversight as a form of hierarchy is seriously mistaken and erodes the continued unity and well-being of the federation.

The committee gratefully acknowledges the detailed and substantive feedback received from the churches and the considerable effort that was put in by many consistories and individuals.

On the last day of the meeting the committee discussed preparing the final reports to be submitted to the churches and to the respective general synods 2010 of the two federations. In addition to the final draft of a Proposed Joint Church Order (2010) the committee will serve the churches and synods by providing a two-column report showing the PJCO 2007 and PJCO 2010 side by side for easy comparison.

Since this was the last meeting of the committee before the general synods of 2010 the committee members made use of the opportunity for closing remarks. The common thread again was the appreciation for the harmonious and brotherly atmosphere in which the committee could perform its task over the years. It is the prayer of the committee that the Lord will be pleased to use these labors to the benefit of the churches, and, if it is His will, for a combined federation.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web sites: http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco and http://www.canrc.org/resources/press/index.html.

For the committee
Gerard J. Nordeman

Report of the
Psalter Hymnal Committee
of the
United Reformed Churches in North America

Synod 2010 (London, ON)

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Introduction

What a wonderful blessing it is to sing the Lord's praises! Paul expresses it this way: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

Over the past 13 years, since the initial appointment in 1997 of the "Psalter Hymnal Committee," we've been challenged with the various mandates of past synods and the turnover of membership on our committee. Yet, through it all we've enjoyed unity, laughter, good fellowship, steady progress - all with thankfulness in our hearts to God. When Synod 1997 appointed our committee, the delegates understood that the process for producing a new songbook would be lengthy. And so it is. We hope, however, that as you read this report you will see that there is "light at the end of the tunnel." Indeed, we plan on distributing copies of our "hymn proposal" of the new songbook to the delegates meeting in London, Ontario, for Synod 2010. Though the "hymn proposal" will not be discussed at this synod, it will give delegates a first-hand look at a significant part of the proposed songbook. And as the delegates return back to their churches, we are encouraging careful examination of the proposed songs by each consistory.

It is no small task to evaluate, plan and produce a book that will contain songs for the worship of God's people. You have entrusted our committee with this important responsibility and we are truly thankful for being given this opportunity. With this report we seek to provide you with an update of our work and seek your direction in various matters.

I. History and Mandates

A. 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])

B. SYNOD 1999 (Hudsonville, MI) Our committee explored the options of producing, reproducing, or obtaining a psalter hymnal and reported its finding to Synod 1999. This synod 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)

C. SYNOD 2001 (Escondido, CA) Having begun this work, our committee reported our progress to Synod 2001. Synod Escondido approved entering into "Phase Two" of ecumenicity with the Canadian Reformed 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)

D. SYNOD 2004 (Calgary, AB) released our committee from the responsibility to prepare and provide recommendations for the non-musical portion of the songbook (liturgical forms, prayers, confessions, etc.) and appointed another committee to take on that responsibility. (Minutes, Article 96.3-5) Further, Synod Calgary appointed more members to our committee (Article 96.6-7), recommended that the churches of the URCNA "familiarize themselves with the *Book of Praise"* (Article 96.2), and adopted the following:

PRINCIPLES & GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING MUSIC IN THE CHURCH (Article 96.1):

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 praise*[1]
   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]
   > About such beauty, Abraham Kuyper remarks: "The world of sounds, the world of forms, the world of tints, and the world of poetic ideas, can have no other source than God; and it is our privilege as bearers of His image, to have a perception of their beautiful world, artistically to reproduce, and humanly to enjoy it."

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.

1 Hebrews 13:15

2 Psalm 92:1-4

3 Psalm 147:1

Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook.

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 Scripture[5] as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible[6] 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. Use is to be made of the music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage.
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.

E. SYNOD 2007 (Schererville, IN) clarified our committee's mandate — particularly Synod Escondido's decision regarding our working relationship with the CanRC's Book of Praise committee which stated: "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."

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

The decisions of Synod Schererville included:

1. Acceding to Overture 17 in order to clarify these three phrases of the Synod Escondido decision as follows:
   a) "*work together with*" includes both consultation with and careful consideration of views advanced by the Canadian Reformed "Book of Praise Committee" but only insofar as such work does not hinder, delay, or divert the Psalter Hymnal Committee from fulfilling its purpose as originally adopted;
   b) "*to consider for inclusion*" neither implies nor necessitates inclusion of any or all metrical psalmody;
   c) "*this song book*" refers to a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal that will serve the churches of our federation alone, whether or not we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with any number of denominations / federations.
   (Minutes, Article 63.6)
2. "That Synod 2007 continue the Songbook Committee's mandate given by previous synods."
   (Article 78.1)
3. "That Synod 2007 maintain the goal for production and use of a Common Song Book, but establish that the production and use of a Common Song Book is not a condition for federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches." (Article 78.10)
4. "That Synod 2007 provide direction to the committee, regarding whether the inclusion of all 150 Anglo-Genevan Psalms would be detrimental for the churches to accept the Common Song Book, by mandating the URCNA Songbook Committee to contact the churches of the URCNA for their input on this question." (Article 78.11)

II. Summary of Activities

Following Synod 2007, our committee has continued the practice of meeting face-to-face twice a year, alternating between Grand Rapids, Michigan and Hamilton, Ontario. Between these meetings we have met at least monthly by way of a "chat room" online.

Shortly after Synod Schererville, we met with the CanRC Book of Praise Committee to discuss with them our synod's decision to focus our work on a URC songbook. Though understandably disappointed, they received that decision with grace. More recently we met with them briefly and updated them about our hymn proposal for synod. We also learned about their initial recommendation of adding 28 more hymns to their current 65 hymns, a recommendation which has been refined as an addition of 14 hymns. But beyond these two brief meetings over three years, our Committee has worked

on finishing a hymn proposal for a new URC songbook.

We have also posted this report and a separate page containing the **Principles and Guidelines** in our federation's website: www.urcna.org.

A. Hymns

The majority of our time was taken up with applying the approved principles and guidelines to hymns that had been recommended to us and found in various songbooks currently in use among Reformed and Presbyterian churches. To give you some idea of the scope of this project, our committee considered: the 182 hymns of the *Psalter Hymnal* (1959 edition); the 404 hymns of the *Psalter Hymnal* (1987 edition), the approximately 600 hymns of the *Trinity Hymnal* (1990 edition); the 65 hymns of the *Book of Praise* (1984, Canadian Reformed songbook), the 28 hymns of the *Book of Praise, Augment to Hymnary* (2007, Canadian Reformed); approximately 100 hymns from *Cantus Christi* (Canon Press, 2002); the 14 hymns of the *Hymns for a Modern Reformation* (James Montgomery Boice and Paul Jones, 2000); and 74 suggested hymns from various sources sent to our committee by members and councils of United Reformed churches. We also evaluated more recently produced hymns written by Stuart Townend, Keith and Kristyn Getty, and others.

In addition to those main sources various members of our committee scanned through parts of the first edition of the *Trinity Hymnal*, (Great Commission,1961); *Sing! A New Creation*, (CRC Publications, 2001); *Lutheran Book of Worship*, (Augsburg Publishing House, 1978); and *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Word Music, 1986) and a collection of hymns published by GIA Publications (Chicago, Illinois).

This means that we evaluated, either together in committee, or personally by assignment, more than 2000 hymns. Over the years that we've been engaged in this task, we amassed a gross list of nearly 800 hymns that we initially deemed suitable for inclusion. In the last two years we have been engaged in the painful task of paring down that list to a reasonable number that gives adequate representation of the various topics and subjects of our Christian faith and life (e.g. the Trinity, the birth of Christ, the atonement, the sacraments, worship, missions, etc.). We have also digitally formatted each of these songs so that they are uniform in appearance. We have nearly completed this task and intend to make our proposed hymn section available to the churches prior to Synod 2010.

More than half of our hymn proposal includes songs that are not found in the current, blue-covered Psalter Hymnal (BPH). This large number of new songs will require extra attention and will likely produce lengthy debate when it comes time for a synod to approve them.

The vast majority of these songs met with unanimous approval by the

members of our committee, past and present. There were some songs, however, which led to much longer debates and some emotional discussions in our meetings. We all have our own personal tastes, musically and poetically. We have different thresholds when it comes to poetic license: some like colorful, flowery language, while others prefer more literal, straight-forward language. We have different thresholds when it comes to precision of doctrine in the words of a song, as well. Thus, it should not be surprising that some songs evoked these mixed emotions among us, and required longer discussion.

If this was true for our committee of 5-7 members, how much more in a synodical body of nearly 200 delegates! Therefore, for time considerations as well as for removing some of the emotion, we are recommending that synod approve a more structured, deliberative process for approving the proposed hymn section. Please see **recommendations 5 & 6**.

B. Psalms

After completing the hymn section, we will embark on the Psalms. We anticipate that this process will take less time than the hymn selection process. We intend to number the Psalm selections according to their Biblical number, and designate any multiple renditions of a particular Psalm by letter (e.g. Psalm 103a; Psalm 103b; Psalm 103c). We also intend that at least one rendition of a particular Psalm will be that Psalm in its entirety.

We have already been engaged in preliminary research and discussions about various important topics for the Psalm collection. For example, we've approached several Old Testament scholars on the question of whether using the word "Jehovah" for Yahweh is appropriate. We also met with Dr. W. Helder of the Canadian Reformed Churches who illustrated for us, using Psalm 72, the issues and difficulties of bringing the text of Scripture to song. We've had several discussions regarding what makes the song a psalm; for example, how close must the words be to the biblical psalm? If the words are quite different, but the concepts are present, is that a psalm or a hymn? And, in light of guideline 7, we've discussed the matter of "individualism" and the Psalmists' use of the 1st person singular pronoun.

We have also been in contact with the Hymnal Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zeeland who provided us with bound copies of their provisional *Sing To The Lord* hymnal which presently consists of the entire psalter.

As to the question of including all the 150 Anglo-Genevan psalms, Synod Schererville gave the following mandate to our committee: "That Synod 2007 provide direction to the committee, regarding whether the inclusion of all 150 Anglo-Genevan Psalms would be detrimental for the churches to accept the Common Song Book, by mandating the URCNA Songbook

Committee to contact the churches of the URCNA for their input on this question." In fulfillment of this mandate, we sent a letter to all URCNA churches in July, 2008 requesting their feedback on this important question. Sixteen churches responded to our request and we appreciate the thoughtful comments that were offered. Of the 16, ten responses were unfavorable toward including all 150 Anglo-Genevan Psalms. Four churches expressed support of including all, but indicated that there should be other non-Genevan Psalm renditions included as well. The remaining two provided our committee with good advice, but no answer to the question.

C. Rationale for an Official Songbook for the URCNA

At Synod Schererville (2007), several delegates raised the question whether our churches actually want an official songbook, that is, a synodically-approved songbook which each church will be expected to purchase and use in their worship services. As a committee we have discussed this matter and prepared this rationale for the adoption of an official songbook.

Please note that when we speak of adopting an "official songbook," we are not raising the matter of using additional songbooks, or a supplemental collections of songs. As things currently stand, Article 39 of our Church Order allows for consistories to approve hymns not found in the official Psalter Hymnal. In this section of our report we are simply discussing whether all our churches must have <u>at least</u> one songbook as their official songbook, *the songbook that all URCNA churches will use in common*.

As a starting point for our rationale, consider the mandate given to our committee when it was appointed by Synod 1997. Synod 1997, which met in St. Catharines, ON, appointed a "Psalter Hymnal committee" and mandated the committee "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." The first ground given for this mandate was, "A common psalter hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation" (Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C. [pp.33-34]).

In one respect, this should be sufficient rationale for the URCNA to adopt an official songbook. This was the decision of the churches in 1997, and that decision has never been appealed, set aside, or rendered obsolete by any subsequent synodical decision. Therefore, it remains the official position of our churches.

However, simply citing that decision and that ground may not be sufficient to persuade the churches to actually adopt an official songbook. This is partly due to the fact that so many other songbooks and supplementary collections currently are being used in our churches. In some cases, these supplemental songs and songbooks have been used for more than a decade. And these songs are being used not just in pre-worship "hymn-sings" but in some cases within the worship service itself. Many of our office-bearers and

members are getting used to the idea that each church can sing almost whatever they want, provided it meets the approval of their consistory. It seems that the role of the broader assemblies to regulate our church music is being minimized.

We looked into our history as Reformed churches to see whether there is a report or a document that sets out the case for an official songbook and did not find such a rationale. As part of this investigation, we spoke with Dr. Bert Polman of the "Calvin Institute for Christian Worship." He concludes that the absence of any formal rationale for an official songbook probably reflects the unspoken assumption among Reformed churches that having an official songbook needed no argumentation. In other words, in the past it was simply assumed that Reformed churches, as well as many other federations, would develop and use an official songbook. Each federation would choose songs representing its own history, theology, and liturgical principles, and would collect those songs in their official songbook. So we find official songbooks of the Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church. So also, the Christian Reformed Church always had her own official songbook throughout her entire history. This is simply the way it was, and no rationale for an official songbook was needed or provided.

Some may conclude from the "silence of history" on this issue that there is no sufficient argument for the necessity of synodical approval of an official songbook. We would urge you to consider the opposite conclusion: that the very fact that Reformed churches in the past needed no formal rationale to persuade them to adopt an official songbook suggests that it belongs to the unity, the identity, and the wellbeing of the federation to have such a songbook.

The old Latin expression, "*lex orandi, lex credendi,"* illustrates the connection between liturgy and doctrine, between what is sung in the churches and what is believed by the people. The relationship is reciprocal: what we sing is a confession of what we believe, but also, what we sing, we come to believe. That raises the importance of what we sing to a high level, and means that what we sing has a bearing on the confessional unity of the federation.

In this regard, consider the fact that our churches adopted a set of "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church" at Synod Calgary in 2004. By that decision, the synodical delegates were not only saying, "We agree that these are good principles and guidelines for choosing music to be used in the churches." They were also agreeing that it was for the unity, identity, and well-being of the churches to have those standards *in common*.

Consider also the action of Synod 1996. At that synod the churches adopted "the liturgical forms printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition (1976) for use among the churches" (Acts of Synod 1996, Article 24,

point L). The liturgical forms are not, strictly speaking, confessional documents. They are definitely doctrinal, but they are not, in the narrow sense of the word, confessional. Yet our churches without hesitation committed themselves to using the adopted forms in all of the churches across the federation. We consider the adopting of an "official songbook" consistent with the adopting of "official liturgical forms." If we believe that all the churches should use the same synodically-approved liturgical forms, then it follows that a synodically-approved songbook be used by all the churches.

In addition to these fundamental arguments for the adoption of an official songbook, we would ask you to consider an important practical matter. As soon as we have a synodically-approved collection of psalms and hymns, the work of publishing the songbook will begin. At that point, the financial costs will escalate dramatically. Copyright permission has to be obtained, sometimes at a cost. An editor or editors will have to be hired to ensure consistency in capitalization, punctuation, notation, typeface, etc. Decisions will have to be made about paper, book cover, ink, etc. One of the biggest factors in estimating printing costs is to be able to estimate how many copies of the songbook will be produced. Selling only 1000 books might mean a per copy cost of $75-85, whereas selling 10,000 books could bring the cost down to $25-35 per copy, depending on other factors. And the cost per book drops exponentially, for every 500 or 1000 more copies printed.

Thus, before more work goes into the selection of songs, our Psalter Hymnal Committee will need to know an estimated number of copies for the first printing of the songbook. If the purchase and use of this songbook will be optional for our churches, then the printing costs could become prohibitive. In that case, our Psalter Hymnal Committee should be directed by synod simply to publish a list of song titles which meet the criteria of the "guidelines and principles." Then each congregation would be responsible to produce its own songbook or its own supplemental collection of songs.

However, we think we have provided a good rationale for an official songbook and are recommending that this be Synod's decision. **See recommendation 2**. We will come to a subsequent synod with cost estimates for an official songbook as our work gets closer to that stage.

III. Committee Membership

We regret to report that since our last Synod it became necessary for three of our members to resign from the Psalter Hymnal Committee:

Mrs. Daphne Jasperse submitted her resignation after her husband was diagnosed with a cancerous mass on the right front lobe of his brain in November of 2008. Mrs. Jasperse served on our committee since being appointed by Synod Calgary (2004) and was greatly appreciated for her musical

abilities and knowledge as well as her organizational skills. We have communicated to her our regret, our thanks and most importantly our continued prayers for her husband Steve and family.

Rev. Ed Knott has been a member of our committee from its inception, in 1997, where the chairman of Synod St. Catharines appointed him to serve as chairman of our committee. Rev. Knott did so with the wisdom, patience, steady hand, and obvious love for the church for which he is so deservedly loved. He served on our committee until the Spring of 2009 at which point he submitted his resignation. We have also written Rev. Knott, expressing our regret at his resignation and our appreciation for his many years of faithful service.

Rev. Dick Wynia was also appointed to our committee at its inception. He served faithfully and tirelessly, particularly these past several years as secretary. After accepting the call to The Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church of Lincoln, ON, our committee requested that he continue serving until we completed the hymn section and he, with the kind approval of his consistory, consented. However, in January of this year, his work load in the local church and as a delegate to their synod required Rev. Wynia to submit his resignation. We greatly appreciate the work he did and thanked him for his nearly 13 years of service on the committee, and for his willingness to serve "above and beyond" the call of duty after having joined the CanRC.

With the approval of the convening consistory of Synod 2010 (Cornerstone URC, London, ON) we replaced these members with Angeline Vanderboom, a very gifted musician and member of Zion United Reformed Church of Sheffield, ON, and Rev. Christopher Folkerts, pastor of New Covenant United Reformed Church, Twin Falls, ID.

Regarding these membership matters, please **see recommendations 3 & 4.**

Following Rev. Knott's resignation, the committee appointed Rev. Rand Lankheet to serve as our current chairman.

IV. Recommendations

1. That synod receive the work of the committee to date.

2. That Synod 2010 affirm the production of an official songbook which will be purchased **and used by all URCNA churches.** (See pp. 7-8 of this report)

   Grounds:
   a. This is in keeping with Synod 1997's decision to appoint the Psalter Hymnal Committee;

b. An official songbook for all the churches would promote the unity, identity and well-being of the federation;
c. This would keep the cost of producing the songbook to a minimum;
d. This would give confidence to the Psalter Hymnal Committee that their work is not in vain.

3. That synod accept the resignations of Mrs. Daphne Jasperse, Rev. Ed Knott, and Rev. Richard Wynia, and express the churches' appreciation for their service on the committee.

4. That the current Psalter Hymnal Committee be augmented by one member from each **classis not yet represented on the committee (i.e. Classes Central U.S., Eastern U.S., Michigan, and Western Canada), and that these classes be mandated to appoint a qualified member for the committee. Such qualification includes:**
   - **Biblical and theological knowledge;**
   - **Musical ability: a working knowledge of music and (preferably) artistic talent;**
   - **Language ability: an ability to work with poetry and an understanding and appreciation of poetry as an art form;**
   - **A passion for working with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.**

   (Note: members need not be office-bearers)

   Grounds:
   a. This practice has precedence in the makeup of other synodically-appointed committees;
   b. Due to resignations, the present committee is too small to continue our mandate effectively and efficiently;
   c. Having a member from each classis on the committee will give each classis representation on the committee;
   d. Having a member from each classis on the committee will enable the committee to better answer the needs/concerns of the churches;
   e. Having a member from each classis on the committee will aid the churches to take ownership of this project and be more willing to support it financially and prayerfully.

5. That Synod approve the following process for evaluation and approval of the hymn section:
   (see pp. 5-6 of this report)

   a. That each consistory evaluate the proposed hymn section in

light of the synodically-approved "Principles and Guidelines" (included in this report), and send their recommended changes in the form of an overture to its classis. The overtures should follow this format: "The consistory of ____ Church overtures Classis _____ to approve the following changes to the proposed hymn section and communicate its decision to the Psalter Hymnal Committee…" The overture should include grounds.
(Note: The consistory may appoint musically gifted and theologically astute members of their congregation to help evaluate the hymns.)

b. That the classis deliberate the merits of the overture in light of the synodically-approved "Principles and Guidelines." If classis agrees with the overture or a portion thereof, classis shall send an official communication regarding the recommended changes to the Psalter Hymnal committee for its consideration and written response. Such communication must be received by the Psalter Hymnal committee no later than March 31, 2012.

c. That the Psalter Hymnal Committee categorize and print these communications, along with the written response, in a "master report." This report will also include the final proposed hymn section and be distributed to all the consistories at least six months before the next meeting of synod.

d. That the synod which will decide upon the hymn section for the new songbook shall not consider other hymns or changes to the hymns beyond those contained in the previously submitted communications from classes to the Psalter Hymnal Committee or in the "master report" from the Psalter Hymnal Committee.

Grounds:
a. This process will allow for individuals, churches and classes to have a voice;
b. This process ensures that the discussions will be directed by the objective criteria of the synodically-approved principles and guidelines;
c. This process allows for the songbook committee to give due consideration to the communications, understanding that such communications have the approval of both a consistory and a classis;
d. This process will ensure that all things are done decently and in good order (I Corinthians 14:40), avoiding the chaos which would

result if delegates make motions from the floor to include or exclude a particular hymn. With this recommended process, we are confident that most of the discussion and deliberation about the hymn proposal will be objective and professional.

6. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Psalter Hymnal Committee when this report is being discussed.

Conclusion

It is our privileged to serve the churches, and the Lord, in the work entrusted to us as the Psalter Hymnal Committee. Please pray for His continued blessing on our work, and that our work will prove to be useful and fruitful in the worship of God's people, for His glory, and their edification.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Christopher Folkerts
Rev. Rand Lankheet, chairman
Mrs. Angeline Vanderboom
Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen

Report of the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee to the churches of the URCNA for Synod 2010

Background:
In September 2004 our committee began initial deliberations and identified the following operating assumptions before undertaking our work. The reconstituted committee reaffirmed the same before continuing work in 2007:

1. The committee determined to conduct the bulk of our work electronically and by conference call as needed.

2. The committee determined not to undertake new translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort.

3. Rationale for our decision not to undertake new translation of our confessions:

    A. The committee determined that new idiosyncratic translations unique to the URCNA would not be helpful to our churches and might become an obstacle to on-going efforts toward ecclesiastical fellowship with other Reformed churches.

    B. The committee determined to evaluate and recommend adoption of existing English translations of the Three Forms of Unity. Those under consideration include the current versions in the 1976 *Psalter Hymnal*, as well as translations prepared and adopted by the RCUS and Canadian Reformed Church (CanRC). Others may be considered as well.

    C. The committee determined that new introductions and additional Scripture references would be useful and will be taken up by the next incarnation of our committee.

4. The committee determined to undertake the revision/translation of current liturgical forms keeping the following in mind:

    A. The need of the churches is the primary consideration.

    B. Continuity with the older forms is very important, although shortening and modernization of language may be in order in certain cases.

C. The proposed translation used for the biblical citations in the revised forms and confessions is the ESV.

Current Status of Our Work:

Our reconstituted committee continued its work in light of Synod Scheuerville's mandate to report directly to the churches and to consult with the comparable committee of the Canadian Reformed Church.

As of March 31, 2010 our committee has completed the following work:

1. Completed the Christian Prayers section (Appendix One)

2. Completed the Seasonal Prayers (or "Collects") section (Appendix Two)

3. Completed two new liturgical forms including a form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper for those churches which celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently, as well as a form for the Reception of Families (Appendix Three).

4. Completed work on the following current liturgical forms (* Note– These are found in Appendix Four) including:

   A. Form Number 1 for the Baptism of Infants

   B. Form Number 1 for the Profession of Faith

   C. Form Number 1 for Adult Baptism

   D. Form Number 1 for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper

5. The committee received and replied to correspondence from a number of churches, including: Living Water Reformed Church (Brantford, ON), Covenant Reformed Church (Pella, IA), Immanuel ORC (Niagara, ON), Grace URC (Waupon, WI), and Bethel URC (Woodstock, ON).

6. Our committee exchanged correspondence with Rev. Clarence Bouwman, chairman of the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee of the Canadian Reformed Church.

Remaining Work:

1. Our committee did not complete our goal this term to complete the Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word, the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage as well as the forms for excommunication and readmission.

2. The committee will need to determine whether or not to revise the alternate version of those liturgical forms in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal including: Form Number 2 and 3 for the Baptism of children, Form Number 2 for Profession of Faith, Form Number 2 for the Baptism of Adults, and Forms Number 2 and 3 for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

3. Selection of official/approved versions of the Three Forms of Unity.

Recommendations:

1. We encourage the churches to utilize these forms and prayers and continue to give feedback to the committee. Feedback from the churches has been very helpful in clarifying and refining the forms.

2. Three current members of our committee (including our chair) have requested to be released from service (Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, Dr. Michael Horton). Rev. Al Bezuyan and Dr. J. Mark Beach wish to remain on the committee. The committee will need three new members to remain at its current size, and a new chair will need to be appointed.

The committee proposes that Rev. Daniel Hyde (pastor the Oceanside URC) be considered to serve as chair of the committee.

3. Concerns regarding Form Number 1 for the Baptism of Infants:

   Our committee understands that there are concerns in some of our churches about the current form for infant baptism (i.e., that it implies baptismal regeneration, or that it does not emphasize sufficiently the solemnity of the sacrament). Our committee does not feel that these concerns are sufficient to jettison our current form which has served the Reformed churches quite well since the time of Dort.

Furthermore, it is our belief that any new or substitute form for infant baptism should come about in the context of a broader discussion of the nature and theology of baptism (especially the doctrine of baptism as found in our confessions and catechisms). This falls well beyond the current mandate of our committee.

We have recommended that concerned consistories overture their respective classis about undertaking such a study, and that such a study determine whether or not the production of a new form for infant baptism is warranted.

Therefore, we recommend that synod give the appropriate direction/mandate to the liturgical forms committee as it continues its work.

Appendix One: Christian Prayers

The General Confession of Sins (approved 9/13/05; modified 11/20/06)

Dearly loved brothers and sisters, we are called to examine ourselves in the light of God's Law. Let us go to God in public confession:

Our Father, we are sinful and you are holy. We recognize that we have heard in your Law difficult words, knowing how often we have offended you in thought, word and deed, not only by obvious violations, but by failing to conform to its perfect commands, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. There is nothing in us that gives us reason for hope, for where we thought we were well, we are sick in soul.

Where we thought we were holy, we are in truth unholy and ungrateful. Our hearts are filled with the love of the world; our minds are dark and are assailed by doubts; our wills are too often given to selfishness and our bodies to laziness and unrighteousness. By sinning against our neighbors, we have also sinned against you, in whose image they were created. In this time of silent confession we bring you our particular sins.

Our Father, although you are a holy God who cannot look upon sin, look upon Christ our Savior and forgive us for his sake. You have promised us that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For if we do sin, we have an Advocate before your throne, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. Give us your pardon by your mercies, dear Father, for you have clothed us in Christ's righteousness. We ask also that you would give us an increase of the grace of your Holy Spirit, so that we may learn the wisdom of your ways and walk in your holy paths, for your glory and the good of our neighbor. Amen.

The Pastoral Prayer (approved 9/30/05)

Almighty and merciful God, we realize and confess before you that if you should regard our merits, we would be unworthy to lift our eyes toward heaven and present our prayers before you. Our consciences accuse us, and our sins testify against us. And yet in your fatherly goodness you have adopted us in Christ and delight to hear our prayers which we offer through his mediation. Therefore we look to no other King and seek no other Advocate for the help that we need in this world and in the world to come. You call us to seek not only our own salvation and good, but that of your whole church and the world, and we do so now.

We pray first for your benediction on your holy Gospel, that it may be faithfully proclaimed and the world filled with the knowledge of your truth. To that end, please send workers into your field to plant, water, and harvest a people for your name. But frustrate the work of those who would sow weeds of heresy and discord. Pull down all of the strongholds of Satan in this world and establish your kingdom throughout the earth. Please give fatherly attention to your servants who suffer persecution for the sake of the Gospel and strengthen them in mind and body by your Spirit through the means of grace. [Specific prayers added for the peace, purity, and progress of the Gospel throughout the world.]

We pray also for those who serve our common welfare in temporal affairs, especially those who govern us, that they may do so with wisdom, integrity, and the knowledge that their councils stand under your final judgment. Dear Father, who sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike, give to us also, we pray, such humility of conduct and faithfulness in our worldly callings, that we may contribute to the good of our neighbors. We ask that you would restrain wickedness and vice in society, promote justice and the common good, and cause us to be salt and light in this evil age. [Specific prayers added for civil authorities.]

We remember also all who suffer from physical dangers, temptation, doubts, illness of mind or body, financial distress and especially those who are near death. May the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son refresh them in their trials and give them the grace to bear the difficulties you send them for their good. Give also to us the grace to share in their suffering and provide for their needs as we are able. Comfort, we pray, all widows and orphans and be to them a father. Show your mercy to prisoners, to those in the military or whose business takes them great distances. Guard their families and bring them back safely, we pray. [Specific prayers added for members of the congregation.]

Bless the land with fruitful harvest, and give us wisdom and patience to be good stewards of it and of the resources you graciously give us for our callings. Keep us from exploiting your good gifts for our own selfish accumulation and grant that we may be ever mindful of our duties to each other and your creation. Order our priorities and interests, so that our callings in life will promote rather than hinder our love for you and our neighbor. We ask that you would deepen the bonds between us as spouses, parents and children and resolve conflict and strife according to your wisdom and grace. Give to those among us who are single gifts for building up the communion of saints as well as faithfulness in the face of temptation, and grant that your

people may build them up in the most holy faith. Strengthen us through your means of grace that we may worship you not only with our words but with our lives, and so build us up into one body, a city in the world whose light cannot be hidden. Make each of us, we pray, a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving pleasing to you. For this is our reasonable service in view of that sacrifice which alone has reconciled us finally and forever with you. We bring to your throne these intercessions on behalf of each other through that intercession of our Elder Brother at your right hand, even Jesus Christ your eternal Son. Amen.

Prayer Before Sermon (approved 9/30/05)

Eternal Father, who has spoken in various times and in various ways to your people in the past, but in these last days in your Son, the Incarnate Word, we pray that you will open the mouth of your servant to proclaim that Word in the power of the Spirit. And we pray that this same Spirit will open the hearts of its hearers here assembled to receive your holy Gospel and write on their hearts your holy Law, even as you have promised. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: "Our Father…."

Prayer After the Sermon (approved 9/30/05)

Our merciful God, who is pleased to condescend to speak to us through your word, grant us all grace that we may not be mere hearers of your word, but doers also. Give us the grace of your Holy Spirit that we may believe what has been promised to us. May we bring glory and honor to your name in all that we do, as you conform us to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: "Our Father…."

Prayer Before the Explanation of the Catechism (approved 10/23/2005)

Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are sinners, conceived and born in sin, unable of ourselves to do any good. But we do repent of our sins, and seek your grace to help us in our remaining infirmities. Through the teaching of your word, satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst with your refreshing truth, that we, with all our hearts, may love and serve you, together with our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, one only true God, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Prayer After the Explanation of the Catechism (approved 10/30/05)

Gracious and merciful Father, we give you thanks for having established your covenant with believers and their children. This promise you have not only signified and sealed by holy baptism, but daily prove it by perfecting your praise through the mouths of children. You also continue to establish your saints in this faith throughout their lives. "For," as you have told us, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself." So give us, we pray, the grace to inwardly digest the food you have given us and to bring forth works of service and gratitude in this world. All of this we ask in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying: Our Father…

Prayer Before Meals (approved 12/15/05)

The eyes of all wait for you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. You attend to our every need through the creatures you have made, especially our neighbors whose vocations serve to bring these provisions to our table and we ask a special blessing for those who have prepared it for us. If not even a sparrow can fall from the sky or a hair fall from our head apart from your fatherly care and wisdom, we cannot fail to look to you alone for security in this life as also in the life to come. So give us grateful hearts as we pray, saying, "Our Father…"

Prayer After Meals (approved 12/15/05)

We praise you, Lord, for our creation, our preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all else we praise you for your greatest gift: Your Son Jesus Christ, who was born, lived, died, and rose again from the dead for us and for our salvation. As he intercedes for us at your right hand even now, we enter your sanctuary boldly to intercede on behalf of [specific requests]. Praise the LORD! O give thanks to his name, for he is good; for his loving kindness lasts forever. Amen.

Prayer for the Sick/Spiritually Distressed (approved 1/30/06)

Eternal God, the only Creator, Preserver, Judge and Savior of the world, you alone hold the powers of life and death. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he had conquered death and hell, announced, "I was dead, but I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to death and Hades in my hand." Yet often our circumstances seem to us to testify against your promise. What we see does not

appear to agree with what we have heard. Yet, even at the cross, where you seemed so absent and your Son so cruelly and unjustly abandoned by you, we have been taught that he was thereby fulfilling your purposes to redeem us from the power of darkness. We confess that our hearts are so bound to the realities that we see with our eyes in the moment that we easily forget the greater realities that we hear with our ears through your word.

Teach us through these trials to number our days, recognizing that we are but fading flowers in this age, but flourishing oaks in the age to come. We know that these struggles are not tokens of your wrath, but are part of your plan to save us, sanctify us, and glorify yourself. While we may fear the circumstances, we no longer fear the condemnation of the law, the sting of death, or the sharp arrows of Satan. For we know that your Son gained victory for us by his cross and resurrection. We ask that you would, even through these tests, deepen our confidence to appear before you clothed not in the filthy rags of our own works, but in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior. Continue to look upon us in him, for we pray in his name, who taught us to pray, "Our Father…"

Morning Prayer (approved 1/30/06)

Merciful God, thank you for keeping watch over us last night. As we face a new day, we ask that you would fix our eyes on Christ as our only hope and your glory as our only aim. You alone are worthy of this glory because you are the very author of our life, the creator and sustainer of all that exists. The heavens declare your wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness to all you have made. Yet our highest praise is reserved for the great deeds of redemption that you have worked for us poor sinners. Bound in our sin, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, by nature children of wrath even as the rest, we have nevertheless heard the good news that you have delivered us from slavery, freed us from the condemnation of your just law, and brought us new life from above. Even as we face our ordinary tasks this day, recall to our hearts the extraordinary comfort of your promise. Grant also, we pray, the strength of your Spirit to live out the callings you have given us and to all people as creatures made in your image. Make us fit vessels for your work in this world this day—a sacrifice of thanksgiving well-pleasing in your sight and a light that shines before our neighbors. All of this we ask in the name of your Son, who taught us to pray, "Our Father…"

Evening Prayer (approved 1/30/06)

Merciful God, we come to you now at the end of this day in the name of

our Savior, that Light shining in the darkness, dispelling the night of our sins and the blindness of our hearts. Lord of our labor, now be Lord of our rest. Free us of doubts, anxieties, and temptations and continue to work your sanctifying grace in us even as we sleep. Remembering that we are not only frail but sinful, we ask you to defend us from all dangers, but especially from the assaults of the world and the devil as also from the disease of our own hearts. We confess that we have not spent this day without grievously sinning against you, to whom all hearts are open and no wickedness is hidden. Yet, clothed in the righteousness of your dear Son, we invoke your name and claim your salvation. Give us repentant and believing hearts that delight in following your ways. We ask also that you would be with those who are afflicted with grief, pain, temptation, doubts, and especially for [specific requests]. Together with them preserve us all in one communion and body until we enter at last your everlasting rest. In the name of Christ our Savior, Amen.

Opening Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies (approved 2/14/06)

Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, it has pleased you according to your infinite wisdom to gather a church to yourself out of the nations of all the earth, and to govern it through weak servants. Called by you to watch over your flock purchased by your Son's precious blood, we invoke your name now for this solemn assembly, gathered here according to the example of the apostolic churches. Faced with many weighty issues concerning the care of your people, we ask that you would make us truly mindful of your purposes for your church. Draw our minds and hearts away from vanity and pride, discord and pettiness, and do not let these sins which still cling to us distract us from advancing your great cause in this world. Renew us, we pray, in the joyful commission of bringing your good news to the ends of the earth, making us more faithful stewards of the mysteries and ambassadors of reconciliation. We ask that your Spirit would be present among us to guide us into all truth, bringing us to agreement on the matters before us. May Scripture reign in our hearts, just as the Living Word reigns over your church, for we acknowledge only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. All of this we ask because Christ is our Mediator and Advocate, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only God, deserves eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Closing Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies (approved 3/1/06)

Lord God, we give you heartfelt thanks for gathering a church in our land and for making us ambassadors and guardians of such a kingdom. As those who are receiving rather than building your kingdom, make us ever mindful

that it is not our labors but your electing, redeeming, justifying and sanctifying grace alone that renders your church indestructible and victorious against all adversaries. We give you praise for your providence in preserving liberty in this land for the free proclamation of the Gospel and ask that you would, by your Holy Spirit, fill us with joy to make diligent use of such opportunity. Your Spirit, who leads your church into all truth, has been present in our assembly, giving us wisdom in our deliberations. We pray that he would also give us the strength to bless the efforts that we purpose to put forth and finish the work that he has begun. Continue to draw the remnant of the nations to your heavenly Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven and maintain the peace and purity of your church, we ask. Strengthen us with a mighty zeal for the ministry of word and sacrament, as well as for the care of your flock in body and soul. As you hold Christ Jesus ever above and before us as the Mediator for sinners, may our churches faithfully proclaim this good news to those who have never heard it. Give strength, humility, and boldness to your under-shepherds, we pray: to ministers, elders, and deacons. We also ask that you would give prudence to our civil rulers, so that they may act with justice and wise restraint. As you have promised to be present with us even to the end of the age, we ask you to enlighten, guide, awaken, convict and console us by your Word and Spirit. Hear us, dear Father, through your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only true God, is worthy of eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Opening Prayer for the Meetings of Deacons (approved 3/01/06)

Merciful God and Father, you have not only declared that we will always have the poor with us, but have also commanded us to bear their burdens with them. For this reason, you have established the office of deacon. We ask that you would give us wisdom to faithfully discharge the duties of our office in this place. We acknowledge that in your kingdom each member supplies what is lacking in the other, so that your name may be exalted and your people drawn together with ever-stronger cords of love and affection. And since we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from your mouth, help us to assist our brothers and sisters in such a way that they may look to these offerings and services as tokens of your covenant faithfulness. May they together with us render you everlasting thanks in this age until that age when our trials will yield to that everlasting rest you have prepared for us from the foundation of the world. In the name of Christ our Savior we ask this. Amen.

Appendix Two: Seasonal Prayers (or collects)

Christmas

Merciful Father, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son. He who was rich for ourselves became poor, the eternal Word made flesh, a great Light shining in the darkness. Only because of your Word and Spirit have we seen that Light and been drawn into its brightness. Give us the grace humbly and joyfully to receive your Son even as the shepherds and princes who welcomed him, and to look no further for our redemption than to this child lying in a manger. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Good Friday (04/07/08)

Our Father, who so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son, we acknowledge and marvel at your mercy. Even while we were enemies, you reconciled us; even while we were strangers, you made us co-heirs with Christ of all eternal blessings; even while we stood condemned, you redeemed us; even while we were imprisoned, you delivered us from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. On this solemn occasion, we loathe our miserable estate and celebrate your marvelous grace. Beneath the cross of Christ, we come to know that ours is the guilt, but yours the forgiveness; ours the condemnation, but yours the gift of justification; ours the bondage, yet yours the freedom of adoption and new obedience. Even the faith with which we confess our dear Savior's sacrifice was won for us by his death. Therefore, we cry out to you in sorrow for our sins and in thanksgiving for your gift. Give us the grace, we pray, to receive again this word of the cross which alone can refresh us on our pilgrim way, and send us out again into the world as witnesses to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Easter

Holy Father, giver of all perfect gifts, we join the heavenly choir to herald the news that you have defeated the powers of sin, death, and condemnation by the victory of Jesus Christ your Son over the grave. We confess that the circumstances of this present age often rise up to testify against the promise that you have declared in your Word. Nevertheless, we bring the experience of our hearts under your judgment: You have raised Jesus Christ from the dead as the first fruits of the whole harvest at the last day. As in his resurrection you have brought the new creation into this passing evil age, raise us up and seat us with Christ—in this life, through faith, and in the next, beholding

with our own eyes the resurrection of our bodies in life everlasting. All of this we pray, with joy and thanksgiving, in Christ's name. Amen.

Ascension

Almighty God, although we could not ascend to your holy place, you have descended to save us and after your Son won our redemption he ascended to the seat of all authority and dominion. Even now, he intercedes for us at your right hand, ruling over all of his enemies, and ours, for our salvation and the glory of your holy name. Help us to receive and to make known throughout the world this good news that Christ Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And fill our hearts with longing expectation for his return in power and glory to restore all things. In the name of Christ our King. Amen.

Pentecost

Father in Heaven, we give you thanks especially on this day for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Just as you sent your Son to redeem us, you sent your Spirit to renew us after his image, and to begin even now the new creation that awaits us fully and finally at the last day. Forgive us for grieving the Spirit, forgetting the great work that he performed at Pentecost and continues to perform as he makes your Word effectual for the justification and sanctification of sinners. We give you praise for sending your Spirit of adoption into our hearts, so that we may call you "Father"; for his ministry of testifying to Christ, convicting the world of sin and judgment, and opening our hearts to receive the gospel of your Son. Even now, through the gospel, he is gathering from all nations a church to declare your goodness. May we be filled again with marvelous wonder at this saving operation of the Holy Spirit, who, together with you and the Son, is worshiped and glorified, one God, world without end. Amen.

For the National Day of Thanksgiving (04/07/08)

Our Sovereign God, who created all things for your pleasure and who gives to all life, breath, and every good thing, we praise you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. For rain and sunshine, in abundance and in lack, we acknowledge that our times are in your hands. You supply all of your creatures with your good gifts: the just and the unjust alike. Nevertheless, we especially give you praise for the surpassing greatness of your saving grace that you have shown to us in Christ Jesus our Savior. For our election in him before the foundation of the world; for our redemption by him in his life, death, and resurrection; for our effectual calling, justifica-

tion, sanctification, and all of the blessings of our union with him, we give you our heartfelt thanks. And we look with great anticipation toward that day when you will raise us to life everlasting, glorified and confirmed in righteousness, so that we may sing your praises without the defilement of our present weaknesses, distractions, and sins. As you have served us with these gifts, we ask that you would give us grateful hearts so that through us you may serve our neighbors. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, who taught us to pray, saying, "Our Father…."

Appendix Three: New Liturgical Forms

Form for the Frequent Celebration of the Lord's Supper (approved 2/15/07 and revised on 12/07/09)

Rationale:

Many churches in our federation celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently. The current form (form 1) is not suitable for frequent celebrations of the Supper.

In light of this practice and need, the committee recommends that synod approve this proposed form, and also advise churches that where communion is administered frequently, the longer form for communion be used at least quarterly. The committee believes that there is much valuable instruction in that form that it would be good for congregations to hear from time to time.

In developing the proposed form, the committee determined that the current form (form 1) for the celebration of the Lord's Supper has seven main elements:

1). Scripture reading

2). Instruction on self-examination, warning the unrepentant and encouraging the weak on the meaning of the communion

3). Prayer: for right use of the supper and growth in grace in Christ and Lord's Prayer

4). Confession of Faith (Apostles' Creed)

5). Sursum Corda

6). Distribution and Communion

7). Thanksgiving Psalm and prayer

The proposed form for the frequent celebration of the Supper follows this basic order, thereby keeping the essence of the original form intact, while shortening it considerably.

The Form for Communion

(for those congregations who celebrate the Supper frequently)

Preparation:

To all of you who have confessed your sins and affirmed your faith in Christ, the promise of Jesus is sure: "Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood has eternal life and will not come into condemnation." For on the night in which our Lord was betrayed, he took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." After the same manner also he took the cup, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." While remaining bread and wine, these sacred elements nevertheless become so united to the reality they signify that we do not doubt but joyfully believe that we receive in this meal nothing less than the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For all who live in rebellion against God and unbelief, this holy food and drink will bring you only further condemnation. If you do not yet confess Jesus Christ and seek to live under his gracious reign, we admonish you to abstain. But all who repent and believe are invited to this sacred meal not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. Do not allow the weakness of your faith or your failures in the Christian life to keep you from this table. For it is given to us because of our weakness and because of our failures, in order to increase our faith by feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As the Word has promised us God's favor, so also our Heavenly Father has added this confirmation of his unchangeable promise. So come, believing sinners, for the table is ready. "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

The Consecration:

Let us pray:
Almighty and everlasting God, who by the blood of your only begotten Son has secured for us a new and living way into the Holy of Holies, cleanse our minds and hearts by your Word and Spirit that we, your redeemed people, drawing close to you through this holy sacrament, may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity through the body and blood of Christ our Savior. We know that our Ascended Savior does not live in temples made by hands, but is in heaven where he continues to intercede on our behalf. Through this sacrament, by Your own Word and Spirit, may these common elements be now

set apart from ordinary use consecrated by You, so that just as truly as we eat and drink these elements by which our life is sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Apostles' Creed (optional):

Sursum Corda:

Let us now go to our Heavenly Table and receive the gift of God for our souls. By the promise of God this bread and wine are for us the body and blood of Christ.

(***Minister***) Lift up your hearts!

(*People*) We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion:

(*The elements are distributed, and the minister may use the formula*)

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete remission of all our sins.

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink all of it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete remission of all our sins.

Thanksgiving prayer:

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessing of this holy feast. Although we are unworthy to share this meal with you, it is by your invitation and dressed in Christ's righteousness that we have come boldly into the Holy of Holies. Instead of wrath, we have received your pardon; in the place of fear we have been given hope. Our High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant has reconciled us to you and even now intercedes for us at your right hand. Please strengthen us by these gifts so that, relying only on your promise to save sinners who call on Jesus' name, we may, by your Spirit, honor you with our souls and bodies, to the honor and glory of your holy name. Amen.

Form for the Reception of New Families (approved on (04/21/08)

Rationale:

This form has been prepared for use on those occasions when an entire family is received into membership, and when there are multiple forms to be used for professions of faith, baptisms of adults, mature children and/or smaller children and infants. This form combines into one, the relevant sections from the current forms for profession of faith, adult baptism, and infant baptism.

The Reception of Families

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself" (Acts 2:39). Therefore, when certain persons (such as Lydia and the Philippian jailer) professed faith in Jesus Christ, their whole household was baptized and added to Christ's visible church.

Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families. We thank our God that he has given you grace at this time to profess your faith publicly and to present your children for baptism. Since you have already received the sign and seal of God's gracious covenant, we ask you to answer the following questions.

Profession of Faith

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

***Second*:** Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, confessing that you are by nature a sinner under God's just condemnation, seeking your life not in yourself but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to mortify

your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church, including its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

***Answer*:** I do (to be given by each individually)

Baptism of Infants and Children

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism:

First: That we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom God, unless we are born again. By this sacrament we are taught our need for cleansing from the pollution of our sin and to find purification outside of ourselves, in Christ alone.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. We are baptized into the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For in this sacrament the Father witnesses and seals unto us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for his children; the Son witnesses and seals the washing in his blood, so that we are freed from sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he will dwell in us, sanctify us as visible members of Christ's body, giving to us all that belongs to us in Christ.

Third: Since all covenants have two parts, baptism obliges us to cling to this one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; to forsake the world, die daily to ourselves and live to Christ. And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and certain testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

All of this applies to our children as well as to us, since in Christ we share in the covenant of grace that God established with Abraham, promising to be a God to him and to his children. For this reason, he commanded him to circumcise his male offspring (Gen 18:7). In the new covenant, the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, males and females, and all children of believers are now set apart by God. For this reason, they are to be baptized, since baptism has replaced circumcision (Col 2:11-13). From the earliest days of the church, there are examples of whole households being baptized.

You have professed faith, joining this local assembly of Christ's church, and now present your child/children for baptism.

Let us pray:

O almighty and eternal God, who judged the unrepentant in the flood yet in your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; you who drowned obstinate Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea and led your people through the waters on dry land—by which baptism was signified—we ask you graciously to look upon this/these your children and incorporate them by your Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ. May you be pleased to bury them with him through baptism into death and raised with him in newness of life, so that they may be so preserved in true faith and repentance that they may not fear the judgment seat of Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, is to be worshiped as the only God forever. Amen.

Address to Parent/s

Beloved in Christ, you are solemnly asked to answer the following questions.

First: Do you acknowledge that your children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery—even to condemnation itself—are sanctified in Christ and therefore, as members of his visible church, ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you promise to raise your children in the doctrine and practice that you have yourself/yourselves professed?

Answer: I/we do.

Holy Baptism

Then the minister of Word and Sacrament, in baptizing, will say: _____*, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have pledged forgiveness of sins to us and to our children in the covenant of grace, signified and sealed in baptism. We ask you also, through Christ and by the powerful working of your Spirit, to govern and nurture these children in Christian faith and practice so that they too will know the mercy and goodness of your salvation all the days of their life. May they fight valiantly against the world, the flesh, and the devil, until that day when, together with us, they give eternal praise and thanksgiving in heavenly glory to you together with your Son and the Holy Spirit—the only true God. Amen.

Appendix Four: Revised Liturgical Forms

Form 1 for the Baptism of Infants (06/08/08)

(** note, current wording is italics, changes in bold, the edited form appears in its entirety at the end)

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ: *The principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism are these three:* [**There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism**]

First: *That we with our children are conceived and born in sin* [**That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin**], and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, *except* [**unless**] we are born again.

This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, *whereby* [**through which**] the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals *unto* [**to**] us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals *unto* [**to**] us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and *avert* [**turn aside**] all evil or turn it to our profit.

And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals *unto* [**to**] us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, *till* [**until**] we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the

elect in life eternal.

Third: *Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts* [**Since all covenants contain two parts**], therefore we are by God, through baptism, *admonished of and obliged unto* [**admonished and obliged to live in**] new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. *And if we sometimes through weakness* [**And if through weakness, we sometimes**] fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and *indubitable* [**indisputable**] testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, *since they are without their knowledge partakers of* [**since without their knowledge, they are participants in**] the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received *unto* [**to**] grace in Christ; as God speaks *unto* [**to**] Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: ***And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*** (Genesis 17:7–Note, ESV text inserted). *This also Peter testifies* [**Peter also testifies to this**] with these words: *"**For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself**"* (Acts 2:39–ESV). Therefore God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since, then, baptism *has come in the place of circumcision* [**has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant**] (Col. 2:11-13), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and *of* [**as members of**] His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.

That we, therefore, may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, *Thou who hast according to Thy severe judgment* [**you who have according to your severe judgment**] punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, and *hast* [**have**] according to *Thy* [**your**] great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; *Thou who hast* [**you, who have**] drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host

in the Red Sea and led *Thy* [**your**] people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground–*by which baptism was signified* [**by which you showed us the meaning of baptism**]–we *beseech* **[earnestly pray]** *Thee that Thou wilt be pleased* [**we call upon you, that you may be pleased**] of *Thine* [**your**] infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these *Thy* [**your**] children and incorporate them by *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit into *Thy* [**your**] Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross, cleaving *unto* [**to**] Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in *Thee* **[you**], may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ *Thy* [**your**] Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with *Thee* [**you**] and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent/s

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an *ordinance* [**institution**] of God to seal *unto* [**to**] us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition. That it may, then, be *manifest that you are thus minded* [**clear to all that you are in agreement**], you are to [**sincerely**] answer *sincerely* to these questions:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, *yea* **[even**], to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in *the aforesaid* **[this**] doctrine, and cause them to be instructed *therein* **[in these things**], to the utmost of your power?

Answer: We do *(or in case only one of the parents is a confessing member:* I do).

Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise *Thee* [**you**] that *Thou hast* [**you have**] forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of *Thy* [**your**] beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit as members of *Thine* [**your**] only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be *Thy* [**your**] children, and sealed and confirmed the same *unto* [**to**] us by holy baptism. We *beseech* [**earnestly pray**] *Thee* [**you**] also, through Him, *Thy* [**your**] beloved Son, that *Thou wilt always* [**you will always**] govern these children by *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit, that they may be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge *Thy* [**your**] fatherly goodness and mercy, which *Thou hast* [**you have**] shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify *Thee* [**you**], and *Thy* [**your**] Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Baptism of Infants

Form Number 1 (as edited)

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ: There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore we are by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since without their knowledge, they

are participants in the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received to grace in Christ; as God speaks to Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Genesis 17:7–ESV). Peter also testifies to this with these words: *"For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself"* (Acts 2:39–ESV). Therefore, God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since, then, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11-13), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and as members of His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.

That we, therefore, may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, you who have according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, and have according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; you, who have drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground–by which you showed us the meaning of baptism–we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these your children and incorporate them by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent/s

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition. That it may, then, be clear

to all that you are in agreement, you are to sincerely answer these questions:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in this doctrine, and cause them to be instructed in these things, to the utmost of your power?

Answer: We do *(or in case only one of the parents is a confessing member:* I do).

Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:

_____ I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray you also, through Him, your beloved Son, that you will always govern these children by your Holy Spirit, that they may be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God.
Amen.

Form Number 1 for the Public Profession of Faith (04/07/09)

(** note, current wording is italics, changes in bold, the edited form appears in its entirety at the end)

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that you were made desirous of professing your faith publicly, here in the presence of God and His holy church, and of obtaining the privileges of full communion with the people of God. [**We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for bringing you to the place where you desire to profess your faith publicly, [delete "here"] in the presence of God and his holy church, [delete "and of"] obtaining the privileges of full communion with the people of God.**

You are now requested to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you *abhor* [**despise**] and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____ what is your answer?
Answer: I do *(to be given by each individually)*.

I charge you, then, beloved, that you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. In the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome

you to full communion with the people of God. Rest assured that all the privileges of such communion are now yours. *And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. AMEN*. [**And the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. His is the dominion forever. Amen.**—note, the verse citation is taken from the ESV].

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank *Thee* [**you**] that *Thou hast* [**you have**] from the beginning embraced in *Thy* [**your**] covenant the children together with their parents. We thank *Thee* [**you**] that *Thou* [**you**] from the first *didst* [**did**] *cast the lot of* [**include**] these *thy* [**your**] servants in the Christian Church, and *didst* [**did**] grant them all the manifold blessings of Christian culture. We *bless Thee* [**praise you**] that in their case *Thou didst* [**you did**] add the special grace of *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit, so that of their own will they come here today to profess *Thy* [**your**] truth and to consecrate their lives to *Thy* [**your**] service. *We earnestly beseech Thee that Thou wilt* [**we earnestly pray that you will**] continue to carry on the good work *Thou hast* [**you have**] begun in them *unto* [**until**] the day of complete redemption. Increase in them daily the manifold gifts of *Thy* [**your**] grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Grant them the happiness of promoting the glory of their Lord and the edification of His people. Deliver them in the temptations of this life and in the final trial of death. And in that day *when Thou makest up Thy jewels* [**when you make up your jewels**], set also these *Thy* [**your**] servants in *Thy* [**your**] crown, that they may shine as stars, to *Thy* [**your**] praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Form Number 1 for the Profession of Faith
(as edited):

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for bringing you to the place where you desire to profess your faith publicly, in the presence of God and his holy church, obtaining the privileges of full communion with the people of God.

You are now requested to answer sincerely the following questions:

***First*:** Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

***Second*:** Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

***Third*:** Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

***Fourth*:** Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

Answer: I do *(to be given by each individually)*.

I charge you, then, beloved, that you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. In the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God. Rest assured that all the privileges of such communion are now yours. And the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. His is the dominion forever. Amen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have from the beginning embraced in your covenant the children together with their parents. We thank you that you from the first did include these your servants in the Christian Church, and did grant them all the manifold blessings of Christian culture. We praise you that in their case you did add the special grace of your Holy Spirit, so that of their own will they come here today to profess your truth and to consecrate their lives to your service. We earnestly pray that you will continue to carry on the good work you have begun in them until the day of complete redemption. Increase in them daily the manifold gifts of your grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Grant them the happiness of promoting the glory of their Lord and the edification of His people. Deliver them in the temptations of this life and in the final trial of death. And in that day when you make up your jewels, set also these your servants in your crown, that they may shine as stars, to your praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Form Number 1 for the Baptism of Adults (5/19/08)

(** note, current wording is italics, changes in bold, the edited form appears in its entirety at the end)

When those who were not baptized in their youth, on coming to the years of discretion, desire to receive Christian baptism, [**When adults who have not been baptized desire to receive baptism**] they shall first be thoroughly instructed in the *fundamentals* [**doctrines**] of the Christian religion. And when they have made a good profession *thereof before* [**in the presence of**] the consistory, they shall be permitted to make public profession and receive holy baptism; in the administration of which the following form shall be used.

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

The principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism are these three [**There are three principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism**].

First: *That we with our children are conceived and born in sin,* [**That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin**] and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, *except* [*unless*] we are born again.

This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, *whereby* [**through which**] the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals *unto* [**to**] us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals *unto* [**to**] us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and *avert* [**turn aside**] all evil or turn it to our profit.

And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals *unto* [**to**] us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, *till* [**until**] we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: *Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts* [**Since all covenants contain two parts**], therefore are we by God, through baptism, *admonished of and obliged unto* [**admonished and obliged to live in**] new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. *And if we sometimes through weakness* [**And if through weakness, we sometimes**] fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and *indubitable* [**indisputable**] testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although the children of Christians, *notwithstanding their inability to understand these things* [**despite their inability to understand these things**], must be baptized by virtue of the covenant, yet it is not lawful to baptize adults, unless they *first feel their sins and make confession of their repentance and of their faith in Christ*. [**first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ**].

For this cause did not only John the Baptist, according to the command of God, preach the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins, and baptize those who confessed their sins (Mark 1:4,5 and Luke 3:3), [**For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3)**], but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, (Matthew 28:19–ESV), *adding thereunto this promise*. [**This promise is confirmed by Paul**] "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16– ESV ** note, the original biblical citation from Mark 16:16–from the disputed ending of Mark–has been replaced by another passage which affirms the same teaching).

According to this rule *the apostles*, *as appears from* [**as we see in**] the book of Acts, [**the apostles**] baptized no other adults *but such as made confession of their repentance and faith* [**but those who confessed and repented of their**

sins and who made a profession of faith]. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account *thereof and of* [**of**] *their faith by the profession of their mouths* [**of their faith and profess that faith publicly**].

That we therefore may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call *upon* [**on**] His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, *Thou who hast* [**you, who have**] according to *Thy* [**your**] severe judgment punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, and *hast* [**have**] according to *Thy* [**your**] great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; *Thou who hast* [**you who have**] drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led *Thy* [**your**] people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground–*by which baptism was signified* [**by which you showed us the meaning of baptism**]– we *beseech* [**earnestly pray**] *Thee that Thou wilt be pleased* [**that you will be pleased**] of *Thine* [**your**] infinite mercy, graciously to look upon this brother (sister) and incorporate him (her) by *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit into *Thy* [**your**] Son Jesus Christ, that he (she) may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that he (she), daily following Him, may joyfully bear his (her) cross, cleaving *unto* [**to**] Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that he (she), being comforted in *Thee* [**you**], may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ *Thy* [**your**] Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with *Thee* [**you**] and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. AMEN.

Address To The Person To Be Baptized

_____, since, then, you desire to receive holy baptism, that it may be to you a seal of your incorporation in the Church of God–that it may now appear that you not only accept the Christian religion, in which you have been instructed by us, and of which you have made profession before us, but also that you intend to direct your life *in accordance therewith* [**accordingly**], you are to answer these questions sincerely before God and His church:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without His divine will?
Answer: I do.

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore a child of wrath, by nature *wholly* [**totally**] incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

Answer: I do.

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed His human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in His blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit became a member of Jesus Christ and of His Church:

Answer: I do.

Fourth: Do you assent to all the articles of the Christian religion, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God, *and do you purpose to continue steadfastly* [**and are you determined to continue**] in the same doctrine to the end of your life; and do you also reject all heresies and errors conflicting with this doctrine, and promise that you will persevere in the fellowship of this Christian church, not only in the hearing of the divine Word, but also in the use of the holy supper?
Answer: I do.

Fifth: Do you firmly resolve always to lead a Christian life, to forsake the

world and its evil lusts, as is becoming to the members of Christ and of His Church, and to submit cheerfully to all Christian admonitions?

Answer: I do.

The good and great God mercifully grant you His grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise *Thee* [**you**], that *Thou hast* [**you have**] forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of *Thy* [**your**] beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit as members of *Thine* [**your**] only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be *Thy* [**your**] children, and sealed and confirmed the same *unto* [**to**] us by holy baptism. We *beseech* [**earnestly pray**] *Thee* [**that you**] also, through Him, *Thy* [**your**] beloved Son, that *Thou wilt* [**you will**] always govern this brother (sister) by *Thy* [**your**] Holy Spirit, and that he (she) may lead a Christian and godly life, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that he (she) may acknowledge *Thy* [**your**] fatherly goodness and mercy, which *Thou hast* [**you have**] shown to him (her) and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that he (she) may eternally praise and magnify *Thee* [**you**], and *Thy* [**your**] Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. AMEN.

Form Number 1 for the Baptism of Adults
(as edited)

When adults who have not been baptized desire to receive baptism, they shall first be thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Christian religion. And when they have made a good profession in the presence of the consistory, they shall be permitted to make public profession and receive holy baptism; in the administration of which the following form shall be used.

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

There are three principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature,

and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although the children of Christians, despite their inability to understand these things, must be baptized by virtue of the covenant, yet it is not lawful to baptize adults, unless they first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ.

For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3), but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, (Matthew 28:19 ESV). This promise is confirmed by Paul. "*Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16 ESV).

According to this rule as we see in the book of Acts, the apostles baptized no other adults but those who confessed and repented of their sins and who made a profession of faith. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account of their faith and profess that faith publicly.

That we therefore may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call on His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, you, who have according to your severe judgment punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, and have according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; you who have drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground – by which you showed us the meaning of baptism – we earnestly pray that you will be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon this brother (sister) and incorporate him (her) by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that he (she) may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that he (she), daily following Him, may joyfully bear his (her) cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that he (she), being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may

appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address To The Person To Be Baptized

_____, since, then, you desire to receive holy baptism, that it may be to you a seal of your incorporation in the Church of God–that it may now appear that you not only accept the Christian religion, in which you have been instructed by us, and of which you have made profession before us, but also that you intend to direct your life accordingly, you are to answer these questions sincerely before God and His church:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without His divine will?

Answer: I do.

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore a child of wrath, by nature totally incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

Answer: I do.

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed His human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in His blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit became a member of Jesus Christ and of His Church:

Answer: I do.

Fourth: Do you assent to all the articles of the Christian religion, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God, and are you determined to continue in the same doctrine to the end of your life; and do you also reject all heresies and errors conflicting with this doctrine, and promise that you will persevere in the fellowship of this Christian church, not only in the hearing of the divine Word, but also in the use of the holy supper?

Answer: I do.

Fifth: Do you firmly resolve always to lead a Christian life, to forsake the world and its evil lusts, as is becoming to the members of Christ and of His Church, and to submit cheerfully to all Christian admonitions?

Answer: I do.

The good and great God mercifully grant you His grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you, that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray that you also, through Him, your beloved Son, that you will always govern this brother (sister) by your Holy Spirit, and that he (she) may lead a Christian and godly life, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that he (she) may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to him (her) and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that he (she) may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Form 1 for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper (03/15/10)

(** note, current wording is italics, changes in bold, the edited form appears in its entirety at the end)

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, *attend* [**let us give full attention**] to the words of the institution of the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they are delivered by the *holy apostle* [**the Apostle**] Paul *(1 Cor. 11:23-29)*: *For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.*

[**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself**] (** note–ESV text inserted).

That we may now celebrate the supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is necessary, before all things, *rightly to examine ourselves* [**to examine ourselves fully**]; and further, *to direct it to* [**to carefully consider**] that end for which Christ has ordained and instituted *the same* [**this sacrament**]– namely, *to* [**omit "to"**] His remembrance.

The true examination of ourselves consists of *these* [**omit "these"**] three parts:

First: *Let every one consider by himself his sins and accursedness* [**let every one**

carefully consider their sins and ungodliness–note the frequent translation of *asebeia* in the ESV], *that he may abhor himself and humble himself* [**that they may hate their sins and humble themselves**] before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great that He, *rather than to leave it unpunished* [**rather than leaving it unpunished**], has punished it in his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Second: Let every one examine *his heart* [**their own heart**] *whether he also believes* [**whether they also believe**] this sure promise of God that all *his* [**their**] sins are forgiven *him* [**them**] only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the complete righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given *him as his own* [**them as their own**]– *yea* **[indeed**], so completely as if *he himself, in his own person*, [**they personally**] had satisfied for all *his* [**their**] sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

Third: *Let every one examine his conscience whether he is minded henceforth* [**let every one carefully examine their own conscience to see if they are fully determined**] to show true thankfulness to God *in his whole life* [**in every area of life**], and to walk sincerely before His face; *likewise, whether he, without any hypocrisy, heartily laying aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, earnestly resolves henceforward to live in true love and unity with his neighbor* [**and also whether they, with full sincerity, strive to lay aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, and earnestly resolve from this day forward to live in true love and unity with their neighbor**].

All those, then, *who are thus minded* [**who are of this mind**], God will certainly receive in grace and count *them* [**as**] worthy partakers of the table of His Son Jesus Christ. On the contrary, those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment *to* [**upon**] themselves. *Wherefore we also, according to the command of Christ and of the apostle Paul, admonish all who know themselves to be defiled with the following gross sins to abstain from the table of the Lord, and declare to them that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ* [**According to the command of Christ and the apostle Paul, those who know ourselves to be engaging in the following sins without repentance, have no part in the kingdom of Christ and should therefore abstain from coming to the table of the Lord**]: *such as* [**including**,], *all idolaters* [**idolaters**]; *all who invoke deceased saints, angels, or other creatures* [**those who call upon deceased saints, angels or any other creature**]; *all who show honor to images* [**those who revere images**]; *all who resort to or confide in sorcery, fortune-telling, charms* [**those who engage in witchcraft, fortune-telling, or occult practices**], or other forms of superstition; *all despisers*

of God, of His Word, and of the holy sacraments; [**all those who despise God, his word, and his holy sacraments**;] *all blasphemers; all who seek to raise discord, sects, and mutiny in Church or State*; [**all blasphemers, those who seek to cause discord, factions, and dissension in church or in the state;**] all perjurers; all who are disobedient to their parents and *superiors* [**those in lawful authority**]; all murderers, *quarrelsome persons* [**contentious people**], and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors; all adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, *usurers* [**the greedy**], robbers, gamblers, covetous *persons* [**people**], and all who lead offensive lives. *All these, while they continue in such sins* [**All those who continue in such sins**], shall abstain from *this food* [**the Lord's Supper**], which Christ has appointed only for His believers, *lest their judgment and condemnation be made the heavier* [**so that they feel the weight of God's judgment and condemnation**].

But this is not designed, dearly beloved brethren and sisters to discourage the contrite hearts of the believers [**But this warning is not intended to discourage those believers with contrite hearts**], *as if none might come to the supper of the Lord but he that is without sin* [**so that no one would come to the Lord's Supper unless they are without sin**]. *For we do not come to this supper to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves* [**We do not come to this supper to testify about our own perfection and righteousness**], *but on the contrary, considering that we seek our life apart from ourselves in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge thereby that we lie in the midst of death* [**but, on the contrary, we come seeking life in Jesus Christ apart from ourselves**]. *Therefore, although we find many shortcomings and miseries in ourselves* [**Therefore, although we have many shortcomings and difficulties**], *as namely, that we have not perfect faith* [**and we do not have perfect faith**], *and that we do not give ourselves to serve God with that zeal as we are bound* [**and that we do not serve God with sufficient zeal**], *but have to strive daily with the weakness of our faith and the evil lusts of our flesh* [**but that we must struggle daily with the weakness of our faith and struggle against the evil lusts of our flesh**], *yet, since we are, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, heartily sorry for these shortcomings and desirous to fight against our unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God* [**yet, since the grace of the Holy Spirit makes us very sorry for our shortcomings and gives us the desire to fight against unbelief and to live according to the commandments of God**], *therefore we rest assured that no sin or infirmity which still remains in us against our will can hinder us from being received of God in grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink* [**therefore rest assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will, can prevent us from being received by God's grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink**].

Let us now also consider to what end the Lord has instituted His supper [**Let us also consider the end for which our Lord has instituted his supper**] *namely, that we should do it in remembrance of Him* [**that we should do this in remembrance of him**]. *Now after this manner are we to remember Him by it*: [**And this is how we remember him by it**]

First of all, let us be fully persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promises made to the forefathers in the Old Testament, was sent *of the Father* [**by the Father**] into this world; that He assumed our flesh and blood; that He has *borne for us* [**taken upon himself for us**] the wrath of God, under which we should have perished *everlastingly* [**eternally**], from the beginning of His incarnation *to* [**until**] the end of His life *upon* [**on**] earth, and has fulfilled for us all obedience and righteousness of the divine law, especially when the weight of our sins and of the wrath of God pressed out of Him the bloody sweat in the garden [**caused him to sweat drops of blood in the garden**], where He was bound that we might be loosed from our sins; that afterwards He suffered *innumerable reproaches* [**countless insults**] that we might never be *confounded* [**put to shame**]; that He *was innocently condemned to death* **[was innocent, yet put to death**] *that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God* [**that we might be acquitted on the day of judgment**]; *yea, that He suffered His blessed body to be nailed to the cross* [**that he even allowed his own blessed body to be nailed to the cross**] *that He might fasten to it the bond written in ordinances that was against us* [**so as to cancel "*the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*" (Colossians 2:15 – ESV)**]; *and so has taken the curse from us upon Himself* [**and in doing so, he might take from us the curse and bear it himself**] that He might fill us with His blessing; *and has humbled Himself unto the very deepest reproach and anguish of hell* [**and he humbled himself to the very deepest reproach and anguish of hell**], in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when He cried out with a loud voice: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46– ESV)**] That we might be accepted *of God* [**by God**], *and nevermore be forsaken of Him* [**and never to be rejected by him**]; and finally *has confirmed with His death and shedding of His blood the new and eternal testament* [**with his death and the shedding of his blood, he has confirmed the new and eternal testament**], the covenant of grace and of reconciliation, when He said; It is finished.

And that we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His last supper [**That we might firmly believe that we belong to his covenant of grace, during his last supper**] *took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave to the disciples and said, Take,*

eat, this is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. In like manner after supper, he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you and for many, unto remission of sins; this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me; [***Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*** **(Matthew 26:26-28 – ESV)**]. That is, as often as *ye* [**you**] eat of this bread and drink of this cup, *you shall thereby, as by a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this My hearty love and faithfulness towards you* [as a sure reminder and pledge you shall be admonished and assured of this, my great love and faithfulness toward you]; *that, whereas otherwise you should have suffered eternal death, I give My body in death on the tree of the cross and shed My blood for you*, [**since otherwise, you would have suffered eternal death, I give my body and blood for you in my death on the tree of the cross**] *and nourish and refresh your hungry and thirsty souls with My crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life* [**and I nourish and refresh your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life**], *as certainly as this bread is broken before your eyes and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink with your mouth in remembrance of Me* [**as certainly as this bread is broken before you, and this cup is given to you, with your mouth you eat and drink in remembrance of me**].

From this institution of the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ [**From the institution of this holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ**] we see that He directs our faith and trust to His perfect sacrifice, once offered on the cross, as *to* [**omit "to"**] the only ground and foundation of our salvation, whereby *He is become* [**he has become**] to our hungry and thirsty souls the true food and drink of life eternal. For by His death He has taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, *namely sin* [**our sin**], and obtained for us the life-giving Spirit, *that we by that Spirit, who dwells in Christ as in the Head and in us as His members*, [**that by that Spirit who dwells in Christ our head so that we who are his members**,] *should have true communion with Him and be made partakers of all His riches, of life eternal, righteousness and glory* [**should have communion with him and be made partakers of his riches, including eternal life, righteousness and glory**].

Besides, by this same Spirit we are also united as members of one body in true *brotherly* [**Christian**] love, as the *holy* [**omit "holy"**] apostle [**Paul**] says: *Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the*

one bread. [**"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians10:17–ESV).**] *For as out of many grains one meal is ground and one bread baked, and out of the many berries, pressed together, one wine flows and is mixed together*, [**As grain is ground to prepare one loaf of bread, and as many grapes are pressed together to produce wine**] *so shall we all who by true faith are incorporated in Christ be altogether one body* [**we who by true faith are incorporated into Christ shall be one body**], through *brotherly* [**Christian**] love, *for Christ our dear Savior's sake* [**for our dear Savior Christ's sake**], *who before has so exceedingly loved us, and show this towards one another, not only in words but also in deeds*. [**who has so greatly loved us, that we might show his love toward one another, not only in words but also in deeds**].

May the almighty, merciful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this, through His Holy Spirit. AMEN.

That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves before God and with true faith implore Him for His grace:

Merciful God and Father, *we beseech Thee* [**we ask**] that in this supper, in which we cherish the blessed memory of the *bitter death* [**death and sufferings**] of *Thy* [**your**] dear Son Jesus Christ, *Thou wilt* [**you will**] so work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit *that we with true confidence* [**that with true confidence, we**] give ourselves up, more and more, unto *Thy* [**your**] Son Jesus Christ, in order that our burdened and contrite hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, may be nourished and refreshed with *His* [**Christ's**] true body and blood, *yea with Him, true God and man* [**with him who is true God and true man**], the only heavenly bread; and that we may no longer live in our sins, but He [add **lives**] in us, and we in Him, and so truly be partakers of the new and everlasting testament, the covenant of grace, that we do not doubt that *Thou wilt* [**you will**] forever be our gracious Father, *nevermore imputing our sins unto us* [**never imputing the guilt of our sins to us**], *and providing us with all things for body and soul, as Thy dear children and heirs* [**and providing us with all that we need for body and soul, as your dear children and heirs**].

Grant us also *Thy* [**your**] grace that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Savior, and in all tribulation, with uplifted head, expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where He will make our mortal bodies like unto His glorified body, and take us *unto* [**to be with**] Him in eternity.

Answer us, O God and merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. AMEN.

May we by this holy supper [**By this holy supper, may we**] also be strengthened in the catholic, undoubted, Christian faith, of which we make profession with heart and mouth, saying:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. AMEN.

That we, then, [**That we**] may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts *unto* [*to*] *the external bread and wine* [**external things, like bread and wine**] but lift *them* [**our hearts**] up on high in heaven, *where Christ Jesus is, our Advocate* [**where our advocate, Jesus Christ is**,] at the right hand of His heavenly Father, *whither also the articles of our Christian faith direct us* [**where the articles of our Christian faith direct us**]; not doubting that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with His body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of Him.

In breaking and distributing the bread, the minister shall say:

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken *unto* [**for**] a complete remission of all our sins.

And when he gives the cup:

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ.

Take, drink *ye* [**omit "ye"**] all of it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed *unto* [**for**] a complete remission of all our sins.
During the communion a psalm shall be [**omit "devoutly**"] sung, or some *chapter* [**portion of Scripture**] shall be read, in remembrance of the passion of Christ; [insert **such**] as Isaiah 53, John 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, or the like.

After the communion the minister shall say:

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at His table, let us *jointly praise* [**together praise**] His holy Name with thanksgiving; and let every one say in his heart:

Bless Jehovah, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies. Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jehovah pitieth them that fear him (Psalm 103:1-4, 8-13). *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32) *But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life* (Romans 5:8-10). *Therefore shall my mouth and heart show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore*. AMEN.

[**Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy name with thanksgiving; and let every one say in his heart: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy . . . The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us ac-**

cording to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him (Psalm 103:1-4, 8-13). He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32) God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Romans 5:8-10). Therefore my mouth and heart shall show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore. Amen.] (** Note, text taken from ESV)

Thanksgiving

O merciful God and Father, we thank Thee with all our heart that of Thy boundless mercy Thou hast given us Thine only begotten Son for a Mediator and sacrifice for our sins, and as our food and drink unto life eternal; and that Thou givest us a true faith, whereby we become partakers of these Thy benefits. Thou hast also through Thy dear son Jesus Christ instituted and ordained the holy supper for the strengthening of that faith. We beseech Thee, O faithful God and Father, that through the operation of Thy Holy Spirit the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His death may tend to our daily increase in true faith and in blessed fellowship with Christ; through Him, Thy dear Son, in whose Name we conclude our prayers, saying:

[**O merciful God and Father, we thank you with all our heart that of your boundless mercy you have given us your only begotten Son for a Mediator and sacrifice for our sins, and as our food and drink unto life eternal; and that you give us a true faith, whereby we become partakers of these benefits. You have united us to Christ and to each other in a communion of saints. You have given your Son for us and to us and have proclaimed his saving death to the whole world. Having proclaimed and certified the atoning sacrifice of your Son for us, we ask that you would by your Spirit also make us witnesses to this Good News among our neighbors. And strengthen us in faith to live gratefully in this present age as we await our Savior's return in glory. In his name we pray these things, saying in the words he taught us**,]

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come;

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. AMEN.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Form Number 1 (as edited)

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us give full attention to the words of the institution of the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they are delivered by the Apostle Paul *(1 Cor. 11:23-29)*:

> *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

That we may now celebrate the supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is necessary, before all things, to examine ourselves fully; and further to carefully consider that end for which Christ has ordained and instituted this sacrament–namely, his remembrance.

The true examination of ourselves consists of three parts:

First: Let every one carefully consider their sins and ungodliness, that they may hate their sins and humble themselves before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great that he, rather than leaving it unpunished, has punished it in his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Second: Let every one examine their own heart whether they also believe this sure promise of God that all their sins are forgiven them only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the complete righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given them as their own–indeed, so completely as if they personally had satisfied for all their sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

Third: Let every one carefully examine their own conscience to see if they are fully determined to show true thankfulness to God in every area of life,

and to walk sincerely before His face; and also whether they, with full sincerity, strive to lay aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, and earnestly resolve from this day forward to live in true love and unity with their neighbor.

All those, then, who are of this mind, God will certainly receive in grace and count as worthy partakers of the table of His Son Jesus Christ. On the contrary, those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment upon themselves. According to the command of Christ and the apostle Paul, those who know ourselves to be engaging in the following sins without repentance, have no part in the kingdom of Christ and should therefore abstain from coming to the table of the Lord: including idolaters; those who call upon deceased saints, angels or any other creature; those who revere images; those who engage in witchcraft, fortune-telling, or occult practices, or other forms of superstition; all those who despise God, his word, and his holy sacraments; all blasphemers, those who seek to cause discord, factions, and dissension in church or in the state; all perjurers; all who are disobedient to their parents and those in lawful authority; all murderers, contentious people, and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors; all adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, the greedy, robbers, gamblers, covetous people, and all who lead offensive lives. All those who continue in such sins, shall abstain from the Lord's Supper, which Christ has appointed only for his believers, so that they feel the weight of God's judgment and condemnation.

But this warning is not intended to discourage those believers with contrite hearts, so that no one would come to the Lord's Supper unless they are without sin. We do not come to this supper to testify about our own perfection and righteousness, but, on the contrary, we come seeking life in Jesus Christ apart from ourselves. Therefore, although we have many shortcomings and difficulties, and we do not have perfect faith, and that we do not serve God with sufficient zeal, but that we must struggle daily with the weakness of our faith and struggle against the evil lusts of our flesh, yet, since the grace of the Holy Spirit makes us very sorry for our shortcomings and gives us the desire to fight against unbelief and to live according to the commandments of God, therefore rest assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will, can prevent us from being received by God's grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink.

Let us also consider the end for which our Lord has instituted his supper, that we should do this in remembrance of him. And this is how we remember him by it:

First, let us be fully persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ, ac-

cording to the promises made to the forefathers in the Old Testament, was sent by the Father into this world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; that he has taken upon himself for us the wrath of God, under which we should have perished eternally, from the beginning of his incarnation until the end of his life on earth, and has fulfilled for us all obedience and righteousness of the divine law, especially when the weight of our sins and of the wrath of God caused him to sweat drops of blood in the garden, where he was bound that we might be loosed from our sins; that afterwards he suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame; that he was innocent, yet put to death that we might be acquitted on the day of judgment; that he even allowed his own blessed body to be nailed to the cross so as to cancel "*the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross*." (Colossians 2:15–ESV); and in doing so, he might take from us the curse and bear it himself that he might fill us with his blessing; and he humbled himself to the very deepest reproach and anguish of hell, in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46–ESV). That we might be accepted by God, and never to be rejected by him; and finally with his death and the shedding of his blood, he has confirmed the new and eternal testament, the covenant of grace and of reconciliation, when he said; "*It is finished*."

That we might firmly believe that we belong to his covenant of grace, during his last supper "*Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, `Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, `Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:26-28–ESV). That is, as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, as a sure reminder and pledge you shall be admonished and assured of this, my great love and faithfulness toward you; since otherwise, you would have suffered eternal death, I give my body and blood for you in my death on the tree of the cross and I nourish and refresh your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life as certainly as this bread is broken before you, and this cup is given to you, with your mouth you eat and drink in remembrance of me.

From the institution of this holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ we see that he directs our faith and trust to his perfect sacrifice, once offered on the cross, as the only ground and foundation of our salvation, whereby he has become to our hungry and thirsty souls the true food and drink of life eternal. For by his death he has taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, our sin, and obtained for us the life-giving Spirit, that by that Spirit

who dwells in Christ our head so that we who are his members, should have communion with him and be made partakers of his riches, including eternal life, righteousness and glory.

Besides, by this same Spirit we are also united as members of one body in true Christian love, as the apostle Paul says: "*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*" (1 Corinthians10:17–ESV). As grain is ground to prepare one loaf of bread, and as many grapes are pressed together to produce wine, we who by true faith are incorporated into Christ shall be one body, through Christian love, for our dear Savior Christ's sake, who has loved us so greatly that we might show his love toward one another, not only in words but also in deeds.

May the almighty, merciful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this, through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves before God and with true faith implore him for His grace:

Merciful God and Father, we ask that in this supper, in which we cherish the blessed memory of the death and sufferings of your dear Son Jesus Christ, you will so work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that with true confidence, we give ourselves up, more and more, unto your Son Jesus Christ, in order that our burdened and contrite hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, may be nourished and refreshed with Christ's true body and blood, with him who is true God and true man, the only heavenly bread; and that we may no longer live in our sins, but he lives in us, and we in him, and so truly be partakers of the new and everlasting testament, the covenant of grace, that we do not doubt that you will forever be our gracious Father, never imputing the guilt of our sins to us, and providing us with all that we need for body and soul, as your dear children and heirs.

Grant us also your grace that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Savior, and in all tribulation, with uplifted head, expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where he will make our mortal bodies like unto his glorified body, and take us to be with him in eternity.

Answer us, O God and merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

> *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; And bring us*

not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

By this holy supper, may we also be strengthened in the catholic, undoubted, Christian faith, of which we make profession with heart and mouth, saying:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

That we may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts to external things, like bread and wine, but lift our hearts up on high in heaven, where our advocate, Jesus Christ is, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, where the articles of our Christian faith direct us; not doubting that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with his body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of him.

In breaking and distributing the bread, the minister shall say:

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete remission of all our sins.

And when he gives the cup:

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink all of it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete remission of all our sins.

During the communion a Psalm shall be sung, or some portion of Scripture shall be read, in remembrance of the passion of Christ; such as Isaiah 53, John 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, or the like.

After the communion the minister shall say:

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy Name with thanksgiving; and let every one say

in his heart:
Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy name with thanksgiving; and let every one say in his heart: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy . . . The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him*" (Psalm 103:1-4, 8-13). *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things*? (Romans 8:32) *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life* (Romans 5:8-10). Therefore my mouth and heart shall show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore. Amen.

Thanksgiving

O merciful God and Father, we thank you with all our heart that of your boundless mercy you have given us your only begotten Son for a Mediator and sacrifice for our sins, and as our food and drink unto life eternal; and that you give us a true faith, whereby we become partakers of these benefits. You have united us to Christ and to each other in a communion of saints. You have given your Son for us and to us and have proclaimed his saving death to the whole world. Having proclaimed and certified the atoning sacrifice of your Son for us, we ask that you would by your Spirit also make us witnesses to this Good News among our neighbors. And strengthen us in faith to live gratefully in this present age as we await our Savior's return in glory. In his name we pray these things, saying in the words he taught us,

> *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Joint Report of the Theological Education Committees of the United Reformed Churches in North America ("URC") and the Canadian Reformed Churches ("CanRC") [November, 2009]

Mandates and Background

At Synod 2001 Escondido of the URC and Synod 2001 Neerlandia of the CanRC the initial mandates for the respective theological education committees were approved. These mandates reflected the then current cultures in both federations respecting theological education. The URC mandate was short and in retrospect might be considered somewhat open and broad in nature. As stated in the Acts of Synod Escondido 2001 the Theological Education Committee was to "work together with the Canadian Reformed Committee to draft proposals for theological education to our respective synods in preparation for an eventual plan of union." As a federation the URC did not specify a preference regarding federational or independent models of theological education. This lack of specificity in the mandate for the URC Committee allowed for a number of possible configurations of theological education in a united federation. As a result much of the URC committee's early work was spent in discerning and defining the direction for theological education in the URCNA.

On the other hand, the Canadian Reformed Synod 2001 Neerlandia approved a far more detailed and directed mandate. According to the Acts of Synod 2001 Neerlandia the Committee for Theological Education was given the following mandate [Article 95 of the acts of Synod 2001 Neerlandia]:

1.1.1 To work closely with the committee re: theological education appointed by the URCNA synod;

1.1.2 To evaluate the current situation as to theological education within the CanRC and URCNA;

1.1.3 To develop a proposal concerning theological education within the new federation keeping in mind that:

1.1.3.1 The new federation should retain at least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod;

1.1.3.2 Attention should be given as to what to do in the case of an aspiring candidate to the ministry who does not have adequate instruction in significant courses in Reformed

Doctrine, in Reformed Church Polity, or in Reformed Church History.

1.1.4 To keep the CPEU updated on the progress;

1.1.5 To provide the CPEU with a report in sufficient time for them to produce the comprehensive report for Synod in a timely fashion." [note: "CPEU" references the Committee for Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity in the CanRC]

This mandate provided significantly more direction and structure to the work of the CanRC committee than that given by Synod Escondido to the URC committee. Of special significance is that the CanRC committee's mandate required that the united federation retain "at least one federational theological school." The CanRC committee had a definite direction and preference at the very outset of our discussions. The URC operated without a federational seminary, were satisfied with the independent model as represented by Mid America Reformed Seminary and Westminster Seminary California and had very unsatisfactory experiences with a federational seminary in the denomination they had left. The differences in our mandates and our strongly held respective positions relating to the models for the structure and governance of theological education subsequently proved to be a serious and not insignificant impediment to establishing a joint recommendation, which each committee could wholeheartedly endorse to their respective church federation. This became a significant impediment in the discussions between our committees.

In November of 2005 a motion to adopt the model of one federational Seminary, with two officially approved independent seminaries (without presumption as to which of the present seminaries would be which). In its deliberations the URC Committee had come to the conclusion that the churches of the URC would probably not accept a federational seminary. Accordingly, their response to this proposal was as follows:

> We as a committee are not prepared to entertain any proposal for theological education that mandates at least one federational seminary:
>
> Grounds:
> We are not convinced that it is Biblically mandated; and
> We do not believe that this will serve the churches well.

Since the CanRC Committee was mandated to maintain at least one fed-

erational seminary, we found ourselves at an impasse. This clearly was an impasse which prevented the committees from working further until their respective synods directed further or otherwise.

In view of this impasse the CanRC Synod 2007 Smithers altered the mandate for the CanRC committee in the following manner [Article 103 of the acts of Synod 2007 Smithers]:

4.4.1 To seek agreement with the URCNA committee about theological education for the new united federation:

4.4.1.1 On the principle of 2 Timothy 2.2

4.4.1.2 Taking into consideration the joint statements made by the theological education committees (see Consideration 3)

4.4.1.3 While expressing the strong preference for at least one federational seminary

4.4.2 To convey this decision, with the observations and considerations, to the theological education committee of the URCNA in time for the next URCNA synod."

[note: for a full appreciation of the discussion and rationale for the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 one must make reference to the full considerations, sections 3.1 – 3.8 inclusive of Article 103, which to some provided more perceived flexibility in the position of the CanRC committee]

The URC Synod 2007 Schererville made no changes to the mandate of the Theological Education Committee. However, the Synod did:

a. affirm the 6 points of agreement which had been established by the committees in January of 2004 –see specific reference below;
b. affirm the position of the URC Committee that a federationally controlled seminary was not Biblically mandated; and
c. affirm that the churches continue to follow article 3 of the URC church order which requires a man's consistory to assure that he receives a thoroughly Reformed theological education.

As a result of the decisions and directions of the synods of each federation held in 2007, the committees were of the view that further discussions and efforts were warranted to seek a common ground and work together. The

CanRC's willingness to reformulate the mandate for their committee made it possible for progress to be made in our discussions. Since a federational seminary was no longer a necessity (though much preferred by the CanRC), the two committees were able to work towards a common agreement on the question of theological education.

Points of Agreement:

Significant progress was made in our pursuit of a common agreement at our meetings of January 7-8, 2008 on the Campus of WSC, Escondido and at our meetings of November 17-18, 2008, and April 13-14, 2009 on the campus of Mid-America Reformed Seminary (Dyer, Indiana). In order to understand the decisions that were made in these meetings it is worth drawing attention to our distinct perspectives on theological education. Much of our discussion and the decisions which arose from those discussions were made in an attempt to maintain our unique preferences in a unified federation.

In the Canadian Reformed context theological education is a federative matter, as required by Article 19 of their Church Order (cf. Appendix 1: Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own Seminary?). This requirement of the Church Order is being accomplished by a federationally owned and operated Seminary (the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Hamilton, Ontario). The regular affairs of the College are overseen by a Board of Governors appointed by a General Synod held from time to time. The Board of Governors reports to each General Synod which approves its decisions respecting the budget, professor appointments and curriculum for the College. Reports are regularly sent to all the churches who have opportunity to address their concerns with the College at every General Synod. As is expected, the financial support for the College is assessed and approved by the Synod for all communicant members within the federation. The treasurers of each congregation ensure that the support for the Seminary is sent in a timely manner to the College. This method of training men for the ministry has provided a great deal of uniformity in the pulpits of the individual congregations, theological harmony among the churches, and future professors able to maintain the reformed faith within the Canadian Reformed context. This has taken place under the blessing of God for 40 years (the CanRC seminary was instituted in 1969). The churches maintain responsibility for students' training by means of classical examinations for eligibility to preach and ordination in the CanRC (CO Art. 4-5).

In the United Reformed context theological education is at first instance a consistorial matter as required by Article 3 of their Church Order (cf. Appendix 2, "Theological Education in the United Reformed Churches"). Since the matter is consistorial on a local level the federation does not own or operate any seminaries. The Church Order's requirements for admittance into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments simply require that a candidate for the minister obtain a Masters of Divinity degree and a thoroughly reformed theological education. As is to be expected the level and nature of this consistorial oversight varies widely within the federation. Some consistories take an active role in seminary training, others leave the training to the institutions that the URC supports and are only active once the student has graduated from seminary. The same can be said with respect to financial support. Some of the congregations within the URC provide a significant level of support for seminary education, while others support the seminaries on a more occasional basis. None of the institutions supported by the URCNA receives sufficient funds from our churches to maintain their budget. All the supported institutions require support from other quarters to address their financial needs. While there are a number of institutions supported by churches in the URC the two most represented institutions are Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California. Both of these institutions enjoy significant involvement from URC members on their boards of directors, faculty, and student bodies. This approach to theological education reflects the URC emphasis on the authority of the local consistory, and on the importance of local consistories in governing the pulpits of the URC federation.

Despite the significant differences between our federations in the practice of training men for the ministry, there are also significant points of agreement. A highpoint during the meetings of the past number of years was the statements of agreements that both committees accepted and both federations received and endorsed respecting Theological Education. Those points agreed upon by both committees at their meeting of January 13, 2004, are as follows:

1. It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
2. Ministers of the churches must receive sound reformed theological training;
3. As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
4. Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;

5. 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
6. The churches, (i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC), should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

These six points of agreement show that both our federations are in agreement on the principles of theological education. In a context where differences are more obvious and highlighted it is worth recognizing the foundational unity we have with respect to theological education. Where our federations differ is in the application of these principles. Upon the foundation of these six points our committees began to work out a common application for theological education in a united federation.

Towards Agreement

In our discussions we came to recognize that there were three significant areas which required agreement: curriculum, financing, and governance. At our January, 2008, meeting we established three sub-committees from amongst the members of both our committees with mandates to provide answers to these matters in a united federation [Curriculum, Financing and Governance]. These sub-committees met independently and submitted proposals which were discussed by all members in November, 2008. At that meeting and subsequently much agreement and common ground was found reached on each of these three areas.

Curriculum

The Curriculum committee was given the mandate of establishing the minimum requirements in a reformed theological curriculum (cf. Appendix 3). In both the federational model of theological education (CanRC) and in the independent model of theological education (URC), the churches must hold to a common standard by which such institutions can be judged and held accountable. For this reason a minimum theological curriculum was agreed upon. This curriculum is based on the current curricula of the three represented seminaries. All three represented seminaries currently meet the committees' standard for training in the united federation. The minimum requirement for theological education within institutions supported by the united federation was agreed to and is included as Appendix 3.

Financing

Equally important is the need for financial support for those institutions which train men for the gospel ministry among our churches. The finance committee faced significant challenges in coming up with a concrete proposal. There is significant disparity among our churches as to the financial support of theological education. In general it was agreed that the financial support of theological education ought to be formalized within the united federation. Such formalization would involve identifying the costs associated with training men for the ministry and assessing all communicant members a portion of that cost. These monies would be used to support all the institutions approved by the united federation. The way in which these monies would be dispersed would be determined by a Standing Committee for Theological Education to be established by the General Synod of our united federation. Among other responsibilities, this committee would establish a process for endorsing independent Seminaries for financial support within the united federation. This committee would also work to ensure that the federation's interests are being met by those institutions supported by the united federation. This would involve establishing some formal connection between all the institutions the united federation might support. Working out this relationship would also be the responsibility of this yet to be established committee. This committee would receive its first mandate from the first Synod of our united federation. Unless and until the governance model is finalized and adopted by both the URCNA and CanRC federations, admittedly the precise terms of a financing model cannot be established. What was agreed was that there should be an equitable formula by which the churches would fairly and evenly support the seminaries that have the endorsement of the joint federation, whether federational or independent.

Governance

While there was general agreement on curriculum and finance, the Governance Committee, also called the "Model, Structure and Polity Sub Committee" faced significant challenges. The primary and contrasting models of federational and independent seminaries currently in practice are not easily reconciled. Two approaches of reconciling these differences were discussed. At our meetings in January, 2008 at WSC we adopted a proposal that retained a significant measure of federational involvement in the governance of at least one Seminary. More particularly we decided that the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton would be governed by one of the regional synods under consideration in the proposed church order (cf.

PCO Art. 21), presumably the regional synod which would represent the Canadian churches of a united federation. At the same, the independent model for theological education would receive financial support and acceptance in the united federation. According to this approach churches could send their students to Mid-America, Westminster California, or the Theological College in Hamilton (cf. Appendix 4). Financial support for each institution from the churches would be entirely voluntary. What is more, there would be an acknowledgement of each seminary's support structure and membership base. Only the governance of the Theological College in Hamilton would be officially administered by and subject to an assembly of the churches. This proposal was provisionally adopted at a November 17-18, 2008 meeting at Mid-America in Dyer.

It was deemed wise to submit this proposal to the principals of the various institutions involved. Dr. Gerhard Visscher of the Theological College, Dr. Cornelis Venema of Mid-America and Rev. Steve D. Oeverman, Executive Vice President of Westminster California, met with the both committees in April of 2009 and were presented the material and the concepts and models to which our discussion was directed. On the matters of curriculum and finances the representatives of the seminaries were in general agreement. However, the viability of the regional synod model was questioned extensively. There was a strongly held view that as it was likely that the regional synod component of the proposal of the joint church order committee would not find favour with the URC, the pursuit of a theological education model which hinged primarily on a Regional Synod of Canada meeting from time to time was neither profitable or useful. Further, a regional synod model was deemed too favourable towards the Theological College in Hamilton and would give greater place and priority to the Theological College in the united federation. In short, it was a federational seminary, even though it was only governed by a Regional Synod. It was in light of these comments from the principals that the committee revisited the issue further.

In response to the above mentioned concerns the governance committee proposed that consideration be given to a voluntary association of churches within the federation which would be given the opportunity to unite together for the purpose of governing and maintaining the Theological College in Hamilton. This association of churches would not be an official organization of the united federation and would take upon itself all responsibilities for the Theological College. Essentially it would be a coalition of the willing churches which would agree voluntarily to support the "federational" seminary and further in their discretion (collective or otherwise), independent

seminaries. All other elements of the proposal (regarding curriculum, financial support) remained the same.

This proposal faced opposition in CanRC circles. Through informal conversations with CanRC pastors it was deemed that the voluntary association model would not adequately address the conviction of many that Seminaries ought to be under the direct oversight of ecclesiastical assemblies. Simply put, this was the independent model in another guise and not likely to reach favour.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The final meeting of the two committees was held on September 9th, 2009 on the campus of the Theological College in Hamilton. At that meeting it was agreed to submit this report and material proposal to our churches with the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. We are thankful for the harmony and brotherly manner in which we could work together, even in the circumstances where polarized and strongly cherished and held positions did not allow for easy or readily compromised solutions.
2. We are thankful for the providential care of the Lord over our deliberations in the many times we took to traveling to undertake the work.
3. As a fully independent model is not acceptable to the CanRC and a fully federational model is not acceptable to the URCNA, the only real viable choice of governance for theological education in a united federation would be a model where the united federation would operate with a model of two independent seminaries endorsed and approved by the general synod of a united church (i.e., Mid-America and Westminster California), with one federationally governed seminary (the Theological College in Hamilton) by way of a Regional Synod of Canada, or if deemed appropriate, by the general synods of the united federation meeting from time to time.
4. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the URNCA the members of the URCNA will need to adopt in part the federational model by way of a regional synod overseeing a federational seminary (not to mention actually adopting a church order model which includes the concept of regional synods), together with financial assessments to the churches to support the federational model.
5. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the CanRC, the

members of the CanRC will need to adopt in part the independent model which calls for endorsement of independent seminaries, and voluntary financial support.

6. There is agreement on the core elements of the required curriculum, whatever the model (see Appendix 3 attached).
7. Although we do not bring specific proposals, if the proposed hybrid model is adopted, we would envision a blended system of voluntary contributions and assessments to support the federational seminary and the independent seminaries, and are confident that a counsel of experienced wise men could develop an equitable manner to do so.
8. The synodical directions, the distinct historical experiences and the preferences for the two distinct models, do not allow the two committees to make a joint submission for consideration beyond that set out above.
9. The two committees are of the view that they have wrestled with the distinctives thoroughly and sufficiently and that this report, inclusive of its appendices, is intended to serve the churches by laying out the clear alternatives and assist for fulsome and considered reflection and discussion in the churches regarding this matter.
10. That the respective synods receive and approve of the work of the committees and declare that their mandates have been fulfilled and are at an end.
11. That the respective synods receive, approve and adopt the recommended model as set out in recommendation 3 above and direct and serve the churches in that regard.

Appendix 1

WHY DO THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES HAVE THEIR OWN SEMINARY?

In answering this question, the following will be considered.

A. Exegetical Arguments for the Church's Responsibility to Train their Ministers
   1. "Entrust to Reliable Men who will also be Qualified to Teach Others"
   2. The Church is "the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth"
   3. The Task of the Church is to Preach the Gospel
   4. Conclusions

B. Historical Notes on the Role of the Church in the Training for the Ministry
   1. The Medieval and Reformation Eras
   2. Nineteenth Century Holland
   3. North American Developments
   4. Conclusions

A. Exegetical Arguments for the Church's Responsibility to Train their Ministers

Whose responsibility is the training for ministers of the Word? The church's or an organization which is independent of the church it seeks to serve and over which the church has no direct supervision or responsibility?

In examining what the Bible has to say on the topic, we will need to start with 2 Timothy 2:2. In the history of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, this has been a key passage for arguing that it is the church's task to take care of the training of ministers. This is also the only Scripture that is specifically mentioned in the official account of the discussions that led to the decision of the 1891 Synod of the churches of the Secession to maintain the principle that the church is called to maintain their own training for the ministry of the Word.[1]

As a historical note, it should also be mentioned that the Rev. J. Kok discussed many biblical passages on the topic at hand in his notable address

1 *Handelingen van de Synoden der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederlands in de 19 Zittingen door haar gehouden te Leeuwarden, van 18-29 Augustus 1891* (Leiden: Donner, 1891) Art 172.

delivered on a special day held for the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen, The Netherlands, on July 4, 1909. This speech was subsequently published in expanded form as *De Opleiding tot den dienst des Woords: "voor de kerk, door de kerk*" (*The Training for the Ministry of the Word: "By the Church and for the Church")*[2]

For the present purpose, let us consider 2 Timothy 2:2 and 1 Timothy 3:15, followed by a brief look at the task of the church. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

"Entrust to Reliable Men who will also be Qualified to Teach Others"

2 Timothy 2:2

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (NIV)

The apostle Paul is addressing Timothy as his own spiritual son. Paul also called Timothy "my fellow worker" (Rom 16:21), "God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ" (1 Thess 3:2), and "servant (*diakonos*) of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 4:6). Timothy had received the laying on of hands by the elders (1 Tim 4:14) and was exhorted to preach the Word (1 Tim 4:11-13). He did the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Clearly he had an important position of leadership in the church at Ephesus.[3] To him the apostle, for example, gave instructions about the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-19) and entrusted the general care of the congregation (cf. e.g., 1 Tim 4:11-14; 2 Tim 2:14-19).

A key concern for the apostle, who was facing certain death (2 Tim 4:6, 18), was that the gospel be safeguarded (2 Tim 1:13-14; cf. 3:14-17) and proclaimed in truth (2 Tim 4:1-5). In this general context, he mandates Timothy as a close associate of the apostle ("my son" - 2 Tim 2:1), to entrust to reliable men the gospel he has heard so that they may be qualified to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2).

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2 Published by J. H. Kok in Kampen in 1906.

3 When he received the two letters addressed to him, he was labouring in the church at Ephesus. For 1 Timothy, see 1 Tim 1:3; for 2 Timothy the evidence is more indirect. When Paul suggests that Timothy come to him (2 Tim 4:9), he mentions that he is sending Tychius to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12), presumably as Timothy's replacement. Also, he notes that Timothy will know the services rendered in Ephesus by Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:18). See further, G. W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 10.

It is notable when one considers 2 Timothy 2:2 that the apostle specifies that what needs to be entrusted to others is that which Timothy heard from Paul "in the presence of many witnesses." Although the witnesses may refer to those present at Timothy's ordination when the apostle exhorted Timothy to bring sound teaching (1 Tim 1:14), the reference to witnesses probably goes beyond that. It includes all those who have witnessed the public preaching and teaching ministry of the apostle Paul.[4] The phrase "in the presence of many witnesses" thus emphasizes that what is to be handed down is not secret or esoteric but can be testified as the gospel by the many who have heard the apostle preach and teach. The full gospel is to be passed on.

It is also to be noted that the task of entrusting the gospel to others is given to a man like Timothy who had received the laying on of hands and held office in the church. The principle appears to be that those holding office in the church must train office bearers for the church. Office bearers ordained by the church work on behalf of the church.[5]

Here we have a key apostolic mandate for the transmitting of the gospel from one generation to the other with the express purpose that the teaching of this gospel be continued in the future. Those who preach the Word must train others to do the same. "This, then, may be considered as the earliest trace of the formation of *a theological school*, - a school which has for its object not merely the instruction of the ignorant, but the protection and maintenance of a definite body of doctrine."[6]

As further background to the above, it one can note that behind the relationship that the apostle Paul had with Timothy, there was ultimately the teaching relationship that the Lord Jesus had with his disciples. In the gospels, the Lord is often addressed as teacher (e.g. Matt 8:19; 12:38; 22:16, 24, 36) and he refers to himself as the one Teacher, ("you have one Teacher, the Christ" Matt 23:10). The response to one significant teaching event was that "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matt 7:28-29). His teaching relationship with his disciples also meant that they were always "with him" (Mk 3:14; Acts 1:21). It is also apparent that this teaching process did not stop with the ascension of our Lord; rather among the commands given to the disciples was that they, in turn, would need to teach those whom they

4 So, e.g., Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 390; W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 246-247.

5 See J. Van Andel, *Paulus' beide brieven aan Timotheus toegelicht* (Leiden: Donner, 1904), 148-149.

6 Alfred Plummer, *The Pastoral Epistles* (The Expositor's Bible; 2nd ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889) 336 (emphasis is Plummer's). More recently, Knight, e.g., concurs with Plummer's observation. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

discipled and baptized (Matthew 28:20 "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you").

The apostle Paul took along on his missionary journeys several young men whom he left behind to work in congregations. This happened to Timothy who was with Paul (1 Thess 1:1; Rom 16:21) but who also stayed behind in Ephesus to give further instruction for congregational life (1 Tim 1:4, 18), Titus (Titus 1:5) and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25). This was an early form of theological education, from minister to minister.

The Church is "the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth"

1 Timothy 3:15

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14-15 NIV)

It is important to notice that the church is called "the pillar and foundation of the truth." The immediate context of qualifications for overseers and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13), as well as behaving properly in God's household, the church (1 Tim 3:14) suggests that certain kinds of behaviour can be expected by virtue of the fact that the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth." Those who are members are to live up to the ideals of what the church stands for. They must live according to the truth of the gospel.[7]

However, the fact that the church is here called "the pillar and foundation of the truth" carries a major implication for our topic as well. While the precise meaning of the Greek terms translated by "the pillar and foundation of the truth" can be debated,[8] it is clear that this characterization indicates that central to the task of the church is to uphold, maintain and support the truth which is the gospel (1 Tim 2:4; 4:3; John 17:17).[9] "The church is

7 See, e.g., the discussion in I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 510-511.

8 The phrase has also been rendered, e.g., "support and foundation of the truth" (F. W. Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* [3rd ed., based on the 6th ed. of W. Bauer's *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 949) and "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (RSV).

9 See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 181; C. Bouma, *De Brieven van den Apostel Paulus aan Timotheus en Titus* (Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament XI; Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1942), 145-146.

fundamental to the gospel ministry."[10] To the church the gospel has been entrusted (John 17:8, 14). Calvin put it thus: "By these words [of 1 Tim 3:15], Paul means that the church is the faithful keeper of God's truth in order that it may not perish in the world. For by its ministry and labour God willed to have the preaching of his Word kept pure and to show himself the Father of a family while he feeds us with spiritual food and provides everything that makes for our salvation."[11] When Calvin comments on the meaning of the church as pillar of truth in his commentary, he notes "In consequence, this commendation applies to the ministry of the Word; for if it is removed, God's truth will fall."[12] If the above is the case, then training pastors and teachers belongs to the task of the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth and it is not properly the responsibility of an organization independent of the church.

The Task of the Church is to Preach the Gospel

Christ to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt 28:18) gives offices to his church (Eph 4:11-13) and through his Spirit calls and equips them to serve (cf. Acts 20:28). The office of minister is therefore a gift of Christ to his church. Thus when a minister is ordained according to the classical Reformed ordination form, he needs to answer positively the question: "Do you feel in your heart that God himself, through his congregation, has called you to this holy ministry?"

There are two basic elements that need to be noticed here. First, the Lord calls to office and therefore determines how that service is to be executed. Second, the office is given to the church and functions within the context of the church.

The proclamation of the gospel belongs to the very heart and kernel of being church (cf. Matt 28:19-20; Rom 10:14). If the church has the task to proclaim the gospel through the office of preacher given to her (Eph 4:11), then it follows that the church has the first responsibility to see to it that the gospel can continue to be proclaimed by training future ministers of the Word. This is not a duty that can be readily given to another organization. The proclamation of the gospel belongs to the very reason why the church exists. Without preaching there is no church!

How can the church pray for more labourers in the harvest (cf. Matt

10 Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 512.

11 Calvin, *Institutes* IV.i.10 (Battle's edition).

12 Calvin on 1 Tim 3:15 in D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, eds., *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, titus and Philemon* (T. A. Smail, trans.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 232.

9:37-38) without at the same time taking responsibility that good labourers are available, in so far as she is able?
To ask the question is to answer it. As we see in 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

Conclusions

On the basis of the above, three (somewhat overlapping) conclusions can be drawn.

1. The apostolic injunction to Timothy, "*the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*" (2 Tim 2:2), indicates that those ordained by the church should work to supply the church with future preachers. They will have to ensure that these ministers are able to preach and teach.

2. The church as "*the pillar and foundation of the truth*"(1 Tim 3:15) indicates that to her the gospel has been entrusted and therefore to her falls the responsibility to proclaim and maintain that gospel, also by training faithful pastors and teachers.

3. Since the office of preacher has been given to the church, it is the task of the church to preach the gospel. This responsibility also means that the church has to see to it that this proclamation can continue. Besides praying for future labourers, the church must therefore also provide training so that such labourers can be properly prepared and sent out.

B. Historical Notes on the Role of the Church in the Training for the Ministry.

In order to put the whole issue of responsibility for theological education into our present day perspective, it may be useful to have a brief historical overview.[13]

The Medieval and Reformation Eras

13 There has always been a general acceptance of the fact that future ministers need to be trained and educated before they can be ordained. To be sure, some sixteenth century spiritualist groups were of the opinion that leaders of the congregation did not need any education, but this approach was an exception.

The specific form which the training for the ministry assumed often depended to a great extent on the historical circumstances. At some time during the patristic period, local overseers became regional bishops. This led to these bishops establishing schools where future ministers could be educated. To give an example, the Council of Orange 529 determined that bishops and presbyters had to open their houses for young men to train them as fathers, to instruct them in the Holy Scriptures and to educate them so they could assume their office. According to this church decision, theological training of future ministers was entrusted to ministers with regional or local authority. Such seminaries were founded in several places in Italy, in England, Gaul and Spain.[14]

During the later Middle Ages, universities came into existence and this changed the manner of education. Originally the universities consisted of groups of people devoted to study who were more or less self-sufficient. These students selected and supported teachers of their choice. Gradually, however, the universities organized themselves into formal schools, governed and funded by the cities. Rather than being supported by their students, the professors were in the employ of the city and paid by them. At the same time, these professors were subject to the jurisdiction of the church.[15]

When the Reformation of the church took place during the sixteenth century, the training for the ministry had to be reestablished. In agreement with the custom of that time when the government determined the public religion of their nations, this was done by the government. Calvin urged the city council of Geneva to establish a seminary, as it was the right of the church to have an institute for theological training. Similarly, in the Palatinate it was the Elector Frederick who had changed the *Collegium Sapientiae* into a theological school, and had placed it under the supervision of the church council. The city of Leiden in the Netherlands, as a reward for their faithfulness, received a university from Prince William of Orange, which was first of all intended for establishing a training for the ministry.[16]

From the major ecclesiastical assemblies held in seventeenth century Holland, it is clear that the churches always insisted that the professors of theology be subject to the teaching of the church, even though they were appointed by the government to the universities. The Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-1619 determined that from now on "the theological professors must

14 H. Bavinck, *Het doctorenambt* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1899), 20-21, 24-25.

15 H. Bavinck, *Het doctorenambt*, 27-34.

16 H. H. Kuyper, *De opleiding tot den dienst des woords bij de gereformeerden* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1891), 156, 431-432; E. K. Sturm, *Der junge Zacharias Ursinus* (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche, 33; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirken Verlag, 1972), 237-238.

appear at synod and there give an account of their teaching and submit themselves to the judgment of synod."[17]

These examples date from times different from our own. Then the established church was closely connected with the state and lived under its patronage. As a result, theological education was also seen as being the responsibility of the government. However, the church did what it could to exercise their responsibility over those who taught future ministers.

Two changes took place in the nineteenth century. We will focus on what happened in The Netherlands.

Nineteenth Century Holland

The first change concerned the public universities. The Dutch Parliament adopted a law in 1876 which transformed the university departments of theology into those of religion, a shift in emphasis from revelation to piety. The theological professors were appointed by the university. However, the national church, the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk received the right to appoint one professor at each of the universities who would teach the doctrine of the church as an addition to the scholarly training given at the universities.[18] However, since that time, theological education in the Netherlands takes place in the context of the separation of church and state. As a result, many parts of theology were taught from a (usually liberal) scholarly perspective, without consideration of the life of the church.

The second change which impacted on theological education was the establishing of theological seminaries outside of the control of the government. The Secession, a reformation movement beginning in 1834 within the tolerant national church, prompted a basic reconsideration of the way in which the training for the ministry should be organized. There was a desperate shortage of ministers within these churches, for during the early years, there were only seven ministers working within the seceded churches. However, within a year after the Secession had began, the number of congregations grew to about seventy. The few ministers did what they could, by, for instance, preaching three to four times on the Sundays. Worship services were also organized during the week, so that some ministers preached anywhere between 15 and 20 times in a week.[19] It was obvious to all that

17 See the decision of Dordrecht in F. L. Bos, *De Orde der Kerk* ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Bres, 1950) 79. See also the decision of Gorinchem 1622 on the same page.

18 D. Nauta, "Opleiding van predikanten", in F. W. Grosheide and G. P. van Itterzon, *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (6 vols, 2nd ed..; Kampen: Kok, 1956-1961) 1.318.

19 W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding* (Kampen: Kok, 1955) 5-6; H. Bouma,

something needed to be done about the lack of ministers.

The churches decided that they should organize the training for the ministry. The provincial Synod of Groningen of 1839 appointed Hendrik De Cock to teach men who were suitable and willing to become ministers. In the province of Friesland, Rev. T.F. De Haan was appointed for the same task. When De Cock had passed away, De Haan accepted the request to teach the students from both provinces. The churches determined who would teach, and through these ministers they took care of the theological training, however primitive this may have been during those early years.[20]

It was soon felt that this way of training future ministers was insufficient, and that there should be one theological school for the whole church. Rev. De Haan was charged to draw up a proposal for a theological school for all Secession churches. His proposal of appointing two ministers as full time teachers was bettered by the decision of Synod 1849 to appoint three ministers.[21] When the seminary was officially opened in 1854, four ministers were charged to be "teachers of the theological school."[22] The seminary of the Secession churches can be characterized as a church school, for ministers appointed by the general synod of these churches took charge of the theological training of its ministers.

Within the State Church, another reformation movement, called *Doleantie,* took place in 1886. Prior to that, in 1880, Dr. A. Kuyper, one of the leaders of the *Doleantie*, had already established a university.[23] This university began with three departments, including a department of theology. When the churches from the Secession and from the Doleantie discussed unification, theological education was a major point of discussion.

The churches of the Secession emphasized that the churches themselves should maintain a Theological School for the training of future ministers. In 1891, one year before the union, the Synod of the Secession churches adopted the proposal of Friesland by which the Synod maintained the principle that the church is called to have its own institution for the education of its ministers, at least as far as their theological training is concerned.[24]

'De voorgeschiedenis der opleiding', in *Tot de prediking van het woord des geloofs* (Kampen: Comité van Uitgave, 1953), 15.

20 H. Bouma, 'De voorgeschiedenis', 21-26.

21 W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 15-18.

22 H. Veltman, 'Zo God voor ons is', *Tot de prediking van het Woord des geloofs: Opstellen ter gelegenheid van de herdenking van de oprichting der Theologische School A.D. 1854 te Kampen* (Kampen: Comité van Uitgave, [1953]), 68; W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 35-41.

23 F. Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978), 97-99.

24 *Handelingen van de Synode der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland in de*

The General Synod of the Doleantie churches of 1891 was satisfied with the statement made by the Synod of the Secession churches concerning the training for the ministry. However, it decided to qualify it by declaring that the purpose of this statement is not: 1. to destroy the traditional reformed principle of free study; nor 2. to change the Reformed manner of ecclesiastical examination of future ministers; nor 3. to take anything away from the demand for scholarly study which had always been demanded by the Reformed churches; nor 4. to deny that the united churches at a later date have to judge the regulation of this issue.[25] In this decision, both the need for an church seminary and the need for scholarly study were emphasized within the Reformed churches in which Secession and Doleantie came together.

It took a while before the relationship between the united churches and the theological department at the Free University was official. A. Kuyper posited that a fundamental difference existed between a seminary and the theological department of a university. Even as late as 1912 he maintained a fundamental distinction between a seminary and a university. In his opinion, a seminary trains future ministers for the churches, but the Theological Department of the Free University should not demean itself to become a training institution for future ministers. It has to do that, too, but its first task is to present theology in a scholarly way.[26]

Nevertheless, the Reformed Churches did supervise the theological teaching at the Free University. The deputies appointed to maintain the contact between the Reformed Churches and the Theological Department of the Free University stated that it was their mandate to evaluate:

- the appropriateness of the education as training for the ministry
- to be on guard against deviation from the Reformed Confession
- to evaluate whether there were weaknesses in the education
- to provide the faculty with an evaluation concerning an upcoming appointments
- to make known to the faculty comments or wishes concerning the theological students and their conduct
- to make sure that no one receives a doctor's degree in theology without having subscribed to the Form agreed to for that purpose.[27]

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19 Zittingen door haar gehouden te Leeuwarden, van 18-29 Augustus 1891 (Leiden: Donner, 1891), Art. 172 (pp. 95-96); see also W. De Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 175.

25 W. De Graaf, *Een monument der Afscheiding*, 177-178.

26 J.C. Rullmann, *De Vrije Universiteit: Haar ontstaan en haar bestaan*, (Amsterdam: De Standaard, 1930) 110-111.

27 *Acta der Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te*

In conclusion, the following can be noted. When the Reformed Church became independent from the state, it maintained the rule that the church itself should take care of the theological training of its ministers. When the churches of the Secession and the Doleantie came together, they acknowledged, in word and deed, the principle of the churches maintaining a theological training for preparing ministers of the Word. Kampen was maintained. Also, the important place of the churches in theological education was acknowledged by granting the Reformed Churches the authority to supervise the theological training at the Free University.

North American Developments

The two related principles that ministers teach ministers, and that the church takes care of this training were applied by the Reformed churches on this continent. To limit ourselves to the sister church of the Secession churches, the Christian Reformed Church maintained from the beginning the principle that the church is responsible for teaching its future ministers. At the February Classis of 1861, the question was discussed whether the churches should not open the way to training of young men to the ministry. The July Classis of 1863 entrusted that task to Rev. W. H. Van Leeuwen. Later, another minister, D. J. Van der Werp, trained students in addition to the work in his congregation. The first minister who was set aside for the training of the ministry was Rev. G. Boer, who was appointed in 1886 to teach students for the ministry.[28]

When after World War II, the Canadian Reformed Churches were established, the matter of the training for the ministry was on the agenda of the very first General Synod of Homewood-Carman (1954) which appointed deputies "to be diligent concerning the whole matter of the training" (Art 88). Every subsequent general synod dealt with this matter. General Synod Orangeville (1968) established the Theological College and appointed the first professors. Synod also decided that:

> to be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations candidates shall submit proof that they have completed their studies at our own Theological College. Candidates who took their theological training at other institutions shall present a Certificate issued by the Staff of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches stating that they have followed and/or

Utrecht van 22 Augustus tot 7 September 1905, (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, n.d.) 191.

28 H. Beets, *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N.A: Zestig jaren van strijd en zegen* (Grand Rapids MI: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1918) 147-151; see for further history of the training for the ministry, 206-212; 293-300.

complemented a course of studies conforming with the training provided by the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches. (Art 171)

It can be noted that although Synod clearly expected future ministers to be trained at the school of the churches, it nevertheless left the door open for the possibility that a student study elsewhere. In that case, it was up to the College to evaluate such education and possibly request additional training at the Theological College. In practice this has meant an extra year of study at the Theological College prior to being admitted to the Classical examination..

Conclusions

On the basis of the above, the following can be concluded:

1. From the earliest records available, it is evident that the training of future ministers had an official ecclesiastical character. However, historical circumstances did not always allow the churches to assume their responsibility for this training since the civil government at times considered this training to be their task.

2. The churches of the Secession considered that the churches had the biblical duty to train future ministers themselves. This could not be left up to the civil authorities. This conviction led to the eventual establishment of the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen. Even with the Union of 1892, the principle that the churches were responsible was maintained. Not only was the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen maintained, but theological professors who were involved in training students for the ministry at the Free University were placed under the supervision of the Reformed Churches.

3. This heritage has had consequences for North America. It led to the establishing of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids in the nineteenth century and the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the twentieth century.

The Theological Education Committee of the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches - April 2003

Appendix 2

Theological Education in the United Reformed Churches

History, including recent history in Reformed denominations, has shown that denominational (i.e., synodical) supervision provides no guarantee that a seminary so controlled can remain firmly loyal to the Scriptures and to the Reformed confessions. In fact, seminaries so controlled may very well be subject to the "political" forces that can appear in the life of any denomination. Seminaries that are free of such control are "free" to remain loyal to the confessions. Of course, no institution is free of its own history, its own reasons for starting, its support base among God's people (the church!), and the "political" forces that operate within and without, etc. This is to say that no official structure will be able to guarantee, in and of itself, sound training and, indirectly, sound leadership for the churches.

The URCNA Church Order articles that are relevant to theological education are Articles 3-7. Article 3 in particular speaks to this: "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 godliness to his Consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to exhort, and assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should ensure that his financial needs are met."

The URCNA approach assumes that a Reformed theological education can be obtained. Among existing Reformed seminaries, we note that several of them are staffed by men a) who are ordained office-bearers of the URCNA, and b) who are supervised by Boards of Trustees that maintain high academic standards and *ex animo* subscription to the Reformed Creeds of the URCNA. Such faculty members who are ordained ministers in the URCNA are subject not only to their institutions' oversight through the Boards of Trustees, but also to the supervision (oversight and discipline) of their respective consistories. Thus some church oversight now exists in the theological education currently available.

Article 3 of the URCNA Church Order speaks of the consistories' responsibility to urge students to seek a reformed theological education. Minimally this would entail directing a student to study at such institutions that are Reformed in character and have demonstrated that they can provide adequate training. Therefore, a great deal of responsibility lies with the local consistor-

ies to monitor and evaluate the education being received by such students. Indeed, it is entirely up to the consistory to see to it that a Reformed education is obtained. At the same time, the Classis plays an important role by providing concurrence to the declaration that a man is declared a candidate for the ministry, having been properly examined by the Classis.

The URCNA Church Order does not provide for an official seminary, one controlled by the denomination's assemblies. There does not appear to be any desire among the United Reformed congregations to establish an officially-controlled seminary. The current arrangement seems to be serving the URCNA well.

Appendix 3

I. Old Testament Biblical Languages and Studies

i. language competency as demonstrated by a working knowledge of Hebrew in all genres and literary categories of the Old Testament;
ii. knowledge of Old Testament background and canonics; hermeneutics/Textual Criticism
iii. courses in the main sections of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, Historical Books, Poetry, Prophets

II. New Testament Biblical Languages and Studies

i. language competency as demonstrated by a working knowledge of Koine Greek in all genres and literary categories of the New Testament;
ii. knowledge of New Testament background and canonics; hermeneutics/textual criticism
iii. courses in the main sections of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, General Epistles, and Revelation

III. Church History

Courses which cover the Ancient, Medieval, Reformation and Modern Church, including without limitation, Federational/Denominational history

IV. Systematics and Apologetics

i. Courses in the 6 loci: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology, including theological education.
ii. Courses in symbolics and the study of the Reformed confessions, including the Three Forms of Unity
iv. At least one course in each of Ethics or Apologetics

V. Practical Theology

i. Four preaching courses, including catechism preaching
ii. Courses in teaching, Catechetics, counseling, pastoral care, evangelism, polity, missions
iii. Church polity/ecclesiology (both theory and application of the Church Order)

iv. Successful completion of at least ten weeks duration pastoral internship

a. In a merged federation both the federational and independent models of theological training should be accepted and given financial support.
b. Currently this training is being done in the Canadian Reformed Churches by a federational seminary and in the United Reformed Churches of North America by independent seminaries.
c. Seeing, however, that the governing structures for these institutions differ, it needs to be recognized that the governance of a federational seminary will be more directly connected to the churches than that of an independent seminary. The assemblies of the churches have no direct involvement in the governance of independent seminaries.
d. With regard to the federational seminary in Hamilton, this needs be different and it is proposed that in view of the above, this seminary be governed by the merged churches in Canada through the Regional Synod (s) of Canada.
e. This government would entail that each classis in Canada nominate to the Regional Synod (s) one person (and a substitute) to serve as governor. These governors would be responsible for overseeing the affairs of the seminary and would report directly to churches and to the Regional Synod(s) of Canada.
f. The Regional Synod will be responsible for giving proper instructions to the governors as per the Acts (The Canadian Reformed Theological College Act, 1981) and informing the churches of the Regional Synod(s).
g. While the federational seminary will be in Canada and governed by the Regional Synod of Canada, final appeals in matters of dispute shall be heard and decided upon by the General Synod of the merged church.
h. With regard to financial support for the federational seminary, a commitment will be sought from each former Canadian Reformed Church to support the seminary on an assessment basis. In addition, all churches in Canada that were formerly United Reformed will be invited to support the seminary in Canada; however, it is understood that such support will be determined locally and rendered on a voluntary basis.
i. In order to ensure that all of the churches in the merged federation do their fair and equitable share to support seminary education, those churches not supporting the federational seminary shall commit themselves to sending a comparable amount of financial support to one or both independent seminaries mentioned under 1.4. It will be up to the General Synod of the merged church to determine what an appropriate policy will be towards independent seminaries.
j. that the CanRC and URCNA encourage the three seminaries to be intentional in developing their relationship with one another for the ben-

efit of all the churches. The three seminaries should organize mini conferences and consultations amongst themselves on a regular basis (with a rotation of responsibilities for organizing and hosting) to discuss common concerns in theology and/or pedagogy; to have dialogue on matters of theological difference; to share information regarding curricular innovations; to collaborate on publications; to stimulate professional development inside and outside the classroom; and to promote student awareness of the theological and curricular similarities and distinctives of the three seminaries. Faculty representation at annual convocations and/or graduations should be encouraged to ensure regular minimal contact among the three institutions.

CECCA Report to Synod London, July 26-30, 2010

Esteemed brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

It is once again our privilege, as Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA), to report to you on the activities of your committee since our report to Synod Schererville, 2007. The following terminology document serves as the mandate of our committee:

I. The first step, Ecumenical Contact, will follow a period of initial exploration. 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:

    1. Exchange of official observers at major assemblies such that one visit be made to one assembly/church per year to churches with whom we have ecumenical relations.

    2. Consultation on issues of joint concern, including:
        a. authority and sufficiency of Scripture;
        b. creeds and confessions;
        c. formula of subscription to the confessions;
        c. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, ecclesiology and stands on ethical issues.
        d. church order and polity;
        e. liturgy and liturgical forms;
        f. preaching, sacraments and discipline;
        g. theological education for ministers.
        h. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.
        i. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks).
        j. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards.
        k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order.
        l. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals.
        m. Exchange of information regarding current ecumenical relations.

II. The second step, Ecumenical Fellowship, 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 according

to church order article 36, (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 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, 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.

Since our report to Synod Schererville, CECCA has met ten times: nine times by way of conference call meetings and one face-to-face meeting. This report will first focus on churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Second, it will focus on churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to entering into Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Third, it will focus on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Fourth, it will conclude with a number of recommendations that require action by Synod.

I. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact

A. The Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)

We received a letter from the Stated Clerk of the RCNZ inviting us to send a delegate to attend their synod (Sept. 6-12, 2008) in Hastings, NZ. CECCA accepted this invitation and delegated Rev. Mark Stewart to represent the URCNA. Rev. Stewart's report of his visit to the RCNZ Synod was received and discussed by CECCA (**See Appendix 1**). His speech to this synod is attached (**See Appendix 2**).

Since Rev. Ray Sikkema and Rev. Dick Moes attended the ICRC in Christchurch, New Zealand, these brothers had ample opportunity to mix with the brothers from the RCNZ. They noted that the RCNZ strives diligently to be a Reformed federation. Consequently, they now have been sending some of their young men to the Mid America Reformed Seminary for theological training rather than to the Reformed Theological College in Geelong (Australia) which they officially support, but whose Reformed character on some points is being questioned. Both delegates led services in the RCNZ during the time of the meetings of the ICRC and thereafter. Not only were they warmly received, but they also both experienced that they were in the midst of brothers and sisters of the same Reformed household of faith.

CECCA recommends to Synod 2010 that we enter into Ecumenical Fellowship (phase two) with the RCNZ.

B. The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA)

We received a letter from the Administrative Bureau of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) inviting us to attend their Synod (Jan. 5-16, 2009) as well as an International Reformed Conference which they had organized with the theme *Reformed Identity World Wide* (Jan.19-20, 2009). CECCA decided to delegate Rev. Sikkema to this synod; he was also asked to attend the International Conference. Rev. Sikkema's report of his visit to GKSA Synod was received and discussed (**See Appendix 3**). His speech to the GKSA Synod is attached, (**See Appendix 4**).

We received the GKSA report "Commission: Issues concerning women: Report to the Synod 2009." However, before we had the opportunity to discuss this report, the latest GKSA Synod (which met shortly after the January

2009 Synod) had taken a decision against admitting women into the offices of elder and minister of the Word. Needless to say, this was noted with great thankfulness.

Since we are a young federation, there are at present no churches with which we are in Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase two). As can be seen from the recommendations, however, we are proposing that Synod enter into Ecumenical Fellowship with a number of churches. We had an extensive discussion on the question: how the GKSA's relationship with the CRCNA should determine whether we remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) or move to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (phase two). We eventually decided to propose to Synod London that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship upon the following grounds:

1. The GKSA holds to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and is a confessionally Reformed church;
2. Our action would be a warm gesture towards improved and closer ties between our federations, acknowledging GKSA's crucial resolution to reject women in the offices of minister and elder, and it would serve as a strong signal of support and encouragement for them;
3. A more intimate relationship with GKSA would present added urgency and opportunity to appeal to them to reconsider their ties with the CRCNA as we do not share their favorable assessment of the CRCNA;
4. If enmity/hostile relationships would be the criteria for ecumenical relationships, there is no end in sight. Thus, we should not judge GKSA based on their friendships
5. The CGK (Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands) maintains warmest fellowship with the GKSA even though they already cut ties with the CRCNA in the nineties;
6. During the 2005 ICRC meeting in Pretoria, before the women in office issue was resolved, the GKSA was admitted as member with a vote of 21 to 1. If the ICRC gave the GKSA its hand of friendship and fellowship then, there is no reason why we should maintain a standoffish relationship now.

At the meeting of the ICRC in Christchurch, the URCNA delegates had opportunity to meet with Dr. Douw Breed and Rev. Ben Fourie, the delegates from the GKSA. These South African brothers expressed their joy over CECCA's decision to recommend that the URCNA enter into a relationship

of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKSA to our Synod London, 2010 especially since they now realize that we work not with a three, but with a two-step approach. They promised us that they will do their best to be at Synod London, but could not promise that they will be able to make it since they have many other ecumenical commitments at this time.

C. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKNv)

CECCA received an invitation from the GKN(v) to send a delegate to attend their Synod in Zwolle-Zuid (2008) during the Foreign Delegates Week (end of May, 2008). We delegated Rev. Dick Moes to attend this Synod. The report of his visit was discussed. CECCA agreed with his suggestion that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the GKN(v) at this time (**See Appendix 5**). Rev. Moes' speech held at the Synod is attached (**See Appendix 6).**

Since there are concerns about developments in the GKN(v), we decided to make a systematic study of these concerns using documentation available to us. These concerns center on the following four areas: Sabbath and Sunday; marriage and divorce; liberal criticism of the Bible and women in office.

1. Sabbath and Sunday

Synod Zuidhorn (2002) had mandated a committee to study the matter of Sunday as day of rest. The committee produced a report entitled *Sunday, glorious day of the Lord* for the Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005. This synod adopted the general approach of this report and decided to sent a pastoral letter with the same title to function as a resource in the local congregations of the GKN(v). On the basis of this pastoral resource, we concluded that the issue of Sabbath and Sunday is not an impediment to maintaining ties with the GKN(v). For more detailed information about this issue, **see Appendix 7.**

2. Marriage and Divorce

Synod Zuidhorn (2002) had also mandated a committee to study the matter of marriage and divorce. While not adopting all the details of this report, Synod Amersfoort-Centrum adopted its general approach because it desired to return to a very strict, careful, principled upholding of marriage in the face of rampant divorce **(cf. Appendix 8).** It was brought to our attention

that the report operates with a so-called new hermeneutic. While we do not agree with this criticism, we do have our questions about certain exegetical conclusions to which the report comes. It should also be noted that the report of the Deputies is not binding, but is only meant to stimulate discussion in the churches. Thus, based on an abbreviated, translated version of this report and this decision, we concluded that the issue of Marriage and Divorce is not an impediment to maintaining ties with the GKN(v). For more detailed information on this issue **see Appendix 9.**

3. Liberal Criticism of the Bible

Based on certain publications of especially one of the professors of the Theological University of the GKN(v), Dr. Ad de Bruijne, some members within the GKN(v) are concerned that liberal criticism of the Bible is tolerated at this Theological University. One of the reasons for this concern is that De Bruijne tries to integrate modern-theological insights into a Reformed framework. We studied an extensive review of these publications and came to the conclusion that this is not the case.

The appointment of Dr. Stephan Paas as lecturer at the Theological University once again raised the concern of the toleration of liberal criticism of the Bible at this University. In his dissertation, which he defended at a secular university, Dr. Paas had made a statement that the Israelite worship of Yahweh was an offshoot of the Canaanite worship of El. Those concerned misunderstood this religious-historical statement as a theological statement in which Dr. Paas had put the God of the Bible on the same level as other gods. But this is not what Dr. Paas was doing. Instead, he was simply saying that Israel worshipped the true God with the help of terms and concepts that in part were derived from the Canaanite worship of El. In fact, Israel claimed these terms and concepts for Yahweh, the God of the Bible, said Dr. Paas. According to him, this is the same as a missionary in Suriname hearing natives speak about a god called the Master Canoe Navigator and then connecting to this understanding of their god and say that there is only one Master Canoe Navigator. On the basis of the documentation available to us, we decided to give Dr. Paas the benefit of the doubt.

In light of the concerns about liberal criticism, it was decided to send a letter to the GKN(v) expressing concerns that live in the URCNA because of some of the hermeneutical issues that have surfaced during the past years. It was noted with thankfulness that the Theological University in Kampen will

be coming with a declaration of the hermeneutical principles that guide its teaching and research.

4. Women in office

Synod Amersfoort-Centrum (2005) had appointed a committee with the following mandate: to make an inventory of which questions re 'the role of women in the church' need further study. This committee served Synod Zwolle-Zuid (2008) with a lengthy report. Synod engaged in a preliminary discussion of this report during the Foreign Delegates Week. Some time after that week, Synod "decided to follow a three-track approach to the issue. Track 1 consists of academic study of the issue. Track 2 consists of stimulating awareness and study within the churches. Track 3 consists of having a committee draft decisions of a more practical nature for the short term."

Because a decision is expected to be made by Synod Hardewijk (2011), we decided to wait and see what this synod decides before recommending any change in our present relationship with the GKN(v) (**See also Appendix 6). At the same time we sent a letter to the GKN(v) encouraging them to allow the Scriptures and not the culture to be the norm in determining whether women ought to be admitted to the offices in the church.**

These concerns about developments in the GKN(v) led to a group of about 1500 members seceding from the GKN(v) shortly after the Synod of Zuidhorn (2002) (**See Appendix 10**). See **Appendix 11** for an overall evaluation of this secession by the Dutch Deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad. *It should be noted that this overall evaluation does not concern the issue of women in office which is not addressed in the booklet from which the appendices were taken*.

II. Churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to Ecumenical Contact

Since Synod Schererville, 2007, we are corresponding with the following churches with a view to entering into an Ecumenical Contact (Phase one) relationship: the Confessing Reformed Church of Congo (CRCC), the Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT), the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCS(C)), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India (RPCNEI) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI).

1. The United Reformed Church of Congo (Formerly known as the Confessing Reformed Church of Congo)

We received a letter from Rev. K.M. Kabongo, president of the Interim Committee of the Church-to-Church Relations Committee of the Confessing Reformed Church in Congo (CRCC) asking for the establishment of a sister church relationship with the URCNA. We expressed appreciation for this opportunity and decided to enter into correspondence with this federation.

Some time thereafter, we received a document from the CRCC entitled "Reformed Church in the Congo (D.R.):Beliefs and Practice" (**See Appendix 12**). This document was accompanied by a speech entitled: "Reformed Identity in Middle and West Africa" (**See Appendix 13**). We learned, from this "Beliefs and Practices" document, that the CRCC has 250 congregations with only 35 pastors. CECCA discussed this need; we proposed to the CRCC the possibility of it approaching our churches to see if any would be willing to sponsor some of their young men to come and study theology in North America, after which they would be expected to return to their country. When the CRCC responded positively to our suggestion, we proposed that they enter into an Ecclesiastical Contact relationship with us.
Since these initial contacts, there came a schism in the CRCC. The following update on the situation troubling the Confessing Reformed Church in the Congo was given at the ICRC:

> The CRCC has recently gone through a period of turmoil. When the denomination was formed some 25 years ago, the Government of Zaire, now Congo, required by law that the church appoint two signatories as representatives. Recently these men had named themselves as representatives for life and had assumed the right to act unilaterally on behalf of

the churches.

> Because of these two men, the RCN [= GKN(v)]missionaries had been expelled from the country, a huge blow to the churches. There is an impasse. Although the churches were unhappy, they could not remove them. Accordingly, they reformed, took the new name Église Reformée Uni de Congo (ERUC), and appointed two other men to represent them. Most churches went into this group and want to continue and be recognized as the legitimate member of the ICRC.

Thus, the name of the Confessing Reformed Church in Congo is now the United Reformed Church in Congo (URCC). We have communicated with Rev. Kabongo that his federation should make sure that it does not have a repeat of the situation with regard to the two new representatives.

CECCA proposes to Synod London 2010 that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the United Reformed Church in Congo (formerly the Confessing Reformed Church in Congo).

2. The Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT)

Because of some earlier contact with some representatives of the Gereja-Geraja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC-NTT) of Indonesia, CECCA decided to enter into correspondence with GGRC-NTT asking it to give some information about itself while we would do the same about our federation.

The GGRC-NTT responded to our request for information with a letter giving us the information we would need to enter into closer fellowship with them (**See Appendix 14**).

CECCA proposes to Synod London 2010 that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the GGRC-NTT.

3. The Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCS(C))

CECCA received a letter with attachment from Rev. James Maciver, Principal Clerk of Assembly, Free Church of Scotland (FCS) informing us that the FCS has terminated the suspensions *sine die* imposed upon the men who repudiated the authority of the Commission of Assembly in January 2000 and then walked out of its proceedings. The FCS now has decided to recognize the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCS(C)) as a valid, separate church. Maciver's letter also informed us of the FCS's concern that an acceptable settlement of outstanding issues of property and other assets be reached.

It should be noted, by way of background information,that the Free Church of Scotland has been found to be not guilty of the charges laid against it by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) since there was no evidence for the charges. Consequently, the right to property that the FCS(C) had sought, based on their charges, was not granted. It was noted however that, while the right to property cannot be granted as a legal right, it may be granted by local arrangement.

We also received a letter from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) requesting that we enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCS(C). CECCA decided to put a response to this request on hold – pending the ICRC decision regarding FCS(C)'s request for membership in the ICRC. Since the ICRC (2009) did decide to accept FCS(C) as a member, CECCA has asked the FCS(C) to send an Observer to Synod London, 2010 so as to have opportunity to come to further clarity about the relationship between the FCS and the FCS(C) before we propose to enter into a formal relationship with the latter.

3. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India (RPCNEI)

We received a communication from Rev. Pulamte of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India expressing a desire that the URCNA enter into a sister church relationship with the RPCNEI. CECCA decided to enter into correspondence with this federation. Since the RPCNEI response to our request for information about their church federation was incomplete, we requested a follow-up letter containing further information. Our delegates at the ICRC in Christchurch urged the PRCNEI delegate to inform his federation that we still need more information in order to be able to propose to Synod London that we enter into Ecclesiastical Contact with their federation. Up until this time, this information has not been forthcoming. Therefore, there is no recommendation to Synod concerning this federation at this time.

4. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI)

We recently received a letter from Rev. Anupkumar Arun Hiwale, a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India with the request that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RPCI. We decided to ask Rev. Hiwale to provide us with the information we need to be able to enter

into closer fellowship with his church federation. Rev. Hiwalei informed us that he plans to be in the United States from mid April to the end of May. During that time, he is scheduled to meet with two our committee members. There is no recommendation to Synod concerning this federation at this time.

III. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

On the home page of its website, the International Conference of Reformed Churches tell its readers the following about itself:

> The ICRC is a conference of Reformed Churches around the world held once every four years.
>
> The first preliminary meeting was held in 1982 in the Netherlands with the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) taking leading roles.
>
> Subsequent meetings have been held in Scotland (1985), Canada (1989), The Netherlands (1993), Korea (1997), the USA (2001), South Africa (2005), and New Zealand (2009). The next conference will, the Lord willing, be held in Wales, United Kingdom in 2013.

The purpose of the conference is expressed in the following five points:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Rev. Ray Sikkema and Rev. Dick Moes attended the ICRC Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand from October 15-22, 2009. For their report, see **Appendix 15**. Since the next ICRC is scheduled to meet in September 2013 and our next Synod is scheduled to meet in the summer of 2013, Synod London will need to approve the recommendation of CECCA regarding delegates to this ICRC. Moreover, Synod Schererville 2007 had informed the ICRC of the willingness of the URCNA to host the ICRC meeting scheduled for 2013. However, since it was Europe's turn in the rotation cycle to host the ICRC meeting scheduled for 2013 (and it will be North America's turn to host the ICRC scheduled to meet in 2017) we ask Synod London to reiterate

to the ICRC our willingness to host the ICRC scheduled to meet in 2017.
Recommendations:

CECCA recommends to Synod London:

1. that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (phase two) with the RCNZ;
2. that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (phase two) with the GKSA;
3. that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the GKN(v);
4. that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the United Reformed Church of Congo formerly known as the CRCC);
5. that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRT-NTT);
6. that Synod welcome the fraternal Delegates present at Synod, extending to them the opportunity to address Synod on behalf of the sending church; that Synod welcome the fraternal Observers who may be present, extending to them the opportunity to greet Synod on behalf of the sending church;
7. that Synod appoint Rev ____ to serve as Primus Delegate to the next meeting of the ICRC and that Synod appoint the Rev. _____ to serve as the Secundus Delegate; the names of these brothers will be made known at Synod;
8. that Synod inform the ICRC that the URCNA is willing to host the 2017 meeting of the ICRC;
9. that Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of CECCA to answer Synod's questions regarding this report: Rev. Ray Sikkema, chairman and Rev. Dick Moes, secretary.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Dennis Royall, member
Rev. Mark Stewart, member
Rev. Rick Miller, member
Rev. Paul Ipema, member
Br. Huibert Den Boer, member
Rev. Nick Smith, member
Rev. Ray Sikkema, chairman
Rev. Dick Moes, secretary

Appendix 1

Twenty-sixth Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand September 6-12, 2008 Hastings, New Zealand

Synod began on Saturday evening with the election of the officers for Synod. Rev. John Rogers was elected as the Moderator. I was not present for this opening session but was instead about four hours to the south in Wellington where I preached the next morning in the Wainuiomata congregation. We then made our way north to Hastings and enjoyed some fellowship with members of the church and delegates at the home of our hosts. Our entire time with the brothers and sisters in the RCNZ was a wonderful experience of warm hospitality, vigorous conversation and encouraging fellowship. They are very knowledgeable about our churches and very interested in our progress in the faith.

Synod began its business on Monday morning and ended early Thursday afternoon. The RCNZ is a small denomination (19 churches and 3 church plants), making for a cozy synod compared to ours. The churches each send two delegates. There were delegates from a number of other international federations, as well as a number of missionaries, and Dr. Murray Capill, principal of the Reformed Theological College, located in Geelong, Australia. Overall, the deliberation and debate was conducted in a brotherly spirit and with a careful desire to defend and promote the truth.

Synod opened each session with devotions. These differed from ours, since many of these were short-medium length sermons. Along with a somewhat less formal approach towards the moderation of the meeting, more time was spent on issues than we would usually spend. The work was all conducted on the floor of Synod; there were no advisory committees.

I would like to highlight a few issues for our information and edification.

The most controversial issue at Synod involved the RCNZ's sister-church relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA). Like our past relationship with the CRCNA, this is a painful time for their churches since they are seeing some evidence of departure from the Scriptures in some of the Australian churches and a hesitancy to deal with those issues. Of greatest concern was the decision to ordain women deacons. As the fraternal delegate from the CRCA pointed out, this includes the caveat that when women are elected as deacons, they will not be a part

of the session. This explanation led to a general discussion on the various understandings of ordination. In overtures from the churches, concerns were raised about video images of Jesus shown for worship at the most recent CRCA Synod, without any criticism from the officers, though concerns were raised by some of the delegates. The RCNZ was quite split over what to do with their relationship, one which already was "strained," a formal term, giving evidence that these concerns have been around for some time. Finally, after a close vote, Synod decided to continued a strained sister-church relationship. Some delegates were of the opinion that their relationship should cease, while a vocal minority felt that the CRCA was not moving away from the Scriptures and the relationship should be restored.

The RCNZ is further along than our churches in the production of a new Songbook. At Synod we were privileged to sing from their recently completed Psalter, consisting of 150 Psalms (some with more than one setting). There are selections from the new and old Psalter Hymnal and many from the 2003 "Sing Psalms" book of the Free Church of Scotland. There are some noticeable updates to the language of the songs, and a preference for songs that follow the text of Scripture, rather than paraphrases. The committee was mandated to limit the number of Genevan tunes, though twelve still made it into the Psalter. The Psalter is quite fine, and I have requested a copy so that I can forward it to our Songbook Committee.

The RCNZ is not afraid to advise their members as a synod on ethical matters, as evidenced by a committee which had been formed to speak on the use of birth control, in particular regarding possible pregnancy arising from rape or incest. The committee was made up of doctors and other medical personnel from the churches. Synod approved their report and affirmed that life begins at conception and warned that the morning-after pill and other hormonal emergency "contraception" may function as abortifacients.

The RCNZ has an active Overseas Missions Board. The OMB reported on short-term missions and their works in Papua New Guinea (a joint effort with the Canadian Reformed Churches) and Uganda. Rev. Alan Douma addressed Synod, particularly on his recent call by the Hastings church to serve full time in Papua as a missionary.

An overture was defeated asking for the NKJV and ESV versions of the Bible to be approved as pulpit Bibles in the churches. Currently, the NASB and NIV are approved, with the NIV the version of choice in most of the churches. It was determined that there would be no advantages of accuracy or of readability in the new versions proposed.

The principal of the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia, addressed Synod and expressed some of the concerns faced by the

college, including a lack of students. The RTC is a joint effort of the RCNZ and CRCA in particular. It has been the sole seminary of choice in the past for the RCNZ, but this served to bring up a larger issue also in connection with the strained relationship with the CRCA. There are some concerns about inadequate training for the ministry at the college, and this has led to some men choosing to study in North America. There is also a rising concern about the lack of men currently studying for the ministry. By 2009, the RCNZ will have eight vacancies in their churches and church plants. They also have two larger churches looking to call additional pastors. The Deputies for Students for the Ministry reported on this current need and expressed a desire to visit seminaries in North America for the purpose of alerting students of the opportunity and need for service in New Zealand. I concurred with this plan, in particular since we appear to have a number of candidates for the ministry who have not received calls as well as very few vacancies. In private conversations, I was approached by a number of the vacant churches and by the Deputies to speak of their need. They either asked me if I was available for a call or if I could recommend a way in which we could help them. They were also sensitive to the particular challenges facing men coming from so far away. One idea is for a student graduating from seminary to enter their vicariate program (one year under an experienced minister) in order to determine whether he would be open to a call from one of their churches.

The RCNZ expressed great appreciation for our growing relationship with each other and decided to send a delegate to our next Synod.

Based on their faithfulness to and love for the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions, I propose that we recommend to Synod 2010 that we move on to the next step of our relationship, Ecumenical Fellowship, with the RCNZ.

Humbly submitted,
Mark Stewart
Fraternal delegate, on behalf of CECCA

Appendix 2

Speech to Synod Hastings of the RCNZ, September 2008

Beloved Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is a great joy for me to address you this morning on behalf of the URCNA. I am a member of the CECCA and heartily accepted the invitation to attend your Synod and bring you greetings from our federation of churches. We are grateful to our heavenly Father to be able to say that we share our allegiance to the historic reformed faith and that our churches are actively engaged in the work of the Great Commission, both in our own backyards and in various places around the world. I am impressed and thankful for your careful deliberation on important issues, for your knowledge of us and the broader Reformed world, and for your commitment to the Biblical and Reformed faith.

Many back in New Jersey, including my wife and daughter, have asked me why it is important for us as federations to enter into these kinds of relationships and to invest money in maintaining them: does it really mean anything at all or is it just a way for me to get a free ticket to New Zealand? I've thought about that question over the past couple of months. Let me just draw your attention to Paul's closing words in 2 Timothy 4 (read vv. 9-17 - comments). We have friends in the church that encourage and refine us on a close, daily basis - we live and struggle and rejoice together. But it is often the case that conversation with distant friends, with those outside of our own circles, traditions and cultures, can be just as beneficial for our spiritual growth and maturity. We look to you, our international brothers, to help us in the battle against our common enemy, to fill in the gaps in our vision and gifts, to assist us in defending the faith, and to join with us, as we are able, in carrying out the Great Commission around the world; and we would like to be a help to you as well. In a more general way, we enjoy our closer relationship as a way of anticipating our upcoming worship together in the presence of Christ in the age to come (I won't offer any thoughts as to whether we will be playing baseball or cricket there)

Let me give you a few details about the URCNA. We number about 90 churches across Canada and the United States, with concentrations in Michigan, IN/IL/IA, California, Alberta and Ontario. We total about 20000 souls. We have a number of church plants in California, Iowa, Toronto, PEI, and New York. We are actively involved in calling and supporting missionaries to serve in international fields such as San Jose, Costa Rica,

India, Mexico and to various countries in South America.

The URCNA is a very young federation in comparison to you, the OPC and the CanRC, so our relationship is also in its younger stages. Since 2001 we have been drawing closer together as federations. We happily received your delegates at our past two Synods and were glad to speak as a committee last year with Rev. Kloosterman. At Synod 2007, we unanimously agreed to enter into what is our first stage of an ecumeniucal relationship: Ecumenical Contact. Based on our growing appreciation for each other, we foresee a move to our second and last stage, Ecumenical Recognition, at our next Synod in 2010. This would move us towards a recognition of a deep trust and appreciation between our two federations as well as a deeper commitment to assisting each other and a greater accountability between each other.

The URCNA does not have an official seminary. Our students for the ministry are supervised by their local councils and, after passing their candidacy examination, are declared candidates for a call by their own consistory. Currently, most of our new ministers are being trained at two seminaries: Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN, and Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, CA. Many of the professors at these two institutions are URCNA ministers themselves. We currently have a surplus of ministers and candidates, with only about six vacancies (sadly, we have a recent vacancy with one of our ministers dying suddenly of a heart attack) and at least six candidates without calls. We have sent two to you and recently two to the CanRC but don't yet feel the need to stick our thumbs in the dike to stop the flow. It seems to me that the RCNZ would be well served by approaching students in North American seminaries and educating them on the pressing needs in NZ and Australia. Seminary can be a fruitful time for discovering the direction of one's ministerial gifts and for forming an idea of how best to focus those gifts in regard to current needs.

The URCNA has a number of standing committees, including the Church Order, Theological Education, and SongBook Committees. The latter committee, like yours, involves a long but necessary process as we need our own unique Songbook rather than remain dependent on CRC Publications. The new book will contain new and old psalms and hymns, as well as our approved confessions and forms. We also currently have two synodical committees serving Synod 2007. The profession of faith committee will seek to give our churches some advice with regard to what level of understanding of the reformed church and our confessions should be required before visitors can be received as members. The Federal Vision committee has been charged with giving our federation's official response to a particular

movement which has been troubling North American churches. The issues involves confusing and erroneous teachings on justification, the covenant, the church and the sacraments.

We are faced in America, and I know you are as well in New Zealand, with a post-modern swell against objective truth. Someone had a license plate in California that read like this: "There is no right and wrong; only fun and boring." Groucho Marx once quipped, "These are my principles and if you don't like them...well, I have others..." Os Guinness, in his book a Time for Truth, outlines the growing challenges to the church in defending the faith in this culture. However, he concludes like this - "But the darkest night is just before the dawn: the opportunity to speak and live the TRUTH. In terms of distance, the pigsty is the farthest point from home; in terms of time, the pigsty is the shortest distance to dad's house." Instead of compromising the Scriptural call to preach the Word faithfully, to catechize our children, to defend the truth, to worship in Spirit and in truth, the Reformed churches must stand ready to provide the real and lasting answers to the questions and struggles of the human heart, to provide the bread and water to those thirsting for the truth, for hope, for forgiveness, for life. We are glad that we, together with you, by God's grace, have the privilege of holding out the true Bread and the Living Water, the Lord Jesus Christ. We urge you to continue to stand firm on the foundation of the Word of God.

On a personal note, let me thank you for your wonderful welcome and hospitality shown to my wife and I. It was such a privilege to worship in two of your churches and to spend time with some of your members. Thank you and be assured that we continue to pray for God's richest blessing on you and the churches you serve.

Humbly submitted
Pastor Mark Stewart
Foreign delegate

Appendix 3

Report of the visit to the GKSA Synod, January 5-16 2009

The Fiftieth National Synod of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA or GKSA) began meeting on the 5th of January 2009. This was an historic occasion on two counts. It was the first time that delegates from Synod Midlands (a Black federation of churches which has been affiliated with the GKSA for a number of years already but had, up till this year met separate from the GKSA) met with the GKSA as regular voting members. (This also meant that all of the paper work had to be made available in English., since the members of Synod Midlands typically do not speak Afrikaans.) Additionally, the Fiftieth National Synod celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of the GKSA

The Agenda for this Synod was again huge – a 438 page Agenda which presumably was in the hands of the delegates well before the Synod convened, plus a Supplementary Agenda of 319 pages (I'm not sure when it was distributed, possibly at Synod) for a total of a 757 page Agenda. During the two-week meeting, the various committees reporting on the floor of Synod produced an additional 315 pages of reports outlining their proposals to the delegates for action. A massive undertaking which kept many of the delegates afoot for up to 18 hours per day. (Breakfast was served at 6:30 AM, the meetings began at 8:00 AM and concluded typically some time between 9:00 and 10:00 PM.) It is not my intention to cover all the many and varied issues covered; instead I will focus on matters that are, I believe, of interest to the URCNA.

The GKSA and the Celebration of Its 150th Anniversary

I arrived in Potchefstroom early on Wednesday morning, in time to attend the second full day of the meeting of Synod. The Synod is known for its robust a cappella singing. Since this year marked the 150th anniversary of the founding of the GKSA, Synod decided to mark this event by gathering in the church next door to its meeting hall (that is, in the Gereformeerde Kerk, Potchefstroom Noord) and record a number of the Psalms it regularly sings at the beginning of its sessions, a most remarkable, heart-warming experience!

A week later, on a Wednesday evening, the Synod again gathered in this church to receive the Greetings and Congratulations of the many for-

eign and domestic delegates and observers in attendance, a total of 22. The 'program' was set up in such a way that, after an initial musical introduction: "Fanfare – Trumpets", up to four delegates would be invited to bring their greetings and a brief word about their churches and matters of concern, followed by another musical offering – organ, violin, bassoon, singing. It proved to be a momentous, celebratory occasion – attended also by members of the church community. Because of the many speakers on the rostrum, each speaker had been asked to limit his speech to +/- 5 minutes, an impossible request which no one heeded. As a consequence, the program lasted longer than had been planned or anticipated. But that did not appear to be a real problem for those in attendance. (Note, a copy of my speech is attached.)

The GKSA and membership in SACC

The Synod spent much time on a Petition of Protest (a Beswaarskrift) which argued against a recommendation that the GKSA "apply for membership with the South African Council of Churches (SACC)". The SACC is a South African ecumenical organization made up of many and varied church bodies within South Africa – including therefore churches which are outspokenly liberal. The motivation for joining SACC had been argued as follows:

> *"In light of the fact communal ecclesiastical testimony is very important, the Deputies are of the opinion that the GKSA should join the SACC because it provides the GKSA with greater direct access to (the) government. At the same time it will enable our churches to play a more influential role within the broader ecclesiastical environment. The theological climate within the SACC has changed significantly since 1994, while the structure of the SACC allows churches to keep their own identity. Member churches do not have to agree with all the decisions of the SACC, and can give testimony or launch initiatives on their own when necessary. These factors make it easier for the GKSA to join the SACC. Unfortunately, the constitution of the SACC does not provide for observer status anymore, with the result that that the GKSA has either to join the structure, or remain outside of it."*

Regional Synod (RS) Bosveld presented four Grounds of Protest against a decision to join SACC, arguing (1) that the church may not permit the world to determine how it is to fulfil its prophetic task; (2) that the proponents had presented a faulty and incomplete representation of the SACC; (3) that a decision to join SACC could jeopardize the GKSA's membership in the ICRC; and (4) that a decision to join SACC would be in violation of Art. 36 of the Belgic Confession.

The committee of pre-advice presented a report to Synod in which

it argued that each of the four grounds offered by RS Bosveld presented either insufficient or faulty argumentation in support of those grounds – that, therefore, the Petition of Protest should be judged to have failed. When a Petition of Protest (a Beswaarskrift) comes on the floor of Synod, the Synod must deliberate and act on each of the grounds presented by the Protestor(s) (and responded to by Synod's committee of pre-advice) by voting on the recommendations of that committee re each of the grounds. After a lengthy debate on the first ground, an eventual ballot vote showed that the body was evenly divided on the issue; this meant that ground one was dropped. The committee's recommendation that grounds two and three of the Protestors be judged to be insufficient were both defeated. The vote on the fourth ground again resulted in a tie vote, removing that ground. The final result, however, was that the GKSA decided not the join the South African Council of Churches, a decision I applaud – since I am persuaded not only that a move to join the SACC would have jeopardized the membership of the GKSA in the ICRC; (but) it is also my conviction that membership in an organization such as SACC seriously jeopardizes the church's prophetic witness to the world.

The GKSA and the URCNA

The Deputate Ekumenisiteit: Buitenlands, (that is, the Deputies for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad, our CECCA equivalent) presented a lengthy report on the relationship which the GKSA maintains with many a 'foreign' church – in Europe, in Asia, in Australasia, in the Americas and in Africa.

It should be noted that the relationship between the GKSA and the CRCNA had been 'on hold' (op nonactiwiteit geplaas) for a number of years – ever since the year 2000, I believe. The Deputies assigned to North America, Dr. Dries Du Plooy and Dr. Douw Breed, having visited with the CRC at its 2006 Synod reported with thanksgiving their finding that "the CRC faithfully holds to the Word of God, to the Confessions and to the Church Order". (In their own words: "Dat met dank kennis geneem word van die erns by die CRCNA om aan die Woord van God, die Belydenisskrifte en die Gereformeerde kerregering vas te hou.") The committee of pre-advice reported that the Deputies "found their (the CRC's) handling of the Scripture and viewpoint … pure." They therefore agreed with the recommendation of the Deputies that the relationship between the GKSA and the CRCNA be considered as normalized – an action Synod took without any debate. (Significantly, apparently in anticipation of Synods approval of this recom-

mendation, a delegate from the CRCNA had been seated as a 'regular' from the day he arrived, well before this action re the CRCNA was taken. He was not thereafter recognized as now 'officially seated'.)

The Deputies were less enthusiastic when reporting on their relationship with and evaluation of the URCNA. They reported concerning a communication our (the CECCA) committee had sent them – in which we had requested information on 'developments' in the relationship between the GKSA and the CRCNA – also pointing out our concerns re such a relationship and its effect on our relationship with the GKSA. The Deputies recommended (and the committee of pre-advice agreed) that the GKSA note with sadness the decision of the URCNA (made at Synod Schererville) not to move to the second phase of ecumenical relations with the GKSA, (Ecumenical Fellowship). This was adopted.
(It should be noted that the committee of pre-advice erroneously reported that "the URCNA do not want to have discussions with the GKSA because of the involvement of the GKSA with the CRCNA." Such is clearly not our position. Yes, we did indicate that our relation with the GKSA would not likely move to Phase Two if the GKSA normalized its relations with the CRCNA; however, we certainly did not decline to have further discussions with the GKSA. As a matter of fact, we communicated that we "remain committed to establishing a Phase Two – Ecumenical Fellowship – relationship with the GKSA and look forward to the day that this can become reality". Surely, such a 'development' requires that on-going discussions be held.)

The GKSA and its Songbook

The GKSA has, since its 'birth', been a church that is committed to singing only the Psalm and Skrifberijmings (Scripture Hymns) – that is, songs that are poetic renderings of specific Scripture passages. Hymns, however, were not to be sung in the worship service. As was the case also in the two previous Synods I attended, this year the matter of the church's songs once again occupied center stage. The Totius 1937 rendering of the Psalms were again given preference (in distinction from the Cloete translations accepted in 2006) for publication. But this year the Synod did accept a differentiation between Confessional Hymns – versifications of e.g. Lord's Days of the HC – and Scripture Hymns, resulting in the adoption of several Confessional Hymns, after close votes, being added to the repertoire of the church.

A related matter, namely the Report of a committee appointed by Synod 2006 to study the question: May the church in her singing go beyond what Art. 69 of the Church Order (of Dort) presently regulates? proved to be

extremely emotional for many of the delegates. The Report presented argued that Art. 69 of the CO *not be amended or expanded to include the singing of 'other' songs in the church.* However, the committee of pre-advice assigned to handle the Study Report disagreed with the writers of that Report, proposing instead that Art. 69 be amended to read: *"In the churches we sing Scripturally and Confessionally identical, Scripturally and Confessionally rhymed and Scripturally and Confessionally faithful hymns".* (Note, this is the Synod's translation of what in the Afrikaans reads as follows: *"In die kerke sing ons Skrif-en Belydenisidentieke, Skrif-en Belydenisberymde en Skrif en Belydenisgetrouwe liedere".)*

As expected, that meant that the stage was set for an emotion-laden debate. *"This is a very emotional issue,"* said one speaker, *"without a doubt, this matter is the most important issue on this year's Agenda of the GKSA".* One of the 'driving' forces behind the desire to amend Art. 69 of the CO was the fact that the inclusion of Synod Midlands – whose members typically do not sing the Psalms, certainly not in the Afrikaans as found in the song book of the GKSA, but who do sing Hymns faithful to Scripture – now forced the GKSA to re-examine that CO article. Dr. Mashau, a Black professor at the University of Potchefstroom, underscored correctly I believe, the argument presented also by the committee of pre-advice, namely that Art. 69 of the CO of Dort was written in a specific historic context – viz. the church's battle against the error (die dwaalleer) of the Remonstrants. An article re the churches singing today must reflect the issues and concerns of today, he said – without in any way compromising the church's faithfulness to the Word. *Therefore, it must remain the responsibility of the church, via its Synod, to approve of the songs that may be sung in the churches.*

After a lengthy debate, Synod decided to appoint a new committee of pre-advice – with the mandate to report at a later session. This committee advised that the re-wording of Art. 69 previously proposed be adopted. It was – and surprisingly, there was a sense peace.

The GKSA and the Question of Delegation to Broader Assemblies

Regional Synod Bosveld brought a Petition of Protest against a decision taken by the National Synod in 1958 re "Delegation to Major Assemblies". Since this is a matter the URCNA will also have to face when dealing with the PJCO, I will briefly outline the concern raised.

The Petitioners argued that, since every church is a complete manifestation of the body of Jesus Christ, each church must, therefore, also be present at the various gatherings of the churches in Major Assemblies. They

claimed that the National Synod, by adopting the principle of 'staggered' delegation (getrapte afvaardiging) to the broader assemblies, violated the Reformed/Presbyterian understanding of the church. The committee of pre-advice pointed out that it agreed with the Petitioners that *a principle must be agreed to (and understood) before a practice (which must be based on such a principle) can be defined.* The committee further agreed that there is indeed the danger of Collegialism, but pointed out that the danger of Independentism and Democratizing is equally to be guarded against.

The National Synod, in 1958, had introduced a change in delegating to Major assemblies. Whereas before that date every church delegated members to every gathering of such assemblies, thereafter, in response to the recommendations of a Study Committee appointed in 1952, the number of such delegates was decreased by an agreed to number of delegates – from each Classis to the Regional Synod and from each Regional Synod to the National Synod. This of necessity meant that not every church had 'its own people' (office-bearers) at such meetings. The committee of pre-advice pointed out, among other things, (1) that Church Polity experts agree that the question of the number of delegates to be sent to broader assemblies rests not on any Biblical givens one way or the other, but on an agreement between the churches; (2) that such experts also point out that a distinction is to be made between the governance of the church, which belongs to the essence of the church, and the governance of the churches (Synods), which belongs to the well-being of the church. (Cf. Bouwman 1934:65); and (3) that without the ministry of the authority of Christ (BC Art. 31) there can be no congregation, (but also) that without the inter-church relations/help to and supervision over each other, no congregation can 'fare well'.

The committee further 'argued' – on the basis of Acts 15 and 16:4 – that the decision of the Jerusalem council (made by 'delegates' from some but not all of the churches) could indeed be laid before the churches as 'binding' because the emphasis falls not on the office-bearers gathered in Jerusalem but on the work which the Holy Spirit accomplished through those office-bearers. *"The essence of the authority of church decision-making does not rest on who or how many were actually present at an assembly; rather, it rests on whether Christ by His Spirit was authoritatively heard, through those delegated."* The pre-advice committee therefore concluded that *"a principle of Scripture is not involved here on the specific number and manner of delegation*." Synod so decided.

The GKSA and the Question of Women in Office

This year, as at the two previous meetings of the GKSA which I attended, there were again numerous Petitions of Protest, as well as another Study Report on the question of Women in Office. The Executive chose to deal with the Petition of Protest of RS Randvaal against the decision of 2006 – even though the committee of pre-advice appointed to advise on another Petition of Protest, that of RS Brits-West (also against the decision of 2006) had placed its report on the table almost a week earlier. It should be noted additionally that RS Brits-West was asking Synod to recognize that the Report on Women in Office, acted on by Synod 1988, had clearly argued that *the Scriptures do not permit the ordination of women in the church*. Therefore, said RS Brits-West, any action in contravention of that decision is out of order. The majority of the committee of pre-advice, agreeing with RS Brits-West, recommended that Synod adopt the position presented by the Petitioners.

However, Synod never dealt with this report. As indicated, the Executive chose instead to deal first with the Petition of Protest submitted by RS Randvaal. These Petitioners argued that the decision taken by Synod 2006 – which had set aside the decision of 2003 that women could be ordained to the office of deacon – was in error. It presented a lengthy report in support of this contention – arguing how and when a matter may and may not be altered by succeeding Synods. The committee of pre-advice presented a thorough analysis of this Petition of Protest – showing why each of its three grounds was not valid. However, when the first of the three grounds was placed before Synod, Synod instead agreed with the Petitioners. So, in one fell swoop, all the other Petitions of Protest, as well as Synod's own commissioned report on Women in the Office of Deacon, was off the floor.

An ad hoc committee was immediately appointed to advise Synod on the implications/consequences of the decision made. This committee reported as follows: *With respect to the decisions of Synods 2006 and 2003*, this decision means (1) that the decision of Synod 2006 is annulled; and (2) that the implication of such annulment is that the decision of Synod 2003 stands; specifically: *"The Synod approves in the light of Scripture that women who have the necessary gifts may be elected and ordained as deacons in the GKSA. The Synod further judges that certain texts, such as Romans 16:2, I Timothy 3:11 and 5:9-15, have for a long time already played an important role in Reformed Churches with which ecumenical ties have been maintained. Although on the one hand there does not exist clarity, on the other hand no prohibition is placed on women serving in the office of deacon,"* (Acta 2003:591, pt 4).

Furthermore*, with respect to implication for matters on the Agenda of*

Synod 2006 (which had not been dealt with by Synod 2006), all such matters, including Petitions of Protest as well as the Study Report, must as yet be dealt with by this Synod – since they were erroneously removed from the Agenda of Synod 2006. Moreover, the Petition of RS Brits-West (referred to above) which was addressing the decision of Synod 2006 – (which had now been judged to be erroneous!) – is therefore out of order and stands annulled.

Understandably, the Press reported the very next day that the GKSA had moved a giant step forward to ordaining women in all offices. One thing is very sure, the pro women-in-offices people were very happy.

Synod decided, also upon recommendation of this ad hoc committee, that it would *recess* till early next year (rather than *close* this Synod, having then to recognize that some work would , because of time constraints, be left unfinished). It is expected that the sessions of this Synod will be continued in January of 2010. In the meantime, a committee (Deputies) was (were) appointed with the following mandate:

1. *The deputies must investigate all unfinished matters from Synods 2000 to 2009 on women in the church and advise the next Synod in the light of their study regarding the dealing with and/or finalization thereof.*
2. *The deputies must account for all relevant material in the study. This includes the mandate of Synod 2003 …, the study report and commission report of Synod 2006, as well as the study report and commission report of Synod 2009.*
3. *The deputies must take into account all new studies and developments in the GKSA and churches with whom the GKSA is ecumenically one.*
4. *The study must bring the matter of women in the church, including women in office …, to the table in a new report for decision-making by the Synod*, (at its January 2010 session.)

The GKSA and the Office of Elder

A twenty page report, consisting of Six 'Studies' on various aspects of the work of the elder, was presented to and adopted by Synod. Of interest is the fact that the Synod (1) appealed to the churches and the pastors to recognize the seriousness and the importance of properly training and preparing men for the office of elder. (2) Urged the theological school to give clear instruction to its students on the nature, the content and the standards pertaining to the office of elder. (3) Asked the churches to consider conducting training sessions (for the churches of a Classis or a Region) on a regular basis – so as, in that way, to see to it that there is on-going preparation and training for the office of elder available. And (4) proposed that such courses include

the following: (a) instruction in basic, ad rem facets of hermeneutics, exegesis and revelation-history; (b) instruction in the teaching/doctrine of the church – focussing specifically on the Doctrinal Standards of the church; (c) the principles and practice of Reformed church polity; (d) the principles and practice of pastoral work, (the art of shepherding); and (e) the principles and practice of Missions/evangelism and Apologetics.

It is my conviction that the URCNA would do well to give careful heed to the importance these recommendations, and that we take steps to emulate such training work for our office-bearers.

The GKSA and the International Conference of Reformed Churches

As requested, I also attended the first meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which met at Potchefstroom on the 19th and 20th of January, 2009. It is my understanding that the many and varied papers presented – on the life and wellbeing of the Reformed churches worldwide – will be published in a booklet; I will therefore not elaborate on them here. Suffice it to say: The papers were not only interesting, they were also very informative. It is clear that the Lord is richly blessing the work and witness of the Reformed churches as they seek faithfully to ministers the Word by word and deed. I heartily recommend acquiring and reading this publication once it becomes available.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema,
Observer

Appendix 4

Fraternal Greetings Synod GKSA, January 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to greet you with the words of the Apostle Paul – only slightly amended: "To all *in South Africa*, who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and
from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Hearty congratulations on your 150th anniversary! This is a wonderful occasion and I want you to know that I give thankful praise to the Lord that it is my privilege to be in your midst for this festive occasion. I am reminded of the question asked by the Psalmist: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? (Ps. 116:12) As you no doubt know, the Psalmist answers that question by saying, among other things: "I will fulfil my vows to the Lord".

Brothers, you can be sure: the fathers of the GKSA vowed, 150 years ago, that *they* would remain – and that they *committed the GKSA* to remain – faithful to the Word of the Lord *as confessed by the church* in her three Forms of Unity. May that be your vow also, as you remember and celebrate the blessing of the Lord bestowed upon the GKSA for these past 150 years. It is my prayer – and that of our churches, the URCNA – that you may continue to experience the indispensable blessing of the Lord as you walk in faithfulness before Him.

I will not say much about our own federation – suffice it to say that we continue to grow. We now have upwards of 100 congregations in the U.S. and in Canada with a total membership of approximately 22000. We are looking forward to federate with the Canadian Reformed Churches. To that end, three committees – dealing with a new Church Order, a new Songbook, and the matter of Theological Education – have been working on their respective assignments since 2001.

I was very much struck when I read (in an email sent to me from the Netherlands I believe) a brief announcement concerning your feesjaar celebration. The writer noted, among other things, that "Die tema van ons fees, 'Klein voor God' is nie 'n banier nie. Dit is eerder een erkenning, 'n waarheid

wat diep binne-in le. Ons gaan nie feesvier onder die vaandel van enigiets van onsself nie: nie *ons* geloof, *ons* dankbaarheid, *ons* roepingstoewyding nie. Ons gaan maar soos ons is, onvolkome, soms een bietjie uitgerafel, selfs vervlenter, maar tog as God se kinders. Uit 'n wye wereld is ons saamgestamp in een kraal, tot een geloof, met een belydenis." Ah yes, so it is! And you must commit yourself to remain faithful to that tema, that theme. Do not allow it to become nothing more than a wonderful slogan with no substance in reality. Remember what Ds. Aucamp said: Wy *mag* kind van God wees, wy *moet* aan God gehoorsaam wees.

In that context I would like to say a word about the singing of the Synod – singing not only in Afrikaans but also in the Zulu and Sotho languages. As we made the recording this past Wednesday, the thought struck me how great it will be when all of us, from every tribe and tongue and nation, shall sing the songs of victory – in Christ! Ah yes, then there will be no more struggling over issues – but in the meantime you/we must all learn to be sensitive to the needs of the various confessionally Reformed church bodies – since there are many different ethnic backgrounds therein represented. It is wonderful to see that delegates of the Synod Midlands are here. The challenge you face *is* that ways be found which will enable you *to fully work together* in the life and ministry of the GKSA.

You recognize, of course, that blessings entail responsibilities – though I must confess that I am somewhat loathe to be specific here. You see, I have been duly warned that I must not address *matters on your Agenda* from this podium. And, Mr. Chairman, I will duly attempt not to violate my privilege which you have so graciously extended to me. I must also say, however, that I have re-read my 'addresses' to Synods 2003 and 2006. And, yes, I did therein express some serious concerns – in fulfilment, you understand, of *our* (that is, the URCNA's) stated objective, namely that in our ecumenical relations, "the exercise of mutual concern and admonition" be diligently observed.

If, however, it is judged that I was therein in serious violation of the privilege you extended to me, I must not only sincerely apologize – which I hereby do! – but I must also say that that puts me at a loss to know what *you* understand the exercise of ecumenical relations (ought) to be. We will await word from your Deputate Ekumenisiteit: Buitenlands for further instruction and elucidation on that matter.

Let me now say, as tenderly and as sensitively as I know how that, as I listen to discussions that are of special interest to me, I am reminded of a review I read recently of a doctoral thesis (a proefskrif) presented by Szilveszter Fusti-Molnar entitled: Kerk Zonder Vlek of Rimpel (Church Without Spot or Wrinkle). The author compares the situation of the church in Hungary

in the days of communist control to the problems faced by the early church with the Donatists.

The important question, says Fusti-Molnar, – then as now – is: *Wherein* lies the heart, the essence of the church? And, in that context: *What is, what must be*, the relationship between *the holiness* and *the unity* of the church?

When the early church faced persecution she was placed before a choice, he says, the 'choice' between *confrontation* and *compromise*; the 'choice' between *suffering* and *accommodating*. As you may know, the Donatists chose for the holiness of the church – thereby affecting the unity of the church.

Without further commenting on the issue (as it presented itself, and as it was faced by the early church), I do want to say that Fusti-Molnar is touching a sensitive nerve here. And he is right, I believe, when he says: The church still faces this tension – as she reflects on and seeks to come to terms with the question: "What is the role of the church in and for society?"

The task of the church is and ever remains that she fulfill the mandate of her Lord: that she be faithful in proclaiming the Word to all nations and all people – even as she feeds and nourishes her membership with the bread of life. She may not compromise her confession; neither may she *confuse those who hear* – whether members of the church or those whom she evangelizes – *by becoming so caught up in things political that her message becomes no more, and nothing other than, a social gospel; a message that seeks its authority not in "Thus says the Lord", but in the majority opinion of its presenters.*

To be sure, the confessors of the Lord must "work out" their salvation "with fear and trembling" for they all share in His anointing (L.D. 12). Therefore it must be proclaimed in every sphere of life that Christ is the Lord of life. Every knee shall bow before Him. But the church must *not confuse* her own *prophetic* task with what is properly *the calling of her members*, lest she lose her voice in the cacophony of voices of all what calls itself Church of Jesus Christ, *but is not*!

You are *"the salt of the earth",* said our Saviour. Well now, salt, as you know, has the power not only to prevent spoilage, but it also makes the perishable *imperishable!* However, if salt loses its saltiness it is good for nothing, said Jesus. Commenting on that, Andrew Kuyvenhoven writes: "When God's fools start *tasting* like the 'world', when they *think and act* just like all their neighbors, they have *lost the power* to save. Why? Because anything can be flavored with salt *except salt itself.* When salt is not salt anymore, that is, when Christians no longer bear the imprint of God's Kingdom, they are *worthless themselves* and *the whole world is robbed of its hope*. The *saving power*

of the world *is in the Church – as long as it remains church."*

It is my prayer that you, the GKSA, will ever be "the salt of the earth" here in South Africa.

In closing, these words from the letter of Jude:

> "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Humbly submitted
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema
Delegated Observer of the URCNA

NB: Because of time restrictions, not everything prepared in this Greeting was actually presented to the Synod which, for this session, met at the Gereformeerde Kerk, Potchefstroom Noord where members of the GKSA had been invited to attend for a special celebration of the 150th jaarfees. However, I was assured that the entire address will be published in the Acts.

Appendix 5

Report of the visit brought to Synod Zwolle-Zuid (GKNv) on May 28-31

Synods of the GKN(v) last longer and meet differently than synods of the URCNA. While our synods tend to last only four days, Synod Zwolle-Zuid scheduled four days for the sake of foreign delegates! Synod Zwolle-Zuid was officially opened on March 15, 2008 and was tentatively closed on October 10, 2008. It plans to meet two more times, perhaps December 12, 2008 and January 30, 2009 to finish two remaining items on the agenda.

The duration of GKN(v) synods is not the only difference with our synods. They also differ in the way they go about their work. Once the executive of synod is chosen, it meets and divides up the workload among various committees. These committees then meet on their own either by email, phone or in person on their assigned tasks during the week. Then on Fridays and Saturdays (sometimes every week; sometimes every other week) synod meets in plenary session to discuss the work of committees and as well as other items. Thus, while this synod officially lasted for seven months, it only met in plenary sessions (if I counted right) 27 days (including the four days for the foreign delegates).

According to many in the GKN(v), this synod would be a very important one for it appears that another group in the GKN(v) is seriously contemplating leaving the federation. Some years ago, about 1500 people left because they could no longer agree with the way things were going in the GKN(v). According to them, the federation had left its biblical, confessional, and traditional moorings and had drifted into the waters of liberalism. It appears that whether this new group leaves will depend upon decisions Synod Zwolle-Zuid will take. Will synod chart a course heading back to the safe waters of the Bible, confessions, and tradition or will it continue to sail in what is perceived to be unbiblical, unconfessional and untraditional waters?

In order to give the foreign delegates a first-hand experience with some of the issues of concern, Synod Zwolle-Zuid scheduled a foreign delegates week in which the delegates of synod would discuss two items of concern. In addition to conveying their fraternal greetings, the foreign delegates were invited to participate in the discussion.

The two issues of concerns were a report dealing with men and women in the church. The other issue was a report dealing with confessional subscription in unity talks with the Nederlands Gereformeerden (NGK). In the

September, 2008 issue of *Lux Mundi,* a quarterly published by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Rev. Karlo Janssen writes the following about the report dealing with men and women in the church.

> **Men/Women in the Church**
> In 2005 the GKN(v) appointed a study committee to investigate which questions with respect to the role of women in the church require study. One impetus for this investigation is interchurch discussions with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (NGK) and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGKN)*. The former adopted a report in 2004 allowing women to serve not only as deacons but also as elders and ministers in the churches. The latter had already received two study reports in 1998. The CGKN decided not to allow women to serve in the offices and did give guidelines as to how ministry by women in local churches might be more structured. A second impetus comes from twenty-first-century Dutch society. Is the church up-to-date if it does not allow women to serve in the offices, when women fulfil all sorts of leadership roles in society? Would the church be unfaithful to Scripture if women were allowed to serve in the offices?
>
> GS Zwolle-Zuid 2008 received a lengthy report from the study committee. It included an overview of representative literature on the issue, of positions held by various other churches, and the conclusions of a poll taken within a representative group of people within the churches to see what lives among the church membership.
>
> Other submissions to the synod were letters from four local churches and six letters from individual members of the GKN(v). A twelfth submission came from deputies BBK, pointing out (1) that the OPC has position papers on this issue and (2) that it will be necessary to discuss this issue also with sister churches outside The Netherlands before decisions are taken in the future. During the "foreign delegates week" it became evident how important this issue is to Christ's churches elsewhere.

I can concur wholeheartedly with this last sentence. Various foreign delegates warned synod not to open the offices for women. Fear was expressed that a new hermeneutic might lead the GKN(v) into this direction. In my speech to synod, I also touched on this point by saying: "People are

wondering whether you will go the same way as the Christian Reformed Church when it concerns women in office. They also wonder whether your hermeneutics will end up looking the same as theirs: more attention to the writers of Scripture as human beings who had a culturally bound message that was relevant for their time than as instruments of the Holy Spirit who had the same message for the people of their day as they do for the people of today."

The discussion on this report was only of a preliminary nature. After the Foreign Delegates Week, synod met again and took a decision. About this decision, Rev. Janssen writes:

> The general synod received the report and expressed its thanks to the deputies for the work they had done. In doing so it noted that certain criticism of the poll was in error. Synod declared *deputies have sufficiently made clear that the empirical research has proven a useful instrument in coming to understand the issues that live; this does not yet make the empirical research a norm that would then form the basis for future decisions.*
>
> In line with the report general synod has decided to follow a three-track approach to the issue. Track 1 consists of academic study of the issue. Track 2 consists of stimulating awareness and study within the churches. Track 3 consists of having a committee draft decisions of a more practical nature for the short term.
>
> The academic study (track 1) has been given in hands of the Theological University in Kampen. (The TU is an accredited academic institution run and owned by the GKN(v). Its board of governors form a committee under the oversight of general synods.) To make sure that this academic study does not loose touch with the grassroots a "sounding board" of people consisting of the new deputies Men/Women in The Church and several other representative persons will be formed.
>
> The stimulation of awareness and study in the churches (track 2) and the drafting of short term decisions of a more practical nature (track 3) have been entrusted to newly appointed deputies Men/Women in the Church.
>
> With respect to track 3 synod has asked the committee to look specifically at the following issues:
>
> *a. within which frameworks may men and women fulfil diaconal tasks? What does this mean for the activities that currently belong to the office of deacon? What does the answer to these questions*

mean for the current practice of the office of deacon?

b. *what role may women fulfil in a worship service (liturgy, prayer, reading)*
c. *within which frameworks may men and women fulfil pastoral tasks? What does this mean for the activities that currently belong to the office of ministers and elders?*
d. *is it possible in a practical way to disconnect the issue of allowing women to serve in the office of deacons from the issue of allowing women to serve in the office of elders and ministers?*

In seeking answers to these questions the committee has been mandated to consider the following:

a. *is there a sound line of argument that is sufficiently supported to be able to take decisions with respect to these issues?*
b. *to what extent do the churches need to decide on these issue together? Is it possible to leave each free in this? Are guidelines desirable, if so, which?*
c. *what are possible implications for the practice of church life and society: which consequences or further effects will the results of (b) have, and how should this be dealt with?*
d. *at what point is it wise or even necessary in view of existing agreements to enter into discussions on this with churches in and outside The Netherlands with which we have contact?*

In the grounds for this second set of four questions the synod indicates that not only should a line of argument be Biblical, it must also enjoy broad support if the peace in the churches is to be served. The synod also explicitly acknowledged that the adopted rules for sisterchurch relationships require that, on this issue, the sister churches be involved in reflection.

In short, the Theological University has been mandated to look at the issue from an academic perspective, the committee Men and Women in the Church will stimulate awareness and study within the churches, and the same committee will look at some more practical questions that require attention in the short term. Stated negatively, the GKN(v) have not yet taken a position on the issue and have not changed their current practice in any way.

Solid, thorough study is considered absolutely mandatory. This is so, not only because the GKN(v) want to be faithful to the teachings of Scripture. It is also because the GKN(v) criticism of the NGK is that the NGK has opened all offices to women on the

basis of an unconvincing hermeneutics and, it would seem, at the expense of the exegesis of Scripture.

Regarding the second item of concern—a report dealing with confessional subscription in unity talks with the Nederlands Gereformeerden (NGK)—Rev. Janssen writes in the same September, 2008 issue of *Lux Mundi* the following:

> During the late 1960s a breach in the GKN(v) led to the formation of what eventually became the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (NGK). The issues in this breach were matters such as confessional subscription, appreciation for the Liberation, and congregational over against presbyterial-synodal church polity. The GKN(v) and NGK have been involved in discussions for some time now to see if reunion is possible. Both the GKN(v) and NGK also have such discussions with the CGKN. The relationship between the GKN(v) and CGKN is one of hearty recognition, the relationships GKN(v)-NGK and CGKN-NGK are both somewhat restrained. While the GKN(v) and CGKN recognize much good within the NGK, there are grave concerns about their adherence to Reformed doctrine and polity. To these concerns have been added the NGK decision in 2004 that women may serve in the office of elder and minister. Both the CGKN and GKN(v) are afraid that the NGK uses hermeneutics to undermine and sideline exegesis on the issue of the role of women in the church.
>
> Between the general synods of 2005 and 2008 deputies Church Unity of the GKN(v) have held discussions with their counterparts of the NGK. This has resulted in a statement entitled "Where are we now?" on various issues, especially the issue of confessional subscription. While both the GKN(v) [and NGK] have an encoded practice on confessional subscription, the GKN(v) enforce their code while the NGK does not. Thus every GKN(v) must use a certain form for subscription while an NGK is free to regulate subscription as it sees fit. On this issue deputies Church Unity submitted a majority and minority report to the general synod. The majority of deputies felt the statement offered sufficient warrant to enter a new phase in the discussions: namely of starting discussions on working towards church unity. The minority of deputies felt the statement painted a too rosy picture, they suggested that discussions should remain in the investigative phase.
>
> One issue at the general synod was the precise character of the statement. It had received the characterisation of a *balans*, which for some meant it was a "milestone" while others saw it as a mere "stock

take". Cued thereto by the English term "interim statement" used during the Foreign Delegates week the statement is referred to in the decisions of general synod as a *tussenbalans*, a "stock take".

During the Foreign Delegates Week the discussion on this report was also only of a preliminary nature. After this week, synod met again and took a decision. About this decision, Rev. Janssen writes

> General synod received the statement with thanks. Synod founded this decision on the following ground: *deputies have executed the decisions of the synods named to have discussion on confessional subscription, and done so in a way that makes one grateful, even though these discussions have not yet come to completion.* There remain questions with the GKN(v) regarding the NGK practice of confessional subscription.
>
> The National Meeting of the NGK held in 2007 called upon all local NGK churches to subscribe the confessions by means of the adopted form. The general synod of the GKN(v) was grateful for this. However, the GKN(v) noted that it remains unclear what the force of this call is. After all, the Accord for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (the NGK book of church government) serves as a guideline, not as a law book. The GKN(v) also continue to be concerned about the fact that within the NGK many distinguish between "Christ as the foundation" and "matters in the confessions" which do not affect this foundation. The GKN(v) consider the confessions in all articles and points of doctrine to affect the foundation Christ.
>
> The concerns of the GKN(v) also relate to the 2004 decision of the NGK to allow women to serve in the office of elder and minister. General synod was convinced that there is now more clarity on how the NGK deal with the issues of exegesis and hermeneutics. However, the responses of the NGK have not satisfactorily answered all the questions that were raised at the GKN(v) synod of 2005.
>
> Hence newly appointed deputies Church Unity have been mandated to discuss the following issues with their NGK counterparts:
>
> *a. the different ways in which confessional subscription is dealt with in church practice within the GKN(v) and NGK;*
> *b. the different ways in which concrete and continual deviation from the confession is dealt with in church practice within the GKN(v) and NGK;*
> *c. the issue of women in office and the fact that sisters of the congregation have been allowed to serve in the offices by the NGK.*

> The grounds for this mandate indicate that there is sufficient reason to trust one another and that discussions are indeed worthwhile, possibly leading into future discussions focused on organizational union. With respect to women in office the synod noted in a ground that it would not be wise to intensify discussions on this point while the GKN(v) itself is formulating its position on this issue.
>
> In short, general synod opted neither for the majority nor the minority report, but took a middle road. While there is more clarity on certain issues, contact between the GKN(v) and NGK continues to be of an investigative nature.

Rev. Janssen ends his article on Synod Zwolle-Zuid with the following encouraging remarks:

> The GKN(v) take their calling to maintain all that Christ has taught very seriously. On the one hand it means holding fast the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The church may teach no more and no less than what Scripture teaches; the church may certainly not contradict what Scripture teaches. On the other hand the church may not bind the consciences. All those who are truly children of God must find room in Christ's church to experience and confess their faith.
>
> The GKN(v) bear the scars of many struggles over doctrine. In 1834 and 1886 the forefathers of the GKN(v) sought faithfulness to the reformed heritage. In 1944 the GKN(v) liberated themselves from unduly binding doctrinal statements. In 1967 the GKN(v) stuck by their confessional and church political heritage. In 2003 the GKN(v) refused to fall into the trap of confessionalism. The GKN(v) pray that the Lord of the church will help the GKN(v) sail between the Scylla of liberalism and the Charabdis of confessionalism. The decisions with respect to Men and Women in the Church and the talks with the NGK outline how the GKN(v) seek to fulfil their calling.

I wholeheartedly concur with these concluding remarks. During my stay at synod, I at no time sensed an unwillingness to be faithful to Scripture and the confessions. In fact, I continually noticed a deep love for both the Scriptures and confessions.

This does not mean that we should intensify our discussions at this point with the GKN(v). Rev. Janssen writes, Synod Zwolle-Zuid "[w]ith respect to women in office the synod noted in a ground that it would not be wise to intensify discussions on this point while the GKN(v) itself is formulating its position on this issue." If this is true for the relationship GKN(v) and NGK with regard to the issue of women in office, then this is also true

with regard to the relationship GKN(v) and URCNA with regard to this issue. Thus, I would advise what we recommend to Synod 2010 that at this time we remain in phase one of Ecumenical contact with the GKN(v) and wait for further clarity on how the GKN(v) deals with the issue of women in office before we consider recommending that we move to phase two of Ecumenical Fellowship.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. Dick Moes
URCNA foreign delegate

Appendix 6

Speech to Synod Zwolle-Zuid (GKNv), May 2008

Mr. chairman, delegates, brothers and sisters,

It is a joy to be in your midst and to greet you on behalf of the United Reformed Churches in North America. During the seventies, I had the opportunity to study with some of you at the Theological University in Kampen. That I have the opportunity to meet you again after some 30 years gives a deeper dimension to my joy than if I were an official delegate who had never met any of you before.

For the most part the United Reformed Church originated as a secession out of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. This secession was largely due to the increasing conviction that the Scriptures were being read differently than before. More emphasis was being placed, for instance, on Paul as man than on Paul as instrument of the Holy Spirit. What he wrote in his day about the position of women was so culturally bound that it was no longer valid for the church today. Consequently, it did not take very long or all the offices in the church were opened for men as well as women.

In the meantime, we have grown considerably as United Reformed Churches. At the moment, we have 102 congregations (including 10 church plants) with about 22,000 members and 96 pastors. As you can see we do not struggle with a shortage of ministers as your churches do. The church plants I mentioned can be found, for instance, in New York City, Toronto, Missouri, Idaho, California and Hawaii. Just like your churches, so also ours are involved in leadership training, for instance, in India, Honduras, Costa Rica, Central and South America. Because we do not have any regional or national missionary organizations, these trainers are sent out under the auspices of local congregations.

The United Reformed Churches are in merger talks with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Some of the decisions our latest synod in Schererville (Chicago) took last year have made the desired union of our two federations more difficult. If a vote for merging were taken today, I do not believe it would receive the required two-thirds majority for ratification. This reminds us all the more that this proposed union is something that cannot be made by human beings, but needs to be received as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

We are thankful that you have recognized our churches as true churches and have offered us as sister church relationship. From our side we are not yet that far. Our latest synod decided to enter into ecclesiastical contact with you with a view to extending a sister church relationship to you some time in the future. Thus, in some ways we are already your sister while you are not yet ours. Yet, what is not yet a reality today can become one tomorrow under the blessing

of the Lord.

For the last 30 years I have followed developments in your churches. Via the Internet I daily read *Het Nederlands Daglad*. On a regular basis I also read your weekly *De Reformatie* and your monthly *Nader Bekeken*. What fascinates me in your churches is that you consider theological reflection not to be the endless repetition of old positions, but a seriously engaging the questions and challenges of your time on the basis of Scripture and confession and come to new positions if that is necessary. It warms my heart that many in your churches have taken an intentional Christ-centered turn. Christ has increasingly become the center in your theological reflection and spirituality. And this is the way it ought to be because both individually and corporately our lives are hidden together with Christ in the Father through the Holy Spirit. This means that ultimately our identity as churches lies in Him and in Him alone!

It has not gone unnoticed that your contemporary theological reflection and the changes this has brought about have led to significant tension in your churches. I noticed this tension when I read your reports "Men/Women in the Church" and "Confessional Subscription in Unity Talks with the Nederlands Gereformeerden." In my interactions with some of you during the last few days I felt the same tension.

This tension you experience in your own midst had led to concerns in the United Reformed Churches. People are concerned about what is allowed to be taught in your churches about the fourth commandment and the new way you approach marriage and divorce. People are wondering whether you will go the same way as the Christian Reformed Church when it concerns women in office. They also wonder whether your hermeneutics will end up looking the same as theirs: more attention to the writers of Scripture as human beings who had a culturally bound message that was relevant for their time than as instruments of the Holy Spirit who had the same message for the people of their day as they do for the people of today.

You began your synod with a time of communal reflection on your shared love for the Lord Jesus Christ. I thought that was an excellent beginning because if our ecclesiastical identity is ultimately found in Him than your shared love for the Lord Jesus Christ is what is going to bind you together as churches. Where that love for Christ is no longer shared, all external unity is no more than an empty shell. Thus my prayer for both you and ourselves is that the Spirit of Christ would fill us abundantly with this shared love for our Savior so that both you and we receive the love, wisdom and sensitivity we need to continue to be Christ-centered, Reformed churches in the 21st century.

Thank you. Humbly submitted,

Rev. Dick Moes - Foreign delegate

Appendix 7

Sunday

By way of appeal, the General Synod of Leusden (1999) had to judge a section of a sermon, in which was said that resting from work on a Sunday was not founded upon a command of God. The synod saw no reason to condemn this opinion. In support of this it was stated a.o. that in the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, there has always been difference of opinion on this point. From this it can be deduced that this statement in no way censures those who do want to speak of Sunday rest as a command of God.

A number of church members asked the General Synod of Zuidhorn (2002/03) for a revision of this decision. A synod committee researched the Scriptural information and the church history with regard to the Sabbath and the Sunday, and found that there was no one unequivocal conclusion to be taken on the basis of this. Therefore, the synod refused to revise the decision and called the churches not to oblige each other to rules which go beyond the accepted doctrine. The synod added, that with all difference of insight, agreement exists about the meaning of Sunday as a gift of the Lord, as the day upon which the church of Christ should come together and delight itself in God's great acts of creation and redemption. This was how the minister in question had spoken in his sermon about the Sunday: "Be thankful for the Sunday God gives you. A day which He protects from all busyness and haste. A day which we too must protect, so that the Lord has room to work in us through His Spirit."

Nevertheless, the Synod itself was not completely satisfied by this result: two not completely harmonious outlooks, while, above all, the legitimacy of one of both was contested in the churches. Therefore, she agreed to the suggestion of the Regional Synod of Holland-South, to set up a committee which should serve the churches with a document "in which a positive position with regard to the celebration of Sunday as the day of the Lord in the light of the fourth commandment would be offered" to help believers and churches in the 21st century act in an ethically sound way. To this end, amongst other things, these deputies would have to conduct 'a theological-biblical consideration' of 'a Christian lifestyle in connection with celebration and rest'. It was a broad assignment; a critical reflection of earlier synod decisions with regard to this subject was absolutely not out of the question. On the contrary, according to the synod, it would be good if the churches not only registered differences of opinion but, attempted to rise above unsolved dilemmas.

This is also how the deputies have seen their task. The intended report

appeared in the autumn of 2004 entitled *Zondag, HEERlijke dag* (*Sunday, Glorious day of the Lord*). But by then, the first secessions had already taken place. The report concluded about the statement of the Synod of Leusden, that within the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands there has always been room to think differently about the Scriptural foundation of Sunday as day of rest: "Our charcoal sketch of the Reformation history has given no reason to reject this standpoint. As far as the 'how' of the foundation of the Sunday as day of rest is concerned, there are, in any case, different ways of thinking evident, without these – up to and including the 20th century, ever leading to a breach in the unity of confession" (p. 77).

The *Call for Reformation* [see Appendix 10] of February 12th 2003 said: "In this way the practice of Sunday rest through personal interpretation comes less and less under the control of God's fourth commandment to rest on the day of the Lord and to remember His great deeds. By doing so we turn away from His service and He does not receive what is His". Is this a correct sketch of the situation? In the report *Zondag, HEERlijke dag* deputies justly claim that the Synods of Leusden and Zuidhorn stood up for Sunday rest more convincingly than the General Synod of 1927, the last synod before the Liberation of 1944 dealing with this subject (p. 80). The report also reminds us that in another appeal case the Synod of Zuidhorn, in agreement with the Regional Synod of Holland-South, corrected a decision of the classis of Rotterdam. This classis had rejected the opinion that for the New Testament church a command not to work on Sunday, could directly be derived from the text of the fourth commandment. "This opinion has never been rejected in the Reformed Churches and the classis with her rejection had unjustly limited the existing room, regarding the case in question' (Acta GS Zuidhorn, 2002, art. 60).

"It is not true, that within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands the fourth commandment has been pushed aside. I would not hesitate to call that slander. The churches have refused to restrict themselves to one interpretation of this commandment. That is different. It is not the commandment as much as the way we use it, which is the object of discussion and study", wrote Dr. H.J.C.C.J. Wilschut (*Nader Bekeken*, Oct. 2003).

In the same magazine (Nov. 2004), Dr. A.N. Hendriks pointed out that Calvin thought differently about the fourth commandment than the Westminster Confession, which sees the Christian Sunday as a continuation of the Jewish Sabbath. Via the Puritans, this standpoint has also had influence upon the celebration of Sunday in the Netherlands. Hendriks writes: "For Calvin the Sabbath was abolished, as belonging to the types and shadows of the old covenant. Nevertheless, the command of the day of rest has lasting value: it is about *spiritual* rest, that we put away our evil works and direct ourselves to God and His kingdom. The deeper meaning of this com-

mandment is that we have a certain day to hear God's Word, to break bread and to call upon God's name (...) We celebrate the Sunday, not because this is required in the fourth commandment, but simply because this is in harmony with the old Christian practice. And this practice is grounded on the fact that Sunday is the day of Christ's resurrection". Dr. Hendriks hears the echo of Calvin's teaching in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism. He draws attention to the fact that the words 'op de sabbat, dat is' are a non-Calvinist addition to the Dutch text. The original German text does not mention the Sabbath, but speaks of 'sonderlich am Feiertag', that is 'especially on the weekly free day'. A command to rest on the first day of the week, valid up until today, cannot be found in the catechism.

Prof. J. Kamphuis mentioned Luther in this connection. Luther and Calvin are not, according to NGB art. 7, the end of all argument. But, according to Prof. Kamphuis, "on 31st October, I like to remember these both reformers with a clear conscience and with gratitude, and without regretting their subsequent banishment from the church!" (*Nederlands Dagblad*, Sept. 19th 2003; English: *Lux Mundi* 22 [2003] no. 3+4, pp. 43-44). He who judges Calvin's point of view, wants to tie things up more rigidly than the accepted doctrine of the Reformed Churches. He who sees the weekly day of rest above all as a gift, does no less justice to the redemptive-historical meaning of the fourth commandment than he who still sees the day of rest as a commandment.

Rev. J.W. van der Jagt made a comparison with the doctrinal statement about the assumed regeneration in 1942. Then the synod broke with a compromise made in 1905, when two opinions about the meaning of baptism existed. "Kuyper's standpoint was declared to have binding force as the one and only biblical doctrine. No other doctrine could be taught. The peace was broken in this way." There are also two views of the fourth commandment, but Zuidhorn made no one of these binding. But now the concerned parties want to see their opinion as the only legally accepted one. "They are the ones therefore, who break the peace in the churches now (...) At that time (in 1944) the churches were freed from a yoke. Today a new yoke is laid upon the people" (*Nederlands Dagblad*, 20th Sept, the day that Rev. P. van Gurp presented an *Act of Liberation and Return* to a national meeting; English: *Lux Mundi* 22 [2003] no. 3+4, pp. 44-45).

In conclusion, another two quotations from the report *Zondag, HEERlijke dag*: "In all church debate about Sunday, about differences in emphasis, in considerations and in forms of spending time, it is especially good to realise once again, that the value and the special character of the Sunday as rest day is adhered to by a great majority of church people: the Sunday is a day of rest, dedicated to the Lord"(p. 87). "Deputies are of the opinion that everyone who seriously considers what the synods have stated, will see

how much agreement there is in our churches on the point of Sunday rest. This should lead to praise and thanksgiving rather than be a cause for church division" (p. 89).

Taken from: ***Not beyond what is written:*** *Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession? BBK: Zwolle, 2005*, 7-10

Appendix 8

Acts of the General Synode Amersfoort-Centrum 2005
of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
Chapter 3: Church Polity
Art. 57 (pp. 57-61)

Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman

9 July 2009

for

The Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
United Reformed Churches in North America

[*Translator's note:* The Dutch title, "Deputaten huwelijk en echtscheiding," could be rendered literally as "Deputies marriage and divorce," but in the interests of Anglicized euphony in an ecclesiastical context, the phrase is rendered consistently as "Committee on Marriage and Divorce."]

Committee on Marriage and Divorce 24.06.2005

Article 57

Report of the Committee on Marriage and Divorce

. . . . [The article begins by listing the 35 pieces of material received.]

Decision 1:

> to agree with the main line of the approach chosen by the committee with respect to marriage and divorce, that the churches devote every effort, arising from the overflowing grace of Christ and within the totality of Christian living, to maximal consecration to God and his will, to following Christ, and to a lifestyle that does justice to the coming kingdom.

Grounds:

1. In the context of developing this approach, the committee has raised for discussion many insights of a hermeneutical, exegetical, and practi-

cal nature that have met with both agreement and criticism among the churches. The agreement expressed in Decision 1, however, does not depend on agreement with all of these underlying insights. The general synod has in large measure received for information [heeft kennisgenomen] with appreciation the study of the committee, but views the report as the committee's own work. Acquaintance with [kennisname van] the central thrust of its reports is required in order to understand the overall scope of its approach as the background for the fundamental principles [uitgangspunten] and guidelines below.

2. The criticism (see the materials, *passim*) alleging that at several points the committee comes into conflict with Scripture and the confessions rests on a misunderstanding of its reporting. Moreover, in speaking and in writing, the committee members have made clear that they
   a. are not advocating a doctrine of continuing revelation and subjectivizing interpretation within the whole of the congregation, but envision that the application of existing revelation to concrete situations would occur not individualistically but in the context of the congregation;
   b. are not arguing, in connection with 1 Corinthians 7, from a preadopted hermeneutical insight that then dominates Scripture, but from an exegesis of Scripture itself that is honest, though open to discussion;
   c. are not substituting their emphasis on the "style of the kingdom" for an appeal to God's commandments or to specific Scripture passages, but as the context surrounding these, so that with their approach the specific passages of Scripture remain fully normative as well. Differences that surface in connection with that issue arise from differences in the exegesis of specific passages of Scripture.

Decision 2:

to discharge the Committee on Marriage and Divorce, which was appointed by the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002-2003, with thanks for the work it has performed.

Ground:

The committee received from the General Synod of Leusden in 1999 a study mandate. Central to that mandate was the question concerning the understanding of the totality of the biblical message regarding marriage and divorce. In addition, the committee was mandated to study questions concerning ecclesiastical practice, disciplinary regulations, and the ecclesiastical confirmation of a marriage after divorce. In the re-

port to the General Synod of Zuidhorn the result of this study mandate was presented. A second phase of ecclesiastical reflection took place after this synod. The committee was mandated to conduct conversations with the churches and to receive reactions to its work. The committee facilitated this process of reflection in the form of a popular version of the study report, national meetings with office-bearers, local information meetings with churches, and articles in the church press. As a result, the implementation of this initial mandate and the study mandate in terms of the process of reflection has come to an end. The responsibility for the continuation of this process in the area of advising, informing, and prevention will in the future lay with the Council of Advice.

Decision 3:

to declare that in the Reformed Churches a subsequent marriage after a divorce will ordinarily not be ecclesiastically confirmed.

Grounds:

1. Holy Scripture places all the emphasis on the indissolubility of marriage (Matt. 19.6);
2. it corresponds with the style of the kingdom, as the Lord Jesus has taught that to us, to place strong emphasis on the character of one's vow. A promise once made remains valid and continues to reverberate even after a divorce;
3. for consistories it is often impossible to evaluate a divorce situation well, certainly if (a portion of) the history occurred outside of its own congregation;
4. consistories retain their own responsibility with respect to the question whether a subsequent marriage after a divorce is acceptable and can be ecclesiastically confirmed.

Decision 4a:

to declare that whenever a member of the congregation becomes discredited as a result of his conduct in the area of marriage and divorce, the consistory is justified in supplying clarification in a public announcement to the congregation regarding its judgment concerning that conduct. This judgment shall not be given before discussing it with the party involved, and if possible, with his agreement. If that agreement is not obtained, the prior consent of the classis is required. This regulation does not interfere with the duty of the consistory to exercise discipline toward the sinner, if necessary.

Decision 4b:

to mandate the committee for Revising the Church Order to investigate whether a supplementary regulation for ecclesiastical discipline, similar to that formulated in the report of the Committee on Marriage and Divorce, can and must be included in the articles dealing with church discipline in the revised Church Order.

Grounds:

1.-7. . . . .

Decision 5:

to declare that the recommendation deserves consideration [dat het aanbeveling verdient] that each consistory implement a structured program of pre-marital catechesis, and strongly encourage its use by those who are preparing for marriage.

Grounds:

1. divorce is a serious evil, one that must be prevented as much as possible. Therefore a thorough preparation for marriage is very important;
2. preparing for marriage by way of pre-marital catechesis ought not to depend on the willingness of the prospective bridal couple; therefore it is worth emphatically recommending that this form of pre-marital preparation be strongly encouraged.

Decision 6:

to replace the foundational principles and guidelines established by the General Synod of Leusden, Acts, art. 72, Decision 1, with the foundational principles and guidelines below.

Ground:

These foundational principles and guidelines emphasize more strongly than those of the General Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996 and of General Synod of Leusden that when marital difficulties arise, the royal route of contrition, forgiveness, reconciliation, and self-denial must be traveled, as Scripture teaches us, and further, that the indissolubility of marriage must be emphasized. It is also worthy of recommendation that more attention be devoted to the prevention of broken marriages by offering a good pre-marital preparation.

Foundational principles:

1. Marriage was instituted by the Lord. This intimate bond between husband and wife may not be dissolved (Gen. 2.24; Mal. 2.14-16; Matt. 19.3-9; 1 Cor. 7.10-11).

   Divorce is a serious evil, one that must be prevented and opposed as much as possible.

   Living according to the style of the kingdom of Christ means that with all manner of marital difficulties we expend effort toward reconciliation and the restoration of the relationship.

2. If a marriage is affected as a result of sins or through the consequences of humanity's fall into sin, in following Christ people ought to strive by means of contrition, forgiveness, and reconciliation to restore the marriage bond and/or so that along the path of self-denial the marriage bond as much as possible is preserved. In that connection, however, it can become evident that acquiescence must be granted to a divorce.

3. In a case where the marriage bond is officially terminated, the style of the kingdom of Christ is most honored when the marriage is permitted to continue formally and to choose for a solution whereby the partners make and establish mutual agreements, or consent to the separation of bed and board.

4. The marital vows remain in force even in the circumstances just described, as long as both spouses are alive. Therefore a subsequent marriage after a divorce does not correspond to the style of the kingdom of Christ.

5. Ecclesiastical confirmation of a subsequent marriage is ordinarily not possible if the preceding marriage was dissolved by divorce.

Guidelines:

1. When in the marriage of church members a divorce appears imminent, the consistory shall express its pastoral care for those involved in terms of comfort, encouragement, and admonition. When on the basis of conversations with the parties involved, the consistory forms a judgment about the situation, this judgment with its grounds shall be recorded in the minutes [zal dit oordeel geargumenteerd in de notulen worden vastgelegd].

2. If the consistory needs advice—for example, if a difference of opinion

continues to exist between the consistory and the congregation members involved regarding the question whether in the light of God's Word acquiescence must be granted to the termination of the marriage and/or a subsequent marriage—then the consistory can request advice from the Council of Advice. The consistory can also request advice from the classis, according to Church Order, art. 41.

3. If the parties involved (or one of them) leave(s) for another congregation, during the period when the situation described in Foundational Principle 3 is occurring, the original consistory is to furnish the receiving consistory with a concise statement of information required for transferring pastoral care. Before the receiving consistory is informed, the brother and/or sister involved is to be informed of the content of this information.

4. If the divorce has occurred, then on the attestation it is to be stated: "this brother/sister was married. The marriage was dissolved by divorce on (date). He/she was at that time a member of the Reformed Church in (place)."

   If a consistory needs more information, particularly regarding the evaluation of a possible subsequent marriage, it shall with the knowledge of the person(s) involved consult the consistory of the church identified in the attestation.

5. Consultation shall occur between consistories dealing with the same marital break and divorce. The results of this consultation shall be formulated in writing.

   If a difference arises between the consistories involved regarding the evaluation of a marital break, and they arrive at different judgments with regard to the exercise of discipline and/or the ecclesiastical confirmation of a new marriage, advice is to be requested from either the Counsel of Advice or the classis of the church whose consistory must make a decision in the case.

6. In situations of divorce or remarriage, where rejection of admonition and hardening in sin are present, the consistory shall apply censure according to Church Order, art. 76.

   A consistory shall apply the supplemental regulation in situations that have become known to the congregation and where the delay of a public

indication can have deleterious effects upon others.

The announcement to the congregation can also occur in situations where a consistory does not keep the person(s) involved from the Lord's Supper, as well as in situations in which such barring from the Lord's Supper (sooner or later) could occur [als in situaties waarin daarvan (nu of later) wel sprake kan zijn].

7. It is worthy of recommendation that each consistory provide a course of pre-marital instruction, and that taking this instruction be strongly encouraged from those who are preparing for marriage and will eventually be requesting an ecclesiastical confirmation of their marriage.

Decision 7a:

to institute a Council of Advice . . . .

Decision 7b:

to establish the instruction below for the Council of Advice regarding marriage and divorce.

Grounds:

1.-4. . . .

Mandate for the Council for Advice regarding Marriage and Divorce

. . . .

Translator's note: There follows, on pages 61-69, a fulsome summary of the committee's presentation and the synodical discussion of the committee report, concluding with the address of the chairman to the assembly. Although left out of this translation, this material is important for learning about and evaluating the steps leading up to the decision of the general synod. It is important to keep in mind that the committee's study report *has no official standing* among the GKNv. In contrast to many North American denominations, the GKNv official positions on various matters can be derived solely from the official acts recording the synodical decisions, not from study reports.

Appendix 9

The Marriage state

The subject of divorce has been on the agenda of synods continually since the General Synod at Ommen in 1993. The reason for this is that the evil of divorce also rears its head within the churches. Church councils struggle with questions regarding the application of discipline and co-operation with second marriages for those who have been divorced. On the one hand, Christian love requires that every case be judged individually; on the other hand, it is not good when church council policy differs in similar cases. For this reason, the original emphasis in the decision-making, fell upon good agreements surrounding grounds for accepting divorce and policy for situations where discipline is necessary.

The committee appointed in 1993 published a report for the General Synod of Berkel & Rodenrijs (1996), on the basis of which a number of guidelines were formulated for the church councils (Acta, art. 47). So many suggestions for the alteration of these came to the next synod (Leusden, 1999) that it was decided to appoint a new study committee (Acta, art 72).

The report of this committee to the General Synod of Zuidhorn (2002) went in new directions as far as grounds for divorce were concerned, based on a fresh consideration of the Scriptures. Their conclusion is that the Scriptures give no grounds, but calls us to live in the style of the coming Kingdom. In this, it is not fitting that the "I do" becomes "I don't" through divorce. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul applies Jesus' teachings in a specific new situation. The church of today should do likewise "in situations in which following the general rule can lead to injustice".

The report was in agreement with one of the guidelines from Leusden (1999): serious forms of marital sin can be reason for resigning yourself to the divorce situation. Also were situations of unwillingness, powerlessness and inability expressly distinguished. In the first situation, discipline is appropriate; the other situations especially require teaching, directed at growth in the knowledge of Christ. Great concern could be read in the whole of the report: as churches we are threatening to move away from following Christ more and more.

In the discussion of this report at the synod, appreciation was expressed, but also critical questions were raised about, amongst other things: (a) the relationship between the commandments and the style of the Kingdom, and between the Old and the New Testament; (b) the possible tension between biblical teaching and application in practice; (c) the use of 1 Corinthians 7; (d) the application of discipline. This is why the committee received a follow up commission for reflection, wherein the discussions at the synod

and the reactions from the churches had to be dealt with.

In their report to the General Synod 2005, these deputies write, that the reactions from the churches are to do with the authority of God's word and the competence of the church. For this reason they give account of the basic principles of their work (slightly adapted):

(a) We want nothing else but to maintain the authority of the Scriptures. They are our point of departure. We take the norms for discussing marriage and divorce from the Word of God. The canon is closed and we do not want to add anything to it. Nevertheless we must *deduce* things from the Scriptures. We do that on all sorts of points in ethics.
(b) We do not want to present our exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7 as the only correct one, but indeed as a possible exegesis, which allows us the conclusion we have drawn. The opinion of the Synod of Leusden that there are also other serious forms of marital sin (alongside adultery and wilful desertion) because of which the church accepts divorce, is widely applied in our churches and is not dependant on agreement with the committee's exegesis.
(c) In the report to Zuidhorn, we already wrote that we may not place ourselves on a level with Paul. But we can follow the course the Lord and His apostle Paul have set, and draw conclusions for a situation which appears today and which is not mentioned or indicated in the Bible.
(d) Therefore, the conclusion that individual elders are permitted to relieve people of the rules, is erroneous; this is about the church as a whole, or, locally applied, the council of elders who take the decision there.
(e) We must all take the warning in Galatians 1:8 to heart, but we do want to emphasise that this text is about heresy, about another gospel of salvation which was being preached. In our view it is important that we have to use just the whole teaching of the Lord.
(f) There is development in Biblical teaching. Paul makes the teaching of Jesus wider and looks into situations which existed in certain churches. He applies words of Jesus and expands the teaching. And Paul addresses himself to situations which did not appear in Jesus' time on earth, and thus were not mentioned, and not indicated.
(g) We recognise that certain sayings in our first report such as "situations exist wherein Jesus' teaching must not be applied just like that" or "we can relieve someone of the rule given by Jesus" or "declare the rule derived from the teaching of Jesus, not applicable" can evoke much misunderstanding and just criticism. Therefore, they want to remove such sayings. With this way of saying things, we did not mean that we can forget what Jesus said in a specific situation - it might well sound like that. Deputies mean to say: if we are dealing with a new situation, not

mentioned in the sermon on the mount, or which did not occur during Jesus' time on earth, this requires application of the rule Jesus gave.

The considerations in the report on divorce to the Synod in 2002, are also spoken of in the *Call for Reformation* of 12 February 2003. As a symptom of decline is brought forward: "*The holiness of marriage* is under great pressure. It is worrying that divorce happens more and more within the churches, but especially also that various church councils exercise no discipline any more with regards to the sin of a divorce which opposes God's Word. This is also true of remarriage after an illegal divorce. This takes place irrespective of Christ's express command".

The concerns expressed here, were the very reason why general synods took the trouble to involve themselves so deeply in this subject. In this, we leave the question of whether or not the judgement concerning the attitude of 'various church councils', is right; this observation has not been supported by facts. Should it be true, then the guidelines of 1996 and the ongoing reflection since 1999, should oppose this. It cannot be a legitimate reason for splitting the church then.

According to Rev. P. van Gurp in his speech at the national meeting where he presented an *Act of Liberation*, it is Scripture criticism gaining more and more ground which lay at the bottom of the 'direction of the church with regard to divorce and remarriage' (*Reformanda*, 24th Sept. 2003). Of this the *Act of Liberation* in question states: "With regard to the application of the seventh commandment, the last synod did point to maintaining God's commandment, but immediately took away the radicality of this by calling on the hardness of heart, the capacity of those married, the fairness with regard to the concrete situation, the limitations of the seventh commandment in relation to the style of the kingdom of heaven and the feeling of the congregation'. The Act diagnoses here contravention of Matthew 19 : 9 and Lord's Day 41 and 44 of the Heidelburg Catechism.

What did the report say about hardness of heart? In paragraph 7.4.3 where deputies explain how they approach the problem of divorce, we read under point 3b: "In order to enter the kingdom, we must learn on the basis of Jesus' radical salvation in every area of our lives, to put sin away (…) Up until Jesus came, the emphasis lay on limiting and restricting sin and on the hardness of heart. Then things change in God's work: in following Christ, there may be no areas in our lives where we leave sin behind". Later, in a paragraph under the heading 'According to the measure of faith', the committee states "that the hardness of heart of which Jesus speaks as characteristic under the Old Covenant (…) has not completely disappeared under the New Covenant". On the basis of their explanation of 1 Corinthians 7:10f they conclude that it is not the intention that we refuse to take account of

this hardness of the heart in future. If it is impossible to carry on in a marriage, Paul points to the way of separation and remaining single. "It seems that we need to differentiate between sins which come forth from weak faith and remaining hardness of heart, and sins which betray an attitude of disobedience towards God".

These citations also give an impression of how deputies deal with concepts such as capacity and fairness. The words 'limitations of the seventh commandment' do not appear in the report. He who easily turns to Matthew 19 : 9 as proof text for his criticism, must also give account of the comprehensive discussion of this passage of Scripture in paragraph 7.3.3 of the report. The report pleads absolutely for the standard practice that solemnisation of a second marriage after divorce will be refused.

We agree with Dr. Wilschut who wrote: "It is not true that in church practice surrounding divorce problems it is allowed to disregard the seventh commandment. Whatever urgent questions can be raised of the report presented to the Synod of Zuidhorn regarding divorce, the practice will probably be stricter than it often is now" (*Nader Bekeken,* Oct. 2003).

Taken from: ***Not beyond what is written:*** *Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession? BBK: Zwolle, 2005*, 11-14.

Appendix 10

Do not go beyond what is written

In 2004, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated; GKv) celebrated that the Liberation took place sixty years ago. On August 11th 1944, the *Act of Liberation and Return* was publicly presented. Shortly after, on Sunday 20th August, Prof. K. Schilder, who had been deposed from office by the General Synod on the 3rd August, preached in Bergschenhoek, for the first time in a church which had liberated itself from the decisions of the synod (binding to new doctrinal statements, a.o. concerning covenant and baptism). He preached there about 1 Corinthians 4 : 6-7: "I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for you brethren, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying 'Do not go beyond what is written'. Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (NIV).

In this sermon Schilder said: "In my preaching, in my house visits, in my church discipline, I do not bind myself to statements from you [the synod], which have not been clearly taken from the Scriptures. I say: No, I do not bind myself to a statement, for which you do not have the courage to say: see, it is stated there and there in the written Word, and thus, it is true. I bind myself to the Forms of Unity, which originate from the Bible, and the rest I throw overboard".

That same Bergschenhoek was approximately sixty years later, the first place where a group of church members once again liberated themselves from synod decisions of which they disapproved. Throughout the whole country, about a thousand souls were to follow them, amongst whom one (retired) minister. In the meantime, eight or nine churches have been established. In five other places attempts are being made to establish new churches.

What happened here? Had a general synod again proclaimed certain opinions as binding? Were ministers suspended for turning down these statements, or candidates turned away from the pulpit?

Call for Reformation

The General Synod of Zuidhorn was closed on January 24th 2003. Not even three weeks later, on February 12th, an advertisement in the *Nederlands Dagblad* (*Netherlands Daily*) appeared containing a *Call for Reformation*, signed by Dr. P. van Gurp and 39 others. They pointed to eight areas of decline, distortion and degeneration in the Reformed Churches (liberated): keeping of the fourth commandment; sacredness of marriage; confession with regard

to the church; inter church co-operation; hymns from the *Liedboek voor de kerken* (*Hymnbook for the churches*); self-opinionated creativity in the liturgy; new ways of preaching; ongoing liberal criticism of the Bible.

The General Synod of Zuidhorn was blamed for going along with this and having legitimised these developments. As proof, the finger was pointed at twelve of this synod's decisions. We note here that nothing about the confession of the church, about new ways of preaching or about Scripture criticism was presented to this synod.

In the magazine *Reformanda* dated 26th February 2003, it was explained that this call was not meant to be a call for secession, but to repentance. The most issues mentioned had been discussed at Zuidhorn via a request for revision of decisions taken at the previous synod (Leusden 1999). Because Zuidhorn confirmed these decisions, the end of the church procedures had been reached. Church members were called upon to bring this *Call for Reformation* before their church councils. Should the church councils reject the challenged synod decisions on the grounds of article 31 of the Church Order, the churches could yet be saved. That this would mean a split with church councils who did support these decisions, was not mentioned. No single church council answered to this call. A few churches did decide to bring their objections before the next synod (2005).

A call to secession still followed in the summer, labelled as a 'new liberation': "across the whole breadth of the church there is a refusal to reject all that opposes the pure Word of God. For this reason we can do no other than conclude all the more, that the Reformed Churches can no longer be seen as true church. On the contrary – they have degenerated into a branch church, a pluralistic church, where truth and lies have equal rights and can be propagated together" (*Reformanda*, 16 July 2003). At a national meeting of concerned people on 20th September 2003, Rev. P. van Gurp presented an *Act of Liberation and Return* (published in *Reformanda*, 24 Sept. 2003).

Those concerned indicated hereby, that as they saw it, the views as expressed in the synod decisions mentioned, cannot be tolerated within a reformed church. Conversely, church meetings within the Reformed Churches have never said this about the opinions of the concerned parties. Within the boundary of obedience to Scripture and Confession, differences of insight can exist. Should this be the case, the rule of article 31 Church Order is valid that the conclusion of a church meeting reached via a majority of votes, will be accepted as binding.

We do not want to suggest that the decisions of the General Synod of Zuidhorn are above criticism on all points. What we do hope to make clear is that there has been no suggestion of deviation from the Scriptures and Confession, and that for this reason, objections to these decisions can constitute no grounds to split the church.

Taken from: ***Not beyond what is written:*** *Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession? BBK: Zwolle, 2005*, 4-6

Appendix 11

Evaluation

Do the statements made by the most recent synods of the Reformed Churches (liberated) differ on some points from opinions which were usual within these churches? It cannot be denied. But this is not new in the history of the Reformed Churches. In a reaction to the *Call for Reformation*, Prof. Dr. B. Kamphuis reminded us of the thirties of the twentieth century, when Prof. Dr. K. Schilder in Kampen, opposed current opinions. 'Reformation' means that you dare to be critical of your own past. "Characteristic of the reform movement of that time was that they had no untouchables. Reformed doctrine and preaching was considered anew, in obedience to the Bible and in faithfulness to the Confession" (*Nederlands Dagblad*, 20th Febr. 2003).

Do the statements made by the most recent synods deviate from the Holy Scriptures and the Forms of Unity founded on these? The C*all for Reformation* of 12th February 2003 was aimed at "repentance from the decisions of synod which are conflicting with God's Word and the confession, by putting deviations away so that the churches remain pillar and foundation of the truth or become that once more" (*Reformanda*, 26th February 2003). But such conflict has been demonstrated by no-one. There is no decision or publication in which a synod, a committee or an officer has freed himself from the witness of Scripture or from the confession of the church. If somebody thinks that this is actually happening, he is obliged to prove this carefully. As far as any attempt has been made to do so, the respective synods have disproved this with arguments. And if there is no such conflict to be seen, article 31 of the Church Order is then valid, a central element in the Liberation of sixty years ago: "whatever may be agreed upon by the majority of votes, shall be accepted as settled and binding".

He who calls for people to leave the church, without the commitment to Scripture or confession being at issue, breaks the catholic unity of the church. According to Prof. J. Kamphuis, the secessions in 2003 do not come into the same category as the Liberation in 1944: In the Liberation of 1944 an obligatory commitment to doctrinal statements was rejected, which went further than the Scriptures and our mutual confessions. "We did not refuse to live together with brothers who were in various respects 'Kuyperian' in their thinking". K. Schilder "was a formidable critic of opinions and standpoints offered by A. Kuyper and his pupils (…) But one thing he never did. In these discussions he never showed his fellow churchmen the door. (...) He also had his faults, but making the church a club of people who all think the same, was not one of them." Prof. Kamphuis calls "the use of the term 'liberation' misleading for a case which is the very opposite of that of '1944'. At that

time it was *against* binding conscience above the Scripture, and also above the confession. Now they pursue a binding of conscience which has kinship with a far reaching puritanism, and which also binds the church to more than what Scripture and confession bind us to. In so doing they distance us from our reformed past and from the unity given by Christ' (*Nederlands Dagblad*, 19th Sept. 2003; English: *Lux Mundi* 22 [2003] no. 3+4, pp. 43-44).

Drs. G.J. van Middelkoop, editor of *De Reformatie*, recognised that the Reformed Churches (liberated) have their weaknesses, but that does not mean that he is in agreement with the tenor and conclusions of the *Call for Reformation.* "In the form for the Lord's Supper we say: 'We are aware of our many sins and shortcomings. We do not have a perfect faith and we do not serve God with as much diligence as we are obliged to. Daily we have to fight against the weakness of our faith and the evil desires of our flesh. Yet, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we are heartily sorry for these shortcomings, and desire to fight against our unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God." If this is true, and we can address each other on this point, nobody can say that at rock bottom, we are being driven by a wrong spirit which leads us in disobedience to go our own way. I agree that our life with the Lord today is threatened and affected in all sorts of ways, and that we have reason for consideration and self correction, and have to take time to think and sharpen our mind. But all our contrariness and clouded minds do not take away that God has started a good work in us and will carry on with that, today as well. Seeing this in our own lives should keep us from a cold and distanced way of speaking about our brothers and sisters in the church, and also from an unreserved dramatisation in portrayals of and qualifications of the real way things are" (*De Reformatie*, 1st March 2003).

Prof. Dr. B. Kamphuis ranked the *Call for Reformation* with an undercurrent of radicalism which has always been present in the Reformed Churches: "This radical undercurrent has, in my view, done much harm to our churches. Of course they were often right, I would be the last to deny it. It is characteristic of radicalism: they live on their right. But their wrong is greater. They go on to draw unacceptable consequences. They disturb the peace to which Christ has called us. They are responsible for presenting a caricatured image of our churches to those outside" (*De Reformatie*, 29th March 2003).

In 2004, the Reformed Churches (liberated) did not only celebrate a 60 years of Liberation, but also the 150 years existence of their Theological University, and the birth, 150 years ago, of one of their greatest theologians, Herman Bavinck. On the occasion of this last commemoration, Prof. B. Kamphuis wrote, that one of the things for which we can remember Bavinck is: "Being reformed, holding on to the confession, does not mean conservatism but it helps you to face your own time and move forward (...) To stay

only with that which is old, repeating what was once said, does not help us further" (*Nederlands Dagblad*, 23rd Oct. 2004; English: *Lux Mundi* 23 [2004] no. 3-4, pp. 52-53).

It is good to pay attention to this in current discussions. Kamphuis: "Of course you do not have to agree with everything that is asserted today, and of course there is more than enough reason to warn about unripe experiments, but the least you can expect is an understanding of the problems which are there and an attempt to look for solutions."

Bavinck was deeply convinced of the catholic character of the reformed faith: "being Reformed is being Christian. Being a Reformed church is being a Christian church. If you shut yourself away, convinced of your own right, and you shut yourself away from others, you fail to recognise the catholicity of the church." Prof. Kamphuis then refers to Bavinck's speech *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (1888, 1968[2]; *The Catholicity of Christendom and Church*), in which he warned against glorifying your own circles: "that dividing the church is a sin, is recognised by hardly anyone. People leave one church as easily as they join another". Prof. B. Kamphuis ends his article thus: "We would do well also to listen to Bavinck on this point and learn, what it means to stay reformed".

It causes deep grief, it calls for humiliation before the Lord and shame before the world outside, that we, in the (liberated) Reformed Churches, did not manage to be and to stay reformed in such a way. We agree with what Dr. Wilschut wrote: "Our problems expose the churches to the derision of many outside. It gives reason to scorn about 'those Liberated people' who experience yet another church split, who do not know how to keep the peace. This scorn deeply touches the Lord of the church. Do we not confess that we are his house? Our quarrelling can put obstacles in the way of the good news, for which we must clear the way (...) *Kyrie eleison*, Lord, have mercy on us!'

Taken from: ***Not beyond what is written:*** *Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession? BBK: Zwolle, 2005*, 22-25.

Appendix 12

REFORMED CHURCH IN THE CONGO (D.R): BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

Here is briefly what we believe as a Reformed Church:

1. THE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

We believe and teach that the Bible is the Word of God that 'makes God 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' (cf. Belgic Confession, article 2)

In relation with our life and faith 'we believe that these Holy Scriptures are the foundation of our faith and contains the will of God and everything men must believe in order to be saved. No human writings are of equal value with the divine scripture. (Belgica art. 2-7)

2. OUR CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

The Confessions of the Reformed Church in the Congo are the following:

a. The Gallicana called Confession of Rochelle (teach the same as the Belgica)
b. The Heidelberg Catechism
c. The Canon of Dort

During our public services we confess the Apostles'creed. We also teach the content of the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds.

The Confessions and Creeds are received as an authoritative expression of the truth taught in the Holy Scripture and are acknowledged to be the subordinate standards of doctrine in the Reformed Church in The Congo.

3. THE FORMULA OF SUBSCRIPTION TO THE CONFESSIONS

The following formula is signed by every preaching elder; pastors and licentiate, a member who has completed a theological training and authorized to preach the Gospel. It should be read aloud before the classis or before the congregation:

I hereby testify that I honestly and truly accept the doctrine of the

Heidelberg Catechism; the Confession of Rochelle, and the Canons of Dort as in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, and promise faithfully to preach and defend the same. I also declare and promise that I will carefully observe all the ordinances in accordance with the Word of God which now are, or may hereafter be enacted by the authorities of the Church, and I will cheerfully submit to all the admonitions and decisions of these authorities so long as I remain in connection with the Reformed Church in the Congo.

'In testimony whereof I hereunto subscribe my name and the date'

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

4. SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN OUR FEDERATION'S HISTORY, ON ETHICAL ISSUES

Till now, we do not face problems of homosexuality, euthanasia……but we time to time have to struggle against people who do not accept the authority of the church assemblies; be it the church council; the classis or the synod. Some brothers do not accept the mandate or elders; deacons; interim committees, the 'chief mentality' is a challenge for the reformed church government. This is a problem in the church as well as in the civil society: everybody wants to reign forever.

5. CHURCH ORDER AND POLITY

The church council is the first judicatory that has the authority to require obedience to the law of Christ and His Church and to discipline the disobedient.

Cases over which a lower judicatory can not solve should be brought before a higher judicatory only by reference, complaint or appeal. Those high judicatories are classis and synods (regional or national). We are ruled by the presbyterial Church government.

6. LITURGY AND LITUGICAL FORMS

Worship is homage, service and reverence to God. We believe the reformed method of worship should include readiness of our hearts; prayer, singing

psalms and hymns, scripture reading, preaching of God's word, devotion, illumination, confession of sins, thanksgiving; and benediction (Nehemiah 9:1-5, Acts 2:42-7).

In every local congregation of the Reformed Church in the Congo the essential parts of the public worship are: a call to worship, salutation, invocation, singing; prayer, reading of the Word, preaching a sermon, giving the offerings, the benediction and the doxology These elements of worship as well as all liturgical forms are recommended by the general synod and shall be used in the regular Lord's Day Service.

Some days appointed by ecclesiastical or civil authority may be respected and observed by congregations by attending public worship: Christmas, Good Friday; Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Independence Day……

7. PREACHING, SACRAMENTS AND DISCIPLINE

The Reformed Church in the Congo believes that the sacraments instituted by Christ are two: the holy baptism and the Lord's Supper. Covenant children are received into the church by baptism. The sacrament of the Lord's Super is observed publicly in every congregation at least four times a year; the celebration is conducted according to the established order of the Reformed Church in the Congo. The lack of ministers in each congregation is still a problem for the regular administration of the sacraments.

In our Reformed Church in the Congo, Christian discipline is the exercise of that authority and the application of those laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has established in his church to preserve the purity and honour, and to promote the spiritual welfare of its members. Discipline is exercised in the form of admonition, censure, erasure of name, suspension, deposition, excommunication and restoration.

The Reformed Church in the Congo claims that the good preaching of the Gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments and the practice of the spiritual discipline are the three signs of a true church.

8. THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR MINISTERS AND INFORMATIONS REGARDING OUR CURRENT ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Let us begin with the conclusion that we have a lack of trained ministers. Only 35 pastors work for 250 congregations. Our only school of theology was closed last year and brothers from the Netherlands who were funding the work stopped and went back home. The need of a good seminary to train more people is the main reason we called you to help us in the process of

building a strong reformed church in francophone Africa.
Our ministers work without 'salaries' from their local churches because of poverty among our people and church members.

Our current Sister churches are:

- The Reformed Church in the United States
- The Reformed Church in the Netherlands (liberated)
- The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA)

If more information are needed, be free to ask it to our General Secretary the Rev Abel Ntita Tshisungu whose email address is abelntita@yahoo.fr

Yours in Christ,
President:
Rev. Kabongo Kalala Malebongo
Secretary:
Rev. Abel Ntita Tshisungu

Appendix 13

REFORMED IDENTITY IN MIDDLE AND WEST AFRICA

By Rev. K.M. KABONGO

The privilege I felt when invited to this international conference is tremendously great. The Reformed Confessing Church in the Congo D.R, (*Eglise Reformee Confessante au Congo*), ERCC, my church, feels honoured by the GKSA conference organizers.

The chosen topic makes the African situation be known to the large family of Reformed churches worldwide. 'Reformed Identity in Middle and West Africa' sets out two strong poles on which our discussion will focus. The first pole deals with the identity of Reformed churches with all its derivative sub-points. The second standpoint is the field where the first pole operates. This field is Africa in its central and western parts. Our choice for Middle and West Africa is linked to the common genesis of the Reformed churches in countries such as D.R. Congo (Middle Africa); Benin Republic, and Togo Republic in the Western Africa. All of them are the result of the mission Radio broadcasting programmes of 'Perspectives Reformees' by the late Rev A.R Kayayan. He put ERCC in contact with GKv, RCUS and GKSA.

We will discuss first the area of operation (Africa); and then come back to the operation itself. A short conclusion ends this paper.

1. Africa : Middle and West

The subdivision of the African continent in southern, Northern, Eastern, Western and Central Africa is simply conventional and arbitrary. Most of Africans believe that Africa is one large village from cape to Cairo. Yet, a careful look at this continent shows that this subdivision is meaningful.

It's arbitrary because whole Africa is burning in the same way as one village. It is a sorrowful village where inhabitants are more capable giants who set fire, but very unable to quench it and solve their own problems. Africa is a zone of various turmoil : wars in Middle Africa; Cholera in Zimbabwe, Ebola bloody fever in (Mweka/ Kasaï), D.R. Congo, military power takeover in Guinea Conakry three weeks back, AIDS, killing, pirates in Eden Gulf, rapes, hatred, poverty….

The subdivision is meaningful because some corners of Africa get near the stability needed for a country. All Africa is affected but not in the same way, at the same time, and at the same degree of deterioration. Middle

Africa is being the most part of the continent that is in a terrible unrest for decades. It's the region of bombs, guns, gunpowder, orphans, looting of natural resources, and genocide as in Rwanda in 1994.

While I was writing this paper, it was reported that some 400 people were massacred by the LRA (Uganda rebels operating in Uganda, Sudan and DR Congo while they were being attacked by joint military forces from Sudan, Uganda and DR Congo) in farija, Dungu and Duruma villages in North-East regions of Congo DR. We won't forget General Laurent Nkunda's rebellion in North Kivu, DR Congo. West Africa encounters difficult with its security at the borders, drugs circulation, Islamic attacks in some countries, military coup d'etat, strong belief in ancestors, the case of Voodoo in Benin etc. This brief description gives a clear picture of the terrain where Reformed identity is proclaimed and is being engraved into the desperate people. Hence, Reformed identity is like a spotlight shining in a thick dark hole of Middle and West Africa.

2. Reformed Identity

This has come out with the great turn up in the history of the European Christianity in the XVI th century. It is the result of the church reformation. This reformation calls the people of God to the radical return to the whole Scripture alone as the Word of God. And the Word of God stands as the source of this identity. From the Word of God, Reformed Churches dug out the "Solas" known as follows:

a. *Sola Scriptura*: the scripture alone is the rule for our faith and life
b. *Sola Deo*: God alone is the creator of everything visible and invisible. He is a Triune God.
c. *Sola Gracia*: by the God's Grace alone we have become his people in Christ
d. *Sola Christus*: Christ alone is our Lord and Saviour
e. *Sola Fide*: it's through faith alone in Christ that the elected people are saved by God's Grace. Being faithful to the Word of God, our reformed fathers explained the biblical doctrine, and defended it where necessary. In so doing they formulated the Reformed Confessions that remain faithful to the Word of God and to the ecumenical Creeds.

The Reformed Confessing Church in Congo and Benin recognizes all the Reformed confessions; but adopted these ones the Heidelberg catechism, the Canons of Dordt, the French confession (Gallicana).The ecumenical credos are also accepted in both Reformed Church in Congo D.R and the Reformed Confessing Church in Benin. Those Credos are: Apostles' Creed,

Nicaea Creed and the Athanasius' Creed. We accept them as true interpretation of the Word of God.

The Reformed Identity emphasizes both the doctrinal side and the practical life side. Practically the churches are governed in a Presbyterian way. The presbyteroi (church elders) rule the local church, and decisions are taken in church assemblies. Church decisions are taken by elders, not by an individual (Episcopal church government). The Presbyterial government encounters serious difficulties in a dictatorship state. A dictator leader will organize every thing in the country according to his made principles but not with rules made by an elected body. Monsma (2006:7) writes it clearly:

"Another problem many southern world nations face is that they are ruled by dictators. Dictators are men (seldom women) who have gained control of the government and rule the entire nation by laws and policies they have made up, not by the laws made by an assembly of representatives, they often inflict terrible punishments on whose who oppose them or question what they are doing, and give underserved advantages to their close friends who support them".

Where dictators rule, they want churches to be fashioned on the government model. In DR Congo during the late president Mobutu's reign churches were organized in such a way that there be a leader named 'Representant legal' (legal representative) leading a denomination. Many denominations of protestant background were encouraged to be in an organization as the "Eglise du Christ au Congo" (the church of Christ in the Congo DR)

This body was ruled by a president who could be honoured with national dignity medal and given privilege like a government official during ZaÏre time. With that position and privilege one forgets a prophetic role of a pastor. He often echoes the dictator's thoughts. This is not a thing of old in my country among some denomination leadership.

Besides the Confessions, some apologetic declarations are made by Synods; and also some standpoints papers are put forward on current issues that may provoke misunderstanding in the church. Some examples are the Kairos document, Belhar Confession, Road to Damascus, and the RCUS Six Day of Creation etc. The Reformed identity does not close door to the doctrinal points. It gives the principle 'Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda' to mean the reformed church must always keep being reformed.

The reformed identity is carried worldwide by powerful missionaries to the mission fields. It is broadcasted by mission oriented Radio broadcasting programmes, T.V set, and Internet. The redemptive message of God's grace through faith in Christ is taught, and church organization explained, applied and encouraged around the world.

The reformed identity is a wonderful tie among churches of reformed persuasion worldwide. Middle and West Africa make use of the Reformed

identity through the proclamation of the Word of God by Reformed and Presbyterian Churches that are still faithful to the Reformed tradition of the XVI th century.

3. Reformed Identity in Middle and West Africa

The permanent question is how does the reformed identity transform the societies?

The churches of Christ being the salt and the light of the world (Mat.5:13 –16) changes nations, keeps the world from rotting, purify the culture and illuminate people through the Word of God and the secret action of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God influences the socio – economic spheres of life. Middle Africa is not yet totally under the impact of the Word of Truth as interpreted by the Reformed Presbyterian Theology. If they were, they would have been influenced by the Calvinistic worldview in politics, economy, art, sciences and world. The Calvinistic system of ruling the cities and churches by chosen people is still a bitter pill to swallow in Middle and West Africa. Congratulations to the Ghana Republic with its population for their recent presidential election and for their choice. In many African countries, if election is organized, it is undemocratically conducted. If undemocratically conducted, its result is bitterly contested; and this brings to the nation bloodshed. Even if the election is transparent and democratic, because there is no spirit of trust among the people there come protestation and killings. The example of Kenya and Congo D.R post-election trouble can clarify our minds. The culture of one man/Party (monolithic) rule is in use in both political sphere of life and in the churches. We wouldn't make a co-relation between the political leaders' rule with their faith background. We can simply state that most of the D.R Congo political leaders are from the Roman Catholic Seminaries. The emerging ecclesiastic force in some of African countries is Pentecostal/charismatic members. Their theology tends to be a-political or of the status quo basis. This kind of standpoint by the church in Africa will bring the future of the nations into a ruin. We believe that with the Reformed identity, doctrinal teaching and the church government policy, Africa can hope for a better near future.

Reformed identity proclaims the biblical plain truth that shapes people's political and economic leaders. In economy, reformed faith urges people to work with a clear work ethics based on cultural mandate. People have to work the garden and take care of it (Gen. 2:15) the church has to teach people to work with the fear of the Lord in all the spheres of life and in all kind of works: from the head of the state to the simple gardener. Every work must be done to enhance the economy and politics of the country. The government must organize all kind of jobs with sufficient wages so that ca-

pable people can work in appropriate domain. Such a distribution of capable people in job opportunities will prevent people from concentrating in one or some few jobs while others are neglected. How can the reformed tradition be proclaimed in a war, post-conflict / war situation? While I am writing this paper more than four hundred people are massacred by LRA Rebels in DR Congo as mentioned earlier. How can the Reformed identity be of help in the central Africa conflict contexts, in the military coup d'etat situation and also in the purely strong animist society?

4. Modern Time Threats to Reformed Identity in Africa.

In the global world, the threats to Reformed identity are numerous. The threats in Europe, America or Asia are communicated to Africa in various ways: Radio broadcasting; TV set internet, books or visitors. The negative effects of science towards religion and Churches are felt in Africa as well as in the rest of the world. Africa has among others the following hindrances to the advancement of the Reformed identity: scientific hindrances, cultural obstruction (African versus European tradition), ecclesiastical/religious hindrances (worship, homiletics); and economic reasons.

4.1. Scientific Hindrances

Besides the well known negative side of science and technology on the churches in denying the truth of faith and transmitting amoral post modern practices, they bring around the world bad misleading 'preaching' based on the prosperity (without jobs) theology, miraculous healing (excluding medical treatment) and exorcism ministry (focused on witchcraft leading thousand children into streets) that minimize the Word of God and the salvation by grace of God in Christ.

In the war and post–war environment or in the poverty context people adhere to such teachings to earn better life here and now. Man centred theology replaces God centred proclamation that points straight to the Saviour, Jesus Christ

4.2. Cultural Obstruction

Culture is a nice gift from God, but it's worth noticing that it was affected by the fall. Therefore people's culture needs purification by the blood of Christ.

Many Christian missions in the word failed, or have negligible results because of "cultural-ism" (own culture centred mind). Culture is a double edged sword. It helps if we use it in a responsible fashion. It gives a right way to communicate the Gospel, but it can obstruct this proclamation if

the Gospel message becomes secondary duty. While the transmission the own culture is primary. I remember centuries back Rudyard Kipling's 'White Man's burden' to civilize the world! Is that valid in our mission involvement to this day?

Many Christian missionaries around the word encountered obstacles in the mission work because of cultural differences and clash that results from that contact. The cultural basis is sometimes named as 'missionary philosophy or policy'! Whenever this cultural policy prevails on the biblical principles, the reaction from the local church leaders or local government officials always is to terminate the mission work. The reason is that every nation loves his culture and respects it. If one nation wants to under mind other people's culture there comes a fight. The local church members tend to promote their principles and situation, too. And if the prevailed principles are the basis of the local people's culture, there is a kind of syncretism. In West Africa, we find that even Christian scholars still believe in animism propagated in Voodou. They believe that missionaries fail in their mission in Africa because they neglect the place of the ancestors in Christianity. Such conception is also found in other parts of Africa and of the world where people stick firmly to their culture.

The Bible is often opposite to our culture. It comes in our culture to correct it in the way the creator God wants it to be in Christ. The conflict resulting from a clash between Western culture veiled by Christian message and Southern world culture, often stops the mission work. Therefore it obstructs the Reformed identity in that region of the word. Our culture must be subordinated to the Word of God and its redemptive message.

4.3. Ecclesiastical Obstruction

The differences in Reformed Church family hinder the reformed identity. We mentioned some theologies that tend to fight poverty, sickness, joblessness, celibacy, human sterility etc. that create a gap between the churches insisting on the redemptive message and those standing at the prosperity side. But among the reformed family of churches differences happen too. Besides the doctrinal issues on women ministry, justification by faith or and work, marriage vows, there is a difference on what to sing in worship service and how to sing it. Naylor (in Lux Mundi, September 2008. p.71) states clearly:

"There is no unity on this question among the reformed churches. On one hand, for example, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America states, 'the book of psalms, consisting of inspired psalms, hymns and songs, is the divinely authorized manual of praise. The use of other songs in worship is not authorized in the scriptures' (constitution, A– 63).On the other hand the fourteenth general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian

Church, in 1947, considered a report by John Murray and William Young advocating exclusive psalmody, and rejected it. The OPC sings hymns and psalms. Notice that the difference is not over whether we sing Psalms: we all do. It is over whether we sing Psalms only … third; the issue divides believers".

If we are divided on issues as must we use drums, pianos or keyboards, dance, clap hands or not in worship service; it can weaken our Reformed identity towards those from outside the Reformed circle.

Appendix 14

GEREJA-GEREJA REFORMASI CALVINIS (- NTT)
Akta Notarsi N0: 2
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Deputy for Contact with Churches Abroad
Rev. Yonson G. Dethan
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Noelbaki Kupang Tengah -NTT
Indonesia 85361

February 26, 2008

Dear Brother Moes,

Your welcome brother. I am glad to hear from you. I have not met you personally but I have read so many your articles etc. Your name seems to be quite a popular for us.

On behalf of our federation NTT, we would like that thank you all for your willingness to begin an official corresponding with us. We are so happy to hear this. It is also nice to know you as the new secretary of the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad.

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Yonson Gibeon Dethan. I was born in KupangWest Timor, Indonesia on the 4th of October 1969. I have 11 brothers and sisters. My Father name is Soleman Dehtan and he was one of the ministers in our federation. My wife is a Canadian name Mary-Lynn Dethan nee De Beor. Her parents are from Smithville Ontario originally fron Holland. We have 4 children: Becky 7 years old, Dawid 5 years old, Victor 3 years old and Berto 1.5 years old. We are all living in Kupang West Timor.Any way know about our federation.

Now let me answer your CECCA questions.

The authority and sufficiency of Scripture creeds and confessions
The basis of the GGRC is the infallibly inspired Word of God (The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament) as interpreted in the Historic Reformed

faith which is set forth in the Three Forms of Unity, namely, the Heidelberg Catechism 1563, the Belgic Confession 1561, the Canons of Dort 1618-19 and also included the three ecumenical Creeds, the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. All office bearers in our Churches have given a written promise that they will not teach anything that goes against this basis.

Church order and polity
The GGRC NTT Adopted The Church Order of Dort of 1618-1619. Our church order is just the like the church or of Liberated Reformed church in the Nederlands, the Canadian Reformed Churches and the FRCA in Western Australia. Our church decisions that are taken by the majority are accepted as settled and binding, unless they are proven to be in conflict with the Word of God and the Church Order.

Theological education for ministers.
We do not have our own theological College thus our churches sent our theological students to sdudy in Refomerd School in Sumba who are supported by the Liberated Reforemd Churches in Holland and the FRCA in Australia. Rev. Yonson Dethan and Rev. Edwer Dethan were trained in Sumba and then pursue their study in the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton. Some of our students now are studying in the Theological College in Kupang that being supported by the Canadian Reformed Chruches (under Rev. Edwer Dethan).

We do have cooperation with the work of COL and already being able established a Senior Theological College in order to prepare future ministers and religion teachers. We started it just this year and when we opened it we got more the 100 students came to registered. This theological College in a high school level. This is totally different and totally new institution from what my Brother Edwer is doing. I am not involve much in that theological School. His and the theological School of GGRI in Sumba are university level, while our is high school level. So ours is actually a theological high school for grade (10-12). Thus one they finished/ graduate from this SMTK, they can pursue their studies to either Edwer Theological School or the theological School in Sumba running by GGRI or to other universities in Indonesia.

The aims of this Senior Theological College are :

1. To help preparing qualified minister and teachers in the church both GGRC and GGRI. If there is any student who likes to be a Reformed minister or Reformed religion teacher then this schooling will help much better on theological teaching. Since in here we are allow to give them all kind of basic reformed / theological teaching such as dogmatic,

symbolic, church history, ethics, homiletic, exegesis etc. etc., including Greek and Hebrew and also provide some time for them to do their practicum time in our schools as well as churches to help the teachers in the school as well as ministers and elders in the local churches. So you can see how much reformed /theological knowledge they have compared to the students who graduate from the normal /general high school / trade school.

2. To help providing qualified elders and deacons of GGRC and GGRI. If the students do not want to be minister or religion teacher through this SMTK they are being prepared to be future qualified elders and deacons if they were elected to be elders of deacons in both GGRC and GGRI.
3. To help preparing qualified member of churches both in GGRI and GGRC. So, it is not only for future ministers, missionary, teachers, elders and deacons but this SMTK will be good institution to prepared qualified members of churches of GGRI and GGRC. If these students do not want to be a minister or missionary or religion teacher, or not being elected to be elders or deacons, they can still be a great blessing for the GGRI /GGRC churches as members or the church.
4. This STMK is will a great institution for both Edwer's Theological School that is sponsored by Smithville as well the Theological School in Sumba of GGRI that is sponsored by both FRCA and Liberated Church in Holland. Thus once these students graduate from this SMTK they can go to both Theological School. They can just choose from this Theological School. Thus this is institution does not only help the both GGRI / GGRC but also help support both the Theological Schools that set up by the brothers and sisters from Smithville and the brothers and sisters from FRCA and Liberated Church of Holland.
5. To help providing future qualified community leaders such as head of village, head of tribe, head of district, major, member of parliament (MP), governor, judge, professor etc. We never know what the Lord is planning for their future but if there is any of them become community leaders then at least they already have some solid reformed teaching in them via this SMTK.
6. To help providing future qualified University students.
7. To help providing qualified community where ever they are. We hope that after graduating from this SMTK they can apply their reformed knowledge to their community as well. Thus we hope that they still can become reformed witness to others.
8. For Mission and Evangelization. We are not only receiving students from GGRC / GGRI but also from other federation to be trained in the Reformed School. Thus we hope to train kids from other churches or denomination to know and grow in reformed teaching since the govern-

ment allows our school to do so :). Via these students, we hope that the can bring our reformed teaching to their churches or organization of whatever community and institution they work or live.

9. Via this institution we hope that the cooperation between GGRC, GGRI as well as Theological Schools both from Smithville and FRCA / Holland will grow and help us working together and be united as churches.
10. Via this SMTK we hope to be one reformed "light house" in both NTT (Kupang) and in Indonesia the biggest Muslim country in the World.

Formula of subscription to the confessions

We, the undersigned Ministers, Elders, Deacons, and Office-bearers of the GGRC do hereby, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that the whole system of doctrine as taught in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort (The Three Forms of Unity), together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine, made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-1619 does fully agree with the Word of God.

We, therefore promise to teach diligently and to defend faithfully the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing. We declare moreover that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory or Synods, that the same may be examined, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistory, or Synods, under penalty, in case of refusal, of being by that very fact suspended from our office.

Furthermore, if at any time the Consistory or Synods, may deem it proper to require of us a further explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular doctrine of any of the afore mentioned standards, we do hereby promise to be always willing and ready to comply with such requisition, under the penalty above mentioned, reserving for ourselves however the right of appeal in case we should believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Consistory or the Synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

- That the person making subscription subscribes to all the doctrines set forth in the confessions, as being doctrines which are the teaching of the

Word of God;

- That the subscriber, so subscribes to all these doctrines, be they understood in the eyes of men as being major or minor doctrines of the Christian Faith, without any reservation on his part and that he confesses these doctrines to be his own understanding of the teaching of the Word of God, desires to maintain such, and rejects all other teachings which would contradict the same;
- That the subscriber does not by his subscription declare that the statements of these doctrines are formulated in the best manner, or with the use of the best words, or that the Confessional standards of our denomination cover all the teaching of the Scriptures on the matters confessed, or that every teaching of Scripture is dealt with by the Confessional Standards, or that the Confessional Standards of our denomination refute all the heresies that now exist.
- That only the doctrines intentionally conveyed binding and not such allusions, or incidental remarks, or propositions, which can be derived from the Confessions, are binding. Nevertheless no one is free ultimately to decide for himself or for the Church what is and what is not a doctrine contained in the Standards. If such a question of the court of the Church that shall be sought, reached and acquiesced in, in every case.

Liturgy and liturgical forms

We also adopted the Liturgy of the of Liberated Reformed church in the Nederlands, Thus our liturgy is almost the same like the the Canadian Reformed Churches and the FRCA in Western Australia, and Liberated Reformed church in the Nederlands.

The singing of Psalms in divine worship is a requirement, but we also use the hymns as well. Our Office bearers are of three kinds: of the ministers of the Word, of the elders, and of the deacons. Once again since we adopted all the church documents from the Liberated Reformed churches in Holland thus our Office bearers are just the same like theirs.

Preaching, sacraments and discipline

We preach and teaching from the Bible and use the reformed exegetical and homiletical ways that base on the Scripture only (Textual preaching). We also use the two sacraments in our federation (Baptism and Lord Supper) as it is written in the Hedelburg Catechism and in our Church Order. We also use our church discipline as it is mentioned the Hedelburg Catechism and in our Church Order.

Information regarding our current ecumenical relations

The GGRC NTT is a member of ICRC since 1997. The GGRC NTT is not a member the World Council of Churches (WCC). Neither do they have any fellowship of contact with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC).

Appendix 15

Report of the ICRC Meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand

October 15-22, 2009

On Thursday evening, October 15, delegates, observers and visitors of the Seventh Meeting of the ICRC assembled for a Prayer Service in the sanctuary of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale in Christchurch, New Zealand. Rev. John Goris, member of the ICRC Mission Committee led the service and Rev. Dirk Van Garderen, pastor of the Reformed Church in Bucklands Beach preached a sermon on Matthew 5:4—"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Several brothers from different parts of the world were asked to lead in prayer thanking the Lord for safe travel, the preparations for the conference and the conference itself, and the worldwide church—particularly the suffering church.

The Thursday morning roll call revealed that, in addition to the delegates from 21 of the member churches, observers were present from the following four denominations: the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCInd)—all of whom had applications for membership before this meeting of the ICRC. Also present were visitors from the Christian Reformed Church in Australia (CRCA) and the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ). Upon the recommendation of the Interim Committee, the following Executive was appointed: Rev. Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ) as Chairman, Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW) as Vice-chairman, Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen (CanRC) as Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor (EPCEW) as Recording Secretary and Mr. Henk Berends (CanRC) as Treasurer.

The theme of the Conference was "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith." This theme was explored by means of four papers. Each paper was delivered in the evening at the Bishopdale Church in order that the members of that church and neighbouring churches could also be present. Discussion followed and the next day it continued at the Holiday Inn in a number of workshops and a plenary session.

The first paper was delivered by Dr. George W. Knight III (OPC) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Charismatic Movement." The speaker and discussion leaders drew up the following summary statements:

1. There is full consensus that special revelation is now fully inscripturated in line with Ephesians 2: 20 – the church built on the foundation of

apostles and prophets. Thus the statement in *Westminster Confession* 1.1 'those former ways of revealing his will to his people being now ceased' is to the point, as also *Belgic Confession* art. 2-7.

2. The giving of the Spirit at Pentecost is a very special event in the history of redemption. It and subsequent episodes of the giving of the Spirit in Acts 8, 10-11 and 19 are actions of the Spirit which demonstrate the unity of all believers in the one body of Christ, whether Jew, Samaritan, Gentile or disciples of John. No normative two-stage theology of Christian experience – conversion followed by a distinct baptism of the Spirit – can be derived from these episodes. Every true believer has the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:.13), and is gifted and empowered by the Spirit.

3. The point of 'perfection' in 1 Cor. 13: 9-11 which brings the end of partial knowledge is the return of Christ, although some think that the completion of the canon of Scripture is what is referred to.

4. Prophecy, tongues and 'gifts of healings' are closely associated with the foundational Apostles, and some agree with the presumption that these gifts do not continue beyond the Apostolic period; others do not agree. Since Scripture is not explicit on this question, any deductions from Scripture by good and necessary consequence need considerable care, and some doubts can remain in some minds.

5. There is some difference among us as to the precise nature of the modern phenomena termed prophecy, tongues and 'gifts of healings'. The options, which may not be mutually exclusive, as all agree, at least to some extent, on (a) and (b), appear to be:

   a. a psychologically-based human imitation;
   b. Satanic in some instances;
   c. a gift of God but not revelatory in terms of point 1.

   Nevertheless, the discussion suggested, some dissenting, that there is a consensus that much or perhaps all of what occurs today reflects a situation which adequate preaching and pastoral care supplant where there is genuine spiritual life and loving Christian fellowship. True conversion and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22ff.) must be our focus, not extraordinary gifts.

6. It is vital to remember that all gifts are to be used for the building up of others in love (1 Cor. 13) under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12: 3). Paul's regulation of undoubtedly genuine prophecy and tongues in 1 Cor. 14: 26ff. reflects this concern.

The second paper was delivered by Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman (URCNA) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of Individualism in Church Life." The speaker and the discussion leaders drew up the following summary statements:

1. Consensus
   There is consensus among the delegates regarding the problem statement, the diagnosis of the challenge and the doctrinal points which voice the response to the challenge.

2. Exploration
   Certain points caught our attention:
   2.1 To challenge individualism, great care should be taken with the individuals involved. Although it is important to work in a group, the specific needs of an individual should not be neglected.
   2.2 Practical teamwork is a necessity, not only because that is the way a church as body is functioning, but also because that is the most effective way to achieve goals in modern society.
   2.3 Focus on true repentance in an instance where pride or self esteem play a role. It should be clearly stated that selfcentred behaviour is a sin and typical fruit of the flesh.
   2.4 We must distinguish the wrong emphasis on the individual that came about with the Enlightenment from the proper biblical emphasis that was recovered at the Reformation.

3 Practical implications
   The practical application of the principles are of importance.
   3.1 We must confess that the Holy Spirit creates true community, where individuals are incorporated and receive their Spirit-given identity
   3.2 To distinguish between unity and uniformity, it may be helpful to use the distinction between elements and circumstances, as this is applied to worship.
   3.3 In evaluating the experience of "community" outside the Christian faith, perhaps we might distinguish between the concept of sunousia, or co-existence, and koinonia, or community. There is a sense in which unbelievers experience togetherness, but always in a way less than what God has intended and designed for human beings.
   3.4 A clear view of what true *koinonia* is and what it is not is important. For example, *Koinonia* is not the same as togetherness, a cosy atmosphere or a natural friendship.
   3.5 The focus should fall on *ministry* – towards a relationship with Jesus

Christ and following that, with one another.

3.6 The importance of ministry within covenantal parameters should be stressed.

3.7 Individualism is an identity-problem. The church as covenant community suffers on account of this. It should be addressed by a covenantal approach to identify personal sin to ensure the individual becomes part of the body as covenant community (*koinonia).*

3.8 Churches should avoid an approach where groups are ministered to while the body is being ignored.

3.9 In preaching, the application should not only address the heart and life of the individual, but also the covenant community as a whole.

The third paper was delivered by the Rev. Frank van Dalen (ARPC) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge from Islam." The speaker and the discussion leaders drew up the following summary statements:

> 1. *"Humanly speaking, Islam is the greatest threat to the Christian faith at the present time." What is your response to this statement? How does Islam particularly affect Reformed churches?*
>
> Responses: Although we recognize that Islam (especially radical Islam) can be a threat to the Christian church in the same way that Communism set itself against Christianity and declared itself to be an enemy of Christ, we also recognize: (i) secularism may be a more significant threat in some areas of the world. Indeed, Muslims in Europe see secularism as a threat to Islam as well. (ii) Perhaps it would be better to see Islam as a challenge rather than a threat. (iii) Islam is itself divided and should not be regarded as a unified threat. Conversely, however, Islam does unite against a common "enemy" and Christianity is perceived as that enemy.
>
> We note the historical practice of Muslims that when they have approached approximately 40% of a population (with Indonesia as an example), they have engaged in aggressive "Jihad" to implement Islam and Sharia and to establish a permanent Muslim majority. Those of us who live in Muslim minority nations need to be aware of this danger.
>
> 2. *How valid is a ministry that records individual conversions but is not yet able to plant a Muslim Background Believer (MBB)*

congregation?

We believe that, although our ultimate goal is the planting of churches, there are circumstances where this may not be possible for a period of time. Patience is a virtue in ministry to Muslims. However, although we may have to anticipate up to 15 years of ministry before we see fruit in some communities, it appears that the Holy Spirit is working significantly within the Iranian and Turkish communities which are currently very responsive to the Gospel.

3. How do we respond to the persecution of Christians in Muslim lands: prayer or protest? Should Reformed churches support "justice ministries" which speak to political leaders and call for freedom of religion as a human right?

We need to both pray for our persecuted brethren as well as to protest to the relevant authorities about this persecution. We also need to not only be aware of the Protocol for Implementing Mandate 5: Assistance to Persecuted Christians, but also to ensure that we act upon it.

4. "*There is a desperate need for Reformed teaching within the context of cooperative ministry with other evangelical mission agencies and denominations." What is your response to this statement? What parameters would you set to cooperative ministry?*

We should cooperate with other evangelical agencies in bringing the basic Gospel message to Muslims. We need to demonstrate our unity in Christ as much as possible. However, the deeper we get into teaching, the more the differences between denominations appear and the more difficult it is to have cooperative ministries. The boundaries between cooperation and distinction are not 'hard and fast' and have to be determined in each situation.

The fourth paper was delivered by Dr. Mohan Chacko (RPCInd) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Asian Context." The speaker and the discussion leaders drew up the following summary statements:

1. The growth of charismatics may be due to a number of reasons:

indigenous factors, less emphasis on structure, media exposure, meeting the need for emotional outlet, it allows for concessions to human nature, strong leadership.

2. Generally the group was unwilling to make a distinction between impact on worship and life. Both were perceived to be more or less equally dangerous.

3. Mass prayer (all praying loudly at the same time) was discussed in detail. Possible biblical principles and practices were looked into (I Cor 14; Acts 4). Questions were raised whether mass prayer violates the principle of order in worship. It was also pointed out that corporate prayer should be intelligible to all. Another concern was that mass prayer emphasizes individualism. But, on the other hand, silent prayer also is individualistic rather than corporate. The believers' prayer also seems to suggest that all believers prayed at once. However, it was pointed out that perhaps what they did was sing Psalm 2.

4. There was general agreement that the charismatic emphasis on gifts has brought a needed corrective. However, the term "charismatic" is understood differently by different people.

5. Considering that we were agreed on the cessation of special revelation, some held that there had been an over-focus on the cessation of gifts. Others held that the extraordinary gifts were revelatory and confirmatory of the Apostles, and thus could not be discussed separately, and in facts that these gifts had ceased with the close of the apostolic age. This position could be called absolute cessationism. Some held a qualified cessationism since they wished to allow for the possibility that certain gifts may continue in a modified form that is non-binding and non-foundational. Much common ground was evident. The defining issue seemed to be this: "Can we rule out on the basis of Scripture that the 'extraordinary' gifts have completely ceased?"

6. We agreed that general revelation continues and that special revelation is now inscripturated. God's providence does not provide guidance to us apart from reference to God's word. Language such as 'God told me' is not really proper.

7. We agreed that as the Gospel goes forth God often gives dem-

onstrations of his power. Such demonstrations are not limited to mission situations and are not comparable to what happened at Pentecost. Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19 are not normative.

8. The dignity of the individual in Asian societies has been enhanced somewhat by Christian gospel, but one must remember that it is individuality in the community of the church.

9. The group identity in communities is often abused, resulting in clash of interests and wars between communities.

10. Authoritarian leadership is commonly found in Asia. This may be partly due to ignorance of the community and partly due to the selfish interest of leaders.

11. There was a common feeling that several mistakes in history are bing repeated in the current situation as well.

12. There should be good analysis of the community needs and situation where mission work is planned.

13. We should not neglect "saving of souls" but the concept that the gospel is for the whole being must be preached and demonstrated.

14. Non-traditional missionaries should be required to attest themselves with local church.

15. All assistance coming from other countries should be to the church, not to individuals

Thirteen Advisory Committees were appointed to facilitate the work of the business sessions. Advisory Committees 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 dealt with the requests for membership of the following churches: the Reformed Churches of Brazil (10), the Independent Reformed Church of Korea (9), the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (5), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (11), the Heritage Reformed Churches (8), the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (12). All requests were granted with the exception of the request of the last church due to missing some of necessary information needed to complete the application process. Advisory Committee 13 dealt with the incomplete applications of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Burundi, the Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv and the Reformed Church of South Africa Soutpansberg. As with the Africa Evangelical

Reformed Church, these requests were not granted to missing the necessary documentation.

Advisory Committee 7 dealt with a review of the ICRC. One of the member churches had submitted the following overture:

I. To engage in a complete review of the history and functioning of the Conference paying particular attention to:

   A. Constitutional and Regulations Review
      Is the present *Constitution* meeting the needs of the member churches?
      Does Article III on Purpose still adequately address the reason for the Conference's existence?
      Does Article IV on Membership continue to function well?
      Do the present the *Regulations* meet the needs of the Conference and its members?
      Are certain changes relating to Constitution and Regulations necessary?

   B. International Meeting Review
      Are the members satisfied with the frequency of the Conference meetings (every four years)?
      Is the current agenda, dominated by plenary speeches and workshops, effective?
      What about the plenary speeches – number, topic and content – and have they been of benefit to the member churches?
      What about the workshops as to their format, number and helpfulness?
      What about the Conference meetings as to their length, location, and overall set-up?

   C. Regional Meeting Review
      Have the regional meetings that were held in Europe and Asia been of value?
      Should there be more regional meetings, and if so, how should these be stimulated and coordinated?

   D. Mission Committee Review
      Do the member churches benefit from the work of the Mission Committee?
      Should this Committee be expanded and given a broader role and

mandate?

E. Corresponding Secretary Review
Is the current position of the Corresponding Secretary sufficient to meet the needs of the Conference or should it be altered in some ways?
Should the Corresponding Secretary play a greater role in assisting the member churches and in what way is this envisaged?

II. To solicit feedback and comments from the member churches, and, if this is deemed necessary, the Committee may meet in a number of central places with representatives from the member churches.

III. To familiarize itself with other international ecclesiastical organizations, identifying approaches and structures that have worked well for them and that may also improve the workings of the Conference.

IV. To submit its report six months prior to the meeting of the next Conference.

The ICRC adopted the following report from Committee 7:

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches are asking the Conference to appoint a committee to review the constitution, goals, meetings and activities of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Specifically, the mandate of this Committee of Review would be:

    a. To engage in a complete review of the history and present functioning of the Conference paying particular attention to:
        i. Constitution and Regulations.
        ii. International meeting.
        iii. Regional meetings.
        iv. Mission Committee.
        v. Corresponding Secretary.
    b. To solicit feedback and comments from the member churches.
    c. To familiarize itself with other international ecclesiastical organizations, identifying approaches and structures which have worked well and may also improve the workings of the Conference.
    d. To submit its report six months prior to the meeting of the next Conference.

2. The main ground offered by the Canadian Reformed Churches is that twenty-five years have passed since the International Conference was established.

Considerations

1. The International Conference began with only eight member churches. Today, there are thirty member churches. Numerical growth may affect both goals and strategies to attain these goals.
2. The needs of the member churches change over time and this may affect the way in which the ICRC functions.
3. In order to maintain optimal functioning, it is wise for any organization to periodically review its foundational documents, goals, structures, strategies and activities.
4. Technology has advanced at a very high rate since the first conference of the ICRC. New technology may affect the way in which the ICRC operates.
5. There may ways in which the profile of the ICRC can be enhanced particularly in relation to the quadrennial Conference.

Recommendation

1. To appoint a Committee of Review with a mandate as set forth in the proposal by the Canadian Reformed Churches, with the amendment of 1(d) to delete "six months" and replace it by "at least twelve months".

The ICRC also adopted the following additional task for the committee of review:

1. That the Committee of Review be requested to include in its review of the ICRC's Constitution and Regulations a consideration of the matter of how to address ICRC membership issues in situations where, following a split or disruption in a member church, a church with a different name (from that on the roll of ICRC member churches) desires to be recognized as the member church in the ICRC (e.g., the recent situation in the ERCC).
2. That the Corresponding Secretary be authorized to implement (on an interim basis, pending the next Assembly) whatever recommendations or advice the Committee for Review might propose to the next Assembly in this regard.

Advisory Committee 6 dealt with an amendation of Article IV.1 of the Constitution, as done in the assembly of the ICRC 2001 and the voting by the member churches on this amendation. The amendation of 2001 reads as follows:

1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which: a. adhere and are faithful to one or more of the confessional standards stated in the Basis, as each church has adopted one or more of these as its own standards, OR, adhere and are faithful to Reformed Confessions listed in the basis (Art. 2), and which confession (or confessions) shall be proposed to be added to Article 2 of the Constitution.

The result of the voting of the member churches on this amendation was as follows: 11 in favour, 6 in favour but added a condition, 5 no in favour, and 3 did not vote. The report of this committee was referred to the Committee of Review. Advisory Committee 7 dealt with a review of the ICRC.

Advisory Committee 4 dealt with Missions. It interacted with the report the Missions Committee had presented. This report highlighted the fact that Regional Mission Conferences are growing in number. These conferences were held in Europe (2007 and 2008), Africa (2008), and Asia-Pacific (2008). A newsletter has been published on a more or less regular basis. Contact was also made with the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and more contact will be pursued. It was decided to arrange a meeting of representatives of the world mission agencies of the ICRC member churches to exchange information and explore ways for possible multilateral cooperation. Information (names, qualifications, areas of expertise and contact details) will be compiled on short-term theological teachers in order that member churches may be made aware of existing resources and be able to make use of them. Protocols on how members may deal with major disasters and persecuted Christians were adopted. Since Rev. John Goris retired as convener of this committee, Rev. Ray Sikkema was appointed as the new convener.

Advisory Committee 1 dealt with finance. An income and expense statement was received and adopted. It showed that the Conference spent $136,638.09 (USD) from 2006 - 2009. A four year budget for 2010 -2013 in the amount of $140,000.00 (USD), or $35,000.00 per annum, was adopted.

Advisory Committee 3 dealt with ICRC 2013. The next meeting is scheduled, the Lord willing, for September of 2013 in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, hosted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. The topic will be Preaching. Suggestions made for papers were: Paper 1: "The continuing call to preach." Paper 2: "The nature of preaching." Paper 3: a topic on its own. Paper 4: "The challenges of preaching in the early 21st century with its postmodern and entertainment culture." An additional

suggestion: "Preaching to an illiterate community." This would be consistent with the ICRC's interest in mission.

Advisory Committee 2 dealt with the press release. This is can be accessed at: http://www.icrconline.com/press_releases.html

When the Conference opened it consisted of the following members:

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (**ARPC**)
- Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis di Indonesia NTT) (**CRCI,** *was GGRC*)
- Canadian Reformed Churches (**CanRC**)
- Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) (**CRCN,** *was CGKN*)
- Confessing Reformed Church in Congo (Eglise Reformee Confessante au Congo) (**CRCC,** *was ERCC*)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (**EPCEW**)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (**EPCI**)
- Free Church of Scotland (**FCS**)
- Free Church in Southern Africa (**FCSA**)
- Free Reformed Churches of North America (**FRCNA**)
- Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika) (**FRCSA,** *was VGKSA*)
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church (**OPC**)
- Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (**PCEA**)
- Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) (**PCKK**)
- Presbyterian Free Church of India (**PFCI**) previously called the Free Church of Central India
- Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT (Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia NTT) (**RCI,** *was GGRI*)
- Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland - vrijgemaakt) (**RCN,** *was GKN(v)*)
- Reformed Churches in New Zealand (**RCNZ**)
- Reformed Churches in South Africa (**RCSA,** *was GKSA*)
- Reformed Churches of Spain (Iglesias Reformadas de Espana) (**RCS,** *was IRE*)
- Reformed Church in the Unites States (**RCUS**)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (**RPCIre**)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (**RPCNA**)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (**RPCNEI**)
- United Reformed Churches in North America (**URCNA**)

During the Conference the following churches were received as new members:

- the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (**FCC**);
- the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (**IRCK**);
- the Heritage Reformed Congregations (**HRC**);
- the Reformed Churches of Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas de Brasil) (**RCB,** *was IRB*);
- the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (**RPCInd**).

Just before the chairman closed the seventh International Conference of Reformed Churches, the following hymn that Rev. John Goris has given as a parting gift to the conference was sung:

O Lord, alert your church to see
That harvest time is near.
The Christ-less crowd within our reach
The Gospel needs to hear.

So stir your church while time abides
To sow the precious seed
In nearby towns and distant lands
Of this your world in need.

O Lord of harvest, send them forth:
Thrust out the reapers now!
Bid old and young your call to hear,
And to your will to bow.

O readily, so readily
Let those who hear respond
With sacrificial service, Lord,
And of your kingdom fond.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. Ray Sikkema
Rev. Dick Moes
URCNA delegates

URCNA Web Oversight Committee Report
March 31, 2010

Esteemed brothers,

Our committee has been busy over the last three years with many technological, administrative, logistical and aesthetic matters concerning the federation website located at http://www.urcna.org. Our committee currently consists of the following men:

Classis Central US	Mr. Jay de Young (Secretary)
Classis Eastern US	Mr. Ray Lackey
Classis Michigan	Mr. Gary Fisher
Classis Pacific Northwest	Rev. Adrian Dieleman
Classis Southern Ontario	Mr. Bruce Vrieling (Chairman)
Classis Southwest US	Mr. Kevin Bruny
Classis Western Canada	Mr. Kevin Pasveer
Synod	Mr. Bill Konynenbelt (Webmaster)

The committee continues to function well together, and meets from time to time (via conference call) as needs arise. Many of the day-to-day activities are carried out by the Webmaster, while the committee concerns itself more with longer-term projects and direction-setting.

The federation website saw strong usage in 2009 with 86,893 web pages served up to the public and 5,816 web pages to federation members logged in.

Recommendations
We have a number of recommendations to bring to Synod for your consideration and request your adoption. They are as follows:

Recommendation 1: That Synod appoint a new Webmaster to replace our outgoing Webmaster. Currently, the Stated Clerk is also the Webmaster, and thus the two distinct positions are filled by one person. This is not likely to be the case after Synod 2010. We are therefore asking that an individual be appointed by Synod for the position of Webmaster, and that Synod also consider the matter of remuneration. While familiarity with the web is an asset, this position is largely administrative. See Appendix A for an overview of the Webmaster's job description. (Note: The other existing members of this

Committee are not asking to be appointed as the Webmaster.)

Recommendation 2: That Synod thank outgoing Webmaster Mr. Bill Konynenbelt for his years of service to the committee.

Recommendation 3: That Synod thank the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun for their oversight of the Committee, and request that their oversight continue until at least the next Synod.

Recommendation 4: That Synod decrease the amount requested from each Classis for the Web Oversight Committee fund to $100 per year from the current $200. Our current fund balances, plus this decreased amount, should keep us going for the next three years.

Recommendation 5: That Synod request the current owners of the urcna.*com* and urcna.*net* domains transfer ownership of these domains to the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun (and therefore their administration to the Web Oversight Committee). There seems to be some confusion on behalf of some whether or not this action would contradict Synod's previous decision to have the Committee run a single website. We believe that it does not, and the safe-keeping of these domains with the Grace consistory ensures a consistent, single face to the world as well as eased administration.

Our committee also presents several matters for information:
Information 1: The committee believes it has fulfilled the instructions given to it by Synod 2007, except for the posting of the History and Introduction documents (currently in progress).

Information 2: Please be reminded that Synod 2007 adopted the following: "That Synod ask all websites sponsored and/or maintained by Consistories or church officers (individually or in concert with others) to include a prominently placed disclaimer to the effect that their site is not the official website of the URCNA federation." (*Minutes of Synod 2007*, Article 51, #16).

Information 3: As new Top Level Domains (TLDs) become available (eg. .biz, .info, etc) the committee, with discretion and where deemed useful, plans to register domains in these TLDs (such as urcna.biz, urcna.info) and have these new domains redirect to the main website www.urcna.org.

Information 4: Our committee was mandated to produce a public directory

of churches for use by the federation which reflected the data entered by churches on the private side of the website (constantly changing as church information is updated). A directory with this church information is therefore always available on the website. (*Minutes of Synod 2007*, Article 51, #11 in response to Recommendations #17, #18 and #19 from our committee's report to Synod 2007).

Information 5: Our committee produces a more detailed directory, which we have called both the "directory archive" and the "yearbook", which is made available once a year and contains a snapshot of statistical information as of December 31 of the previous year. It is available for download as an Adobe Reader PDF file from the website. The production of this yearbook was never mandated by Synod.

Information 6: Our committee has noted the fact that some churches have suggested delegation of additional administrative tasks to the Web Oversight Committee. With respect, this committee wishes to remind the churches that our mandate is to oversee the web site.

Information 7: Chapter 5 of the document circulated to all the Councils in February, 2010 from the *Ad Hoc URCNA Synodical Rules Committee* prescribes processes related to committees of the Federation. Section 5.3.2 states that members of a standing committee shall be "chosen by Synod", and that nominations "shall originate from the standing committee" and then be "presented to Synod for final approval". This is contrary to the practice of this committee whose members' nominations and appointments come from each Classis, not Synod.

Information 8: Our committee believes committees and classes have underutilized the tools that have been provided to them to share information with the churches of the federation. Very few committees have posted reports or shared information on their allocated web links. Classis minutes from each classis should be available for review by churches. Some committees have gone so far as utilizing services from commercial providers such as Yahoo when the same functionality is available from our website.

Appendix A: Webmaster Duties

The position of Webmaster for the federation website entails the following duties, as determined by the Web Oversight Committee:

1. Act as the primary liaison between the Web Oversight Committee and the website Service Provider.

2. Ensure web site functions in support of Stated Clerk's needs regarding e-mails to churches of the federation.

3. Perform small troubleshooting efforts that may arise – referring more significant matters to the web engineer or perhaps other members of the Committee.

4. Update web pages on behalf of less technically-adept classis Stated Clerks or committee chairmen.

5. Maintain/produce the various files required to publish directories as directed by Synod.

6. Transfer data from church profiles to databases as required (only until new database backend is in place, hopefully by Q2 2010).

7. Perform updates using the existing Content Management System as directed by the Stated Clerk.

8. Maintain the sub-administrator (e.g. classis clerks) site permissions.

9. Approve/deny requests for access to the private side of the website.

10. Provide administrative assistance for discussion board use - ensuring proper access and removing extraneous postings upon request.

11. Provide Stated Clerk with information regarding pending church profiles that have not yet been updated (based upon timelines set by the Stated Clerk).

12. Provide report information as needed for the Stated Clerk (information readily available to the Webmaster, and not expected to require significant technical ability).

Report of Oversight Consistory for the WOC

Esteemed brothers,

The consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church humbly presents this report to synod for our duties as the oversight consistory for the Website Oversight Committee (WOC).

Synod Schererville 2007 (article 51 of the Acts) appointed Grace URC (Waupun, WI) as the "oversight consistory for the Website Oversight Committee" as well as gave the following tasks related to the WOC:

1. Approve the WOC's commissioning, posting, and updating of
   a. A brief "Introduction to the URCNA"
   b. A "History of the URCNA"
2. Approve the WOC's posting of
   a. The 1996 Letter to the Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches
   b. The Ecumenical Creeds, with their introductions, as found in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal
   c. The Three Forms of Unity, with their introductions and footnotes, as found in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal
   d. The URCNA Church Order (able to be viewed and printed from the website)

We are working with the WOC to complete the documents listed in item 1. We have approved for posting all documents listed in item 2. We note that the introductions to the Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dort reflect their composition by the Christian Reformed Church.

We have also worked with the WOC to serve as a legal entity when needed for the proper functioning of the website (e.g. to enter into binding contracts, registering the domain name www.urcna.org, etc.).

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve the Lord of the churches in this capacity. In keeping with synodical rules 3.2., we humbly present the following recommendations for synod:

1. Rename the "oversight consistory for the Website Oversight Committee" the "partnering consistory for the Website Oversight Committee." This recommendation and the next one better reflect our actual relationship since the WOC answers to each synod rather than to a consistory.
2. State explicitly the responsibilities of the partnering consistory to in-

clude and be limited to:

a. Acting as a legal entity when such is requested by the WOC for the proper fulfillment of the WOC's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.
b. Acting as the responsible ecclesiastical assembly, in the time between synods, when such is requested by the WOC for the proper clarification and fulfillment of the WOC's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

3. Mandate the WOC to commission and post (with approval by its partnering consistory) new introductions for the Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dort.
4. Decide if there should be (and if so, what it should be) a term of service and/or a term limit for a consistory to serve as the partnering consistory. This will provide a level of consistency yet also guard against the possible accumulation of power with one consistory.

Sincerely, in Christ
Done in consistory, March 15, 2010

William Pausma
Clerk – Grace United Reformed Church

Report of the *Ad Hoc* URCNA Synodical Rules Committee To Synod 2010

Esteemed Brothers in Christ,

With gratitude to God we hereby make our final report concerning the work of the *Ad Hoc* Synodical Rules Committee. We are thankful for your prayers and for the blessing of God to be enabled to complete this task for the church.

Background

The Synod of Calgary, 2004, mandated our committee to prepare "a standard of parliamentary law" for synodical meetings in order "to ensure that the business of the synod meeting is transacted in an orderly, practical way; and to assist the officers of synod in overseeing the proceedings and preserving order." In addition, we were given the task of preparing "guidelines … to assist prospective appellants prepare an appeal and be familiar with protocol, standards of admissibility and preferred verbiage" for appeals. Our committee was instructed that "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." Finally, your committee was asked to "delineate the inter-synodical responsibilities of the stated clerk." (*Acts of Synod, 2007*, p.386)

After presenting its preliminary report to Synod 2007, Synod Schererville provisionally adopted the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* to function on a trial basis for synod. Furthermore it granted the provision to "allow responses from the churches and others regarding these regulations" until May 1, 2008. Synod 2007 decided to include in its regulations the following: "The convening consistory shall call and conduct a prayer service to be held prior to the opening of synod which shall include singing, appropriate prayer, and an exhortation from Scripture. Delegates of synod are expected to attend this service, which shall also be open to the public." Along with responses from the churches, proposed changes recorded by the advisory committee of synod were referred to our committee. Finally, Synod Schererville mandated our reappointed committee "to prepare and distribute to the churches at least four months before synod a refined version of the Regulations for final approval by Synod 2010."

Regulations For Synodical Procedure

Having fulfilled the mandates of Synod 2004 and Synod 2007, and having considered various proposed changes made by individuals and consistories, as well as the advisory committee of Synod 2007, we herewith present the refined version of the *Regulations For Synodical Procedure* for your consideration and adoption.

REGULATIONS FOR SYNODICAL PROCEDURE
The United Reformed Churches in North America

INTRODUCTION

Seeking to honor the apostolic command that in the churches all things be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40), we adopt the following regulations for our synodical proceedings. As synodical delegates, we commit ourselves to work in an ecclesiastical manner, to consult mutually and to consider carefully God's Word, and to deliberate thoughtfully the matters brought before the synod, as we endeavor to make decisions which are mutually agreed upon. These regulations are adopted to facilitate this deliberative process. However, when it seems advisable, they may be suspended, amended, or revised, by a majority vote of the synod.

We have structured these regulations according to the following divisions:

1. Convening a Synod
2. Constituting a Synod
3. Matters Legally Before a Synod
4. Officers and Functionaries of a Synod
5. Committees
6. Rules of Order

1. Convening a Synod

1.1. Synod shall be convened and constituted in accordance with the *Church Order* and these Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

1.2. "If a majority of the classes deem it necessary that a synod meet earlier than the regular time determined, the consistory charged with convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur." (*Church Order*, Article 28)

1.3. Each consistory shall delegate two of its members to synod. Consistories which cannot send two delegates shall be required to submit an explanation to synod.

1.4. A synod shall convene at least once every three years at a time and place determined by the previous synod. The meetings shall be held in each of the classes in turn. Each synod shall authorize a consistory to convene the next synod.

1.5. The convening consistory shall have the duties of announcing the next synod to the consistories at least four months in advance, pre-

paring the provisional agenda with the assistance of the stated clerk, securing the facilities needed for the synodical meetings, arranging the lodging of the delegates, recommending to synod the assignment of each delegate to an advisory committee on the basis of a completed questionnaire, and all other necessary items to facilitate the synod. Expenses incurred in connection with these duties shall be reimbursed by the synodical treasurer(s).

1.6. The convening consistory shall call and conduct a prayer service to be held prior to the opening of synod which shall include singing, appropriate prayer, and an exhortation from Scripture. Delegates of synod are expected to attend this service, which shall also be open to the public. This prayer service shall be distinguished from an official worship service.

1.7. The time schedule for the sessions of synod shall be recommended by the convening consistory for adoption by the synod. The time schedule may be changed to facilitate the work of synod.

2. Constituting a Synod

2.2. Synod shall be convened by the consistory appointed by the previous synod.

2.2.1 Synod shall be called to order by a member of the convening consistory designated by that assembly to serve as chairman *pro tem.* He shall:

a. Conduct the opening devotions.
b. Call the roll of delegates identified by lawful credentials from consistories of the United Reformed Churches in North America.
c. Read the form of Subscription to which every member of synod shall respond by rising to indicate his agreement.
d. Declare synod to be constituted.
e. Preside over the election of the officers, ensuring they are chosen by open ballot from among the delegates of synod in the following order: chairman, vice-chairman, first clerk, and second clerk. The delegate who receives a majority of votes cast shall be elected to each office.

2.3. The stated clerk shall serve as clerk *pro tem* until the first and second clerks have been elected.

2.4. Each delegate who takes his seat at a later time shall be requested to express his agreement with the Form of Subscription individually in the presence of synod.

2.5. Each plenary session of synod shall be in *open session.* When synod meets in *executive session*, in delicate or unusual situations, only synodical delegates and fraternal delegates may be present. When synod meets in *strict executive session*, in very unusual situations, because of the personal honor of an individual or the welfare of the church, only synodical delegates may be present. Synod shall decide how the minutes of each executive session shall be recorded.

2.6. Immediately after synod is declared constituted, synod shall:

a. Determine by a vote of ratification (Church Order, Article 32) the status of all churches provisionally accepted by a classis.
b. Request that new delegates rise to indicate agreement with the Form of Subscription.
c. Adopt the provisional agenda, including the advisory committee assignments of delegates, chairmen, and reporters.

2.7. Synod may recess from plenary session to enable the advisory committees to meet.

2.8. Each advisory committee shall ensure that its report is prepared according to the standardized reporting format, and distributed to all of the delegates as soon as feasible.

2.9. The privilege of the floor may be granted to those not delegated when the synod considers it useful or necessary; such permission shall be granted by majority vote and restricted to the matter under discussion.

3. Matters Legally Before Synod

3.1. Provisional Agenda

A provisional agenda is prepared for each synod by the convening consistory with the assistance of the stated clerk. Its contents shall be limited to a compilation of the reports, overtures, appeals, and communications addressed to the synod. Immediately when synod has been declared to be constituted, this provisional agenda shall be acted upon for adoption before proceeding to act on any of its items.

3.2. Report

A report is a written document from a committee or an appointee of a synod indicating the work performed in response to a synod's mandate and presenting one or more recommendations for action by synod.

3.3. Overture

An overture is a written proposal to a synod, originating from a consistory and processed through a classis, requesting a definite action regarding a specific matter for the benefit of the churches. In order to be admissible an overture must provide written grounds. (See **Appendix A, Guidelines for Overtures**)

3.4. Appeal

An appeal is a written request for a decision or judgment, made to a synod by a consistory or individual within the federation, regarding a matter previously decided upon by an assembly within the federation. In order to be admissible an appeal must provide written grounds. (See **Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals**)

3.5. Communication

A communication is a written document from a consistory or an individual expressing opinions or ideas to a synod, or its appointed committees. A communication requires an acknowledgment, but does not require a decision by the synod or committee to which it is addressed.

4. Officers and Functionaries of Synod

Officers

The officers shall perform the duties listed below and any others assigned by synod. Their official functions shall end at the conclusion of the synodical assembly.

4.1. The Chairman

4.1.1. He shall call the meeting to order at the appropriate times and shall ensure that each session is opened and closed with devotions**.**

4.1.2. He shall see to it that the members of synod observe the rules of order and decorum, and pastorally admonish those who do not.

4.1.3. He shall see to it that the business of synod is transacted in the proper order and expedited as much as possible.

4.1.4. He shall request any delegate who takes his seat at a later time to express his agreement with the Form of Subscription individually in the presence of synod.

4.1.5. He shall welcome fraternal delegates and other guests of synod, and

respond to their greetings, or appoint others for this purpose.

4.1.6. He shall recognize only those who have properly asked for the floor.

4.1.7. He shall place before synod every motion that is made and seconded, and shall clearly state every question before a vote is taken.

4.1.8. While holding the chair, he may state matters of fact or inform synod regarding points of order. However, if compelled to speak on an impending matter, he shall relinquish the chair to the vice chairman until the matter under consideration is decided.

4.1.9. He shall have, and duly exercise, the prerogative of declaring a motion or person out of order. If his ruling is challenged, synod shall sustain or reject the ruling by majority vote.

4.1.10. He shall retain his right to vote on any question. When there is a tie vote, the chairman may cast the deciding vote, if he has not already voted.

4.1.11. He shall not preside in any matters that concern himself personally or his congregation specifically.

4.1.12. He shall rule on all points of order. If any member is dissatisfied with the ruling of the chair and appeals to the floor, his ruling may be reversed by a majority vote of synod.

4.1.13. He shall close the synodical assembly with appropriate remarks and with prayer.

4.2. The Vice-Chairman

4.2.1. In the absence of the chairman, the vice chairman shall assume all of the duties and privileges of the chairman.

4.2.2. He shall assist the chairman as circumstances require.

4.3. The First Clerk

4.3.1. He shall keep an exact record of the synodical proceedings. This shall contain a record of:

a. Opening and closing of sessions.
b. Main motions whether carried or defeated.
c. All reports of advisory committees and all decisions of synod.
d. The names of fraternal delegates and others who address synod.
e. The names of all synodically appointed committees and their members.
f. Any document or part of debate or address that synod by majority vote decides to include in the minutes.

4.3.2. He shall not include in the record:

a. Any motion that is withdrawn.
b. Any incidental motion.

c. Any defeated motion except it be a main motion.

4.3.3. He shall distribute and review the concept minutes daily, section by section, and request the chairman to solicit the delegates' evaluation and approval.

4.4. The Second Clerk

4.4.1. The second clerk shall serve in the absence of the first clerk.

4.4.2. He shall assist the first clerk in keeping an accurate record of the synodical proceedings.

4.4.3. He shall assist the first clerk as circumstances require.

4.4.4. He shall prepare the synodically approved press release of the synod's actions.

Functionaries

4.5. The Stated Clerk

4.5.1. Qualifications

The stated clerk shall belong to a member congregation of the United Reformed Churches, currently serving, or having served as a minister or elder within a church of the federation. He must likewise possess:

a. Thorough knowledge of the Church Order and competence in interpreting it,
b. Ability to write clearly and succinctly,
c. Administrative and organizational ability,
d. And proficiency in current communication technology and word processing skills.

4.5.2. Term

Synod shall elect a stated clerk to serve from that synod until the conclusion of the next synod. An alternate shall be elected for the same term, who shall serve should the stated clerk be unable to do so. The stated clerk shall serve for no more than three consecutive terms. Synod shall stipulate his honorarium in the currency of his respective country.

4.5.3. Supervision

The stated clerk shall work under the supervision of the consistory of the church convening the next synod, and is ultimately accountable to synod for the performance of his duties.

4.5.4. General Responsibilities

a. Assist the convening consistory to determine questions of admissibility and good order with regard to overtures, appeals, and other submissions to synod. Reasons for judging any matters to be inadmissible will be included in the convening consistory's report to synod. All doubtful matters shall be referred by the convening consistory by way of the stated clerk's report to synod for its judgment.

b. Become thoroughly familiar with synodical regulations and past decisions as well as their bearing upon matters proposed for the synodical agenda.

c. Assist the convening consistory with nominating advisory committees for synodical appointment, in order to help ensure that these committees consist of a fair and balanced representation of delegates to synod.

d. Provide a current handbook for the convening consistory of synod, listing the various responsibilities of the convening consistory, and the provisions that need to be made in order to host a synod meeting.

e. Prepare and distribute the Acts of Synod. At federation expense, one copy shall be sent to each federation with whom the United Reformed Churches are engaged in any ecumenical relations or contact. All other copies shall be purchased by those who order them.

f. Preserve original records of all proceedings of synod, and all documents, letters and papers having reference to its proceedings.

g. Receive credentials of the delegates of synod, requesting them in a timely manner, no fewer than eight weeks before synod convenes. As instructed by synod or its ecumenical committees, he shall invite churches outside the federation to send fraternal delegates or observers to synod, requesting them to forward credentials in a timely manner. He shall also sign the credentials of fraternal delegates and observers representing the United Reformed Churches among churches outside the federation.

h. Maintain and publish alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches, including all emeriti ministers and those who are deceased. He shall also maintain an archival record of those released or deposed from the ministry in the United Reformed Churches.

i. Notify all those appointed by synod of their appointment, their mandate, and the due date of their reports, including reminding the respective corporation boards of their annual meetings and reporting responsibilities.
j. Supply advisory committees and other appointees a standardized format for reporting.
k. Attend all meetings of synod, at which he shall be given the privilege of the floor.
l. Submit a written report of his work as part of the written report of the convening consistory.
m. Serve as clerk pro tem of synod before synodical officers are chosen.
n. Perform any other duties assigned by synod.

4.5.5. Correspondence Duties

The stated clerk shall carry out all correspondence specifically assigned to him by synod. The following guidelines shall be observed in handling correspondence between meetings:

a. Correspondence requesting archival information shall be answered directly.
b. Correspondence pertaining to committee work shall be referred to the appropriate committee chairmen.
c. Correspondence requesting interpretation or evaluation of policies or decisions of synod shall be referred to synod or the convening consistory.
d. Correspondence requesting any action by synod, or the opportunity to address synod shall be forwarded to the convening consistory for its consideration of placement on the provisional agenda, according to rules of admissibility.

4.6. Treasurers

4.6.1. Qualifications

Each treasurer shall belong to a member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in the country of each respective Corporation. A treasurer shall have proficiency in current communication technology and possess financial and bookkeeping capabilities. If required, the treasurers shall be appropriately bonded. No treasurer may be married to a Director of either corporation.

4.6.2. Term

Each Corporation shall appoint its treasurer to serve from one syn-

od until the conclusion of the next synod. Each Corporation shall appoint an alternate treasurer for the same term, who shall serve if the treasurer is unable to serve. All appointments shall be approved by synod. A treasurer shall serve for no more than nine years. Each Corporation shall stipulate its treasurer's honorarium subject to the approval of synod.

4.6.3. Supervision

The treasurers shall work under the supervision of their respective Boards which shall regularly report to the consistory of the church convening the next synod.

4.6.4. Responsibilities

The Board of each Corporation shall instruct its Treasurer to:

a. Administer the finances of the federation in accordance with the requirements of its respective jurisdiction and in keeping with the decisions of synod.
b. Pay synodical expenses as authorized by synod.
c. Submit to the Board an audited financial statement annually, which statement shall be forwarded to synod.
d. Alert the Board concerning the financial needs of the federation, and submit quarterly statements to the churches via the Stated Clerk. The respective Boards shall notify the deacons of the churches whom they serve concerning such needs, requesting the churches to respond generously.

5. Committees

5.1. Committees

A synod may appoint a variety of committees to function on its behalf so that the various mandates of synod will be carried out in an orderly manner.

5.1.1. The authority of committees shall be limited to the mandates given them by synod. No committee may arrogate to itself duties or mandates not specifically assigned to it.

5.1.2. Synod shall appoint the chairman and a reporter of each committee.

5.1.3. The chairman shall convene the committee and ensure that it fulfills its mandate. The reporter shall present, explain, and defend the committee's findings, actions, and recommendations with their grounds for synodical action.

5.2. Advisory Committees

Advisory committees serve the synod by facilitating the work of synod during its sessions. Such committees summarize the matters assigned to them and advise synod by formulating recommendations as to how to proceed with the matters on the synodical agenda. The convening consistory proposes for synodical approval the assignment of each synodical delegate to an advisory committee, and the chairman and reporter of each advisory committee. Each delegate shall be made aware of his proposed assignment at least two weeks in advance of synod.

5.2.1. Advisory committee meetings shall be open to the public unless the committee decides that for weighty reasons it should enter executive session. However, any member of synod may appear before any committee for the purpose of speaking about a matter referred to it.

5.2.2. Advisory committee reports shall be signed by the chairman and the reporter of the committee. Where a minority report is presented, both the majority and minority report must be signed by the members who favor them.

5.2.3. The report of the majority shall be considered the report of the advisory committee. After the advisory committee's report has been read and the motion to adopt has been made and supported, any report of the minority of the advisory committee shall be read for information.

5.2.4 When the recommendation of an advisory committee is substantially different from that proposed by an overture, an appeal, or the report of a committee of synod, the reporter for such proposed material shall have the privilege to present and defend the proposal prior to synodical deliberation of the advisory committee's recommendation.

5.2.5. While the report is being discussed the task of defending the report shall rest primarily with the chairman and the reporter of the advisory committee. These shall have precedence over every other speaker and shall not be limited as to the number and length of their speeches. Other committee members shall be subject to the accepted rules.

5.2.6. Committee recommendations may be recommitted to the committee when this is helpful to synod.

5.3. Committees appointed by a previous synod

These committees include the following:

5.3.1. *Ad hoc* committee

a. Description. An ad hoc committee is chosen by synod to perform a specified task. Its membership, mandate, duration, and deadline by which it is to report are determined by synod.

b. Reporting. An ad hoc committee shall report to each synod on its progress; on the need to review, alter, or continue its mandate; and on the need to alter, augment, or continue the committee's membership.

5.3.2. Standing committee

a. Description. A standing committee serves the synod under synodical regulations on a continuing basis. Its members are chosen by synod for specified terms and are given a particular mandate. The committee and its mandate continue even though the members of the committee serve only until their terms are completed.

b. Appointment. Any required nominations for committee members shall originate from the standing committee, be presented to the appropriate advisory committee, and then be presented to synod for final approval.

c. Terms. The members of a standing committee shall serve no more than three consecutive three-year terms, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointment. Members who have completed three consecutive terms are eligible for reappointment after one year.

d. Reporting. A report shall contain the following:

1. A review of the committee's mandate.
2. A summary of the committee's activities.
3. Recommendations for synodical action.
4. A list of nominees required to fill vacancies.

5.3.3. Study committee

a. Description. A study committee is one which is assigned by synod, on the basis of an overture from the churches, to investigate and evaluate a particular problem, idea, or course of action on behalf of synod. The committee membership, mandate, duration, and deadline by which it is to report are determined by synod.

b. Appointment. Nominations for committee members shall originate from the advisory committee proposing such a study committee, and be presented to synod for final approval.

c. Reporting. A report shall contain the following:
   1. A review of the committee's mandate.
   2. A presentation of the committee's study.
   3. Recommendations for synodical action with the appropriate grounds for synodical action.
   4. A list of nominees required to fill vacancies.

5.4. Reports and rules for *ad hoc*, standing, and study committees

5.4.1. In the event of a vacancy in a committee, an alternate appointed by the convening consistory shall complete the vacated term, except for classical appointees to standing committees.

5.4.2. These committees have the right to explain and defend their reports before the advisory committees of synod as well as on the floor of synod. The spokesmen of these committees shall have the same privileges during the discussion as do the chairmen and reporters of the advisory committees.

5.4.3. If the recommendations of an appointed committee and an advisory committee differ significantly, the recommendations of the *Ad hoc*, Standing, or Study Committee shall have precedence and be considered as the majority report.

5.5 When synod has adopted a recommendation regarding a matter, it shall declare that its action constitutes synod's answer to that particular matter.

6. Rules of Order

6.1. Main motion

This motion presents a specific matter for consideration or action.

6.1.1. The main motion is **acceptable** under the following conditions:
   a. If the mover has been recognized by the chair and his motion has been seconded by a member of synod.
   b. If, at the request of the chairman, the motion has been presented in writing.
   c. If the chairman judges the motion acceptable.

6.1.2. A main motion is **unacceptable** under the following conditions:
   a. If it conflicts with the Church Order or is contrary to Scripture as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity.
   b. If another motion is before synod; if it conflicts with any decision already taken by synod in its current meeting; or if it interferes with the freedom of action by synod in a matter that was previously introduced but which has not been decided.

c. If it is substantially the same as a motion already rejected by synod.

6.2. Motion to amend

This motion seeks to amend a main motion in language or in meaning before final action is taken on the main motion.

6.2.1. A motion to amend may propose any of the following: to strike out, to insert, or to substitute for certain words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.

6.2.2. A motion to amend may not nullify the main motion and it must be germane to the main motion; that is, no new matter may be introduced to synod under the guise of an amendment. The chairman shall judge whether an amendment is acceptable or he may submit the matter to a vote.

6.2.3. A motion to amend an amendment is permissible and is called a secondary motion. Only one such amendment may be considered at a time.

6.2.4. All motions may be amended except the following:

a. to adjourn.
b. to amend an amendment.
c. to table, or to place again a tabled motion before the body.
d. to reconsider.
e. to rescind.
f. to take up a question out of its regular order.
g. appeals to the floor from the decision of the chair.
h. calls for the order of the day, requests or questions of any kind.
i. points of order.

6.3. Motion to defer or withhold action

This motion seeks to postpone a matter either temporarily, to a definite time, or indefinitely.

6.3.1. Table (postpone) temporarily

a. Tabling a motion temporarily implies that synod will resume consideration on the motion at a later unspecified hour or date.
b. This motion is not debatable or amendable.
c. When synod wishes to resume consideration of the motion any member may move to place again the motion before the body. The motion to place the motion again before the body is not debatable or amendable.
d. All matters that have been tabled temporarily must be placed before the body again before synod adjourns.

6.3.2. Table (postpone) to a definite time

a. Tabling a motion to a definite time implies that synod will resume consideration on the motion at a specified hour or date.
b. This motion is debatable and may be amended.
c. If a motion to table to a definite time has passed, no other motion similar in word or thought to the tabled motion may appear before synod.
d. The matter tabled to a definite time may be taken up before the specified time by a majority vote of synod.
e. If a motion to amend has been tabled definitely, the main motion to which the tabled amendment is related is likewise deferred.
f. Any number of matters may be tabled to the same time. When that time arrives, the matters tabled are taken up in the order in which they were tabled.
g. When the hour arrives to which such matters have been tabled, and synod is at that time busy with an undecided question, synod need not be disturbed or interrupted in its work by the consideration of the tabled matters, if those tabled matters can wait until the question then before synod has been decided.
h. All matters that have been tabled to a definite time must be placed before the body before synod adjourns.

6.3.3. Withhold action or table (postpone) indefinitely

a. This motion may be used when synod decides that it is wise and prudent to avoid a direct vote on a matter without deciding either positively or negatively.
b. This motion is debatable, but not amendable.

6.4. Privileged motions

6.4.1. Call for the order of the day

When any member of synod believes that the regular business of synod is being obstructed or interrupted by irrelevant or unimportant material, he has the right to rise and to call for the order of the day. This means that he desires synod to return to the regular course of action. The following rules apply:

a. A call for the order of the day may be made without recognition and while another member is speaking.
b. Such a call is not debatable, needs no seconding, and must be put to a vote.
c. It has precedence over every other motion except a motion to adjourn or to take a recess.

6.4.2. Point of order

It is the duty of the chairman to apply the rules of order and to prevent infractions. Should a member believe that the rules have been misinterpreted or misapplied, he may rise stating that he wishes to make a point of order. Asked by the chair to state the point, he does so, and the chairman renders his decision at once on the point in question. The following rules apply:

a. A point of order may be raised at any time and must be recognized by the chairman.
b. It needs no seconding and is not debatable.
c. In case the member making the point of order is not satisfied with the decision of the chair, he may appeal to the floor. When this is done, the point of order becomes debatable, and a simple majority is sufficient to sustain or reverse the chairman's decision.

6.4.3. Call for a division of the question

With a majority vote of synod, a motion consisting of several parts must be divided into its component parts and each part must be voted on separately.

6.5. Motion to reintroduce matters once decided before synod

If for weighty reasons any member of synod desires reconsideration of a matter once decided, one of the following motions may be used.

6.5.1. Motion to reconsider

a. The intent of this motion to reconsider is to propose a new discussion and a new vote. This motion must be made by someone who voted with the prevailing side.
b. The motion to reconsider must be made the same day on which the motion in question was passed.
c. It is unacceptable if action has begun in accordance with the motion in question.
d. The motion to reconsider may be tabled to a definite time, but it may not be amended, withheld indefinitely, or referred to a committee.
e. The motion to reconsider is debatable only insofar as the reasons for reconsideration are concerned.

6.5.2. Motion to rescind

a. The intent of this motion to rescind is to annul a decision.
b. The motion to rescind shall require a two-thirds majority to carry.

c. The motion to rescind is debatable, including both the reasons for rescinding as well as the merits of the original question.
d. Rescinding applies to decisions taken by synod while in session. It does not apply to decisions taken by a previous synod. A succeeding synod may alter the stand of a previous synod or it may reach a conclusion which is at variance with a conclusion reached by an earlier synod. In such cases the most recent decision invalidates all previous decisions in conflict with it.

6.6. Debate

6.6.1. To obtain the floor, a member must be recognized by the chairman.

6.6.2. If a member obtains the floor, he shall address his remarks only to the chairman and never to any member of synod. He shall refrain from using personal names, and from addressing persons by name. If he fails to adhere to the point under discussion or becomes unnecessarily lengthy, the chairman shall call attention to these faults and insist on pointedness and brevity.

6.6.3. A member may not call into question another member's motives or character.

6.6.4. Those who have not yet spoken twice on a pending issue shall be given priority over those members who have already spoken twice.

6.6.5. The chairman, when he believes that a matter has been sufficiently debated, shall have the right to propose cessation of debate. Should a 2/3 majority of the members sustain this proposal, debate shall end at once and the main motion and any pending amendments shall be voted on.

6.6.6. Any member, when he believes a matter has been sufficiently debated, may move to cease debate. Having been seconded, this motion is not debatable and is to be voted on at once. If it passes by a 2/3 majority, debate shall cease only after all those who had previously requested the floor and been recognized by the chairman have had opportunity to speak. However, these speakers shall not be allowed to offer any amendments. This motion is not acceptable when a motion to table, to commit, to recommit, or to withhold action is before synod.

6.6.7. A member may not speak to a motion and then immediately move to cease debate.

6.7. Objection to the consideration of a question

When a member rises to make such objection, the chairman shall

ask him to state his objection. The chairman, having heard his objection, either sustains or overrules it and states his reason for so doing. If the objector is not satisfied by the ruling of the chair he may appeal to the floor. When he does so, the objection becomes debatable and requires a majority to be sustained.

6.8. Right of protest

It is the right of any member of synod to protest any decision of synod. Protests must be registered immediately or during the session in which the matter was decided. Protests must be filed individually and not in groups. A member may request his name and vote be recorded in protest, or he may submit a written protest.

6.9. Procedural inquiry

Any member of synod may request advice of the chairman regarding how to accomplish a purpose for which he does not know the proper means.

6.10. Voting methods

a. Voice. This is the ordinary method of voting.
b. Show of hands. Whenever the chairman is unable to determine from the voice vote which opinion has prevailed, or if the chairman's determination is questioned by any member of synod, the chairman shall call for a show of hands.
c. Roll call. The name and vote of each delegate is recorded in the Acts of Synod. This method is to be employed only upon decision by a majority vote of synod.
d. Ballot. Synod must vote by ballot in election of officers. In other cases synod may vote by ballot if a majority so decides.

Appendix A
Guidelines for Overtures

In accord with articles of the *Church Order,* such as Articles 17, 25, and 29, the following guidelines must be observed in preparing an overture. These guidelines shall serve as the standard for the admissibility of an overture.

Definition

An overture is a written proposal to a broader assembly, originating from a consistory and processed through a classis, requesting a definite action regarding a specific matter for the benefit of the churches. In order to be admissible an overture must provide written grounds.

Guidelines

1. An overture must originate from a consistory and "be considered by classis before being considered by synod" (Art. 25)
2. An overture must meet the requirement of Church Order Article 25, "In the broader assemblies only those matters that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches of the broader assembly in common, shall be considered."
3. If an overture is not adopted by classis, the consistory may overture synod for its adoption.
4. Since an overture is a written proposal requesting a definite action regarding a specific matter for the benefit of the churches, an overture must:
    a. Provide a brief background of the matter being proposed.
    b. Provide specific grounds for the adoption of the overture.
5. An overture must meet the deadline for the provisional agenda in order to be considered, unless for weighty reasons the assembly decides otherwise.
6. Judgments of the broader assemblies shall be received with respect, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order (See Church Order, Article 29).
7. The consistory authorized to convene synod shall use these guidelines to determine the admissibility of overtures, and provide to synod the reasons why any overture has not been admitted on the provisional agenda.

Appendix B
Guidelines for Appeals

In accord with *Church Order,* Article 29, the following guidelines must be observed in preparing an appeal. These guidelines shall serve as the standard for admissibility of an appeal.

Definition

An appeal is a written request for a decision or judgment, made to an assembly by a consistory or individual within the federation, regarding a matter previously decided by an assembly within the federation. An appellant is either a consistory or individual who registers and defends such an appeal either on his own behalf or through a representative.

Guidelines

1. An appeal may be made by a consistory or individual who is a member of a church within the federation.
2. An appeal must first be made to the body whose decision is being appealed, with a view to possible reversal, and only then to classis and/or synod.
3. Since an appeal requests an assembly to make a decision or judgment regarding a matter previously decided by an assembly of the federation, the appeal must:
   a. Provide a written copy of and reference to the specific decision of the narrower body which is being appealed.
   b. Provide a brief history or background of the appeal.
   c. Stipulate specific grounds for the appeal.
4. An appeal must provide written evidence to substantiate the allegations that are being made.
5. An appellant must notify the body whose decision is being appealed in order to grant sufficient time for its response to the broader assembly.
6. When an appeal has been admitted, the adjudicating assembly shall respond to each ground of the appeal by a) stipulating whether each ground is valid, and why or why not, and b) stipulating upon which of its grounds the appeal has been sustained.
7. The judgments of the broader assembly shall be received with respect, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. (Church Order, Article 29)
8. If a synod does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal

synod's decision only once and to the next synod, responding to the grounds adopted by the synod which denied the appeal.

9. If a member objects to a decision of synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, he should bring the matter to his consistory, and urge it to appeal the decision of synod.
10. The consistory authorized to convene synod shall use these guidelines to determine the admissibility of appeals, and provide to synod the reasons why any appeal has not been admitted on the provisional agenda.

Recommendations

1. That during the discussion of this report by synod or its advisory committee, the members of the Ad Hoc URCNA Synodical Rules Committee be granted the privilege of the floor.
2. That Synod 2010 adopt the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.
3. That Synod 2010 mandate the Stated Clerk to prepare and distribute to the churches copies of the adopted Regulations for Synodical Procedure for their usage, and maintain a copy on the federation's web sight for ready public access.
4. That Synod 2010 declare that the Ad Hoc URCNA Synodical Rules Committee has completed its work and thank them for their faithful and diligent service.

Respectfully submitted,

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"Level of Doctrinal Commitment" Report
Synod London 2010
26-30 July 2010

Esteemed fathers and brothers,

1. Introduction to the full report

The committee began its work by reviewing the original overture submitted to Synod Schererville 2007 from Classis Central US, and the synodically assigned mandate. This is the mandate: "That Synod 2007 accede to Overture 8 to appoint a committee to study the level of doctrinal commitment advisable for communicant membership in our churches" (*Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*), p. 16).

The committee proceeded to review and interpret, in terms of the committee's mandate, the synodically adopted liturgical forms found in the *Psalter Hymnal* (1976 edition). The same process was followed with respect to the Three Forms of Unity; since no English version of these Confessions has been officially adopted, we used those found in the 1959 edition of the *Psalter Hymnal*. Similarly, the committee reviewed the Church Order of the URCNA with a view to the mandate.

Throughout its discussions, the committee became aware of significant disagreements that have required submitting to Synod 2010 a single document with two reports. The positions being advocated in these reports may be identified as follows, in terms of their respective outcomes:

Position 1: Membership Access with Stipulations
Position 2: Membership Access upon Full Assent

2. Position 1: Membership Access with Stipulations

The report on Position 1 which follows begins with a section dealing with biblical observations relating to the church's required level of doctrinal commitment for membership. Then follows a lengthy section dealing with historical observations drawn from the history of Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, both throughout the centuries since the Reformation and around the world. The body of the report on Position 1 concludes with pastoral observations relating to the question before us.

2.1 Biblical considerations

2.1.1 *The missionary growth of the church*

The first observation involves the missionary growth of the church. Our Lord's words in Matthew 28:18–20 form the charter of the New Covenant church as it grew from the original one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). Our Lord commanded his apostles to "make disciples," which consisted in two things: first, baptizing, and second, teaching. Of note is that making a disciple entails two activities: baptism and teaching. A disciple, then, is one who places himself under the Lordship of Jesus, receiving the name of God in baptism, and who places himself under the teaching of Jesus' ministers. This is also applied throughout the book of Acts as sinners hear the gospel, believe that gospel, receive the seal of baptism, and then as members of the body of Christ continue in learning the doctrine of the apostles (Acts 2:42).

2.1.2 *Confessing Christ*

The second observation involves the theme of confessing Christ. One important passage is Romans 10:9–10. In the context Paul is contrasting salvation by means of works and salvation by means of faith. In contrast to "the righteousness that is based on the law" (Rom. 10:5), Paul speaks of "the righteousness based on faith" (Rom. 10:6) saying, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Those who believe and who confess are not only saved but are the members to whom Paul wrote in Rome.

2.1.3 *Church membership*

The third observation identifies the nature of church membership in the New Testament. In the book of Acts those who believed in Jesus Christ were "added" to the number of the visible church. This is portrayed throughout the New Testament with various metaphors to describe the relationship between Christ and his Church: vine and branches (John 15), sheep and shepherd (John 10), temple and stones (1 Peter 2), head and members (Rom. 12), and husband and bride (Eph. 5).

2.1.4 *Discipleship*

The fourth observation explains the nature of discipleship. In Ephesians 4 Paul prays for the church to grow up to maturity. In 1 Peter 2 Peter exhorts the church, saying, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted

that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2–3).

2.1.5 *Distinctions among members*

The fifth observation notes that there are various distinctions made among the members of the churches in the New Testament. For example, in Romans 14 Paul speaks of the strong and the weak in the church at Rome. Again, in Hebrews 5 the apostolic writer distinguishes those who are like children and unskilled in the word of righteousness, and therefore in need of milk, and those who are mature with their powers of discernment trained, and therefore in need of solid food (Heb. 5:11–14).

This distinction seems directly relevant in our context with regard to all the differences among believers within our congregations, as well as differences of faith among those who come into contact with our congregations:

1. Covenant youth, who have the privilege and blessings of catechetical instruction, family worship, preaching, and the fellowship of the church.
2. Persons transferring from one URC to another, having the blessings of similarities in preaching, catechesis, liturgy and liturgical forms, and common traditions.
3. Persons being received from other Reformed congregations, whether NAPARC or otherwise, who have the blessings of Reformed preaching, liturgy, and historic confessions.
4. Professing Christians who have not grown up in Reformed churches but who come to learn of the Reformed faith and of our churches; these friendly evangelicals need in-depth and long-term instruction and shepherding in order to change ways of thinking and living.
5. New converts to Christ who have little if any background in the thought patterns of Scripture, in the historic tradition of confessional orthodoxy, and in living godly lives.
6. Those dear brothers and sisters who suffer in this age with mental disability, with whom Reformed churches have always operated on the basis of knowledge commensurate with mental capacity and "as far as one is able to understand."

2.2 Confessional considerations

2.2.1 *Belgic Confession*

The committee agreed to review and interpret, in terms of the committee's mandate, the Three Forms of Unity. Since no English version of these Confessions has been officially adopted, we are using those found in the 1959 edition of the *Psalter Hymnal*.

> The Belgic Confession speaks of believers' relationship to the church, in part, as "maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof" (BC, art. 28).

The next article speaks of the third mark of the true church, saying, "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" (BC, art. 29).

When article 30 discusses the nature and purpose of church government, it says, "by these means the true religion may be preserved" (BC, art. 30). In order for "true religion" to be "preserved," there must be a doctrinal standard which is applied in doing this.

2.2.2 *Heidelberg Catechism*

The Catechism defines the second aspect of true faith, assent, "hold [ing] for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word" (HC, LD 7, Q&A 21). The next question focuses on what this means, asking, "What, then, is necessary for a Christian to believe?" Its answer: "All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary" (HC, LD 7, Q&A 22).

To be called a Christian, according to question and answer 32, is to participate in Christ's anointing through faith in Him (HC, LD 12, Q&A 32).

To be a member of Christ's church is to be joined "in the unity of true faith" (HC, LD 21, Q&A 54).

2.2.3 *Canons of Dort*

Nothing of note is mentioned in the Canons of Dort that pertains to the specific question of what level of doctrinal commitment is necessary for membership in our churches.

2.3 Historical considerations

By way of historical orientation, we note that the Reformer John Calvin taught that division within the church should not occur on the nonfundamentals of the faith. In his *Institutes* (4.1.12), Calvin wrote,

> Some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the principles of the religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among

> the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith. . . . A difference of opinion over these non-essential matters should in no wise be the basis of schism among Christians.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:40, Calvin wrote:

> The Lord allows us freedom in regard to outward rites, in order that we may not think that His worship is confined to those things. At the same time, however. . . . He has restricted the freedom, which He has given us, in such a way that it is only from His Word that we can make up our minds about what is right.

All of this suggests that we can profitably study and learn from the history of Reformed and Presbyterian churches as we chart our course for the future of the URCNA. This instruction is necessary for ecumenical reasons: we wish to stand in the line of our ecclesiastical and spiritual ancestors, and stand together with all who today share with us this ecclesiastical and spiritual history. As we place these historical considerations in the light of Scripture's teaching, we will avoid the twin dangers of arrogance and sectarianism.

2.3.1 *Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*

Following the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), many Reformed churches in the Netherlands had questions regarding Arminians and specifically whether they could be granted church membership. The Regional Synod of Gouda in 1620 judged that those who were willing to be instructed in the Reformed faith could be received into church membership so long as they did not propagandize their views.

Similarly, Synod 1914 of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken der Nederland) in the Hague faced a question from the Particular Synod of Friesland (Southern Part) regarding whether a member who rejected infant baptism could be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The synodical response was based on the following observations supplied by its study committee:

> . . . [W]ith respect to members of the congregation (not with respect to office-bearers, for whom entirely different rules apply) who with good intention expressed doubt concerning any point of doctrine, so long as this did not affect the fundamental matters of truth, they should be treated with great patience and forbearance, with the proviso that they would exhibit readiness to be better instructed and that they would not propagandize on behalf of their deviating sentiment.
>
> Our forefathers based this practice on the fact that the Apostle urged us to receive "the weak in the faith" and "to bear [with] the weakness of the weak" (Rom. 14:1 and 15:2, see further Phil. 3:15, Heb. 5:11-12, etc.); that

in this regard, Scripture establishes different requirements for the office-bearers than for ordinary members of the congregation (1 Tim.3:2, Titus 1:9), and that God's Word itself distinguishes between fundamental articles of faith and points of doctrine that do not affect the foundation of salvation (Phil. 3:15 and 1 Jn.4:1-3).

Voetius (in Pol. Eccl. Part I, tract I, ch. IV, p. 56) correctly deduces from this that Scripture commands us to show such tolerance not only toward those who are ignorant, but even toward those who err. And although such tolerance will naturally be extended more broadly toward those who are already members of the congregation than toward those who affiliate for the first time with the church—because the church must see to it that she permits no enemies of the truth within her gates—nevertheless our forefathers showed, even during the time of the Remonstrant quarrels, how they dealt very patiently not only with members of the congregation who belonged to the Reformed Church and continued to harbour more or less Remonstrant sympathies, but even with those who for a time had joined the Remonstrant brotherhood and later wanted to return to the Reformed Church. Thus, such people were not required, for example, to subscribe to the Five Articles against the Remonstrants in their entirety, but a somewhat less sharply formulated declaration was substituted, as happened, for example, with the consistory in Utrecht.

But no matter how much our forefathers praised this tolerance in theory and showed it in practice, at the same time they nevertheless gave the very proper advice that the Synod should not make a general decision for the sake of determining which points of doctrine could be the subject of deviating sentiments that could be tolerated, because otherwise the impression could easily arise that the Synod no longer considered this particular point of doctrine to be binding (Voetius, Pol. Eccl. Part III, book II, tract II, p.377).

Although your committee [i.e., of the GKN] is united in its opinion that, no matter how important the doctrine of infant baptism may be to the Reformed Churches, this doctrine nevertheless cannot be said to belong to the fundamental doctrines of the faith, and therefore tolerating a deviating view regarding this point of doctrine on the part of a brother who for the rest agrees wholeheartedly with the Reformed confession, does not appear to us impermissible.

Nevertheless, your committee would not invite Synod to make a general pronouncement to the effect that agreement with this weighty matter of our confession is no longer necessary as a requirement for being received as a member of our Churches.

To this we would add that the response to the question whether in a particular case such tolerance is permitted, depends on a variety of circumstances, which cannot be evaluated by the General Synod, but only by the local consistory or classis. This variety of circumstances includes such con-

> siderations, for example, as whether the person involved is unmarried and past child-bearing years, in which case his deviating viewpoint regarding infant baptism would have practically no influence; or whether he already has children or presumably may receive children, in which case he should certainly be required to allow these children to be baptized. Therefore, the committee advises the General Synod.

Therefore, on the basis of these and similar observations, Synod 1914 of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands declared that "our Reformed Churches have repeatedly judged that according to the example of the apostolic church, tolerance can be shown toward brothers who in good conscience err with respect to a point of doctrine, as long as this does not affect any fundamental truth, as long as the one who errs shows readiness to be better instructed, and as long as he promises not to agitate on behalf of this viewpoint; in addition, it should be self-evident that as long as such brothers continue holding that viewpoint, they are not ever eligible for any office in the church." In addition, the synod left the decision as to the exercise of tolerance in this matter to the consistory involved, and if necessary, with the advice of the classis.

So in both cases, Synod 1620 and Synod 1914, churches were permitted to admit and/or retain members who could not subscribe to every doctrine in the Three Forms of Unity so long as they agreed not to propagandize their views and agreed to submit to further instruction.

2.3.2 *Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

A report on this matter was submitted to the Thirty-third General Assembly (1966) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, entitled "Refusing to Present Children for Baptism." (This report is available online at http://www.opc.org/GA/refuse_bapt.html. Although it should not be construed as the official position of the OPC, this report, together with the accompanying assembly action, offers a reliable picture of how this matter is currently handled in the OPC.) The report presents a firm position regarding infant baptism as the biblical teaching and the denomination's confessional stand. It also reviews a variety of situations faced in the church, some where admitting to membership those not persuaded of infant baptism might be inadvisable, others where it might be acceptable. The outcome of this discussion was that the general assembly declared that "the admission to membership of those who cannot in good conscience present their children for baptism is a matter for judgment by sessions."

2.3.3 *Christian Reformed Church in North America*

The Christian Reformed Church has a long history of dealing with this matter. In 1888 the synod discussed the matter of receiving as a member someone who denied infant baptism. The 1888 synod's response consisted of two parts. "1. To the question whether a Consistory may receive as a member someone who denies and opposes infant baptism, the answer is: '*No!*' 2. To the question [about] how to deal with members of the church who, because of scruples of conscience, are unable to allow their children to be baptized, the answer of the synod is: 'Instruct and admonish such people patiently, and if this proves ineffective, follow the ecclesiastical path [of discipline].'" (The text of this decision is found in *Synodale Handelingen der Holl. Christl. Geref. Kerk in Amerika gehouden te Grand Rapids, Mich. den Juni, E.V.D. 1888*, Art. 57, p. 19; and in J. L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1956), p. 167.)

Again in 1964, the CRC synod answered an appeal about whether someone not convinced of the doctrine of infant baptism could be admitted into church membership. The answer was that the relevant church order article "does not deny the right and duty of a consistory to evaluate each case of admittance according to the special circumstances of the person requesting such admittance [to membership]." Additionally, "in this case the couple agrees wholeheartedly with the Reformed religion, except on the point of direct biblical evidence for the doctrine of infant baptism, and is willing to be further instructed in the Reformed doctrine of baptism." Moreover, "[t]his couple also promised not to propagate any views conflicting with the doctrinal position of the church." (This synodical decision is found in *Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 63. This decision and its historical background in the CRC are reproduced in William P. Brink and Richard R. DeRidder, *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*, 1987 ed. (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), p. 258. It should be noted that this manual (and its 2001 successor, edited by David Engelhard and Leonard J. Hofman) omits any mention of the *second* part of the 1888 decision, cited above.)

For historical completeness, it is important to recall what was written about this matter, within the CRC context, by Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, in their well-known commentary on the Church Order. (Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary: An Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), pp. 233-234. The same material can be found in *The Church Order Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), pp. 251-252.) Historically the Church Order required that members confess the Reformed religion, which implied agreement with both the gen-

eral truths of Christianity and the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith. These authors strongly insisted that members of Reformed churches must confess "the Reformed fundamentals" and agree with the Three Forms of Unity, in order both to preserve the Reformed character of the churches and to resist the infection of the churches with non-Reformed heresies. They spoke of the church's peace and purity depending upon agreement with the vital, essential, fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith. They continued:

> And this consistent position of our churches does not spell injustice toward any child of God. They who do not agree with us should simply seek and join a church with which they are agreed. Let one who is methodistic in doctrine join a Methodist church. Let one who is baptistic in doctrine affiliate with a Baptist church, etc. Our churches have always taken the stand expressed in Article 59 [61], although we believe with all our hearts that there is a holy Catholic Church and that the Christian Church is by no means limited to the Christian Reformed denomination together with some other loyal Reformed organizations.

By way of preliminary observation, it should be noted here again that these "categories" being used by Van Dellen and Monsma don't fit our situation altogether well. Where, in this arrangement, would one assign a Reformed Baptist? Today the class of persons identified as "they who do not agree with us" is not as clearly identifiable as it may have been forty years ago, and finding "a church with which they are agreed" has, as we have already noted, become a difficult, if not impossible, challenge for people who are coming to the Reformed faith in contexts other than Reformed churches.

2.4. Pastoral considerations

2.4.1 *Ignorance and misunderstanding v. opposition and denial*

Given the history of ecclesiastical discussion of this matter among Reformed churches, it should require no argument to claim that the quality of a prospective member's "non-belief" in a doctrine confessed and practiced by the church, such as infant baptism, ought to be examined and evaluated. Is there openness to further (even long-term) instruction and clarification? Or do the elders face an altogether firm and stubborn resistance against the doctrine and practice, such as, for example, infant baptism? The answers to these questions go a long way in guiding the elders' response to a request for membership.

Perhaps we need to ask a prior question, however. Should it matter to us whether a prospective member's "non-belief" arises from ignorance or

misunderstanding, on the one hand, or from opposition or denial, on the other hand?

Some may be inclined to declare such a distinction to be irrelevant. In their view, it matters not one whit whether this "non-belief" arises from ignorance or from denial. The decisive reality is that such people are unable to affirm "the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation." That fact ties our hands; they may not be admitted into membership.

Others would say—and several Reformed churches are among them—that this distinction regarding the quality and character of a prospective member's "non-belief" is essential to deciding whether or not to admit such a person into membership. Moreover, each of the church groups we have surveyed has refused to adopt a single formula or response to be followed in every instance. Further, each of them has placed responsibility for the decision firmly in the hands of the elders. In addition, four tests have been composed to assist in shedding light on such decisions.

(1) *Does the prospective member agree wholeheartedly with the Reformed religion, except on the matter in question?*

Examining the prospective member's doctrinal commitment may turn up other areas of difficulty with respect to biblical teaching. Before admitting such a person into membership, these difficulties may need to be addressed by a thorough, long-term tutorial catechizing, perhaps in the person's home, together with other family members. In this case, the impediment to membership is not "just" infant baptism.

(2) *Does the prospective member promise to be instructed further in the biblical doctrine in question?*

Educability is an essential quality in such cases, and the elders ought to insist on further instruction. If the prospective member responds by saying he or she "just can't talk about this subject anymore," once again, elders should patiently probe for the reason. What if the person has been verbally bombarded or beaten up over this doctrine in the past? What if, in connection with the doctrine of infant baptism, the person has stood at the graveside of his or her own unbaptized child, and suffers unwarranted, but nevertheless real guilt feelings relating to this child's eternal welfare? Patient and persistent pastoral care over the long term may, by God's grace, be instrumental in bringing such a person to see the truth of infant baptism. In any case, willingness to learn more about the doctrine in question must be required, if for no other reason than that

this person is seeking to worship God together with the congregation in terms of shared doctrines and practices!

(3) *Does the prospective member promise not to propagate any views contradicting the church's doctrinal position?*

Although this test question may strike the reader as odd, it is really a very useful diagnostic tool. For example, if the prospective member intends to boycott the administration of baptism to any infant, that would be a form of propagating a view contradicting the church's doctrinal position. A couple who are the parents of two unbaptized children with a third about to be born, were they adamantly to refuse to have any of their three children baptized, would by their example be advocating a view contrary to the church's teaching. And yet, a retired couple beyond childbearing years who is willing to attend every administration of the sacrament, and who promises not to propagate views contrary to the church's position, would satisfy this particular test.

(4) *Does the prospective member agree that as long as he remains unpersuaded about the doctrine in question, he will not be permitted to serve among the congregation in any office or in any teaching capacity?*

Someone may object: But does this not create a two-tiered membership within the church, where some are restricted in terms of service, while others are not? This restriction would be judged unfair only on the basis of an egalitarian view of the church, one which claims that every member has the right, by virtue of membership, to serve in any or every available capacity. But this view is simply neither biblical nor prudent. This egalitarian view is not biblical, because the Bible sets forth requirements for office, for example, which excludes some people from church office while permitting them to be church members (e.g., managing one's own household well, 1 Tim. 3.4). And this egalitarian view is not prudent, because the power of some sexual sins may, for example, render a church liable for the misdeeds of a former sexual criminal (though penitent and forgiven) who was permitted to work with children or teenagers. Similarly, restricting opportunities for service on the part of someone unpersuaded about a particular doctrine or practice is not unfair or unjust; it is biblical and wise.

Receiving answers to these four questions will go a long way in determining the pliability of such people with regard to responsible church membership.

It should be added, however, that if the elders were to allow into membership someone not yet convinced but willing to be taught about a

particular doctrine or practice in dispute, a thorough instruction in this doctrine might well take months, perhaps years. This would require a good deal of patient and persistent attention by pastor and elders, not only to provide the needed instruction, but also to guide the congregation in relating biblically toward such a member. Lessons about living with and esteeming those less mature in the faith might require the focus of family visiting or the use of other forums of congregational discussion.

The argument that claims that if consistories admit into the church people who question distinctively Reformed doctrines, such action would injure the Reformed character of the church, would be true if Reformed church government were congregational (governed by the church's members) and not presbyterial (governed by the church's elders). Since Reformed church government is presbyterial, however, the Reformed character of a church is bound up with her eldership (the governing body) and not her membership. So long as we retain and properly maintain the Form of Subscription for office-bearers, it is impossible for a Reformed church to deviate from its Reformed moorings.

Moreover, Reformed churches have long recognized a distinction between qualifications for church *membership* and qualifications for church *leadership*. Not everyone qualified to be a member is qualified to hold office in Christ's church. It is reasonable that the differences in qualification include different levels of doctrinal maturity. An office-bearer must have a more mature and full commitment to the Reformed faith than a mere member. In the history of Reformed church practice, church membership has neither implied nor required formal subscription to the Three Forms of Unity. To argue the contrary is to obviate the need for what today is an *additional* requirement for holding church office, namely, signing the Form of Subscription.

2.4.2 *Analogies: coming to the Lord's Supper and attending the second service*

Perhaps some remain unconvinced regarding the propriety of admitting into membership a person who does not believe a particular doctrine or practice to be biblical, but who nevertheless meets the tests stipulated above.

Consider, then, the following analogies.

Imagine interviewing for membership a person who had been taught that making public profession of faith in Jesus Christ does not require personal regeneration, but that the experience of personal regeneration is required for coming to the Lord's Table. With this view, a person can for years be a "professing Christian" but never have participated in the Lord's Supper, because he is unable to testify to having experienced personal regeneration.

Nor will he promise to come to the Table, if he were to be admitted into membership in your congregation. Should such a person be admitted?

This scenario is quite realistic, in terms of both the past and the present. In the past, during the early years of the 20th century, Christian Reformed consistories were by synodical instruction expected to elicit from those being interviewed for public profession of faith a promise to come to the Table. Back then, making this promise was a prerequisite for making public profession of faith. In the present day, quite a number of United Reformed congregations have members who, for reasons similar to those explained above, do not come, or rarely come, to the Table.

Imagine another interview for membership, this one with a person who has been raised in a church that met only once per Sunday for worship. This person is unpersuaded of the biblical warrant for a second service, and refuses to promise to attend the second service, although agreeing to be instructed further regarding this obligation. We could tweak this analogy by changing the scenario from a person seeking membership to a person who is already a member, who attends faithfully every Sunday morning but never on Sunday evening—earning the unflattering nickname of "oncer." Quite a number of United Reformed congregations have members who, although not hindered by providence or providential assignments (home childcare, hospital nursing duty, etc.), regularly do not attend second service worship.

We do not intend to discuss possible healthy resolutions to these analogous situations. Our purpose in raising them as analogies is to supply some perspective, some balance, some nuance to our discussion about admitting into membership people who do not yet believe a particular doctrine or practice to be biblical, such as infant baptism.

It is important to observe that each of these analogous situations that we have described involves the means of grace, whether the preaching of the Word or the administration of the sacraments.

We would suggest that these analogies supply an argument for caution in advising consistories about how to respond to people seeking membership who do not believe, for example, the biblical doctrine of infant baptism. *All of us are living with these and similar conundrums*—whether as established congregation, or newly formed church, or blossoming church plant. We should not pretend otherwise. If, in advising others, we pretend that we are not struggling with such conundrums, our dishonesty will wound our fraternal bonds.

How a consistory deals with such members depends on a number of other considerations. Still, many URC consistories, upon careful investigation, coupled with clear explanation of expectations, either have admitted or

would likely admit into membership such people who profess Christ but do not come to the Table, or who absent themselves regularly from the second worship service. But on what basis? And with what consistency? Are we not in fact practicing a form of relativism, and thereby endangering the church's purity?

2.4.3 *Biblical tolerance*

At this point it seems most helpful to introduce into our discussion the notion of biblical tolerance. (On this matter, see the useful essay/speech of J. Kamphuis, "Remarks on Church and Tolerance" (reprinted in *Ordained Servant*, 3/1 [January 1994]: 9-16), presented to the International Conference of Reformed Churches, September 1-9, 1993, in Zwolle, the Netherlands. This essay is available at http://www.opc.org/OS/html/V3/lb.html) The adjective "biblical" is essential to our definition of tolerance, for we must distinguish between a humanistic tolerance arising from commitment to human autonomy, on the one hand, and a proper forbearance, on the other hand. The former starts with the authority of the individual as the center of all things, whereas the latter moves from God's own character and aims at the growth of the individual within the body of the church along the divinely prescribed route. Dutch theologian J. Kamphuis sought to integrate God's intolerance (against idols and idolaters) with his patient forbearance (toward his people), and found the "solution" to this "dilemma" in the fact that our God is the God of history. Throughout this history, God travels with his people along a way, a route, one which is perfect and holy.

> At the beginning of his dealing with us he did not proclaim a philosophical world view, a religious system, but revealed himself as the Living God and the God who works salvation. If he had been the God of a system, then he would have been as intolerant as everybody who builds a philosophical and world view system and then asks submission to it. But he makes himself known in the way of grace and justice. On that way he shows quite a lot of patience and lenience in enduring the conduct of a troublesome and obstinate people (Acts 13:18), although he undoubtedly maintains himself also in the way of his judgments of them who take counsel against him and his anointed (Psalm 2). . . . And on the way of salvation he has made his name known to Moses: the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Ex. 34:6-7) (J. Kamphuis, "Remarks on Church and Tolerance," 15).

This emphasis is quite helpful, especially since it draws our attention

to the character of God himself as the basis for practicing proper tolerance (forbearance, patience) in the church. This tolerance does not leave people on their own, but rather seeks to cultivate, to nurture, and to bring people to maturity in Christ.

Similarly, a biblical intolerance against error was combined with biblical tolerance toward doctrinal immaturity among the Reformed churches in seventeenth-century Netherlands when church leaders opposed the errors of the Remonstrants while patiently bearing with simple folk in the churches who, though confused, were willing to be instructed.

The kind of tolerance and forbearance for which we are pleading does not seek to expand the boundaries of doctrine and practice as widely as possible. Rather, this kind of patience carefully tends the growth and progress of grace, in the life of both the church and individual believers. This kind of tolerance presupposes—indeed, possesses firm confidence in—the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in bringing progress in sanctification.

2.4.4 *Spiritual developmental milestones*

Within the field of pediatrics, specialists evaluate a baby's development in terms of stages or milestones, as a baby grows and develops from primitive reflexes to learned reflexes. Developmental milestones are functional skills (motor, language, cognitive, and social skills) assigned to certain age ranges, milestones which assist physicians and physical therapists in assessing appropriate child development. Sadly, people with developmental disabilities may never achieve these milestones.

For example, specialists expect that at three months a baby should be able to raise his head and chest when lying on his stomach, to bring hand to mouth, to follow moving objects, to turn toward the direction of sound, and begin to develop a social smile.

A similar pattern may be seen in baby believers as well. New Christians have not yet learned some reflexes that come with experience in the faith. Hopefully, if growth is natural and normal, these will be developed and become apparent. These include doctrinal and moral reflexes, which are the fruit of understanding, discernment, and practice. Such an emphasis on growth-through-practice is repeated frequently in the New Testament (Eph. 4.11-16; Phil. 1.9-11; Heb. 5.12-14).

Another way of stating this is to suggest that if we may understand the marks of the true church (pure preaching of gospel doctrine, pure administration of gospel sacraments, and faithful exercise of church discipline) as gift and calling (*Gabe und Aufgabe*), as those characteristics of Christ's church "on the way" and en route to maturity, then why may we not con-

strue the marks of the true Christian in a similar way? These are set forth in Belgic Confession, Article 29:

> With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in Him.

Taken together, these marks—faith, fleeing sin, following righteousness, loving God and neighbor, crucifying the flesh—all form the believer's musculo-skeletal, cardio-pulmonary, and nervous systems with which a baby Christian is born. We observe these features, these "marks," and we must conclude: This person is really a Christian. Just as a healthy baby possesses each of these systems, all of them functioning together to supply and sustain life, so the new, yet immature Christian possesses all of these "spiritual systems."

Possessing all these systems, however, does not yet mean the baby has the physio-neurological-social reflexes of a twenty year old!

So as we near the end of this discussion about the level of doctrinal commitment required for church membership, we face this question as consistories and as churches: Are we prepared and willing—indeed, eager—to receive newborn baby Christians into our church families, baby Christians who need the nurture of discipling, the mentoring of spiritual "parents" and older siblings? Are we prepared and willing to facilitate, through the Spirit-effectuated preaching of the gospel, the birthing of new Christians whose reflexes may not yet be fully trained and developed, but who are willing to submit themselves to the governance and instruction of the church?

2.4.5 *Freedom and accountability in federative practice*

We must honestly face the pastoral difficulty that can arise if one consistory receives into communicant membership those who do not (yet) agree with a particular doctrine or practice (for example, infant baptism). What happens when such a person moves away and wishes to join with another URC whose consistory may hold differing convictions and therefore follow a different practice on this matter? How can these differences exist among churches in the same federation? Can and should consistories retain a measure of freedom in this matter, such that they instruct and remind such

people whom they receive into membership that not every URC consistory follows this practice?

It is important that we do not phrase the question as follows: Should consistories *be given* this measure of freedom?—for such wording would imply that the federation is the source of such freedom.

The real question becomes: Do our federatively constitutional documents—the Church Order, together with the Three Forms of Unity and the adopted liturgical forms, all of them applications or summaries of Scripture and its teaching—entail this freedom? We answer in the affirmative, in view of analogies noted earlier, whereby already among the URC some consistories receive into membership people who do not come regularly to the Lord's Table and people who regularly absent themselves from the second worship service.

The other dimension involves the need for, and function of, accountability among the churches in the federation. This forms an important pastoral concern, one that we may not dismissively shrug off with an attitude of independentism or individualism. Some might observe that during our recent youthful past, the URC have traveled very far—in several respects, too far—down the road of diversity in practice. To the extent that consistories and congregations have lost touch with, or have not learned, many of the protocols that once functioned as standard procedures for Reformed church life and practice, to that extent the dangers exist of people getting hurt and confusion seeping in, because too many things are being done "on the fly" or "by the seat of the pants."

Here, the real question becomes: What kind of accountability is entailed in belonging together as churches within a federation? As a federation of churches, are we more like marbles in a pail, simply existing alongside each other, without intimate, organic interconnectedness?

So as we discuss the matter of receiving into membership people who do not (yet) agree with a particular doctrine or practice (such as infant baptism), the issue needs to be joined precisely at this point of self-examination: Is this a matter concerning which we are willing and ready to hold one another accountable? Can this be a matter of consistorial freedom to be exercised with requisite pastoral care within the context of mutual accountability to other consistories? Can we as consistories and as churches pursue growth that is both free and accountable? As consistories and as churches, in connection with this and similar issues generated by needed church growth, do we welcome both consistorial freedom and mutual accountability? Have we as a federation already lost the Reformed (which is to say: biblical) character of mutually accountable consistories? Are we sufficiently aware of the danger

that a legitimate aversion toward hierarchical abuse can easily spawn tyranny of another kind—not the tyranny of a synod or a classis, but the tyranny of a consistory over its members or over other office-bearers?

With all of this, we are suggesting that the discussion of admitting into membership those who do not (yet) agree with a particular doctrine or practice provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our federative identity and future.

2.5 Response to Position 2, "Membership Access upon Full Assent"

Synod London 2010 will recognize and face the very difficult differences of viewpoint on the question before us, just as the committee itself did. Our committee discussions were amicable, thorough, and clarifying, even as we hope the synodical discussion will be.

In response to Position 2, the signatories of Position 1 would simply appeal to the following considerations.

2.5.1 *Ecumenicity*

The position being advocated under the heading "Membership Access with Stipulations" is the historically defended position, both in the past and in the present, among very many Reformed and Presbyterian churches with whom we have close or growing ecumenical relationships. For example, a large number of churches who are members of NAPARC either endorse or practice some version of Position 1. This number includes denominations most of us would consider very conservative and confessional. In addition, our relationships with churches like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, and the Canadian Reformed Churches will be affected by this discussion. It is fair to say that generally speaking, most churches and church federations with whom we are ecumenically related either endorse or practice "Membership Access with Stipulations."

We believe that Position 2 will impede our quest for genuine ecumenicity in our generation. In a day when churches must address the gospel to an increasingly hostile culture, we as a federation of churches need all the support and flexibility that ecumenical solidarity both offers and requires.

2.5.2 *Historical integrity: the URCNA and the CRCNA*

Historical honesty requires us to observe that before the URCNA formed in 1995, as many members were living in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, struggling to preserve biblical teaching on a number of issues, at no point in the struggle did this denomination's century-long

commitment to Position 1, "Membership Access with Stipulations," occasion vigorous dispute or fracture the life of the denomination. Another way of stating this is to say that very many of those who currently are members of the URCNA had been living without complaint for years, for decades, within a denomination that both endorsed and practiced "Membership Access with Stipulations."

Historical honesty requires the observation, then, that it was not this particular practice that occasioned or caused the demise that led to the formation of the URCNA. At this point in the history of the URCNA, to abandon the freedom to exercise pastoral sensitivity and flexibility now enjoyed by consistories in evaluating requests for membership would be extremely discouraging.

2.5.3 *Similarity among Presbyterian and Reformed churches*

Finally, let it be noted that the levels of doctrinal commitment historically required of office-bearers, on the one hand, and church members, on the other hand, have varied among both Presbyterian and Reformed churches. This variety is expressed more formally among Presbyterians, whereby, for example, a church member is required to make "a credible profession of faith," while an officer is required to assent to the creedal standards. But Reformed churches have implicitly recognized the same variety in levels of doctrinal commitment by requiring *only office-bearers*—not church members—to sign the Form of Subscription. This requirement itself shows a similarity, though not uniformity, of practice among Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

2.6 Recommendations for "Position 1: Membership Access with Stipulations"

In light of the above report, the signatories of Position 1 recommend:

2.6.1 That Synod London 2010 grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Daniel Hyde and Dr. Nelson Kloosterman when this portion of the report is discussed in the contexts of advisory committee or plenary session.

2.6.2 That Synod London 2010 receive this report on "Membership Access with Stipulations" as fulfillment of the mandate adopted by Synod Schererville 2007.

2.6.3 That Synod London 2010 advise consistories to study this report on "Membership Access with Stipulations" and implement its considerations with pastoral care and responsibility toward both prospective members, present members, and federative relationships.

2.6.4 That Synod London 2010 dismiss the committee with thanks.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Hyde
Nelson Kloosterman, committee reporter
Richard Kuiken

3. Position 2: Membership Access upon Full Assent

3.1 Introduction

Position 2 is a response to Position 1 and to Overture 8 and its grounds submitted to Synod Schererville 2007. Position 1 advises Synod London 2010 "to study [their] report and implement its considerations with pastoral care and responsibility toward prospective members, present members, and federative relationships." Their conclusion is that our consistories have the freedom to admit into membership those who disagree with some of our church's doctrine and practice.

The burden of proof that our federatively constitutional documents (the Church Order, Three Forms of Unity and adopted liturgical forms) grant consistories the freedom to receive into membership those who do not (yet) agree with a particular doctrine or practice is on position 1. We would affirm that our constitutional documents *do not* grant consistories this freedom.

The grounds cited in Overture 8 also suggest that our consistories have freedom to decide what constitutes acceptable exceptions to our federatively constitutional documents. The focus of the grounds is on how to handle evangelicals who disagree with the biblical doctrine of infant baptism. Again, we would argue that our consistories have no freedom to decide to accept into membership those, for whatever reason, cannot assent to what the Scripture teaches and demands (viz. infant baptism). We will argue that our churches must require its members to assent fully to our federatively constitutional documents, the confessions of which faithfully summarize what the Scriptures teach and require.

First, we will review Overture 8 and offer a short response; second, we will make some observations from the history of subscription; and third, we will argue for the necessity of our churches to require all members to assent fully to the Three Forms of Unity.

3.2 The stated overture and our response

3.2.1 *The stated overture from Synod 2007*

Overture#8
Adopted by Classis Central US
Overture to appoint study committee on doctrinal commitment and communicant membership

Overture for classis
The consistory of the Covenant Reformed Church in Kansas City, Missouri, overtures Classis Central US to overture Synod 2007 to appoint a committee to study the level of doctrinal commitment advisable for communicant membership in our churches. Grounds:

1. The history of the Reformed Churches indicates diversity on this question, with many insisting on full agreement with the Three Forms of Unity (see *Acts of Synod 1959[CRC]*, pp.21-22), and others permitting exceptions to certain formulations provided the membership candidate (a) promises to submit to further instruction, (b) promises not to propagate his deviation and, (c) understands his ineligibility for office in the church (see, *Acta Generale Synod GKN 's–Gravenhage 1914*, Art. 138 p.86; cf. The Regional Synod of Gouda 1620 for a similar judgment).
2. The history of the Reformed Churches indicates diverse understandings regarding the meaning of the third question in the Form for Public Profession of Faith with some insisting this refers to commitment to the Reformed Confessions and others insisting it does not (see N. H. Gootjes, "The Articles of the Christian Faith" *Clarion* 48:5 [1999] and "Once More: Articles and Confessions" *Clarion* 48:6 [1999]; cf. G. Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* [Neerlandia, Inheritance, 1995], pp. 188ff.).
3. The current practices among Reformed Churches with whom we presently enjoy formal relationships via the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) are diverse on this question, though most do not require full agreement with the doctrinal standards of their churches. The 34th General Assembly of the OPC (1967), for example, was of the opinion that "with regard to the admission to membership of those who cannot at that time in good conscience present their children for baptism, the session may judge in the special circumstances that such persons, having been informed of the position of the church, may be admitted if they are willing to answer sincerely and affirmatively the questions asked of those being admitted to communicant membership in the church (*Directory for Worship V:5*)." Quoted from *Minutes of the*

Thirty-Fourth General Assembly of the OPC [1967], p.136.

4. Because of recent church plant initiatives and a renewed commitment to outreach, the churches of our federation receive requests for membership with increasing frequency from friendly evangelicals who do not fully agree with our doctrinal standards. It is the desire of leaders in these churches to shepherd these brothers and sisters in Christ without compromising the Reformed character of the church.
5. Such a synodically adopted study would serve the harmony and uniformity of practice among the churches of the federation (see art.25).

3.2.2 *Our response to the stated overture*

The following is our response to the overture. We'll begin by responding to each of the grounds:

1. Though historically there have been differing practices in Reformed churches, the vast majority of this history demonstrates that churches required members to assent fully to the Three Forms of Unity.
2. Our understanding of the third question in the Form for Public Profession of Faith is that it requires full assent to The Three Forms of Unity.
3. We would expect there to be diversity among churches in NAPARC on the understanding of agreement with the doctrinal standards of their churches. American Presbyterian churches today typically practice system subscription (or *quatenus* subscription, meaning "insofar" as the confession agrees with the Scriptures) for their officers. For the members of these churches there is no demand for full assent to their confession. This is a departure from the Presbyterian practice of full subscription, not to mention a departure from the practice of Continental Reformed churches.
4. The best and most helpful method to shepherd friendly evangelicals who wish to join our churches is to catechize them while maintaining the need for full assent to the Three Forms of Unity. Furthermore, we will argue that allowing members to join our churches while not fully assenting to the Three Forms of Unity *does* compromise the "Reformed character" of our churches.
5. Finally, we will argue that the requirement of full assent best serves the harmony and uniformity of practice among the churches in our federation. Full assent is true to the nature of a confessional church that seeks to honor what God has revealed in the Scriptures.

3.2.3 *The history of doctrinal commitment*

The first ground in Overture 8 recognizes that many Reformed churches in history insisted that members fully agree with the Three Forms of Unity. Indeed, the history of Reformed churches in the British Isles and on the Continent demonstrates that fact (R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), p.180). Historically, most Reformed churches in the Netherlands also required full agreement with the Three Forms of Unity for its members. Roelf C. Janssen notes in his dissertation, *By This Our Subscription*, that publications in the seventeenth century demonstrate the ubiquity of the Reformed practice of full assent. The works of both G. Voetius and W. à Brakel "defend the necessity of confessions in the church and consider church members bound to them." (Roelf C. Janssen, *By This Our Subscription: Confessional Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Tradition since 1816* (Drukker: Kopiedruk de Leeuw, Dalfsen, 2009, p.33).

Article 61 of the Church Order of the Synod of Dort (1619) is instructive with respect to the importance of the members of Reformed churches agreeing with Reformed doctrine: "None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who, according to the usage of the Church with which they unite themselves, have made a profession of the Reformed Religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly conduct, without which also those from other Churches shall not be admitted." If visitors to the Lord's Supper were required to make a profession of the Reformed Religion, we can assume that the Reformed churches during this time required their members to assent fully to all of the Reformed Confessions. Position 1 mentions that one year after the conclusion of the Synod of Dort, the Regional Synod of Gouda (1620) "judged that those who were willing to be instructed in the Reformed faith could be received into church membership so long as they did not propagandize their views." But the national (even international) great Synod of Dort representing Dutch Reformed history later on demonstrates the regional synodical decision to be an exception.

Janssen's dissertation cites many examples of Dutch Reformed churches requiring their members to assent fully to the Three Forms of Unity. In addition Janssen states, "In general, the Dutch tradition has been to have church members bind themselves to the confessing of the church via the promise made when professing one's faith, and to have office bearers and other functionaries subscribe either by means of placing one's signature beneath the confessions or by means of a form of subscription" (p.403). Furthermore, Janssen continues:

"Originally, church membership implied explicit agreement with the con-

fessing of the church (CO-1619 art. 60). This was the position maintained by the Juridical Calvinists, and churches that accordingly have their roots in the Secession and Doleantie. However, especially since the 1860s, this became a debated point in the NHK …History seems to indicate that the higher one's view of Scripture as divine revelation, the more precisely defined one's understanding of profession of faith is" (p.391).

Historically, then, the Dutch Reformed churches, in general, required their members to assent fully to the Three Forms of Unity and only later did this become a debated point.

Reformed churches in the rest of Europe also practiced full subscription for their officers and members. During the sixteenth century French Reformation, there was no tolerance for those embracing much of Reformed theology but denying infant baptism. This is important to note because the implicit argument in Overture 8 and in position 1 is that disagreeing with infant baptism is acceptable in Reformed churches. This argument cannot be sustained in view of the history of the Reformation. In this quote, the category of "Anabaptists" included others who would look like our Baptists today:

> The Anabaptists occupied a range on the religious spectrum. They included individuals who held various radical positions outside of denying infant baptism. There was no formal "Anabaptist" church with an official "Anabaptist" confession that rivaled the Huguenots, but only loosely affiliated groups with a broad array of beliefs typically organized around charismatic personalities. These groups adopted this particular structure partially because magistrates prevented them from organizing, partially because they tended to renounce formal ecclesiastical hierarchy, and partially because some of the members of these groups already considered themselves Protestants and *even devotees of Calvin, individuals who merely wanted him to extend his program and break from Catholicism on additional points such as infant baptism*." (Joshua Lee Rosenthal, *The Sword that Divides and Bonds that Tie: Faith and Family in the French Wars of Religion* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2005) p.192, emphasis ours).

Therefore, there were people in Calvin's day whose confession was similar to "Reformed" Baptists of today but they were not received as members of Reformed churches if they agreed with Reformed theology but could not accept infant Baptism.

Even the early Presbyterian churches subscribed to their confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith. "The modern American Presbyterian approach to confessional subscription seems to assume the *quatenus* ['insofar as' is agrees with the Scriptures] view. From 1647 to the beginning of the ambiguity in the American Presbyterian church in 1729, however, the West-

minster Confession was subscribed *quia* ['because' it agrees with the Scriptures]" (Clark, *Reformed Confession*, 179). This history seems to demonstrate that when churches form they understand the importance and necessity of defining themselves according to their written confessions and of demanding full subscription and assent concomitant with confessional particularity. But as time goes on they tend to drift away from stricter forms of subscription and assent as the culture and theological landscape shifts and changes.

To our understanding, Reformed churches have typically subscribed and assented (even the members) to the Three Forms of Unity *quia* (because they agree with the Scriptures). *Quia* subscription takes the Confessions of the church seriously as a unified summary of what the Scriptures teach and demand. After all, we could subscribe or assent to any document — even the Book of Mormon — *quatenus*, or "insofar" as it agreed with the Scriptures. We hold so dearly to the Three Forms of Unity because they actually and faithfully summarize the Scriptures – they don't state anything that the Scriptures do not teach. R. Scott Clark notes, "It is not that the authority of the confessions is 'very nearly tantamount to that of Scripture,' but it *is* tantamount to that of Scripture, assuming that a given confession *is* biblical and intended to be subscribed *because* (*quia*) it is biblical. If a confession is not biblical, it should be revised so that it is biblical, or it should be discarded in favor of a confession that is biblical." (Clark, *Reformed Confession*, 178, emphasis his).

3.3 Arguments for full assent

3.3.1 *The necessity of full assent for the members of our churches*

1. *Keys of the kingdom of Heaven*

In discussing Ecclesiology as related to the issue of subscription, R. C. Janssen cites a work in dogmatics by J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema. He considers this to be the up-to-date representation of orthodox Calvinism in The Netherlands. Van Genderen and Velema argue that "the church (congregation) has its origin and existence in the work of God, who causes it to assemble to serve Him" (Janssen, *By This Our Confession*, p. 284). Janssen comments on this: "Confessional subscription is, in the Dutch Reformed tradition, an element in the process of 'assembling' the church: only those can become members in full-standing whose beliefs match those of the church as expressed in its confessions, and among churches the confessions form the basis for fellowship" (p. 284).

Indeed, the Three Forms of Unity contain this idea explicitly. Accord-

ing to the Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 83, the preaching of the Holy Gospel and Christian discipline, as the Keys of the Kingdom, open the Kingdom of Heaven to believers and shut it against unbelievers. Q/A 85 makes it clear that those in the congregation must confess right doctrine or face discipline. Furthermore, the Belgic Confession article 28, states that Christians must submit to the doctrine of the church as those assembled by God. The Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession do not distinguish between "essential" and "nonessential" doctrines to confess. The confessions in their entirety are to be confessed by the church's members for their "beliefs match those of the church as expressed in its confessions."

The keys to the Kingdom of Heaven ultimately have been given to Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:7). In His infinite wisdom, He shares the use of these keys with the officers of the church (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). Janssen argues that the church, which shares this power with Christ to determine who enters the Kingdom of God and who is to be excluded, must use the Scriptures as the standard to make these determinations. The standard is Christ and "His teaching passed on in the instruction of the apostles (Matt. 28:20). The church is not to add or remove from this teaching, nor to proclaim a different teaching (Gal. 1:8; Rev. 22:18-19). Instead, the church is called upon to contend for the faith *once for all* entrusted to it (Jude 3)" (p. 294 emphasis his).

In context, Janssen is arguing that the confessions may never be the standard of truth for exercising the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; only the Scripture are. But, then says Janssen, "The New Testament implies that all church members are required to believe (e.g. Matt. 28:19; Col. 1:23). This faith is brought to expression in confessional documents by churches" (p. 391). Thus, the confessions summarize what those in the church are to believe. And when the officers of the church are using the Keys of the Kingdom rightly, with the confessions as a guide, they are using *Jesus' teaching* functionally to guide the church. The church can ask nothing more, and nothing less, than what Christ has taught. To allow someone to join the church and hence enter the Kingdom of Heaven without confessing what Jesus taught, as we understand it in our confessions, is functionally to subtract from our Lord's teaching.

When the church uses the Keys of the Kingdom to allow ("loose") people into the church it does so under the requirement that the person agree with the Scriptures (Matt. 28:19; Col. 1:23). Our churches believe that infant baptism, as well as all of the substance of the Ecumenical Creeds and Three Forms of Unity, is biblical. There is nothing in the Creeds and Confessions that we believe is unbiblical or the opinion of man. But if we

allow people to join our churches who are not yet convinced of a doctrine such as infant baptism, whether they have children or they are elderly, we imply, on some level, that it is permissible not to believe something the Bible teaches. To say that a person who is not yet convinced of infant baptism may join the church with the provisos of being educable, not being able to be an officer and committed to not propagating their view merely puts them on a different tier of membership. This is not the same as a covenant child who is not yet communed, for if he does not confess his faith publicly and does not commune he will eventually be disciplined for implicitly denying the faith and denying the means of grace in the Lord's Supper. But for the person who joins the church who is not yet convinced of infant baptism there is no terminus to the provisos he is under – there is no threat of discipline. Therefore, he may continue to deny what the Bible teaches until the day he dies. In that case, the church has failed to carry out the third mark of the church, discipline.

The Scriptures teach infant baptism. Thus it is a requirement for our members to believe and apply and thus that for which the church must hold people accountable. The church must shepherd the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2). Therefore, to receive members into our churches who do not yet believe in infant baptism is not to grant them forbearance, it is to capitulate to an unbiblical position; everyone loses – the church and the person who needs proper instruction and exhortation.

Infant baptism is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. After all, it is a sign of the Covenant of Grace. While infant baptism is a fundamental doctrine of the faith, and while our churches must require members to confess infant baptism, we should not conclude that no Baptists have true faith. The issue for our churches is to be faithful to our mandate from the risen Christ "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (not to mention baptizing all whom He commanded, which includes infants) (Mat 28:20). It's tragicomic to read arguments for allowing Baptists to join Reformed and Presbyterian churches, which includes the statement that "infant baptism is important and biblical." The subtext seems to be, "but not important and biblical enough to be required for one to believe and necessarily apply to one's infant."

Should our churches receive those into membership who don't believe the fourth or the seventh commandments apply today? Of course not: they are denying a command of God. So it is with infant baptism – it is a command of God. We all believe the Bible teaches the Trinity and that the Bible requires that Christians believe it. Yet there is no explicit teaching on the Trinity – it is a deduced from a study of the Bible. It is the same case with in-

fant Baptism – there is no explicit teaching on it yet it is taught and required of Christians. Further, who is to decide which doctrines are permissible to deny? Are we to give each consistory the freedom to weigh doctrines differently and then make the decision that the "lesser" doctrines are not necessary to believe in order to join the church? To allow someone to join the church who is not yet convinced of certain doctrines is to grant permission not to agree to what God has reveled is true.

2. *Provisos and patience*

The first ground of Overture 8 suggests that our churches may institute certain provisos for those who do not agree fully with the Three Forms of Unity. There are three: "…the membership candidate (a) promises to submit to further instruction, (b) promises not to propagate his deviation and, (c) understands his ineligibility for office in the church." These three provisos are not meaningful.

First, *all* members, regardless of whether they take any exceptions to the confessions, must "promise to submit to further instruction." All members are always learning what the Scriptures teach and are deepening in their understanding and appreciation of them. But never is it assumed that they believe something contrary to Scripture.

Second, how can the church require someone not to "propagate his deviation [from what the Scripture teaches]"? If the church attempts to squelch a person's belief of what the Bible teaches, then it encourages the person to deny what his conscience has decided is true. Exactly because this person, for the time being at least, believes he is confessing rightly, he will tell others in one way or another. The church has no right to tell that person not to express his opinion in his own home or to others in the church. In this author's experience in another church this is exactly what happened, to the chagrin of the church's leadership and the detriment of some of the church members.

Also, if the church allows members not to believe the biblical teaching of infant baptism given the stated provisos, then what happens to their children who grow up in the church? To be fair it would seem that the church would have to allow them also to deny infant baptism with the given provisos. Thus the next generation arises denying this essential biblical teaching and then *their* children may do the same and so on. This is not a ridiculous scenario. After all, parents have the responsibility to teach their children what they believe is biblical. These qualified members will teach their children that infant baptism is not biblical and that error will persist in our Reformed (then "quasi-Reformed") churches. The stated provisos do not include the

exhortation for Baptist parents to teach their children infant baptism. How could parents do so in good conscience? Thus the church drives a wedge between the biblical and confessional teaching of the church and the parent's biblical responsibility to teach their children and raise them in the faith.

These provisos do not help the church or the person who wishes to join while denying some of our doctrine. A person can believe in something our church teaches is unbiblical until the day he dies without any consequence, without any discipline.

Position 1 poses the question: "Should it matter to us whether a prospective member's "non-belief" arises from ignorance or misunderstanding, on the one hand, or from opposition or denial, on the other hand?" We would respond that it indeed does not matter. The church cannot judge the heart. In using the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16 and 18) the church can only judge the person's confession. Many of those who are heterodox are so because of ignorance or misunderstanding, which has become a stable conviction. To their minds they are not opposing anything but rather are confessing the truth of the matter. The church does need to be sensitive to people with disagreements on biblical doctrine. But if these people are willing then the church can instruct them *before* they join the church.

Position 1 also argues that our churches should be sensitive to the spiritual development of Christians: As parents are patient with their children who cannot yet accomplish certain tasks because of where they are in their physical development so should the church be patient with baby Christians who cannot yet confess certain doctrines because of where they are in their spiritual development. But this metaphor is not appropriate. First, is there anything more basic than the doctrine of baptism? It has been the practice of the church for centuries to instruct people *before* they are baptized and join the church to understand the rite. Second, the author of Hebrews in chapters 5 and following exhorts those who are *already* in the true visible church to grow and he even argues that if they don't progress in their knowledge they will fall away from the faith. He is making this argument to those *in* the true visible church – not to those who are considering coming into the true visible church. We would put it rather, that we must be patient and loving to those who do not yet have a credible confession of faith.

Are there any limits to our tolerance? If we were really to evaluate what many friendly evangelicals hold dear we would see that it is some form of innovation in the worship service. If incorporating contemporary stylistic variations don't change the essence of the faith, then shouldn't we necessarily change to accommodate what they believe is good and true; to be sensitive to their spiritual development? Are we that naïve to believe that because they are members

of our church that they'll eventually come around on this issue? They won't. Their convictions will change the character of the church. So it is with someone who is allowed to join our churches with an unbiblical view of the Sacraments and covenantal theology.

Finally, if the consistories are given the freedom to allow people to join the church without assenting fully to the Three Forms of Unity an impasse will be created between churches with contradictory positions on what is allowed and what isn't. For example, one church will allow an elderly couple who don't agree with infant baptism to join. But if they move and chose to transfer their membership to another URC that doesn't allow those with Baptist convictions to join, then they'll be rejected. Therefore, members in good standing of one URC will not be received into another URC not on the grounds of church discipline but due to the difference in church polity. These church members should not be embarrassed; the churches should for allowing this situation.

3.3.2 *Membership vows, the conscience, and faith*

The present and proposed membership vows require all members to assent to the Ecumenical Creeds and The Three Forms of Unity. In the current "Public Profession of Faith" form number 1 and the proposed form for the "Reception of New families," the first vow is: "Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession (Form 2 states the necessity of believing "the confessions of this church)?" The burden of proof is on those who would argue that the "doctrine…taught in this Christian church" does not refer to the Three Forms of Unity. The doctrine of our churches includes infant baptism. One holding to credo baptism could not honestly affirm these vows.

If our churches allow a person to join without fully assenting to the Three Forms of Unity there will be situations in which the person is forced to go against his conscience. For instance, if a person joins with baptistic convictions he will have to worship against his conscience when infants are baptized in the worship service. He will be forced in the worship of God to listen to our form of baptism that explains God's covenant love and commitment to the infant, explains the plain teaching of Scripture that infants of Christian parents are promised the Gospel and that all the members of the church are required to pray for the infant. This is tantamount to binding the person's conscience. He is not worshipping freely but under compulsion

from what he believes is not biblical.

Reformed churches confess a common, unified faith. Janssen argues that,

> "those who belong to the church share the same faith (Eph. 4:5, 13)… While there are different measures of faith in the church (Rom. 12:3), this does not imply different convictions…'Faith' is thus a characteristic of the church: it is the communion of believers. This faith is both *fides qua* ["faith by which;" the act of faith] and *fides quae* ["faith which;" the substance of faith, a set of convictions]. The faith is common to the members, not only in that they all believe, but also in the convictions that they individually hold" (p. 323).

But to allow people who have different convictions to join the church destroys the biblical teaching of communal faith. Ostensibly they the confess Christ but they do not confess what He taught about baptism.

Janssen goes on to discuss the fact that there are differences,

> "from person to person according to the individual capabilities to understand and appropriate the church's confession. Again, Scripture speaks of different measures of faith (Rom. 12:3). Appropriation may be minimal (as in the case of those with mental disabilities). The point thus cannot be that every individual member of the church must hold all of the confessing of the church [i.e. a non-communicant member, such as a very young child]. The point is that an individual is to be within the boundaries of the confessing of the church. *The faith that lives in the heart of the church member may not contradict the faith that the church confesses*" (p. 331, emphasis ours).

This relates to the issue of how to think about the distinction between the confessing of office bearers and members. Janssen argues,

> "The New Testament implies that all church members are required to believe (e.g. Matt. 28:19; Col. 1:23). This faith is brought to expression in confessional documents by churches. Church members are considered to express agreement with the faith convictions of the church by the very fact that they are members of a particular church" (p. 391). "Scripture does not indicate precisely who is meant by the community that confesses. The plural is used in letters addressed to a congregation as a whole. This would suggest that the congregation as a whole confesses. Romans 10:9 implies that only those who confess receive salvation. This would imply that those in the congregation who are able to confess are to confess. A distinction between, for example, clergy and laity or office bearers and non office bearers is thus not in order" (p. 331).

That is, such a distinction is not in order in terms of what each person confesses to be true of what is essential to being a member of our Reformed churches. There is a distinction between officers of the church and laity when

it comes to confessional subscription. Officers are required formally to subscribe ("write," sign their name) and, as we're arguing, laity simply assent to the Three Forms of Unity. This distinction is important because of the officer's duty to teach (especially ministers and elders) and promote the faith of the church. Otherwise, all the members of the church should be in agreement with the confessions of the church.

It is not too much to ask those new to the Reformed faith to assent fully to the Three Forms of Unity. But what about those from other countries who wish to join our churches? It is often the case that they require a longer period in which to understand the teaching of the Scriptures and our confessions due to language and cultural limitations. But we would argue that they too must assent to the Three Forms of Unity. We would suggest, as in the case of those with limited abilities to understand the confessions (e.g. youth who are communed but are still struggling to grasp the meaning of all the doctrines of the church), that they assent to the substance of the confessions as far as they are able to understand them. That is, they may not be able to read through the entire Three Forms of Unity and understand all the doctrines fully before they join the church (after all we don't believe people must have perfect understanding of biblical doctrine before they join the church). But surely, the church, in the process of catechizing them and preparing them to join the church, would take care in explaining the more difficult doctrines to grasp such as the Trinity, the nature of Christ, predestination, justification and the sacraments. In this way, immigrants would be able to assent fully to the confessions more quickly and join the church rather than slog through every bit of minutiae within them before they do so.

3.3.3 *Sacramental and covenantal theology*

Reformed theology understands the Sacraments to be necessarily connected to the administration of the covenants. Specifically, baptism is *the* sign of the Covenant of Grace. In the Abrahamic expression of the Covenant of Grace, God tells Abraham in Genesis 17:10 that circumcision *is* the covenant that shall be kept. The substance of the Covenant of Grace and the sign are so close that God calls circumcision "the Covenant." Paul argues that baptism replaces circumcision in Colossians 2 and baptism is the sign of the New Covenant that Jesus makes with His blood (Luke 22:20). Therefore, because the sign can never be disconnected from the Covenant of grace, it is necessary to administer it to the proper recipients, which includes infants and children (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14; Col. 2:11, 12). Since this is what the Scriptures teach, it is not only necessary to apply the sign of the Covenant but to teach it and require people actually to believe what God

commands. Not to believe this doctrine even if one is "past child bearing years" (by the way, elderly people can and do adopt children) is still to deny what God commands, which is sinful. An elderly person who is allowed to be a member in our churches will necessarily not regard the church's infants as Christians in the Covenant of Grace. Again, this is to deny what God has proclaimed about His Covenant children.

Position 1 does not state that it would be wrong not to allow families to join without baptizing their children. But this cannot happen in our churches. First, a church that allowed a Baptist family to join with unbaptized children, not willing to baptize them, would be out of order: "The covenant of God shall be signified and sealed to the children of confessing members in good standing through holy baptism administered by the minister of the Word in a service of corporate worship, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. The Consistory shall properly supervise the administration of the sacrament, which shall be administered as soon as feasible" (Church Order, article 41). Simply on this basis alone, our churches cannot allow Baptists members with unbaptized children to join unless we change the church order.

But also, a church that allowed a Baptist family to join without baptizing their children would also be in violation of the Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 74, which argues that infants *must* be baptized. Additionally, a church that did not require infant baptism would be in sin according to the biblical theology of the Covenant of Grace (cf. Gen. 17:1-14; 1 Cor. 7:14; Col. 2:11, 12). Finally, the Belgic Confession, article 34 makes the matter clear:

> We detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And indeed Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of believers than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, baptism is to our children. And for this reason St. Paul calls baptism the *circumcision of Christ*."

3.4 Conclusion

In summary, Overture 8 and position 1 make pragmatic arguments. They are rightly concerned to reach out to evangelicals. But to allow them to

deny what God requires compromises the nature of the church and fails to challenge them seriously to accept what God demands. History clearly demonstrates that the majority of Reformed churches have required its members to assent fully to the Reformed confessions. Further, we have demonstrated that the nature and character of the church necessitates the requirement of full assent.

We believe that the historic practice of requiring full assent will contribute to tremendous growth in our churches simply on the ground that we will be following what the risen Christ has commanded. People in whom God's Spirit is working are compelled by the truth. How many "Reformed" Baptists would confess rightly and become rightly Reformed if we were consistent with our membership requirements?

As churchmen we very much want evangelicals and others to join our churches. We want them to have proper assurance of their salvation and grow in their faith through the means of grace. We are pained when attempting to plant churches some quickly write the plants off simply because they confess infant baptism. Some believe that if we can just get them to join the church and expose them to Reformed preaching and teaching that they will eventually accept the biblical teaching of infant baptism. This is the error of the "myth of influence." If Baptists visit our churches and agree to listen to the biblical arguments for infant baptism and covenant theology, which necessarily is attached to infant baptism, then that is sufficient. But to allow them to join and to deny what the Bible teaches does not help them and they will influence the church negatively.

3.5 Recommendations for "Position 2: Membership Access upon Full Assent"

In light of the above report, the signatories of Position 2 recommend:

3.5.1 That Synod London 2010 grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Tom Morrison and Rev. Mitchell Persaud when this portion of the report is discussed in the contexts of advisory committee or plenary session.

3.5.2 That Synod London 2010 reject the report and associated recommendations pertaining to Position 1, "Membership Access with Stipulations," and receive the report and associated recommendations pertaining to Position 2, "Membership Access upon Full Assent," as the fulfillment of the mandate adopted by Synod Scherville 2007.

3.5.3 That Synod London 2010 advise consistories to continue what has been assumed by the Scriptures, by the nature of our confessions, by the church order, and by the membership vows, namely, that the

members and prospective members of our churches fully assent to the Three Forms of Unity and the Ecumenical Creeds.

3.5.4 That Synod London 2010 dismiss the committee with thanks.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Morrison, committee chairman
Mitchell Persaud
Wil Postma

Report of the Synodical Study Committee on the Federal Vision and Justification

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I. Background

A. Mandate and Composition of the Study Committee

At its meeting in Palos Heights, Illinois, in July, 2007, Synod Schererville adopted the following recommendation:

> That Synod 2007 [of the United Reformed Churches in North America] appoint a study committee to examine by the Word of God and our Confessions the teachings of the so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justification; and present a clear statement on these matters to the next synod for the benefit of the churches and the consistories. (*Acts of Synod Schererville 2007,* Article 72.2)

Synod Schererville also appointed fourteen members to the study committee, two from each classis of the federation:

Rev. Mark Stewart (Classis Eastern US)
Rev. Steve Arrick (Classis Eastern US)
Rev. Dick Wynia* (Classis Southern Ontario)
Rev. Christo Heiberg (Classis Southern Ontario)
Rev. Brian Vos, Secretary (Classis Michigan)
Rev. Rick Miller (Classis Michigan)
Dr. Cornelis Venema (Classis Central)
Rev. Patrick Edouard, Chairman (Classis Central)
Rev. Chris Gordon (Classis Pacific Northwest)
Rev. Kevin Efflandt (Classis Pacific Northwest)
Rev. Bill Pols (Classis Western Canada)
Rev. Eric Fennema* (Classis Western Canada)
Dr. Michael Horton (Classis Southwest)
Rev. Marcelo Souza (Classis Southwest)

*Note: Due to his decision to accept a call from a congregation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Rev. Wynia resigned from service on the Committee and did not take part in its deliberations or the preparation of this report. On September 6, 2008, the Lord unexpectedly called home, Rev. C. Eric Fennema, a faithful member of our Committee.

The decision of Synod Schererville to appoint our study committee was taken in response to an overture from Classis Michigan (Overture #5), which asked Synod to adopt the 2004 RCUS *Report of the Committee to Study Justification in Light of the Current Justification Controversy.* Rather than adopt a study committee report of another denomination, Synod Schererville decided that the URCNA would be better served with a study

committee report of its own.

In addition to the decision to appoint a study committee, Synod Schererville also adopted the following motions:

a. That Synod 2007 reaffirm the statement of Synod 2004, "that the Scriptures and Confessions (Heidelberg Catechism 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" (*Acts of Synod Calgary 2004*, Article 66; *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Article 67.2)

b. That Synod 2007 affirm that the Scriptures and Confessions teach that faith is the sole instrument of our justification apart from all works (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 61, "Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only." Cf. Belgic Confession Articles 22, 24). (*Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Article 67.3)

c. That Synod 2007 present the following statement to the churches as pastoral advice:

"Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod 2007 rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that "God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness," able to perform "the commandment of life" as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);

2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the "commandment of life" given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);

3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;

4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE 1.3, RE II.1);

5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD I, V);

6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);

7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the "instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness" (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);

8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than "leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified" or "a certain knowledge" of and "a hearty trust" in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);

9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37)." (*Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, Art. 72)

B. The Committee's Work and Approach to its Mandate

In order to fulfill the mandate of Synod Schererville, the Committee first met at Mid-America Reformed Seminary on June 17-18, 2008. In preparation for this meeting, the chairman assigned the writing of background papers on various aspects of the teachings of the Federal Vision (hereafter FV) by specific members of the Committee. The bulk of the time of this initial meeting was devoted to a discussion of the Committee's mandate and a review of these papers. The Committee enjoyed from the beginning a spirit of unity and collegiality regarding the doctrinal issues and controversy relating to the FV. At this first meeting of the Committee, it was agreed that a

draft report should be prepared by October 31, 2008, and that the Committee would meet again in plenary session, March 17-18, 2009, to finalize its report to the churches and synod.

In its initial deliberations, the Committee discussed at some length the mandate that was adopted by Synod Schererville. In the course of this discussion, several questions were addressed: What role should the reports of other confessionally Reformed churches play in the preparation of our report? Should our report concentrate almost exclusively upon the FV reformulation of the doctrine of justification, or does the language of "other like teachings" refer to a number of related teachings within the writings of FV authors? What is the nature and extent of the influence of FV views within the United Reformed Churches in North America? In our description of the FV, should we rely upon printed materials that belong to the public domain, or should we address questions directly to proponents of the FV? One question that was also discussed at some length was: What is the status of a study committee report on these doctrinal issues? Should we, for example, recommend to the synod the adoption of a "short statement" of the biblical and confessional doctrine of justification? And, if we were to do so, would such a statement be viewed as a supplement to our confessional documents or an application of confessional teaching to a contemporary controversy?

After an extensive discussion of these questions, the Committee reached the consensus that our report should focus upon the doctrine of justification in the writings of FV authors. However, since a number of the teachings associated with the FV in other areas are of special importance to our understanding of justification, it was also determined that these teachings should be identified, particularly in terms of their implications for a proper understanding of justification. The Committee also agreed that our report would make grateful use of the study reports of other confessional Reformed churches in North America. However, since our churches subscribe to the three Forms of Unity, not the Westminster Standards, it was the Committee's judgment that our mandate called for an independent report that would evaluate the FV understanding of justification and other related teachings from the standpoint of the Scriptures and these confessional standards. As to the question whether our Committee was obliged to communicate directly with FV authors regarding their views, the Committee determined that our mandate was to study the doctrinal formulations of the FV and to offer the churches a helpful guide in their assessment of these formulations. Our Committee is not a judicial committee, but a committee mandated "to examine by the Word of God and our Confessions the teachings of the so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justifica-

tion." The Committee is keenly aware of the fact that not all FV proponents agree on a number of features of these teachings, and that it would violate biblical standards of conduct to proceed on this assumption. However, the Committee believes that the published writings of FV authors contain reformulations of the doctrine of justification and other related teachings that have not only created considerable controversy and confusion within the family of confessionally Reformed churches in North America, but continue to exercise influence in these churches, including the URCNA. When there is uncertainty within the Reformed churches regarding the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone, it is the duty of every confessionally Reformed officebearer to exert himself in propagating the truth of the gospel and opposing error of every kind. On the difficult question of the status of the Committee's report, it was also agreed that this report would not present a supplement to the Confessions, but an *application of the Confessions* to a contemporary controversy.

The Committee offers the following report to the churches with the earnest prayer to the Lord of the church that He will preserve us in the way of truth, and that our testimony to the free grace of God in Jesus Christ will continue to be sounded with ringing clarity in our time. The report begins with a short background, which describes the development and advocacy of what is known in shorthand as the FV in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. The second section of the report describes several of the "related teachings" of the FV that are of special importance to its formulation of the doctrine of justification. The third and most important section of the report offers an extensive summary and evaluation of the FV understanding of justification. On the basis of the report's study, the fourth and concluding section presents a summary of the biblical and confessional teaching on justification, together with several recommendations to synod.

II. A Brief Sketch of the Emergence of the Federal Vision

In the mandate given to our Committee by Synod Schererville, reference is made to the "so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justification." Before we enter into the main body of our study, it may be beneficial to the churches to identify what is meant by this language of "Federal Vision" and to identify the way those associated with the FV have contributed to the contemporary controversy in a number of North American Reformed and Presbyterian churches regarding the doctrine of justification.[1]

1 For treatments of the history and emergence of the FV, see *Justification: A Report*

Though some advocates of positions associated with FV do not believe it is appropriate to refer to it as a well-defined movement, there is no doubt that such a movement exists. Whatever differences may exist among its proponents, the FV represents at least a number of common emphases and teachings that have particular significance for our understanding of the covenant of grace and the gospel blessing of justification by faith. Proponents of the FV have vigorously promoted their views through their public writings, theological conferences, and a variety of internet media. One of the pervasive themes of the FV, as the name "Federal" Vision itself confirms, is that the biblical doctrine of the covenant has not been adequately understood in many Reformed churches, and that the implications of the covenant for the church's life and ministry have also not been fully appreciated.[2] The controversial nature of FV stems from the way a number of FV writers have reformulated, revised, or even rejected aspects of the understanding of the covenant in the Reformed tradition, whether in its confessional or theological expressions.

It is important to observe that the language of "Federal Vision" did not originate with those who have criticized some of its themes and emphases. In January 2002, Rev. Steven Wilkins, pastor at the time of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Monroe, Louisiana, invited a number of speakers to the church's annual pastor's conference to articulate and defend their advocacy of the "Federal Vision." These speakers included Rev. Wilkins himself; Rev. Steve Schlissel, pastor of Messiah's congregation in New York City; Rev. Norman Shepherd, a retired CRC pastor and former professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary; and Rev. Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Since Rev. Shepherd was unable to attend this meeting, Rev. John Barach, at the time a pastor of the Grande Prairie URC, was invited to speak in his place.[3] Though it is sometimes suggested that the FV is a movement outside of the URCNA, and that it is largely an intramural debate among North American Presbyterians, the roster of speakers at this conference illustrates that the FV has had

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from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 2007), pp. 11-18; and Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006), pp. 1-29.

2 The term "federal" in "Federal vision" stems from the Latin term for covenant, *foedus*. Thus, one way to interpret the FV is to regard it as an attempt to articulate a comprehensive understanding of the covenant of grace that will resolve a number of long-standing questions in the Reformed tradition.

3 Recordings of the lectures that were delivered at this conference are available at www.auburnavenue.org.

significant representation in a broad spectrum of Presbyterian and Reformed denominations in North America, including the URCNA.

The 2002 Auburn Avenue Conference can be regarded as the point at which a growing debate about the FV commenced within several Presbyterian and Reformed church communions. Shortly after the 2002 Conference, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States strongly condemned the FV as being out of accord with the Westminster Standards on the doctrines of the covenant and justification.[4] Among the objections raised against the FV, the following were most important: the denial of a pre-fall "covenant of works"; the blurring of the distinction between the law and the gospel; the rejection of the teaching of the imputation of the "active obedience" of Christ as a ground for the believer's justification before God; the tendency to include the "works" faith produces as part of faith in its instrumentality for justification; a kind of sacramentalism that ascribes efficacy to the sacraments apart from the response of faith on the part of their recipients; and a tendency to identify covenant membership with election to salvation in Christ. Despite some diversity of expression and viewpoint among proponents of the FV, these issues have continued to lie at the center of the debate regarding the compatibility of the FV with the Reformed Standards or Confessions.

In response to the serious criticisms that were brought against some aspects of the FV, Rev. Wilkins invited Revs. Barach, Schlissel, and Wilson to join him in a discussion with critics of the FV at Monroe, LA, in January 2003. Participants in this discussion also included Dr. Joseph Pipa, president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Rev. Carl Robbins, pastor of the Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Greenville, South Carolina; Dr. Morton Smith, professor at several Presbyterian seminaries and former stated clerk of the PCA; and Rev. R.C. Sproul, Jr., editor of *Tabletalk* and director of the Highlands Study Center. When this discussion did not achieve a resolution of the controversy over FV, another conference was held in Florida in August 2003 under the auspices of Knox Theological Seminary. Participants in this private discussion included not only those who had met earlier in January in Monroe, LA, but also several others who were sympathetic or critical of FV teachings.[5] Though this discussion did not take place

4 The decisions of the General Assembly of this denomination are available at www.rpcus.com. A minister of this denomination, John Otis, has written a book-length critique of the FV. See John M. Otis, *Danger in the Camp: An Analysis and Refutation of the Heresies of the Federal Vision* (Corpus Christi, TX: Triumphant Publications, 2005).

5 Participants at this conference who were sympathetic to FV included Dr. Peter Leithart, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Moscow, ID; Rev. Rich Lusk, assistant

before an ecclesiastical audience, the various presentations, including several critical evaluations of the FV, were later published in book form.[6]

Since the time of these early discussions between proponents and critics of the FV, debate regarding its emphases has continued in a variety of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Proponents of a number of FV teachings have held conferences and published books that defend the FV positions against their critics.[7] Several Presbyterian and Reformed denominations have mandated studies of the FV, including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. All of the study committee reports of these denominations have reached conclusions sharply critical of a number of FV emphases.[8]

Several developments in the ongoing evaluation of the FV movement are of particular interest to the URCNA. Both Westminster Seminary in California and Mid-America Reformed Seminary have offered public testimonies that judge elements of the FV movement to be contrary to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions.[9] The faculty of Westminster Seminary in California and Mid-America Reformed Seminary have also published books and articles and conducted public conferences that criticize a number of FV teachings, particularly its denial or uncertainty regarding the imputation of Christ's active obedience in the justification of believers.[10]

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pastor at the time of AAPC; and Rev. Tom Trouwborst, pastor of Calvary OPC in Schenectady, NY. Participants who were critical of FV included Rev. Christopher A. Hutchinson, associate pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Statesboro, GA; Dr. George Knight III, adjunct professor of New Testament at GPTS; and Rev. Richard Phillips, pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Coral Springs/Margate, FL (currently pastor of 2nd Presbyterian [PCA] in Greenville, SC.).

6 E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, August 11-13, 2003* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004).

7 Among these books, the following are of special importance: P. Andrew Sandlin, ed., *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004); and Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds., *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, LA; Athanasius Press, 2004).

8 As noted earlier, the OPC study committee report is available in book form. The reports of the PCA (www.byfaithonline.com) and the RCUS (www.rcus.org) and the OCRC are available online or in the respective Acts of their synods or general assemblies.

9 The statement of the Westminster Seminary in California is available at www/wsca;/edi. The statement of the Board and Faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary is available in booklet form: *Doctrinal Testimony Regarding Recent Errors* (Dyer, IN: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 2007).

10 See, e.g., R. Scott Clark, ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry* (Phillips-

In recent years, a number of internet discussions among URCNA members have focused upon FV. Some former ministers and members in the URCNA remain vocal and active proponents of the FV. Articles, both pro and con the FV, have been published in periodicals that are well-known to and read by URC members (e.g., *The Outlook, Christian Renewal*). The advocacy of children at the Lord's Table, which is one of the most common practical fruits of the FV understanding of the covenant of grace, has been addressed by the broader assembles of the federation. Two successive synods of the URCNA have felt it necessary to affirm the imputation of Christ's active obedience in justification. We do not mention these items to suggest that the FV has had a significant influence upon the understanding of many URCNA officebearers or members. Rather, we mention them to illustrate the widespread controversy regarding the FV among the confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. This controversy has not only taken place outside of the URCNA, but within the URCNA as well.

In the opinion of our Committee, therefore, there is ample reason to believe that a URC study committee report on the FV could be beneficial to the churches. The Reformed churches in North America, including the URCNA, need to be clear rather than confused on the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. Our testimony to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is so richly set forth in our Three Forms of Unity, demands that we carefully examine the claims of the FV and its proponents.

III. Characteristic Themes of the Federal Vision

The synodical mandate for our Committee focuses especially upon the FV formulation of the doctrine of justification. However, it also speaks of "other like teachings," which the Committee understands to refer to the distinctive emphases or themes of the FV that are of special significance to our understanding of the doctrine of justification. As we noted in the previous section of our report, the FV movement is not monolithic. There are a variety of viewpoints represented among proponents of the FV. In the development of the FV, however, certain themes recur that have provoked considerable discussion and criticism. Before we turn in the main section of our report to the doctrine of justification, therefore, we wish to identify several of these themes and summarize the revisions that proponents of the FV have proposed to confessional Reformed teaching. At the conclusion of

burg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007); and Cornelis P. Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ: An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), pp. 232-56.

our summary of these themes, we will also offer some evaluative comments regarding the extent to which these FV emphases meet the test of the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions.

A. The Doctrine of the Covenant

The FV movement, as its name indicates, focuses primarily upon the doctrine of the covenant. In this respect, it is a movement that must be of special interest to the Reformed churches, which have always viewed the relationship between the Triune God and His people, whether before or after the fall into sin, as a covenantal relationship. It could even be said that the original "covenant vision" is not the FV movement, but the Reformed faith in its understanding of God's gracious initiative in establishing His covenant with His people in Christ. That the FV movement emphasizes the covenantal character of God's dealings with His image-bearers is, for this reason, unexceptional and even to be commended. However, there are some features of the FV understanding of the covenant relationship between God and His people that are distinctive. These distinctive features of the FV viewpoint on the covenant are the reason that this movement has generated so much controversy in the churches.

1. Covenant and Salvation

In the writings of proponents of the FV, the saving significance of the covenant that God establishes with His people is strongly emphasized. The covenant relationship, especially the covenant of grace that God initiates between Himself and believers and their children, is not simply a means whereby God accomplishes the salvation of fallen sinners. The covenant relationship itself is a saving relationship, which unites believers and their children in true communion and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace. The covenant relationship is salvation, and all who are members of the covenant people of God—believers together with their children and all whom God calls into membership in the church of Jesus Christ—enjoy all the benefits of saving union with Christ. Rich Lusk, a proponent of the FV, offers a clear statement of this emphasis:

> On the one hand, some so totally identify covenant and election that to be in covenant and to be elect are one and the same …. At the other extreme are those who identify the covenant with the visible church, but make covenant membership a matter of mere externals …. Against both of these distortions, we must insist that *the covenant is nothing less than union with*

> *the Triune God, nothing less than salvation. …* So when someone is united to the church by baptism, that person is incorporated into Christ and into his body; that person becomes bone of Christ's bone and flesh of his flesh.[11]

In this statement, Lusk distinguishes between election and covenant but still insists that all who are included in the covenant are, in the proper sense, truly and savingly joined to Christ. All who are members of the covenant community are genuinely united to Christ and participants in all the benefits of His saving work.

Another proponent of the FV, John Barach, makes similarly strong and remarkable claims regarding what it means to be a member of the covenant people of God. According to Barach, "[t]he covenant is not just a bare legal relationship. The covenant is not just a means to an end, the goal of salvation. The covenant in history is the early form of that final goal. It is a bond of love with the triune God of Scripture. God chose you to have the bond with Him in Christ."[12] In this understanding of the administration of the covenant of grace in the course of the history of redemption, all those with whom God covenants genuinely enjoy salvation in union with the Triune God. While Barach does acknowledge that not all who begin to enjoy covenant salvation will persevere, since God has only chosen them to salvation "for a time," he insists that all who are embraced within the covenant are thereby truly saved, at least for a period.[13] In Lusk's and Barach's view of the covenant of grace, membership in the covenant community, which includes believers and their children, must be understood in the strongest sense to include full participation in the saving blessings of Christ's work as Mediator. Consistent with this identification of covenant membership and true, saving communion with Christ, proponents of the FV reject any distinction, however it is expressed, between those members of the "visible" church who may truly be members of Christ by faith and those who are only "externally" members of the covenant people of God. Distinctions between the covenant in its historical administration and the covenant as a saving communion of life, between the "visible" and "invisible" church, between "external" membership in the covenant and "internal" or saving membership, are frequently rejected by FV proponents, who insist that all members of the covenant community are savingly united to Christ.[14]

11 "Covenant and Election FAQs," http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk. Emphasis ours.

12 "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* p. 154.

13 "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* p. 154.

14 See, e.g., Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* p. 154; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* pp. 262-67; and Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs."

2. Covenant and Election

Closely allied to the FV emphasis upon the identity of covenant and salvation is its emphasis upon the "objectivity" of the covenant and its significance for our knowledge of God's election of His people in Christ. Though FV proponents do acknowledge that not all members of the covenant community are "elect" in the strict and confessional sense of this language,[15] they often employ the language of "election" in a way that suggests the election of all members of the covenant community. Consistent with their undifferentiated view of all who are covenant members, some proponents of the FV speak at times as though covenant membership and election coincide. In doing so they leave the distinct impression that not all those who are "saved" in the covenant for a time, or who are "elect" by virtue of their inclusion within the covenant, are necessarily saved or elected to perseverance in the way of salvation.

John Barach, for example, has emphasized the FV's teaching that election and covenant are virtually coincident.

> But then who is in Christ? Those who have been incorporated into Christ, brought into Christ, those who have been baptized into Christ. … Covenantal election and individual election aren't actually all that far apart. We can distinguish them perhaps, but we cannot and may not divide them completely. What is the connection? The connection has to do with God's promise, God's speech to us. God has promised every covenant member that he or she is elect in Christ. … When God speaks to his people and calls them elect, he is not simply predicting that this will happen, he is making a pledge to them. ... His promise is that he administers his salvation to us by speaking to us …. And God in the gospel and through baptism, promises us that he unites us to Christ …. What's missing in Jesus? In him you have redemption, righteousness, justification, sanctification, the Holy Spirit, glorification, and election. The whole package of salvation … is found in Christ.[16]

This remarkable statement is typical of the way some FV writers equivocate in their use of the language of "election." On the one hand, Barach's statements could be interpreted to mean that there is a kind of "corporate election" which encompasses the entire number of those who belong to the covenant community, though not all of these members are "savingly elect" in the sense of the Reformed Confessions' use of the language of election. On the other hand, Barach seems to reject any distinction between covenantal elec-

15 See "A Joint Federal Vision Statement," www.federal-vision.com.

16 "Covenant and Election," 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference lecture transcript, pp. 87-90.

tion and individual election. Without emphasizing the necessary response of faith to the covenant promise, a faith that savingly unites the believer to Christ and His benefits, Barach wants to affirm that all covenant members are individually elect and true beneficiaries of the Christ's saving work with all of its benefits. Since membership in the covenant is salvation, and since election is unto salvation, what Barach calls a "connection" between covenant and election becomes more than a connection. For this reason, he rejects the idea that we should regard covenant members to be elect in the sense of a "charitable judgment" about them.[17] Covenant and election are identified and, as we shall see in the following, serious problems are created when it is further acknowledged that not all saved and elect members of the covenant persevere in the way of faith.

3. The Pre-Fall Covenant

Another common theme in the writings of FV proponents is that the historic Reformed view of the pre-fall covenant between the Triune God and the human race in Adam needs to be significantly revised. The problem with the Reformed understanding of the pre-fall covenant, which is commonly termed a "covenant of works," is that it introduces the unbiblical idea of "merit" into the relationship between God and man. Furthermore, the Reformed understanding fails to acknowledge the underlying unity of the covenant between God and His people, whether that covenant is administered before or after the Fall.

In the Reformed view of the pre-fall covenant of works, the Triune Creator "voluntarily condescended" to establish a covenant relationship between Himself and the human race in Adam.[18] The aim of this covenant was to grant to Adam and his posterity the blessing of eternal life and glorification in unbreakable communion with God "upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." The promise of this original covenant relationship was an implicit promise of eternal life, which was sacramentally signified and

17 John Barach, "Covenant and History" (2002 AAPCPC lecture). Cf. Cal Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 311.

18 Westminster Confession of Faith, VII. i.-ii: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. The first covenant made with man was a *covenant of works,* wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."

sealed by means of the "tree of life" in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). The sanction of this original covenant relationship was the explicit threat of death, both physical and spiritual, in the event of human disobedience and transgression. When God stipulated the command that Adam should not eat of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:16-17), He subjected Adam, as covenant representative and head of the human race, to a "probationary testing," which concentrated the absolute demand of obedience to God's law in the form of a particular prohibition. As a result of Adam's sin and disobedience, the entire human race has come under condemnation that brings death. Though all human beings are subject to this original covenant relationship as fallen sinners in Adam and are incapable of obtaining life in the way of obedience to the law, Christ, the "last Adam," has fulfilled all of the obligations of the law on behalf of His people and thereby obtained for them justification and life in restored fellowship with God (Rom. 5:12-21). The significance of the Reformed formulation of the "covenant of works" is that it provides the biblical framework that is indispensable to any proper appreciation of the mediatorial work of Christ in the covenant of grace. Whereas Adam was obliged to perfect obedience in order to obtain the promised reward of eternal life in fellowship with God, believers are obliged to receive the super-abounding grace of God in Christ by means of the empty hand of faith alone, which rests in the perfect and sufficient obedience of Christ that secures their covenant inheritance. In the historic Reformed view, the "condition" that must be met in the covenant of grace is not the believer's personal and perfect obedience to the law, but a heartfelt trust in Christ whose righteousness is wholly sufficient to restore His people to full and indefectible communion with God.[19]

According to a number of proponents of the FV, the Reformed view fails to account for the structural similarities between the pre-fall and post-fall covenants. In both covenants, union and communion with God is based entirely upon God's grace or undeserved favor toward those with whom He

19 Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. VII, iii: "Man, by his fall, having made himself uncapable of life by that covenant [of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly call the *covenant of grace;* wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe"; Belgic Confession, Arts. 21 & 22: "We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him"; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23.

covenants. When we distinguish between a pre-fall covenant of "works" and a post-fall covenant of "grace," our language fails to do justice to the grace upon which the original (and all) covenant relationship(s) depends. Furthermore, in all covenant relationships, union and communion with God requires that those with whom God covenants live in obedience to His law, an obedience that springs from gratitude and filial devotion. When Adam was obliged to obey God perfectly, he was obligated to render the obedience of faith, namely, to serve God from a "heart of faith alone, in a spirit of loving trust."[20] Similarly, when believers in Christ are graciously restored to covenant fellowship with Christ, they are placed under the renewed obligation of the obedience of faith. Without the obedience of faith, which is the condition of the covenant of grace even as it was the condition of the "covenant of life" before the fall, believers cannot be justified or assured of their covenant inheritance or eternal life. Due to these common features of the pre-fall and post-fall covenants, we may speak of the way of blessedness in all covenants as "by grace through [the obedience of] faith."[21]

In their reformulation of the doctrine of the covenant, especially the distinction between the pre-fall and post-fall covenants, FV writers often criticize the Reformed view for continuing to uphold the idea of "merit" in the relationship between the creature and the Creator. In the older view, according to FV authors, the relationship between Adam and the triune Creator is construed on analogy to that between an employee and an employer, or a servant and a master. Adam's obedience is the required payment or "wages" that he owes God, the basis upon which he would receive what was "due" him as an obedient servant. Furthermore, in the older doctrine, the work of Christ is also viewed in terms of the idea of "merit." By His entire obedience under the law, Christ "merited" justification and life for all those who by faith receive His righteousness as a free gift. The problem with this entire conception of the covenant relationship, and even of the work of Christ in redemption, is that it fundamentally misconceives the nature of the covenant fellowship between God and His people. Not only does it deny what is true of the covenant before and after the Fall into sin, namely, that it is based upon God's grace or undeserved favor, but it also undermines the obedience of faith in the covenant of grace as a necessary (pre-) condition for the believer's inheritance of eternal life. On the one hand, the older view

20 "A Joint Federal Vision Statement," www.federal-vision.com.

21 Norman Shepherd, "Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective" (Norman Shepherd, 2004), p. 9 *et passim.* Shepherd nicely captures the FV tendency to diminish the differences between the pre-fall and post-fall covenant relationship, when he says "[w]hat is promised [in the Adamic, Noachic, and Abrahamic covenants] is a gift of grace and it is received by a living, active, and obedient faith."

diminishes the grace of God in the pre-fall covenant. And on the other hand, the older view undermines the legitimate obligations of obedience in the post-fall covenant of grace.

4. Law and Gospel in the Covenant

To appreciate the significance of the FV criticism of the formulation of the pre-fall and post-fall covenants, it is important to note the way FV authors treat the distinction between the "law" and the "gospel." In the Reformed tradition, a sharp distinction is drawn between the law of God, which requires that human beings created in God's image obey perfectly all of its commandments, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, which promises believers free justification and acceptance with God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone. In the Reformed view of the gospel benefit of justification, only the perfect obedience of Christ under the law, whether to its precepts (active obedience) or its penalties (passive obedience), is a sufficient basis for satisfying the requirements of God's justice and enabling the believing sinner to be right with God. When the believer is clothed with the fullness of Christ's righteousness under the law, he is able to be justified or placed in the status of innocence and holiness before God. Though the Reformed Confessions affirm the continued use of the law of God as a "rule of gratitude," they clearly distinguish between the law and the gospel when it comes to the great question of the believer's justification. No "works of the law" of any kind constitute even a part of the believer's righteousness before God or the basis upon which he is justified.[22]

In the judgment of a number of FV writers, this contrast between the law and the gospel depends upon an unbiblical understanding of the pre-fall "covenant of works." In the FV view, because the Reformed view teaches that Adam's obedience would "merit" his inheritance of eternal life under the covenant of works, it also teaches that the work of Christ, the last Adam, graciously fulfills the requirements of this covenant and thereby "merits" for believers their acceptance before God. Furthermore, since it is alleged that the Reformed view regards any works performed in obedience to the law within the framework of a "works-merit paradigm," FV writers believe it is unable to do justice to the obligations of obedience to the law within the covenant of grace. However, when we view the pre-fall covenant as a gracious covenant, which required Adam to live before God in grateful obedience, FV writers claim that there is no basis for regarding Adam's works

22 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 2, 3-7, 23-24, 33; and Belgic Confession, Arts. 22-23.

as meritorious. Similarly, when we recognize that the covenant of grace also requires that God's people respond to His grace with an obedient faith (or: the obedience of faith) in order to be justified and secure their inheritance, they believe we have no reason to fear that this introduces any "merit" into the covenant relationship. The "works of the law" that the Scriptures condemn, when they speak of justification by faith and apart from works, are not the works that belong to faith but works that are performed in order to merit acceptance with God.[23] Just as the pre-fall covenant promised blessing to Adam in the way of an obedient faith, so the post-fall covenant of grace promises blessing to those who respond to it in the way of an obedient faith. Rather than drawing a sharp contrast between the law and the gospel, we need to recognize, according to FV authors, that grace (or gospel) and law are like two sides of one coin.[24]

B. The Doctrine of the Church and Sacraments

Upon the basis of the FV's reformulation of several features of Reformed teaching regarding the doctrine of the covenant, the FV also argues for a particular understanding of the doctrine of the church and the sacraments. If we properly understand the nature of the covenant relationship between God and His people, particularly in the administration of the covenant of grace, we must revise some features of the historic Reformed understanding of the church as a covenant community. In the writings of FV authors, this becomes apparent in three areas: 1) the Reformed distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church; 2) the efficacy of the sacraments; and 3) the admission of covenant children to the Lord's Supper.

1. The Distinction Between the "Visible" and "Invisible" Church

In the history of the Reformed churches, a distinction is commonly drawn between the so-called "visible" and "invisible" church. Though this distinction is variously defined, its most basic function is to acknowledge

23 Norman Shepherd, "Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective"; and idem, "Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works," Thesis 24 (www.hornes.org/theologia/norman-shepherd/the-34-theses).

24 See Rich Lusk, "A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 128: "The law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures. Thus the basic requirement of the law was covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection."

that not all professing believers and their children, who belong to the concrete, visible expression of Christ's church in the world, are truly saved and members of Christ by faith. Since the visible church includes some who are not genuinely "of" the church, or who are not "elect" in the strict sense, this language serves to distinguish between the church as a community of professing believers and their children, not all of whom properly and savingly belong to Christ by faith, and the church as God alone knows it as the "whole company of the elect."[25]

Several proponents of the FV have rejected this Reformed distinction because it is incompatible with the FV's claim that covenant membership and saving union with the Triune God coincide. They have also objected to this distinction because it suggests too sharp a distinction between the circle of the covenant and of election. For example, John Barach has argued that, because "the doctrine of election goes hand in hand with the doctrine of the church," we may affirm, upon the basis of their baptism, that believers and their children "are among the elect *now.*"[26] Though it is unclear how literally he wants to use this language, Barach also adds that this affirmation is no mere "wish or boast," but ought to be the confident conviction of all who are baptized.[27] Douglas Wilson, another advocate of the FV, has expressed similar reservations regarding this distinction, since it allegedly undermines the importance of membership in the visible church.[28] Wilson proposes that we should distinguish between the "historical" (as it visibly exists now) and "eschatological" (as it will perfectly exist in the future consummation) church. According to FV writers, the distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church or a similar distinction between an "internal" or "external" membership in the covenant of grace, creates insoluble pastoral problems of assurance (Am I truly a member of Christ? Am I elect?). Contrary to the implications of the distinction between the visible and invisible church, FV authors argue that we should affirm that all members of the covenant community are truly and savingly in Christ. As we noted previously, while FV writers

25 Westminster Confession of Faith*,* XXV. i-ii. Cf. Belgic Confession*,* Art. 29, which in treating the marks of the true church notes that "we speak not here of hypocrites who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it …."

26 "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 155.

27 "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 155. Cf. E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons,* pp. 308-9.

28 See Douglas Wilson, *"Reformed" is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), p. 59: "… a Christian is one who would be identified as such by a Muslim. Membership in the Christian faith is objective—it can be photographed and fingerprinted."

acknowledge that some members of the covenant people of God may not persevere in the way of salvation, they want to insist that all members of the covenant are nonetheless in true and saving union with Christ.[29] In the FV view, the "objective" character of membership in the covenant and church of Jesus Christ is undermined, when we distinguish between the church as it visibly exists and as it known only to God.

2. The Efficacy of the Sacraments (Baptism)

While there are differences of opinion among advocates of the FV on the doctrine of the sacraments, one of the primary themes of the FV is that the Reformed churches need a renewed appreciation for the efficacy of the sacraments in the communication of God's grace in Christ. Corresponding to their emphasis upon the close connection between covenant and salvation, or between covenant and election, FV writers frequently maintain that the sacraments are effectual means of grace, which genuinely communicate the grace of Christ and participation in His saving work to all their recipients. In the view of many FV writers, the Reformed churches have not adequately developed a strong view of the effectiveness of the sacraments in the salvation of those who belong to the covenant community.

This FV emphasis upon the efficacy of the sacraments comes to prominent expression in the understanding of the sacrament of baptism, especially the baptism of children of believers. For example, in his defense of paedobaptism, Rich Lusk insists that the sacrament of baptism does something that even the Word preached does not accomplish. In his interpretation of Acts 2, especially verse 37, Lusk argues that

> [p]reaching alone is insufficient to make them [believers and their children] participants in Christ's work of redemption. … Baptism, not preaching per se, is linked with forgiveness and the reception of the Spirit. Clearly, Peter believes God will give them something in baptism that they have not received through preaching alone. Baptism will consummate the process of regeneration begun by the Word preached.[30]

In this statement, the sacrament of baptism is understood to be *constitutive* of its recipients' membership in the covenant of grace. Whereas Reformed sacramental theology would speak of the Spirit producing faith

29 John Barach, "Covenant and Election," 2002 AAPCPC lecture. Cf. Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* pp. 308-9.

30 "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals" (document online: http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/some-thoughts-on-the-means-of-grace).

through the Word and *confirming* faith through the use of the sacraments, Lusk's view of sacramental efficacy ascribes to the sacraments the power to effect communion with Christ in the fullest sense of the term. By virtue of their baptism, believers and their children are constituted members of Christ and participate in the fullness of His redemptive work on their behalf. All of the benefits of Christ's saving mediation are imparted to all those who are incorporated into the covenant community by means of baptism.

Another example of this emphasis upon baptism as an effectual means of incorporating believers and their children into Christ is provided by Steve Wilkins. As we have previously noted, in his understanding of the relation between covenant, baptism, and salvation, Wilkins also proceeds from the conviction that covenant membership involves full, saving communion with the Triune God. All persons who are incorporated into the covenant of grace enjoy "a real relationship, consisting of real communion with the Triune God through union with Christ. The covenant is not some *thing* that exists apart from Christ or in addition to Him (another *means* of grace) – rather, the covenant *is* union with Christ. Thus, being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ."[31] According to Wilkins, the sacrament of baptism is the instrumental means whereby this covenant union with Christ is effected. All who are baptized, accordingly, enjoy the fullness of participation in Christ and are the recipients of all the blessings of such participation, including regeneration, justification, and sanctification.[32] Though it is possible for such persons who through baptism are united to Christ to fall away in unbelief and impenitence, thereby losing the real benefits of salvation that were once their possession, Wilkins maintains that baptism is the means of incorporation into Christ and places its beneficiaries in possession of all the benefits of His saving work.[33]

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31 Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 262.

32 Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* pp. 262-4.

33 Similar unqualified statements of the efficacy of the sacraments, especially the sacrament of baptism, can be found sprinkled throughout the writings of FV authors. See, e.g., Douglas Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* p. 236: "Worthy receivers of the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper are effectually saved by these sacramental means through the working of the Holy spirit and the blessing of Christ." Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology,* pp. 198-257, offers extensive evidence of FV statements relating to the efficacy of the sacraments. For a critical evaluation of the FV exaggeration of the efficacy of the sacraments, see William B. Evans, "'Really Exhibited and Conferred … in His Appointed Time': Baptism and the New Reformed Sacramentalism," *Presbyterion* 31/2 (Fall 2005): 72-88.

These kinds of unqualified affirmations of the saving efficacy of the sacraments in FV writings are not incidental. They follow naturally from the kind of undifferentiated view of covenant and church membership that characterizes FV teaching generally. If membership in the covenant community entails salvation and warrants a confident affirmation of the election of its members, the sacraments, which signify and seal to all their recipients the promises of the gospel, should be viewed as saving ordinances, which effectively unite believers and their children with Christ and His church. Since membership in the covenant community is tantamount to saving union with Christ, and since baptism is the means to effect such membership, it seems to follow that baptism saves by uniting covenant members to Christ so that they are flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone.

3. Children at the Lord's Table

A particularly instructive example of the implications of these FV teachings is the question whether the children of believing parents should be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since "ideas have legs," it is not surprising that one of the most obvious and practical implications of FV teaching is that all children should be admitted to the Lord's Table.

We have had occasion at several points to observe the claim of FV authors that *all* covenant members without exception – believers and their children who are recipients of the covenant promise and the accompanying sacrament of covenant incorporation, baptism – enjoy a full and saving union with Christ. Though Reformed theologians have historically distinguished between those who are "under the administration" of the covenant of grace and those who truly enjoy the saving "communion of life" that the covenant communicates, we have had occasion to see how FV proponents often reject as inappropriate any such distinction between covenant members. Within the framework of this unqualified definition of what it means for all believers and their children to be members of the covenant of grace, we have also seen that FV writers strongly emphasize the efficacy of baptism as a sacrament of incorporation into Christ. The FV emphasis upon the significance and efficacy of baptism is of particular relevance to the question whether children of believing parents should be admitted to the Table of the Lord. Since the baptism of the children of believers effectively unites them to Christ and grants them full participation in His saving work, baptism by itself is thought to provide a sufficient warrant for admitting such children to the Table of the Lord without requiring a preceding profession of faith.[34]

34 Perhaps recognizing the danger of this kind of understanding of paedobaptism as

The common advocacy of paedocommunion on the part of most FV writers, therefore, is no accident, but follows from the most basic features of the FV itself. The advocacy of paedocommunion is a necessary consequence of the FV doctrine of the covenant of grace and its sacraments. Within the framework of the FV understanding of what is true of all members of the covenant community, and of the effectiveness of baptism as constitutive of their incorporation into Christ, the warrant for the admission of children of believers to the Table of the Lord should be apparent. It is a simple matter of theological and covenantal consistency to move from the reality of covenant membership and saving union with Christ, which are the possession of all believers and their children under the covenant of grace, to the reception of children of the covenant at the Lord's Table. In the view of many of FV writers, to exclude children from the Table of the Lord denies them privileges that are theirs as members of Christ. The children of believing parents, who already possess Christ in His fullness, may scarcely be denied a participation in Christ by means of the sacrament that Christ appointed to strengthen communion with himself and to nourish faith. At stake in the debate regarding the admission of children to the Lord's Table is nothing other than a consistent covenantal hermeneutic or way of interpreting Scripture. Consequently, those who advocate the admission of children to the Lord's Table upon the basis of their covenant membership regard the historic practice of the Reformed churches on this question to be baptistic and inconsistent.[35]

C. Assurance, Perseverance, and Apostasy

One of the primary motivations that underlies the FV is the desire to resolve certain pastoral problems that have surfaced in the history of the Reformed churches. A frequent charge of FV writers is that many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have aggravated the problem of the assurance of salvation by failing to articulate a biblical view of the covenant of grace. Furthermore, because many Reformed believers have viewed the covenant of

an effectual instrument of salvation, Rich Lusk has posited the notion of a kind of "paedofaith" that embraces the promise that baptism communicates. See Rich Lusk, *Paedofaith: A Primer on the Mystery of Infant Salvation and a Handbook for Covenant Parents* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2005); and Rich Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and Baptismal Latency: A Sacramental Dialogue," *Presbyterion* 32/1 (Spring, 2006): 36.

35 For a brief summary of this argument, see Gregg Strawbridge, "The Polemics of Infant Communion," in *The Case for Covenant Communion,* pp. 147-65. For a recent critical evaluation of this argument, see Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord's Table? Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

grace from the perspective of the doctrine of election, they have also failed to do justice to the biblical warnings against apostasy and covenant breaking on the part of those who belong to the covenant people of God.

1. Assurance of Salvation

The FV solution to the problem of the believer's assurance of salvation should be readily apparent from what we have already noted in respect to the FV's doctrine of the covenant and the sacraments. According to FV authors, the Reformed churches historically have been plagued by the question as to how believers ought to be assured of their own salvation. Rather than basing such assurance upon the "objective" promises God makes in the covenant of grace, or upon the efficacy of the sacramental communication of the grace of Christ in baptism, believers have been encouraged to look within themselves for concrete signs of their regeneration and conversion. Several FV authors maintain that this accounts for the tendency to engage in a kind of "morbid introspection," a looking inward to ascertain evidences of the work of God's grace in the individual believer's life, as the pathway to obtaining assurance of salvation.[36] Because of the uncertainty and unreliability of Christian experience, however, this introspective or subjective approach to the assurance of salvation is unable to grant the believer any secure confidence before God.

The solution to the problem of assurance that is proposed by FV authors is to base the assurance of salvation on the status of believers as members of the covenant community, and to appeal to the efficacy of the sacraments as a reliable basis for confidence. A common theme among writers of the FV is that their view of the covenant and its sacraments resolves a problem that many Reformed churches have only aggravated. John Barach offers an especially clear statement of this solution:

> [H]ow do you know that promise [of the covenant] is really for you and not just for other people in the church, people who've advanced further in their sanctification or who've had some special experience that convinced them of God's love? The answer is that you've had a special experience. You've been baptized. All God's salvation—from election to glorification—is found in Christ. And when you were baptized, God promised to unite you to Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be baptized into Christ. You're united to Jesus and all His salvation is for you. At baptism, God promises that you're really one of His elect: I will be your God and you will be my child. And

36 See, e.g., John Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002 AAPCPC); idem, "Covenant and Election," in *The Federal Vision,* p. 38; Steve Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant II" (2001 AAPCPC); and Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology,* pp. 125-56.

God never hands out counterfeit promises.[37]

In his comments on the problem of assurance in the Reformed churches, Steve Wilkins makes a similar claim. Rather than look to a subjective experience of conversion as the basis for assurance, believers and their children should be directed to their membership in the covenant and their reception of the sacrament of baptism. When believers look to their "objective" membership in the covenant community, they have a sure basis for the assurance of salvation. Moreover, this assurance is more than a "judgment of charity." It is an assurance that is based upon what we know to be true in the strongest possible sense.[38] As another FV writer concisely expresses it, "The gospel is preached, the water was applied, the Table is now set. Do you believe? The question is a simple one."[39]

2. Perseverance and Apostasy

Even though the FV emphasis upon the assurance of salvation, which is based upon objective covenant membership and efficacy of the sacraments, might appear "presumptuous," it is interesting to observe that there is another emphasis also present in the teaching of the FV. Since the covenant is always "conditional," requiring the obedience of faith on the part of those with whom God covenants in order to secure the covenant blessing of eternal life, FV writers stress the need for an obedient faith that perseveres to the end, and that does not fall away into apostasy. Because all members of the covenant community are obliged to new obedience, failure to continue in the way of faithfulness to the covenant will ultimately prove spiritually fatal. One of the themes of FV writers, accordingly, is the theme of perseverance in the way of covenant faithfulness, lest covenant members lose their salvation through their disobedience.

We have already noted the way some FV writers speak of the salvation of those who belong to the covenant community as one that may be experienced only "for a time." Since "covenant election" does not coincide with "election" in the proper sense of God's eternal purpose, it is possible for

37 "Baptism and Election" (August 21, 2002, AAPCPC), a response to a question posed to Steve Schlissel. As cited by Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology,* pp. 134-5. Also see John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *The Federal Vision,* p. 38 *et passim.*

38 See, e.g,. John Barach, "Covenant and History" (2002 AAPCPC); and Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons,* pp. 259ff.

39 Douglas Wilson, *"Reformed" is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), p. 130.

covenant members to fall away from a salvation that they once possessed. In September 2002, the session of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church adopted a "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation." In this statement, the possibility of covenantal apostasy on the part of persons who have genuinely experienced saving union with Christ is affirmed.

> God mysteriously has chosen to draw many into the covenant community who are not elect in the ultimate sense and who are not destined to receive final salvation. These non-elect covenant members are truly brought to Christ, united to Him in the Church by baptism and receive various operations of the Holy Spirit. Corporately, they are part of the chosen, redeemed, Spirit-indwelt people. Sooner or later, however, in the wise counsel of God, these fail to bear fruit and fall away. In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however, withholds from them the gift of perseverance, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they entered into at baptism.[40]

Among FV writers, it is frequently argued that Christ's words in John 15:1-8, which speak of some who do not abide in the vine and bear its corresponding fruit, describe the reality of some who enjoy a true communion with Christ but subsequently fall away through apostasy and lose what was once theirs.[41] Because the covenant is always conditioned upon a persevering and obedient faith, those who fall away through unbelief and disobedience lose their salvation in union with Christ and all its accompanying blessings.

Though it would not be difficult to multiply examples of this kind of emphasis within the writings of FV proponents, the FV understanding of perseverance and apostasy should be fairly transparent. Because all those who belong to the covenant people of God by baptism are genuinely incorporated into Christ and thereby participate in the saving benefits of His work of Mediator, failure on their part to meet the conditions of the covenant may entail the loss of saving blessings that were once their possession. Since FV authors resist any distinctions between some within the covenant community who are only "externally" or "apparently" in union with Christ and others who are truly and savingly in union with Christ, they are compelled to regard cov-

40 "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation, " www.auburnavenue.org. For a survey of similar statements by FV authors, see Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology,* pp. 146-67.

41 See, e.g., Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Federal Vision,* p. 63-4; Norman Shepherd, "The Covenant Context for Evangelism," in *The New Testament Student and Theology,* ed. J.H. Skilton (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976); and Douglas Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," *Credenda/Agenda* 15:1,4-5.

enant apostasy as tantamount to a kind of "falling from grace" or the loss of a temporary election and salvation. Even though the FV emphasizes the close connection between covenant, election, and salvation, the FV also stresses the necessity of meeting the obligations of the covenant in order to ensure the blessings of salvation in Christ. This means that covenant members must be faithful in the way of an obedient and persevering faith, lest they risk the loss of what was once theirs when they were first incorporated into Christ through baptism.

D. Evaluating these FV Emphases

Since the mandate of our Committee focuses upon justification, our evaluation of the emphases of the FV that we have identified will be restricted primarily to their implications for our understanding of this doctrine. Since these emphases are comprehensive and far-ranging, and include subjects that have been disputed throughout the history of the Reformed churches, we believe it would exceed our mandate to consider them in great detail or to attempt to offer "the" Reformed or confessional view of these issues. In the history of the Reformed churches, there has always been room for a diversity of opinion and formulation within the boundaries of the Confessions' summary of the Word of God. With respect to some of these FV emphases, we wish to honor legitimate differences of expression within the framework of the "Forms of Unity" to which the URCNA as a federation subscribes. However, we also believe that some of these emphases are problematic and at odds with the Confessions at important points, particularly in terms of their implications for the doctrine of justification.

1. Covenant, Election, and Salvation

As we noted in our survey of the claims of the FV movement, several proponents argue for the closest possible relationship between covenant, election, and salvation. When God covenants with His people (believers and their children), He graciously elects them to a true and saving communion with Himself. All who are members of the covenant people of God may legitimately proceed from the conviction that they are "elect in Christ" and possess accordingly all the saving benefits of Christ's work as Mediator. With respect to the doctrine of justification, this means that all covenant members enjoy all gospel benefits, including justification, by virtue of their membership in Christ and His church.

From the standpoint of the Confessions, this FV identification of

covenant, election, and salvation is at best overstated and at worst seriously unbiblical. By identifying covenant, election, and salvation, FV proponents are unable to maintain clearly that those whom God elects in Christ will unfailingly be granted the fullness of salvation in unbreakable communion with God. Since not all those with whom God covenants in history are "elect" in the proper sense of the term, especially as election is defined in the Belgic Confession (Article 16) and the Canons of Dort, we may not assert in an unqualified manner that they are all elected unto salvation and participant in the saving benefits of Christ's work as Mediator. Within the framework of this identification of election and covenant, some FV authors speak of covenant members who, though elect and saved in Christ, do not persevere in the covenant and subsequently lose their salvation. However, in the Reformed Confessions, God's gracious purpose of election infallibly ensures that the elect will be granted every saving blessing in Christ, including the blessing of free justification, and that they will be preserved by God's steadfast love and faithfulness in this salvation. According to the Canons of Dort, God eternally elected to give His people to Christ. In order to accomplish this purpose, God in time redeems, effectually calls, justifies, and glorifies them.[42] Therefore, the Canons of Dort expressly repudiate the error of those who teach that Christ has purchased any temporal saving benefits for the nonelect, even those who may be members of the church for a time, as though they were temporally justified or sanctified.[43] The simple identification of covenant, election, and salvation, which is a principal theme of several FV proponents, can only leave the impression that there is a kind of covenant election that depends upon the covenant member's faithfulness and obedience. Such covenant election does not ensure anything more than a "temporary salvation" and can be subsequently lost through covenant apostasy. Though some FV authors insist that the covenant of grace is tantamount to election unto salvation in Christ, they are compelled to equivocate in their use of the language of "election," "justification," and "salvation," since by their own admission not all of the elect or justified persevere in the way of an obedient faith. In this FV teaching, elect and justified persons can cease to

42 Canons of Dort, 1:7: "And so he decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through his Word and Spirit. In other words, he decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of his Son, to glorify them"; 2:8: "it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the father; that he should grant them faith … that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end."

43 Canons of Dort, Rejection of errors 1:2.

enjoy a salvation that they once possessed.

There are at least two ways in which FV authors diverge at this point from the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity. In the first place, the Canons of Dort are quite explicit in rejecting the teaching of various "kinds of election," as though some are elected to grace but not to glory, or to salvation but not to "the way of salvation, which he (that is, God) prepared in advance for us to walk in."[44] According to the Canons of Dort, all the fruits of election, which include "faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts," are included within God's purpose of election and are granted in time to those whom He elects.[45] The formulation of some FV authors that allows for an election to salvation "for a time," which can then be lost through subsequent disobedience and apostasy, is expressly included among the views that the Canons reject.[46] In our survey of FV emphases, we noted how some authors speak of an election to a temporary salvation and non-persevering faith. As it stands, this FV emphasis is incompatible with the express language of the Canons of Dort, when they reject the position of those

> [w]ho teach that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn either incomplete, revocable, nonperemptory (or conditional), or else complete, irrevocable, and peremptory (or absolute). Likewise, who teach that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from a peremptory election to salvation.[47]

Contrary to the teaching of a temporary salvation and a non-persevering faith, the last main point of doctrine set forth in the Canons of Dort deals with the believer's perseverance in the way of faith and salvation. The teaching of the perseverance of the saints follows properly from the other main points of doctrine that the Canons summarize. Since God's purpose of election will be infallibly accomplished, believers may be assured that God will preserve them in the way of faith and salvation. In the beautiful language of the *Canons,* God's "plan cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out."[48]

44 Canons of Dort, 1:8.

45 Canons of Dort, 1:9.

46 Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors 1:5-6: "Who teach that not every election to salvation is unchangeable, but that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it."

47 Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 1:2.

48 Canons of Dort 5:8. Cf. Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 5:3: "Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again not only can forfeit justifying faith

In the second place, the FV tendency to equate election and membership in the covenant of grace compromises the Canons of Dort's teaching of *unconditional* election. Though FV writers maintain that all covenant members are elect in Christ, they also want to stress the *conditionality* of the covenant relationship. If those with whom God covenants do not meet the conditions of the covenant, namely, persevering faith and repentance, they can lose their salvation and become subject to God's covenant wrath. Since the covenant obliges believers and their children to embrace the promise of the gospel in the way of a living faith, it is possible that some covenant members can lose the grace of communion with God in Christ that was once theirs. The problem with the FV formulation at this point is not that it emphasizes the "conditionality" of the covenant relationship. It is undoubtedly true that the covenant promise demands the response of faith and repentance. The Reformed Confessions consistently maintain that believers and their children are ordinarily saved in Christ in the way of faith and repentance.[49] However, the FV tendency to identify election and covenant in an unqualified manner renders saving election losable, election being conditional upon covenant faithfulness. In this way, faith and repentance, as conditions of the covenant, cease to be the fruits of God's gracious purpose of election (cf. Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:4-8; Rom. 8:1-4). It is proper to emphasize, as FV authors do, the decisive importance of persevering faith and obedience within the covenant relationship. However, it is improper to formulate the relation between election and covenant so that persevering faith and obedience are not themselves the fruits of God's gracious election and work on behalf of His own through the ministry of the Spirit. In some of the writings of FV authors, covenant faithfulness and covenant unfaithfulness are conditions, respectively, for election unto final salvation and election unto temporary salvation. From the standpoint of the Reformed Confessions, however, it must always be emphasized that what the Lord requires in the way of faith and repentance, He also gives by the operations of the Holy Spirit through the gospel Word and its accompanying sacraments. Even the so-called "conditions" of the covenant of grace are graciously met in accordance with God's purpose of election.[50]

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as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever. For this opinion nullifies the very grace of justification and regeneration as well as the continual preservation by Christ …."

49 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, 20, 21, 25, 32, 33; Belgic Confession, Arts. 22-24; Canons of Dort, 1:4, 7; 2:6, 7, 8; 3/4:10-17.

50 See, e.g., Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors 5:1: "Who teach that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ's death, but a condition of the new covenant which man, before what they call his

2. The Pre-Fall Covenant

One of the most significant features of FV teaching, and one that directly bears upon the doctrine of justification, is its position on the pre-fall covenant relationship between God and all human beings in Adam. FV proponents do not approve the Reformed language of a pre-fall "covenant of works," and reject the idea that Adam's obedience within this covenant relationship would in any sense "merit" the reward of eternal life that was promised to him. Furthermore, since there is a close biblical parallel between the fall and disobedience of the first Adam, which is the basis for the condemnation and death of all men, and the obedience of Christ, which is the basis for the justification and life all who are members of Christ by faith, FV authors oppose some features of the historic Reformed view of Christ's saving work. In the Reformed tradition, the obedience of Christ in its entirety (active and passive) is viewed as an obedience that justly "merits" eternal life for believers. Christ's righteousness is viewed in terms of His fulfillment of all the obligations "under the law" that Adam failed to meet, but that Christ met on behalf of His own for their justification. The manner in which FV writers reject the doctrine of a pre-fall "covenant of works" compels them to reject the teaching that the believer's justification is based upon Christ's entire obedience under the law, which "merits" righteousness and eternal life for His people.

There are especially two questions that this FV denial of a pre-fall covenant of works raises, when evaluated by the standard of the Three Forms of Unity: 1) do the Three Forms of Unity teach a doctrine of a pre-fall "covenant of works," as is evidently the case in the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chap. 7)?; and 2) do the Three Forms of Unity affirm the teaching that Christ "merited" righteousness and life for His people? Both of these questions are of special importance to an evaluation of the FV and its doctrine of justification.

With respect to the first question – do the Three Forms of Unity teach a pre-fall "covenant of works" doctrine? – the answer might appear at first glance to be relatively easy. Since the Confessions nowhere use the language of a pre-fall "covenant" or "covenant of works," it appears that this is a confessional teaching that belongs only to the Presbyterian tradition. The negative answer to this question, however, is too hasty. Though the language of "covenant" or "covenant of works" may not be used in the Three Forms of Unity, what matters is whether the components of a "covenant of works" doctrine are present. No one who subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity is

'peremptory' election and justification, must fulfill by his free will."

obliged to use the language of a pre-fall "covenant of works." Nor is a subscriber to the Three Forms of Unity obliged to agree with every formulation or view of the pre-fall relationship between God and (all men in) Adam. Such persons are obliged, however, to subscribe to the confessional descriptions of the pre-fall relationship, and to do so particularly in terms of the way they inform the confessional understanding of Christ's saving work as the Mediator of the covenant of grace.

There are several key elements that belong to the Confessions' summary of the relationship between God and Adam in the pre-fall state. First, the Confessions teach that Adam's obedience to God's holy law was indispensable to his life in blessed fellowship with God. The life promised Adam (cf. Gen. 3:22) in this fellowship is not viewed as a "free gift" of God's *saving grace*, but as an inheritance that depends upon Adam's perfect obedience to the law of God. If Adam were to have perfectly obeyed the holy law of his Triune Creator, he would have continued to enjoy fellowship with God and receive the reward of eternal life. The reward of eternal life promised Adam would have been granted Adam in full harmony with God's truth and justice.[51] Second, in the confessional view of the pre-fall relationship between God and Adam, Adam's status of favor and acceptance with God was not based upon the righteousness of Another, but upon a righteousness that was his own (though his by virtue of God's gracious enablement and provision). Prior to Adam's fall into sin, he was properly reckoned to be righteous by God, and this was not an act of God's saving grace in Christ (cf. Romans 5:12-21). Even though the Confessions do not say that Adam's acceptance with God and eternal life would have been "merited" through his obedience, they do insist that Adam's inheritance of eternal life and blessedness was dependent upon his obedience to the "commandment of life."[52] And third, the

51 See Belgic Confession, Art. 14: "We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God. But *being in honor, he understood it not,* neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life"; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3, Q. & A. 8: "so that [aus dass] he might live with Him in eternal blessedness"; Lord's Day 16, Q. & A. 40.

52 Belgic Confession, Art. 14. Since the Reformed Confessions do not use the term "merit" in their descriptions of the obedience Adam was obliged to render to God in order to enjoy life, subscribers to these Confessions are not required to do so. However, subscribers to the Confessions are required to recognize that Adam's obedience was the stipulated condition for his enjoyment of God's favor and eternal life, and that his disobedience justly forfeited (demerited) God's favor. Reformed theologians who have used the language of "merit" in the pre-fall covenant context, typically

Confessions view the work of Christ, as Mediator of the covenant of grace, within the framework of their understanding of the pre-fall relationship between God and (all men in) Adam.[53] In the covenant of grace, Christ, the "last Adam," fulfills all the requirements of God's holy law on behalf of His people. In this way, Christ's work of redemption obtains eternal life for His people in a way that upholds God's truth and justice.

Therefore, the absence of the terminology of a "covenant of works" in the Confessions does not alter the fact that all of the elements or components of the Reformed doctrine are present "materially" in them.[54] The Three Forms of Unity clearly affirm the original state of integrity in Adam, the obligation of perfect obedience to the law of God, the promise of life upon condition of such obedience, and the consequence of Adam's sin and fall for the whole human race. Because Adam transgressed the law of God and broke fellowship with his Creator, he forfeited for himself and all his posterity any possibility of eternal life in unbreakable communion with God in the way

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recognize that the language is being used "improperly," and merely expresses the "connection" between God's covenant promise and the reward of eternal life. It is a kind of "covenantal merit" (*meritum ex pacto*) that accords with divine truth and justice, but ultimately originates with God's unmerited favor in conferring upon Adam a "right" to eternal life that surpasses anything he "deserved" as a creature in the presence of his Creator. Since God promises to bless human obedience to His will, God's bestowal or granting a blessing to Adam for obedience to His will is a matter of being true to Himself (that is, His promise) and therefore a matter of covenanted justice. Contrary to the claims of some FV writers, this understanding of the connection between Adam's obedience and the promised reward of eternal life does not represent a Reformed appropriation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of human "merit," whether "condign" (full) merit or "congruent" (half) merit. In the Roman Catholic view, "condign" merit is the intrinsic merit or worth of human obedience as it is prompted by God's grace and Spirit; "congruent" merit is the "half-merit" of human works that receive a reward that exceeds their intrinsic worth. For classic Reformed treatments of this question, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 2:710-23; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), II:569-71; and J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vanden Hoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 112-119, 196-202, 326-328. The following observation of Turretin is of particular significance to an understanding of the Reformed view: "Hence also it appears that there is no merit properly so called of man before God, in whatever state he is placed. Thus Adam himself, if he had persevered, would not have merited life in strict justice, although (through a certain condescension [*synchatabasin*]) God promised him by a covenant life under the condition of perfect obedience (which is called meritorious from that covenant in a broader sense ….)" (2:712).

53 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3-6.

54 Belgic Confession, Arts. 14, 15; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3 & 4; Canons of Dort, 3/4.

of obedience to God's holy law. After the fall and disobedience of Adam, the only way to obtain eternal life is through faith in Christ, the last Adam, who alone is able to grant the fullness of life and glory to those who belong to him. Consequently, though the language of a "covenant of works" may be disputed, the substance of the historical Reformed understanding of this covenant is present in the Three Forms of Unity.[55]

Consistent with the FV denial of the teaching of a pre-fall covenant that required obedience to the law as a condition for obtaining eternal life, FV writers reject the language of "merit" even when it is applied to the work of Christ. However, the Confessions often speak of Christ's "merits" to refer to His entire obedience under the law on behalf of His people. Just as the disobedience of the first Adam brings condemnation and death to the whole human race whom He represented, so the obedience of Christ brings justification and life to those whom He represented as Mediator of the covenant of grace. The justice and truth of God satisfied through the work of Christ, the last Adam, consists in His active obedience to all the requirements of His Father's holy will and His passive obedience to the penalty due those who transgress God's holy law. For this reason, the Confessions expressly use the language of Christ's "merits" or "meriting" eternal life for His people.[56] The following affirmations in the Confessions are especially important in this respect:

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55 See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II:569, who notes that "though the name may be disputed, the matter is certain" (*de vocabulo dubitetur, re salva*). In the history of Reformed theology, the pre-fall covenant between God and humanity in Adam has been variously designated. Sometimes it is termed a "covenant of nature," since this covenant required obedience to the moral law of God that man knew by nature and was able to obey by virtue of the created gifts and integrity with which he was originally endowed. However, it is most commonly designated a "covenant of works," since the eternal life promised in the covenant was able to be obtained only in the way of works, that is, in the way of keeping God's commandments.

56 See, e.g., Belgic Confession, Arts. 20-23; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 2-7, 16, 23-24; and the Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 2:3-4. When the Confessions speak of the "merit" of Christ's work, they affirm that the work of Christ, though entirely the fruit of God's gracious purpose to provide for the redemption of the elect through the work of the Mediator, *truly and properly merits,* in full conformity to the requirements of God's exact justice, eternal life and favor for His people. Unlike the improper use of "merit" to describe the connection between Adam's stipulated obedience and the promised reward of eternal life, the language of "merit" is entirely appropriate in respect to the perfect righteousness of Christ, who fulfills all the obligations of the law in His Person as true God and true man on behalf of His people (cf. Rom. 3:26; 8:1-4; Gal. 3:10-14). See the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 4-6; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II. xvii, "Christ Rightly and Properly Said to Have Merited God's Grace and Salvation for Us."

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. (Belgic Confession, Art. 20)

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits …. For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that more is required besides him, would be too great a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior. … But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins. (Belgic Confession, Art. 22)

And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. (Belgic Confession, Art. 23)

[T]hat not only to others, but to me also, remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7)

God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, A. 60)

[We reject the error of those] Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of those conditions depends on the free choice of man…. Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with men through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it ac-

> cepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life. (Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 2:3-4)

Contrary to the claims of many FV authors, therefore, the Three Forms of Unity clearly teach that the entire obedience of Christ under the law was performed in His office as Mediator, and that this obedience remedies the failure of Adam to live in obedience to God. With respect to the doctrine of justification, the Confessions treat the righteousness of Christ, which is granted and imputed to believers for their justification, to include "all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead" under the law.[57] This means that what some FV authors disparage as a "works-merit" paradigm is expressly set forth in the Confessions, particularly in their description of Christ's saving *work* on behalf of His people.

3. Law and Gospel in the Covenant

In our summary of the FV, we noted that FV proponents oppose a sharp distinction between the law and the gospel in their understanding of the covenant of grace, and even in the understanding of the difference between the pre-fall and post-fall relationship between God and His people. Just as Adam was required to respond to God's grace in the way of an obedient faith in order to obtain what was promised to him, so believers are required to respond to the gospel of Christ in the way of an obedient faith in order to secure their inheritance of eternal life. Though the language of "gospel" is appropriately used only with respect to the covenant of grace, it remains true that the "way" to covenant blessing is always "by grace" through an obedient faith, whether before or after the fall into sin.

The problem with this FV tendency to blur the difference between Adam's obligations of obedience under the law in the pre-fall state and the believer's obligations to the law in the post-fall covenant of grace, is that it undermines the biblical and confessional view of justification. When it comes to the justification of believers, it is imperative that a sharp distinction be drawn between the "law" and the "gospel." As a result of the sin and disobedience of Adam, no one is able to obey the law perfectly, not even the believer who enjoys the grace of the Spirit's work in sanctification. According to the Reformed Confessions, the believer's obedience to the law of

57 Belgic Confession, Art. 22. See also Belgic Confession, Arts. 14, 20, 23, 24; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3-6, 15-17, 23-24; Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 2:3-4.

God plays no role whatsoever in obtaining the grace of free justification.[58] Under the conditions of human sinfulness, the holy and good law of God can only expose our sin and misery.[59] The only way back for sinners to renewed fellowship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all the obligations of the law on behalf of His people.[60] So far as the believer's justification is concerned, the radical contrast between the "righteousness of faith" and the "righteousness of the law" cannot be overstated. No human works, not even the good works of believers that are prompted by the Holy Spirit and performed in gratitude for God's grace in Christ, can contribute anything to the believer's acceptance with God.[61] Of course, this does not mean that the Confessions deny the believer's obligation to live before God in grateful devotion and conformity to the holy requirements of His law. However, such obedience is itself a gift of God's grace in Christ, who renews His own by the working of the Holy Spirit, and is performed out of gratitude for a salvation that is a free gift of God's grace.[62] Therefore, believers are not "under the law" in the sense in which Adam was obliged to live in obedience to its requirements. Since Christ has discharged all of the obligations of the law in the place of His own, the obedience of believers is a free response to God's grace and can be pleasing to God only upon the basis of a prior acceptance with Him.[63] Contrary to the FV claim that believers are obliged to

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58 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 23; 24, Q. & A. 62: "But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God? Because the righteousness which can stand before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect and wholly conformable to the divine law, while even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin"; Belgic Confession, Arts. 21-24.

59 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 2.

60 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 4-7; 23, Q. & A. 60: "God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ."

61 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24; Belgic Confession, Arts. 22-24.

62 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 64: "it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness"; Lord's Day 32, Q. & A. 86: "Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image, that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits"; Lord's Day 33, Q. & A. 91: "But what are good works? Only those which are done from true faith, according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are based on our opinions or the precepts of men."

63 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33, Q. & A. 91; Belgic Confession, Art. 24: "These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace. Nevertheless they are of no account towards our justification, for it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good

secure their inheritance in the covenant in the same way as Adam, namely, in the way of an obedient faith, the Confessions teach that Christ has secured this inheritance for them through His perfect obedience and atonement.[64]

It should be noted that, though the Confessions insist upon a sharp distinction between the law and the gospel when it comes to the justification of believers, they also maintain the perpetual validity of God's holy law in their understanding of Christ's saving work. Though Adam (and all men in him) failed to keep the law of God perfectly, and thereby brought himself and all his posterity under the curse and judgment of God, Christ assumed our human nature in order, as Mediator, to perform on behalf of His people all that the law required.[65] The difference between man's fellowship (or covenant) with God before and after the fall does not mitigate the fact that in both circumstances the law of God is fully upheld. Because God is unchangeably holy and righteous, the demand of His holy law is maintained not only before the fall under the covenant of works but after the fall in the administration of the covenant of grace. No human being can find favor with God without doing what the law of God requires. This is as true in the covenant of grace as it was in the covenant of works. Therefore, in the covenant of grace, God does not act capriciously or arbitrarily. He always acts in a way that maintains and upholds the righteous requirements of His holy law (cf. Rom. 3:21-26). Indeed, after the fall into sin, the whole human race comes to stand "under the law" in two respects: first, all remain obligated to do what the law requires in order to be pleasing to God; and second, all now come under the law in terms of its liability and penalty. After the fall into sin, the requirement of perfect obedience in order to obtain eternal life remains, but it has now been complicated by the additional requirement that payment be made for the debts or demerits that disobedient sinners now owe God for their sins.

4. The Doctrine of the Church and Sacraments (Baptism)

In our summary of some of the characteristic features of the FV, we called special attention to three aspects of its doctrine of the church and sacraments: 1) a repudiation of the Reformed distinction between the "visible" and the "invisible" church; 2) a strong doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments; and 3) a common advocacy of admitting children to the sacrament

works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good."

64 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 19, Q. & A. 52; Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 59: "But what does it profit you now that you believe all this? That I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir to eternal life."

65 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 2, 21, 23-24, 44; Belgic Confession, Arts. 20-23.

of the Lord's Supper. On each of these aspects, there are elements of the FV that are out of accord with the teaching of the Confessions.

While it is true that the Three Forms of Unity do not explicitly distinguish between what some Reformed Confessions term the "visible" and "invisible" church,[66] the most important elements of this distinction are present in them. The primary use of this distinction in the history of the Reformed churches is to observe that not all members of the covenant community, the church of Jesus Christ, are "elect" persons and therefore truly and savingly joined to Christ by faith. God alone knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19), and some of those who are embraced under the covenant of grace in time do not genuinely belong to God. The church is comprised of genuine believers and hypocrites, persons who do not have a true faith and who do not persevere in the way of faith and obedience. It is inappropriate, therefore, to affirm the election and salvation of all who belong to the covenant community, and to do so in an unqualified and undifferentiated manner.

Perhaps the clearest statement in the Three Forms of Unity that has a direct bearing upon this question is to be found in Article 29 of the *Belgic Confession.* In this Article, which identifies the "marks of the true church" and the "marks of Christians," the church is said to include "hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it." This language coincides with the usual way in which the "visible" church is distinguished from the "invisible" church in the history of the Reformed churches. It reflects the common teaching of Scripture (and, for that matter, of Christian experience) that not all who fall under the administration of the covenant of grace in time (professed believers and their children) are genuine members of Christ by faith. Remarkably, this Article also goes on to note, with respect to the "marks of Christians," that the primary mark is faith: "With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof." This language clearly implies that those who are properly members of the church are only those who receive the gospel promise in the way of persevering faith. Though this acknowledgment that not all who belong to the church "externally" are genuinely "of" the church is explicit in the Belgic Confession, it is also clearly implied in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. In the Heidelberg Catechism, those who are savingly joined to Christ are joined

66 See the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. XXV. i-ii; Belgic Confession, Art. 29.

to Him by a "true faith."[67] This faith, which is produced by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by the sacraments, is a persevering faith.[68] It is not a faith that grants a temporary salvation, but a faith that confidently professes that God will preserve His own and make all things subservient to their salvation.[69] Throughout the Heidelberg Catechism, a strong emphasis is placed upon membership in the covenant community or church of Christ, and upon the use of the Word and the sacraments in the communication of the gospel. But such membership and reception of the "means of grace" does not automatically confer salvation in Christ, since the "means of grace" are only effective when the Spirit of God accompanies them and produces the kind of faith that confidently believes the gospel promise.

The necessity of true faith, which the Holy Spirit works through the gospel, for possessing Christ and His saving benefits, is also evident in the Confessions' treatment of the sacraments. Though the FV emphasis upon the importance of the sacraments is laudable and not out of accord with the Confessions, it often leads FV authors to neglect the indispensability of faith to the appropriation or reception of the grace communicated in the sacraments. However, in the Three Forms of Unity, the sacraments are consistently defined as visible signs and seals of the promise of the gospel that require the same response of faith as does the Word. It is only when and as the Spirit authors faith through the Word of God, to which the sacraments are appended as confirmatory signs and seals, that the grace of Jesus Christ is communicated.[70] Consequently, in all of the confessional statements about the sacraments as means of grace, the necessity of faith to the right use and efficacy of the sacrament as a means of grace is affirmed.

Contrary to the FV conception of sacramental efficacy, the Three Forms of Unity do not countenance any view of the sacrament of baptism, for example, that would ascribe to the sacrament the power to "regenerate" its recipient. Nor do they teach that all recipients of baptism are savingly incorporated into Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the sacraments in general, including baptism, as a means that the Holy Spirit uses to "confirm" faith. Just as is true of the preached Word, the visible Word of the sacrament requires that it be received in the way of faith. It is especially important to observe the way the Heidelberg Catechism distinguishes be-

67 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7.

68 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 20, 21, 25.

69 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1.

70 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, Q. & A. 65: "Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith? From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments."

tween the "sign" of baptism and the "reality" to which it points. Without diminishing the importance of the sacrament of baptism to the confirmation and strengthening of faith in its recipient, the Catechism rejects the idea that the water of baptism itself washes away the sin of the person baptized. Only the blood of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit are able to wash or cleanse believers from their sins.[71] Any doctrine of sacramental efficacy, therefore, that ascribes to the sacrament in its administration the power to effect what it signifies, and that without clearly emphasizing the necessary appropriation of God's grace in Christ by faith, is not in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity. But this is precisely the kind of emphasis that can be found in the writings of FV advocates. Because the FV wants to stress the objectivity of the covenant and its sacraments, it often neglects to emphasize equally the necessity of the Spirit's work in the application of redemption, particularly in authoring the kind of faith that is necessary in order to benefit from the Word and its accompanying sacraments.

The FV advocacy of admitting children to the Lord's Table is of one piece with its tendency to identify covenant membership with election and saving communion with Christ. Since children are truly and savingly united to Christ, possessing all the benefits of such union, they ought to be received at the Table of the Lord in order to be further nourished in Christ. Failure to admit covenant children to the Table of the Lord is an intolerable act of "excommunication," since it excludes them from partaking of Christ even though they are full members of Him. As noted in the foregoing, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because it is a visible representation and confirmation of the gospel promise in Christ, *requires faith* on the part of its participants. Because the sacrament visibly signifies and seals the promises of the gospel, it demands the same response as the gospel. Neither the gospel Word nor the sacrament works merely by virtue of administration (*ex opera operato*). Only by a spiritual eating and drinking by the mouth of faith does the sacrament work to communicate Christ to His people. Therefore, the Roman Catholic teaching of an objective presence of Christ in the sacramental elements, irrespective of a believing response to the gospel Word that the sacrament confirms, is rejected. Not only does this Roman Catholic view improperly identify the sacramental sign and the spiritual reality it signifies, but it also maintains that Christ is objectively present before, during, and even after the administration of the elements whether or not those participating (or not participating) actively accept the gospel in faith and repentance.

In the Reformed Confessions, moreover, the kind of faith that is

71 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 27, Q. & A. 72: "Is, then, the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sin? No, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins."

competent to remember, proclaim, and receive Christ through the Lord's Supper is carefully defined. Before members of the church may receive the sacrament, they have a biblical mandate to engage in self-examination. This self-examination requires that the believers test their faith against the normative requirements of the Word of God. Essential to such faith are the acknowledgement of the believer's sin and unworthiness, the recognition that Christ alone by His mediatorial work has made atonement for the sins of His people, and a resolution to live in holiness and obedience to His will. In this way believers are called actively to embrace the promises of the gospel that the sacrament visibly confirms in the same way as they respond to the preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, it is the duty of the ministers and elders of the church to oversee the administration of the sacrament, preventing so far as they are able those from participating who are unbelieving or living an ungodly life. Since Christ has instituted the sacrament for the purpose of nourishing the faith of believers, it would violate the nature of the sacrament to invite the unbelieving or the impenitent to partake. Unworthy participation, that is, participation on the part of those who have not properly examined themselves or who are unbelieving, would profane the table of the Lord and be contemptuous of its ordained purpose.

Since this feature of the Reformed Confessions' teaching touches directly upon the propriety of paedocommunion, we need to take particular note of the Confessions' teaching regarding the proper recipients of the sacrament. The Belgic Confession, after noting that the recipient of the Lord's Supper receives the body and blood of the Lord "by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul)," speaks directly to this subject.

> [W]e receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are moved by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.[72]

According to the language of this article, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper requires the active engagement of its recipients. Only believers who are capable of remembering the faith and the Christian religion, may come to the Table in order to be nourished and fortified in the way of faith and love. With an obvious allusion to the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11, this Confession also insists upon a proper preparation on the part of believers for the reception of the sacrament. Only those who have previously ex-

72 Belgic Confession, Art. 35.

amined themselves should partake of the bread and the cup, lest they should eat and drink judgment unto themselves.

In its extensive treatment of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Heidelberg Catechism also expressly addresses the question of those for whom the sacrament is instituted.

> Q. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? A. For those who are truly displeased with themselves for their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmity is covered by His passion and death; who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts eat and drink judgment to themselves.[73]

It is important to observe that the three marks of true faith, which are identified in this question and answer, are the same as the three general headings of the Heidelberg Catechism. This is not accidental, since the purpose of the Catechism is to provide an instrument for the instruction of the children of believers in the Christian faith. True faith always includes three elements: 1) a conscious awareness of the believer's sin and misery; 2) an understanding of the person and work of Christ, who satisfied for the believer's sins by His cross and passion; and 3) a Spirit-worked readiness on the part of the believer to live in gratitude to God. When the children of believing parents, who have received the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ through the sacrament of baptism, are instructed in these principal elements of the Christian religion, they are being invited to respond in faith to their baptism and to come believingly to the Lord's Supper. Though this is not the place to answer the objections of proponents of paedocommunion, the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism does not seem to create an artificial and unnecessary barrier before children who might otherwise be received at the Lord's Table. All believers who are received at the Lord's Table come in the same way and with the same obligations. Consistent with the nature of true faith, all believers who come to the Table of the Lord in order to be nourished in faith are expected to come believingly. If the sacrament is to be used to strengthen faith, it is only appropriate that those who receive the sacrament do so as professing believers.

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73 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 30, Q. & A. 81. It should be noted that the Scripture proofs cited for this answer are: 1 Cor. 11:20, 34; 10:19-22. In earlier questions and answers, additional passages are cited to show that faith is required on the part of the recipient of the sacrament (e.g., John 6:35, 40, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54).

5. Assurance, Perseverance and Apostasy

Though the occasion for a number of the emphases of the FV is to resolve the problem of assurance, it is likely that the FV aggravates this problem by its particular understanding of assurance in relation to perseverance and apostasy.

On the one hand, the FV places a great deal of emphasis upon the "objectivity" of the covenant. All who are embraced within the covenant of grace, and who receive its sacraments, especially baptism, may conclude that they are elect and saved in Christ, and in possession of all the saving benefits of this union. From this point of view, the FV claims to have provided a sure and reliable basis for confidence and assurance of salvation. If someone has been baptized and incorporated thereby into the covenant community, there is no need to look inward or to engage in any form of self-examination to determine whether he or she is in the faith or saved. On the basis of covenant membership, and on the basis of an appeal to what has been communicated through baptism, all believers and their children ought to be convinced of their election and salvation, including the benefit of free justification. On the other hand, however, the FV view of the conditions or obligations of the covenant tends to undermine whatever assurance is gained through membership in the covenant with its sacraments. Since election and salvation, at least in terms of covenantal membership, may be election and salvation only for a time, it is possible for covenant members to lose what was once theirs. Covenant election and salvation are losable election and salvation. Unless the covenant member perseveres in the way of an obedient faith, there remains the fearful prospect of falling away irrevocably and forfeiting the salvation that was once his or hers. To put the matter in rather blunt terms: the FV attempt to solve the problem of assurance ends up making the believer's assurance hang by the thin thread of an obedient and persevering faith. The believer is cast upon his own persevering faithfulness instead of upon Christ and His saving work on the believer's behalf.

Though FV proponents often claim that their understanding of the covenant resolves the alleged problem of assurance in the Reformed churches, it actually undermines the kind of basis for assurance that is highlighted in the Three Forms of Unity. In the Three Forms of Unity, faith, which is worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel and strengthened by the accompanying sacraments, produces a strong assurance of acceptance and favor with God. Because the promise of the gospel is especially the promise of free justification and acceptance with God, which is based upon the perfect obedience, righteousness and satisfaction of Christ, believers ought to enjoy

a heartfelt confidence in God's mercy and grace.[74] The absolute exclusion of good works from playing any role instrumental to the believer's justification before God and inheritance of eternal life is decisive to the Confessions' insistence that such assurance belongs ordinarily to true faith. In the Heidelberg Catechism, the believer's comfort is founded upon the conviction that Jesus Christ, to whom the believer belongs body and soul, "has fully satisfied for all my sins" (Lord's Day 1). In the Belgic Confession, the close link between justification through faith alone and the believer's confidence with God is particularly emphasized:

> And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig-leaves.[75]

The Confessions consistently link the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone to the joyful confidence that it grants to believers. When faith rests in the perfect work of Christ, it finds a solid basis for assurance before God. However, when believers seek to base this assurance before God upon their own righteousness or good works, the consequence is loss of confidence before God.

Now it should be noted that the Confessions do draw a connection between the believer's assurance of salvation and the good works that genuine faith produces by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, affirms that good works serve to "assure" believers of the genuineness of their faith.[76] Just as a good tree is known from the fruits that it produces, so genuine faith is confirmed by the good works that such faith necessarily produces. Even though the Catechism ascribes this confirmatory role to good works in relation to the genuineness of faith, it must be observed that this role is not primary or foundational to the believer's

74 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, Q. & A. 21: "True faith is not only a sure knowledge … but also a firm confidence which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits"; Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 60.

75 Belgic Confession, Art. 23.

76 Heidelberg Catechism, Lords' Day 32, Q. & A. 86: "that each of us may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof."

assurance of salvation. Since the good works of believers stem from true faith, which is a necessary precondition for them to be good works,[77] they can hardly constitute the basis for the believer's confidence before God. In the Canons of Dort, the assurance of salvation and perseverance is likewise based, firstly, upon the gospel promise and the testimony of the Holy Spirit with the Word, and only secondarily, upon the good works that true faith produces.

> Accordingly, this assurance [of perseverance] does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which he has very plentifully revealed in his Word for our comfort, from the testimony of *the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs* (Rom 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a good conscience and of good works.[78]

Unlike the FV, the Three Forms of Unity present a carefully balanced view of the basis for the believer's assurance of salvation. On the one hand, this assurance is born out of faith's confidence in the perfection and sufficiency of the work of Christ as Mediator. Nothing tends to buttress the believer's assurance more than the gospel promise of free justification on the basis of Christ's righteousness, and the solid conviction that God's saving purpose of election will preserve the believer in the way of salvation until its completion. Contrary to the covenantal objectivism of the FV that appeals to covenant membership and baptism as a sufficient basis for such assurance, the Confessions always emphasize the necessity of faith as the means whereby the gospel promise and its sacramental confirmation are received. Furthermore, when the Confessions acknowledge the legitimate role of self-examination and good works to the confirmation of the genuineness of the believer's faith, they do not do so in a way that undermines the assurance of salvation. The Confessions base their confidence on the Scriptural teaching

77 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33, Q. & A. 91: "But what are good works? Only those which are done from true faith …."

78 Canons of Dort, 5:10. The balance of the Confessions is evident in their treatment of the role of good works in the believer's confidence before God. Though good works may confirm the genuineness of faith and provide confirmation of salvation, they may never become the principal foundation for the assurance of salvation. The believer's assurance rests upon the fullness and perfection of Christ's work for free justification. Cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 24: "Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior."

that perseverance itself belongs to the "better things that belong to salvation" (Heb. 6:9). From the perspective of the Three Forms of Unity, nothing could be more harmful to the cultivation of the assurance of salvation than the teaching that believers can be saved or elect "for a time," but not preserved in this salvation. Unlike the FV attempt to resolve the alleged problem of assurance, the Confessions offer a careful and balanced view that provides a sure basis for assurance, but without giving any place to presumptuousness or complacency.

IV. The Doctrine of Justification and the Federal Vision

The central point of doctrine in the present controversy regarding the FV and related views is, undoubtedly, the doctrine of justification. Were it not for the way various writers within the orbit of the FV have reformulated this doctrine, it is hard to imagine that the FV would have provoked as much concern as it has. Since the grace of free justification is a principal theme of the gospel of Jesus Christ, uncertainty regarding what this grace entails must be a matter of grave concern to any Reformed believer or church. In order to evaluate the way in which FV authors have compromised the biblical and Reformed understanding of this doctrine, we will begin this section of our report with a brief statement of the historic understanding of justification. After this review of the historic Reformed understanding, we will identify and evaluate several revisions of the doctrine that have been proposed by authors of the FV. In the third and last section of this part of our report, we will offer an assessment of the seriousness of these FV departures from the biblical and confessional understanding of justification.

A. The Biblical and Confessional Doctrine of Justification

When considering the confessional doctrine of justification, we must be careful to formulate the doctrine as clearly as possible. Saying merely that believers are "justified by grace through faith" does not adequately state the biblical teaching. In the biblical and confessional view, believers are said to be justified before God *by grace alone* (*sola gratia*) on account of the work of *Christ alone* (*solo Christo*), and this free justification becomes theirs *by faith alone* (*sola fide*). Each of these expressions is an essential part of the Reformed understanding of justification. In our summary of the confessional understanding of justification, therefore, we will successively treat each of these phrases. The questions we need to answer are: 1) what do the Confes-

sions mean when they speak of the believer's "justification"?; 2) why do the Confessions insist that this justification is "by grace alone" on account of the work of "Christ alone"?; and 3) why do they also emphasize that the gracious justification of believers is "by faith alone"?

1. "Justification": A Judicial Declaration of Acceptance with God

One common way of expressing the nature of the Reformed understanding of justification is to note that it views justification as a *judicial* declaration of God. Unlike the classic Roman Catholic doctrine, which regards justification as including a *moral transformation* of believers, the Protestant conception identifies justification with the pronouncement of the believer's innocence in God's court. According to the Reformation view, justification is a legal declaration by God, which declares the justified person righteous and acceptable to him.[79] For this reason, the apostle Paul contrasts "justification" with "condemnation" in Romans 8:33-4. In contrast to this view, the Roman Catholic view maintains that justification includes a process of moral transformation equivalent to what in the Reformed conception is regarded as the work of sanctification.[80]

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79 The descriptions of justification in the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession confirm that it refers to the judgment God pronounces regarding believers who entrust themselves to Jesus Christ. Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3, Q. & A. 60: "How are you righteous before God? Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, though my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart"; Belgic Confession, Art. 22: "… we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins." Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 62: "But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God? Because the righteousness which can stand *before the tribunal of God* must be absolutely perfect and wholly conformable to the divine law…."

80 Cf. the definition of justification in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Chapter 7 (quoted from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985 (1931)], 3:94): "This disposition, or preparation,

Though the language of justification is metaphorical, depicting sinners in legal terms as persons called to appear before God as their Judge, this language represents the real circumstance of sinners in relation to God. As creatures originally created in God's image, but now fallen into sin in Adam, all human beings are accountable before God and deserving of condemnation and death (Rom. 2-3).[81] Consequently, the problem that justification addresses can hardly be exaggerated. To be judged innocent or guilty by a human court is a matter of some importance. But to be judged in God's court is a matter of ultimate religious importance. Everything finally depends upon the sinner's "reputation" in God's judgment. The question of justification is not merely one question among many, but *the* religious question, the paramount question in life and in death. The justification of believers is a definitive act, which declares the forgiveness of their sins and righteousness before God. It anticipates the final judgment and declares that "all the curse" of the law has been removed for believers.[82] Therefore, in the biblical and confessional understanding of the gospel, justification is the principal benefit of Christ's saving work, revealing God's grace toward undeserving sinners whom he saves from condemnation and death (Rom. 5:12-21).[83]

2. "By Grace Alone", "On Account of Christ Alone": The Basis for Free Justification

Though the Confessions reject the traditional Roman Catholic view that confuses justification and sanctification, treating justification as though it involved a process of moral renewal, this is not their basic objection to it. According to the Confessions, the basic error of Roman Catholicism resides in its wrong conception of *the basis* of the verdict of innocence and righteousness that justification declares. In Roman Catholic teaching, God justifies believers in part on the basis of their own righteousness. Because justification includes a process of moral renewal, the righteousness that justifies believers

is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just [*fit iustus*] …."

81 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3, Q. & A. 10.

82 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 19, Q. & A. 52: "What comfort is it to you that Christ *shall come to judge the living and the dead?* That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same Person who before has offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as Judge from heaven."

83 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 59: "But what does it profit you now that you believe all this? That I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir to eternal life"; Belgic Confession, Art. 23.

is said to be an inherent righteousness.[84] When God justifies believers, He does not do so solely upon the basis of the work and merits of Christ, which are granted and imputed to believers by grace, but partly upon the basis of the work and merits of believers, which are the fruit of God's grace at work in them.[85]

In their rejection of this Roman Catholic understanding of the basis for the justification of believers, the Reformed Confessions affirm that justification is wholly a free gift of God's grace. Grace alone – not grace plus the working of believers prompted by grace – is the exclusive basis for the justification and salvation of believers. So far as their acceptance with God is concerned, believers rest their confidence, not in anything they might do in obedience to God, but in God's gracious favor demonstrated in the free provision of redemption through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the Confessions emphasize that the righteousness that justifies believers is an "imputed" righteousness, not a personal or inherent righteousness.[86] Though this language is frequently criticized for suggesting that justification involves a kind of "legal fiction," the Confessions use it on the basis of the Scriptural teaching that the believer's justification rests upon the righteousness of Another, namely, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:19). By means of His suffering and cross, Christ bore the penalty and suffered the curse of the law on behalf of His people (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:25; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:13). Christ satisfied God's justice by His endurance of the condemnation and death due those who violate the law of God. Furthermore, by means of His obedience and fulfillment of all the requirements of the law, Christ met all the demands of righteousness on their behalf. Christ alone, upon the basis of "all his merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead," secures the justification of His people before God.[87]

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84 Cf. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* 2:95-6: "For, although no one can be just, but he to whom the merits of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet is this done in the said justification of the impious, when by the merit of that same most holy Passion, *the charity of God is poured forth,* by the Holy Spirit, *in the hearts* of those that are justified, and is inherent therein [*atque ipsis inhaeret*]."

85 *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* Sixth Session, Chap. 10 (Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* 2:99). This has two serious and acknowledged consequences: first, Christ alone is no longer the believer's righteousness before God; and second, the believer cannot have any assurance of salvation (unless by special dispensation and revelation) since his own righteousness can scarcely provide any sure footing in the presence of God.

86 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 60: "God grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ"; Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 62; Belgic Confession, Art. 22: "But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits."

87 Belgic Confession, Art. 22. Cf. Louis Berkhof's definition of justification in his *Sys-*

Consistent with this understanding of the basis for the justification of believers, the Confessions sharply distinguish between the law and the gospel in relation to justification. When distinguished from the gospel, the law of God refers to the righteous requirements that God imposes upon human beings as His image bearers. Whether Jews, who received the law of God in written form through Moses, or Gentiles, who have the works of the law written upon their consciences, all human beings fail to live in perfect conformity to the law's demands (Rom. 2-3).[88] By the standard of the perfect law of God, all human beings stand condemned and are worthy of death as the wages of sin (Rom. 6:13). Though the law of God is good and holy, it can only demand from believers what they cannot do.[89] No one can be justified by the works of the law because no one actually does perfectly what the whole law requires. Contrary to the law's function to expose human sin and guilt, the gospel proclaims the good news that God freely grants to believers in Christ what the law could never achieve: acceptance and favor with Himself on account of the righteousness of Christ.

3. "Through Faith Alone": The Instrument of Justification

The Confessions' insistence that believers are justified by faith alone is an obvious implication of their insistence that justification is a free gift of God's grace in Christ. If justification is a free gift, which is based upon a righteousness graciously granted and imputed to believers, it most emphatically is not by works. "Grace alone," "Christ alone," and "faith alone" are interrelated expressions. To say the one is to say the other. To deny the one is to deny the other. If we are saved by grace alone, then works must be excluded

tematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans reprint, 1939, 1941), p. 513: "Justification is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner." Reformed theology distinguished in this connection between the "active" and "passive" obedience of Christ. The purpose of this distinction was not to divide Christ's obedience into two chronological stages (the first being his earthly ministry, the second being his sacrificial death upon the cross) or even into two parts, but to distinguish two facets of the one obedience of Christ. Christ's active obedience refers to his life of conformity to the precepts of the law; Christ's passive obedience refers to his life of suffering under the penalty of the law, especially in his crucifixion (Rom. 5:12-21; Phil. 2:5ff; Gal. 4:4). For presentations of this distinction and its significance for justification, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 379-82, 513ff.; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 2:646-59; and James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997 [1867]), pp. 314-38.

88 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 2.

89 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 62: "while even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

as a necessary condition for our being accepted into favor with God. If we are saved by the person and work of Christ alone, then nothing believers do before God in obedience to the law could possibly complete or compensate for anything lacking in His righteousness. In the Confessions, this is precisely why "faith alone" is the instrument whereby believers receive the free gift of justification upon the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone.[90]

To express the unique role of faith in the reception of the gift of free justification, the Reformers used a variety of expressions. Calvin, for example, spoke of faith as an "empty vessel" in order to stress its character as a receptacle that brings nothing to God but receives all things from him.[91] Luther used the striking analogy of a ring that clasps a jewel; faith has no value of itself, but clasps the jewel that is Christ and His righteousness.[92] Calvin also remarked that, in a manner of speaking, faith is a "passive thing," because it is the cessation of all working and striving to obtain favor and acceptance with God in order to rest in a favor freely given in Christ.[93] What makes faith a suitable instrument for the reception of free justification is that it is marked by a humble acknowledgement that all honor in salvation belongs to God in Christ. As a receptive and passive acknowledgement of the sheer graciousness of free justification, faith is an act of trustful acceptance of what God freely grants believers in Christ. When believers accept the free gift of justification by faith, they look away from themselves and focus their attention upon Christ who is their righteousness. Faith is the antithesis of any boasting in human achievement before God. Because such faith finds its sufficiency in Christ's saving work, it also produces a confident assurance of His favor.[94]

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90 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 61: "Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith? Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only"; Belgic Confession, Art. 22. The Scriptures speak of faith as the instrument or occasion of the believer's justification, but never speak of faith as that "on account of which" believers are justified. See, e.g., Gal. 2:16 ("through faith"); 3:28 ("by faith"); and Rom. 5:1 ("by faith")..

91 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.xi.7.

92 *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (American ed.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 26:89, 134.

93 *Institutes,* III. Xiii.5.

94 The formulation, "faith alone," does not mean to imply that faith, which is the exclusive instrument of justification, is a lonely or work-less faith. According to the Reformers, true faith always produces fruits in good works. Cf. Calvin's well-known

4. Faith and Works (Justification and Sanctification)

Before we turn to the way in which the FV revises the confessional doctrine of justification, we need to note briefly two additional features of the Confessions' doctrine of justification. The first of these features is the confessional understanding of the relation between faith as the alone instrument of justification and the good works that justifying faith necessarily produces.

In the Confessions, a clear distinction is drawn between faith, which is the alone instrument of justification, and the works that faith produces in the way of sanctification. Though the Confessions, echoing Scriptural teaching (Gal. 5:16), insist that true faith always and necessarily produces good works, they are careful to exclude the works that are the fruits of faith from the instrumentality of faith in justification.[95] For example, in the Heidelberg Catechism, it is noted that "good works" are only those works that flow from true faith, are conformed to the standard of the law of God, and are performed in order to glorify God.[96] In the Belgic Confession, it is clearly affirmed that faith justifies believers "before [they] do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good."[97] This language should not be understood to imply a temporal relationship between faith and good works, as though believers could first be justified and sometime later begin to be sanctified. The precedence of faith here is a theological precedence. Only believers, who are acceptable to God and dearly loved for the sake of Christ's work alone, can please God, even though the works that flow from faith are never perfect or such as could contribute anything to their justification.[98] The inseparability of faith and works, of justification and sanctification, is based upon the fullness of Christ's work for and in believers. Christ, whose righteousness alone is the basis for the believer's justification, also renews the believer after His

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comment in his "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* (ed. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House reprint, 1983 [1851]), 3:152: "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone; just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light."

95 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 64; Lord's Day 32, Q. & A. 86; Lord's Day 33, Q. & A. 91; Belgic Confession, Art. 24.

96 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33, Q. & A. 91.

97 Belgic Confession, Art. 24.

98 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. & A. 62.

own image by the Holy Spirit.[99] However, the necessity and obligation of new obedience in the life of the believer is not motivated by any suggestion that good works play a role in the believer's justification. Rather, the new obedience of the believer is a "free" and "grateful" response to the gracious provision of redemption through the work of Christ, and is not motivated fundamentally by the prospect of reward or obtaining final salvation on this basis.

5. Justification and the Sacraments

Another feature of the Confessions' understanding of justification concerns the role of the sacraments in confirming and nourishing faith. In traditional Roman Catholic teaching, the sacraments confer grace to their recipients by their administration, provided no obstacle nullifies their efficacy. The sacraments "infuse" grace in an *ex opera operato* ("by the work performed") fashion. Furthermore, the grace infused by the sacraments, when the recipient freely concurs with this grace and performs good works, makes the believer a righteous or holy person. So far as the doctrine of justification is concerned, the Roman Catholic view is that baptism entirely removes original sin and makes the baptized person inherently righteous.[100] For this reason, the "instrumental" cause of "first justification" is the sacrament of baptism. So long as those who are baptized do not commit "mortal sin" and fall out of a state of grace, the use of the other sacraments provides a continual infusion of grace whereby the faithful are able to enjoy "further" or "second" justification as they increase in good works and "merit" further grace and finally the grace of eternal blessedness. In this conception of the sacraments, justification, as a process of renewal in righteousness, is first given and then increased by means of the sacraments.[101]

According to the Reformed Confessions, the Holy Spirit produces the response of faith by means of the holy gospel, and confirms or strengthens faith by the proper use of the sacraments.[102] As visible signs and seals, which the Lord has appointed in view of the weakness of believers, the sacraments do not add anything to the Word but rather serve as visible words and tokens

99 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, Q. & A. 86.

100 The Belgic Confession, Art. 15, has in mind this view of the sacrament, when it notes that original sin is not "altogether abolished or wholly eradicated even by baptism."

101 *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* Sixth Session, Chap. 10 (Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* 2:89-118).

102 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, Q. & A. 65.

of the gospel promise of salvation on the basis of the work of Christ.[103] So far as the believer's justification is concerned, faith alone is the instrument of justification, and the sacrament strengthens faith by confirming the gospel promise of free justification on the basis of the merits of Christ. Though the sacraments are a means of grace, they serve to communicate Christ and His saving benefits only in the way of faith and never apart from the preceding Word to which the sacraments are added. To ascribe to the sacrament by itself the power to effect a saving union with Christ, which imparts all of the benefits of His work as Mediator, including justification, is contrary to the biblical and confessional understanding of the sacrament.

B. An Evaluation of the FV Revisions of the Doctrine of Justification

Though there is a diversity of positions on the doctrine of justification among authors of the FV, there are several significant revisions to the confessional view we have outlined that have been proposed by some proponents of FV. These revisions are the consequence of a number of key themes in the FV reformulation of the doctrine of the covenant, particularly the obligation of obedience to the law of God in the pre-Fall covenant between the Triune God and Adam, the representative head of the human race. Because proponents of the FV reject the teaching that Adam's whole-hearted obedience to the law of God was the only way whereby he could justly inherit or secure the blessing (promise) of everlasting life in unbreakable communion with God, they also reject the teaching that Christ's entire obedience to the law of God (all of His holy works or "merits") is the exclusive and just basis for the believer's inheritance of eternal life. Thus, the serious errors present in the FV reformulations of the doctrine of justification are symptoms of an erroneous understanding of the covenants between the Triune God and His people before and after the Fall into sin. These errors are the inevitable consequence of a failure to acknowledge the implications of God's "righteousness" in the administration of the covenants before and after the Fall, including the obligation of perfect obedience to His righteous law.

1. Justification as the "Forgiveness of Sins"

Proponents of the FV often define what is meant by justification in a way that conforms to the historic Reformed view, or appears to be conformed to it. Though at least one author has suggested that the language of

103 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, Q. & A. 66; Belgic Confession, Art. 33.

justification be enlarged to include the idea of "definitive sanctification,"[104] most of the proponents of the FV acknowledge that justification is a judicial declaration of the believer's right standing (or status) before God, and that it ought to be clearly distinguished from sanctification. Justification does not refer to the process of renewal in righteousness that occurs by the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart and life. Rather, it refers to God's gracious acquittal of believing sinners on account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

However, despite the acknowledgment among FV proponents that justification is a judicial act of God (declaring the believer's innocence), there is a tendency to define this act as consisting only in the "forgiveness of sins" or the non-imputation (reckoning) of the guilt of sin to believers. In the writings of Norman Shepherd, an influential figure among those associated with the FV, it is explicitly asserted that justification consists only in the forgiveness of sins and does not include the imputation of the entire righteousness of Christ to believers.[105] Though we will return to this subject more directly in the next section of our report, it should be noted that this identification of justification with the forgiveness of sins represents a significant change in the usual Reformed doctrine of justification. It is one thing to say that justified believers are not regarded by God as guilty sinners who are obliged to suffer the penalty due them for their sins. It is another thing to say that justified believers are regarded by God as holy and righteous, even as Christ is holy and righteous.[106] When justification is defined simply as the forgiveness of sins, it cannot grant title to eternal life. The forgiveness of sins removes the guilt of sin, but it does not declare that the forgiven sinner has met the full requirement of the law in order to obtain the inheritance of eternal life. Since the implications of this difference will become more clear in what follows, we will refrain from further evaluation of this reduction in the meaning of justification at this point. The most serious problems with the FV reformulation of the doctrine of justification relate to the critical

104 Peter Leithart, "'Judge Me, O God': Biblical Perspectives on Justification," in *The Federal Vision,* ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Spencer (Monroe, Louisiana: Athanasius Press, 2004), pp. 203-36.

105 "Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible,* ed. P. Andrew Sandlin (Nacognodches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004), p. 89 *et passim*; idem, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology," *Backbone of the Bible,* pp. 103-20; idem, "The Imputation of Active Obedience," in *A Faith That is Never Alone,* ed. P. Andrew Sandlin (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2007), pp. 249-78.

106 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 60: "as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart"; Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 61.

questions of the basis for the believer's acquittal before God and the instrumentality of faith in receiving the grace of justification.

2. The Basis for Justification: Christ's "Passive Obedience" Alone

That writers of the FV reduce the meaning of justification to the forgiveness of sins is not accidental. This becomes especially evident when we consider the basis for the justification of believers. Among FV authors, it is sometimes argued that the basis for the justification of believers is not the imputation of the whole of Christ's obedience to the law. Some authors will acknowledge the importance of the act of imputation for the justification of believers; however, the "righteousness" that is imputed to believers is solely the righteousness of Christ's so-called "passive obedience" or substitutionary endurance of the penalty of the law. Christ's so-called "active obedience," namely, His life-long obedience to the Father's will and voluntary subjection to the requirements of the holy law of God, may "qualify" Christ to offer Himself as an unblemished sacrifice for the sins of His people.[107] But some FV proponents deny that Christ's entire obedience to the law is attributed to believers for their justification so that they are no longer under obligation to obey the law in order to be justified before God. Provided the works of faith are "non-meritorious" works, they belong to faith as the proper instrument of justification and are necessary in order for believers to obtain final justification.[108] Furthermore, among other authors of the FV, it is sometimes suggested that the believer's "union with" or "incorporation" into Christ through faith is a sufficient basis for justification.[109] The idea of imputation is said to become superfluous by virtue of the believer's union with Christ.

In our summary of the confessional understanding of justification, we have already had occasion to note that the righteousness of Christ, which is

107 See, e.g., Norman Shepherd, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology," *Backbone of the Bible,* pp. 103-20.

108 Norman Shepherd, "Thirty-Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works," Thesis 24, http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/normanshepherd/the34theses.htm.

109 E.g., Richard Lusk, "A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons, Debating the Federal Vision,* ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary2004), pp. 141-43; Don Garlington, "Imputation or Union with Christ? A Response to John Piper," *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12/4 (Fall, 2003): 45-113; and Michael F. Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47/2 (June, 2004): 253-76.

granted and imputed to believers by sheer grace, includes His entire obedience. The language of the Confessions, though it does not use the theological distinction between Christ's "active" and "passive" obedience, clearly affirms that the entirety of Christ's obedience "under the law" is imputed to believers as the basis for their justification. This could not be more clear than in Article 22 of the Belgic Confession and in Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism.[110] Therefore, the claim of FV writers that the active obedience of Christ plays no direct role in God's declaration of the righteousness of believers is contrary to the explicit teaching of the Confessions.[111]

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110 See Nicolaas Gootjes, "Christ's Obedience and Covenant Obedience, *Koinoonia* 19/2 (Fall, 2002): 6-10. Gootjes provides evidence that the language of the Belgic Confession, Art. 22, was slightly edited and revised at the Synod of Dort from its original form in order to express explicitly the imputation of Christ's active obedience. These changes were made in order to refute some in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century who denied the imputation of Christ's active obedience. Contrary to the FV tendency to deny that Christ's entire obedience to the law "merits," in accordance with God's truth and justice, the believer's acceptance before God, the Confessions often speak of Christ's "merits" or his "meriting" of the grace of free justification, or of his fully "satisfying" the requirements of God's justice. See, e.g., Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 5, Q. & A. 12, 13, 14; Lord's Day 6, Q. & A. 16; Lord's Day 7, Q. & A, 21; Lord's Day 15, Q. & A. 40; Lord's Day 21, Q. & A. 56; Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 60, 61; Belgic Confession, Arts. 22, 23, 24, 29; Canons of Dort, 1:8, 9; Rejection of Errors, 1:3, 6; 2:8; Rejection of Errors, 2:1, 3, 4; Rejection of Errors, 5:1. Objections to the idea of "merit" among FV authors are common. See, e.g., Lusk, "A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* pp. 118-48; James B. Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?" in *The Federal Vision,* pp. 151-202; P. Andrew Sandlin, "Covenant in Redemptive History: 'Gospel and Law' or 'Trust and Obey'," in *The Backbone of the Bible,* pp. 63-84; Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000), pp. 25-6; idem, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible*, pp. 111-18.

111 It is disingenuous to insist that the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 60, does not teach the imputation of Christ's entire obedience, when you consider how Ursinus, one of its principal authors, interpreted its teaching. Ursinus, in his *Larger Catechism* (which was written as a basis for his university lectures on the Catechism), Q. & A. 135, makes this clear: "Why is it necessary that the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ be imputed to us in order for us to be righteous before God? Because God, who is immutably righteous and true, wants to receive us into his covenant of grace in such a way that he does not go against the covenant established at creation, that is, that he neither treats us as just nor gives us eternal life unless his law has been perfectly satisfied, either by ourselves or, since that cannot happen, by someone in our place" (as quoted and translated in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, by Lyle Bierma [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], p. 188).

3. Biblical and Confessional Evidence for the Imputation of Christ's Entire Obedience

Since some FV writers argue that the Bible nowhere teaches the imputation of the "active obedience" of Christ to believers, it is necessary that we consider several biblical and confessional reasons why the basis for the believer's justification includes the entire obedience of Christ.

First, the biblical descriptions of Christ's relation to the law of God in His state of humiliation are comprehensive. Throughout the whole course of Christ's life, from His conception of the virgin Mary to His sacrifice upon the cross, He was lovingly obedient to His Father's will and devoted to His people for whom He laid down His life. The obedience of Christ is a "seamless" garment of active conformity to the requirements of the law of God. In Galatians 4:4, for example, the apostle Paul declares that "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born *under the law.*" In this pivotal verse, the expression "under the law" refers to the state from which believers in Christ have been redeemed or set free (cf. Gal. 4:21; Rom. 6:14-15). In the first instance, this freedom from the law is a freedom from the "curse" of the law, since Christ voluntarily subjected himself to this curse even though He continued in all things written in the book of the law to do them (Gal. 3:13; cf. Rom. 3:21-24). But in the second instance, this freedom from the law refers in the context of Paul's writings to a freedom from the obligation to obtain life on the basis of doing perfectly what the law requires (Gal. 3:11-12; 4:5; 5:3-4; Rom. 9:30-10:10). Christ assumed our flesh and was born "under the law" in order that He might "fulfill all righteousness" and meet all the obligations of the law on behalf of His own (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 8:1-4).

Another passage of particular importance is Romans 5:12-19, which closes the apostle Paul's summary treatment of the doctrine of justification in Romans 3-5. This passage sets forth a remarkable comparison and contrast between the first Adam and the last or second Adam, Christ. Just as all who are "in Adam" are subject to condemnation on account of his one trespass, so all who are "in Christ" receive justification and life on account of His "one act of righteousness." Though this passage bristles with difficult questions of interpretation, it is of special importance to our understanding of the obedience of Christ, which is imputed to believers for their justification.[112]

112 For a more extensive treatment of Romans 5:12-21 and its implications for the imputation of Christ's righteousness, see John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), pp. 90-114; John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed reprint, 1959); and Cornelis P. Venema, "N. T.

The burden of Paul's argument in this passage is that there is an *immediate link* between *the one trespass of the one man, Adam,* on the one hand, and the reign of death *and the judgment that brings condemnation upon the many,* on the other. For this reason, he emphasizes that death reigned from Adam to Moses, "even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (v. 14). Even though the trespass was Adam's, and Adam's alone, the consequence of this trespass, death, reigned over all. Accordingly, the apostle insists that the "one trespass led to condemnation for all men" and "the many were made sinners" (vv. 18-19). Because of the union of all with Adam in his one trespass, God imputes or reckons to all men the guilt of this trespass and its judicial consequence, death. This is the sense in which we may say that "all sinned" in Adam, and all bear, as a consequence, the judicial liability of condemnation and death.

In a similar way, the apostle links the one man's obedience (lit., "the act of righteousness of one") with the making righteous of the many. Just as death reigned through the disobedience of the first Adam, so "the free gift of righteousness reign[s] in life through the one man Jesus Christ." So far as the doctrine of imputation is concerned, the critical phrase in these verses is "the free gift of righteousness." The many who are constituted righteous, who receive justification and life through the work of Christ, are not made righteous through their own deed or deeds. Nothing believers do in obedience to the law constitutes them righteous or beneficiaries of God's favorable verdict and acceptance. Rather, God's grace "super-abounds" toward the many who become, through union with Christ, partakers of His righteousness. For understanding the doctrine of imputation, the critical point in Paul's argument is his insistence upon the direct (or immediate) participation of all who are united with Christ in His one act of obedience. Just as Adam's sin (and not the sins of all men) constitutes all as sinners under the judicial sentence of condemnation and death, so Christ's obedience (and not the obedience of the many) constitutes the many as righteous and under the judicial sentence of justification and life. The dominant thread in Paul's argument is the *judicial implication* of our union with the first and second Adams. God counts or reckons as guilty all who are in Adam; and He counts or reckons as innocent all who are in the second Adam, Christ.

A critical question that arises in this connection relates to the meaning of Paul's expression, "the one act of obedience/righteousness." Does this refer to Christ's passive obedience alone (his cross)? Or does it refer to Christ's active and passive obedience, using the language of "one act" to summarize the

Wright on Romans 5:12-21 and Justification," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 16 (2005): 29-81.

whole of His life of obedience? John Murray provides a helpful answer to this question:

> If the question be asked how the righteousness of Christ could be defined as "one righteous act," the answer is that the righteousness of Christ is regarded in its compact unity in parallelism with the one trespass, and there is good reason for speaking of it as the one righteous act because, as the one trespass is the trespass of the one, so that one righteousness is the righteousness of the one and the unity of the person and his accomplishment must always be assumed.[113]

Christ's obedience upon the cross epitomizes His whole life of obedience. The cross does not exhaust Christ's obedience but reveals it in its most striking form (cf. Phil. 2:8, "becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"). Indeed, were it not for the entirety of Christ's obedience from the beginning to the end of His ministry, it would not be possible to speak of His having died "*the righteous* for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Even though the reference to the "one act of righteousness" in Romans 5 describes Christ's death upon the cross, it is not possible to separate this act of obedience from His entire life "under the law" (cf. Gal. 4:4). To distinguish between Christ's "active" and "passive" obedience in this way is artificial. The so-called "passive obedience" of Christ cannot be restricted to a single act or event. The cross of Christ represents the apex and culmination of a life marked by suffering under the consequence of human sinfulness (Rom. 8:1-4).[114] The passive obedience of Christ may not be reduced to a "point," namely, the cross. It should rather be regarded as a "line" that took him from conception to death, even the death of the cross. Furthermore, in all of His suffering, Christ was actively offering himself in obedience to the Father and on behalf of His people. It should also be observed that, whereas the "one act of disobedience" on the part of the first Adam was sufficient to constitute him and his posterity liable to condemnation and death, only the entire "curriculum" of Christ's perfect and constant obedience was sufficient to restore His people to righteousness and life. Christ's seamless obedience in all of its richness and fullness under the law was alone sufficient to procure everlasting life for believers.

Another important passage for an understanding of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the basis for the believer's justification is Philip-

113 *The Epistle to the Romans,* vol. 1, pp. 201-202. Cf. Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ,* pp. 110-114.

114 See Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15, Q. & A. 37: "That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race."

pians 3:8-9.

> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

This remarkable testimony of Paul was written in the context of his fierce and unyielding opposition to certain persons who were placing their confidence before God in their own flesh (v. 3). Though the apostle does not explicitly identify his opponents, it appears that they were persons who were boasting of their own religious pedigree and credentials, particularly circumcision, on the basis of which they sought to commend themselves before God. In his initial reply to these opponents, the apostle engages in an extended *ad hominem* argument. If his opponents would place their confidence before God in such things, the apostle Paul has even more right to do so: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless."

Unlike these opponents, however, Paul's boast or confidence is not in "a righteousness of my own that comes from the law." His boast, rather, is in "the righteousness from God that depends on faith." This righteousness of God comes "through faith" to those who are "found in Christ." Though Paul does not explicitly speak of God imputing or reckoning the righteousness of Christ in these verses, the idea is certainly present. Those who are *united with Christ through faith* receive, *on that account,* a righteousness from God. This righteousness, Paul insists in the most emphatic terms, is not his own righteousness but a righteousness that comes from "outside of himself" as God grants it to him. Paul's righteousness, as is true of any believer's, consists in the free bestowal of an "alien" righteousness by God to all who are in union with Christ.

The final passage we consider is 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 ("In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."). Perhaps no passage in Scripture more clearly teaches the doctrine of imputation than this one. The reconciling work of God in Christ took place when Christ, who "knew no sin," was "made to be sin." In

an inscrutable manner, God regarded the sinless Christ as though He were sin. On the other hand, God did "not count [our] trespasses against [us]"; He did not treat or regard us in a manner consistent with our condition and circumstance as sinners. By these means – not counting our sins against us, making and treating Christ as though He were sin – we "become the righteousness of God *in him*." In this passage, as in those previously considered, the apostle Paul does not expressly speak of the granting and imputing of Christ's righteousness to believers. However, no other interpretation can legitimately claim to do justice to this passage. It is only by virtue of our union and participation in Christ that we benefit from His saving and reconciling work. Charles Hodge's comments on this passage express this truth well:

> Our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in his righteousness. ... Christ bearing our sins did not make him morally a sinner ... nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls. ... Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice.... It is not mere pardon, but justification alone, that gives us peace with God.[115]

According to this reading of 2 Corinthians 5:19, the justification of believers on account of the work of Christ involves a great transaction: the sins of believers are imputed to Christ and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers.

The Substitutionary Nature of Christ's Obedience

Second, the FV denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ to believers for their justification also fails to do justice to the biblical teaching that Christ's work as Mediator was a comprehensive work of *substitution.* Even as imputation corresponds to what is expressed by the language of "faith alone" and "Christ alone," it also expresses what is implicit in the biblical themes of Christ's substitutionary atonement and the believer's union with Christ. If Christ's life, death and resurrection occurred by God's design *for* or *in the place of* His people, then it follows that all that He accomplished *counts as theirs,* so far as God is concerned. How could Christ's work on their behalf and for their benefit not be reckoned to their account, if indeed it is *just as though they had performed it*?[116] Furthermore, when believ-

115 Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), pp. 150-151.

116 D.A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives,* ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III

ers become united to Christ through faith, they participate in all the benefits of His saving work. Faith is the "empty hand" by which believers receive all that Christ has accomplished for them. To say that God grants and imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers is, accordingly, to acknowledge what is required by the doctrines of Christ's substitutionary atonement and the believer's union with Christ through faith.

The link between the themes of Christ's substitutionary work, union with Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, sheds light on recent claims that Paul has no doctrine of imputation but only of incorporation into Christ. It has been argued, for example, that the "modality" for the believer's becoming the "righteousness of God" is union with Christ, not the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers.[117] The element of truth in this claim is certainly that the believer's justification by faith only occurs by virtue of his or her incorporation into Christ. Nothing that God does for believers in Christ can benefit them, unless they are joined to him by faith. So far as the justification of believers is concerned, the governing theme of Paul's gospel is that Christ was put to death on account of their sins, and raised on account of their justification (Rom. 4:25). However, if justification refers to the believer's status in union with Christ, which is based upon the judicial verdict that God first declared in raising Christ from the dead, then imputation precisely corresponds to the nature of the justifying verdict itself. In justification, God declares the believer to be in the same judicial circumstance before him as Christ is. This declaration presumes that all that Christ is and has done is equally the believer's by

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(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), p. 134, fn53, makes an important observation regarding the connection between substitution and imputation: "Part of the contemporary (and frequently sterile) debate over whether or not Paul teaches 'imputation,' it seems to me, turns on a failure to recognize distinct domains of discourse. Strictly speaking, Paul never uses the verb *logizomai* to say, explicitly, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner or that the sinner's righteousness is imputed to Christ. So if one remains in the domain of narrow exegesis, one can say that Paul does not explicitly teach 'imputation,' except to say slightly different things (e.g., that Abraham's faith was 'imputed' to him for righteousness). But if one extends the discussion into the domain of constructive theology, and observes that *the Pauline texts themselves* (despite the critics' contentions) teach penal substitution, then 'imputation' is merely another way of saying much the same thing."

117 Cf. Don Garlington, "Imputation or Union with Christ? A Response to John Piper," *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12/4 (Fall, 2003): 97: "Hand in hand with the preeminence of the person of Christ is that union with him bespeaks a personal (covenant) relationship that is obscured when legal and transactional matters are given as much prominence as they are in Reformed thought. 'Imputation' is the transferal of a commodity from one person to another; but 'union' means that we take up residence, as it were, within the sphere of the other's existence."

virtue of his or her faith-union with Christ.[118] To deny that this transaction involves a legal component, equivalent to the declaration of a person's innocence in a court of law, would expunge the theme of justification from the gospel. Imputation language functions to express the believer's status before God on the basis of Christ's work on his or her behalf. To argue that the theme of incorporation into Christ offers an alternative explanation of how believers become righteous makes no sense, if justification essentially refers to the believer's standing in God's court. For the believer's justification on the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, is but a way of saying that the believer is justified by virtue of his or her judicial connection with the work of Christ. Imputation is a corollary of union with Christ, and not an alternative to it.[119]

Justification Declares the Believer Righteous

Third, unless believers are granted and imputed the righteousness of Christ in His obedience to the law as well as in His suffering of its curse, they could not, strictly speaking, be justified in the proper sense of being "declared righteous" before God. The justification of believers upon the basis of the righteousness of Christ involves a favorable verdict that goes beyond the mere forgiveness or non-imputation of the guilt of sin to believers. When God justifies the ungodly for the sake of Christ's saving work, He declares believers to be in a positive state of innocence or righteousness. Justified believers are not simply declared to be without sin; they are declared to be positively righteous before God. In Christ the justified person enjoys a righteous standing before God that properly belongs to someone who has not

118 Cf. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (2nd ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), p. 123: "Jesus' being delivered up (his death) on account of our transgressions identified him with us in the condemnation inevitably attendant on our transgressions; in fact his death is the pointed manifestation of this solidarity in condemnation. Consequently, his being raised on account of our justification identifies him with us in the justifying verdict inevitably attendant on the righteousness which he himself established for us (better, which he established for himself as he was one with us) by his obedience unto death; his resurrection is the pointed manifestation of this solidarity in justification."

119 Cf. John Murray, "Justification," in *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:214: "In reality the concept is richer than that of imputation; it is not simply reckoned as ours, but it is reckoned to us and we are identified with it. Christ is ours, and therefore all that is his is ours in union with him and we cannot think of him in his vicarious capacity or of anything that is his in this capacity except in union and communion with his people. … These are not legal fictions. They are the indispensable implicates of what union with Christ entails."

only borne the curse of the law but also met all of its demands.[120] In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the ground for the believer's justification, God vindicates His own righteousness and establishes the believer's right to be received into His favor as a righteous person. Not only is there now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but there is no longer any possible basis for a charge to be brought against them (Rom. 8:33-34). As those who were crucified and raised with Christ, believers enjoy the privileged status of full acceptance with God. As John Murray observes,

> [I]t is prejudicial to the grace and nature of justification to construe it merely in terms of remission. This is so to such an extent that the bare notion of remission does not express, nor does it of itself imply, the concept of justification. The latter means not simply that the person is free from guilt but is accepted as righteous; he is declared to be just. In the judicially constitutive and in the declarative sense he is righteous in God's sight. In other words, it is the positive judgment on God's part that gives to justification its specific character.[121]

God's Justice and the Believer's Justification

A fourth biblical and confessional consideration that argues for the imputation of the entire obedience of Christ in justification, is the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial work as a complete *satisfaction of all the demands of God's righteousness.* If justification involves *God's* pronouncement of the believer's righteousness, this pronouncement must surely accord with the dictates of God's own truth and righteousness. God will not declare righteous or positively holy, and an heir of eternal life, human beings who have not met the demands of His righteousness, either in their own person or in the Person of Jesus Christ, their substitute. If Christ as Mediator "satisfied" all the requirements of God's justice on behalf of believers, then believers must fully share through imputation in the fullness of His righteousness. This follows from the Scriptural teaching that God, in the justification of believers, demonstrates His own justice or righteousness (Rom. 3:26).

This consideration can be illustrated by a simple analogy. Suppose a father were to promise to give his son an inheritance, provided his son fulfills

120 In this connection, appeal may be made to passages like Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12, which enunciate the principle that the law as such promises life only to those who do what it requires. Christ's active and passive obedience, accordingly, are understood to have met all the claims (perceptive and penal) of the law on behalf of his people. In this way, the law is upheld in the gospel of Christ, and God is both just and the one who justifies those who believe in him (cf. Rom. 3:26).

121 *Collected Writings,* 2:218.

certain filial obligations of obedience. Failure to fulfill these obligations would nullify the son's right to receive the inheritance promised. Suppose further that this son should forfeit his inheritance through disobedience, and become worthy of punishment instead. Suppose still further that, in a remarkable and undeserved display of fatherly mercy, the father were to assume the burden of suffering in the place of his son the punishment that was due him. Would the father's substitutionary endurance of his son's just punishment be sufficient to support the son's insistence that he receive his promised inheritance? Not at all. Though the son would not be liable to punishment, he would scarcely have a right to the promised inheritance, since he would not yet have fulfilled his filial obligations of obedience. The point of this simple analogy is that the grace of justification, which is based upon the imputation of Christ's entire obedience and satisfaction, "entitles" the believer to eternal life. No obligation of obedience under the law of God has been left unfulfilled, since Christ has undertaken to fulfill all righteousness on behalf of His own.[122] In this way, the glorious inheritance of eternal life, which is the believer's through faith in Christ, is secured in a manner that fully accords with God's truth and justice.

4. Justification by the Instrument of an "Obedient Faith"

One of the characteristic features of the FV view of the role of faith in justification is a persistent ambiguity of definition. In the Confessions and the Scriptures, justifying faith is viewed as a "receptive" instrument that rests in the perfect work of Christ alone for justification. Believers are not justified "on account of" their faith but "through faith." As the apostle Paul insists in Romans 4:16, justification is by faith "in order that it might be by grace." What distinguishes faith in its role as the instrument of justification is that it receives and rests alone in the righteousness of Christ. Faith is not a human work in lieu of obedience to the law of God. Faith is the cessation of all human work or effort, and a confident resting in the work and merits of Jesus Christ.

In the writings of FV authors, however, faith, even in respect to its instrumentality for justification, is defined differently. Norman Shepherd, for example, persistently speaks of the instrument of justification as a "living," "obedient" faith (or "faithfulness").[123] Rather than distinguishing between

122 Cf. Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), pp. 624-5. Dabney observes that "[p]ardon would release from the punishment of its [the law's] breach, but would not entitle to the reward of its performance."

123 Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14/1 (2005): 76. See also Shepherd, *The Call of Grace,* p. 50; "Justification by Faith

faith as instrument of justification and the works that such faith produces, Shepherd insists that faith justifies by virtue of the obedience it produces. The "works" that are excluded, when we speak of justification "by faith alone," are only those works that are performed in order to "merit" acceptance and favor with God. Once the whole idea of "merit" or "meritorious" works is rejected, we may speak of *one* "method of justification" that holds for Adam (and all men in Adam) before the Fall, for Christ himself, and for all believers.[124] The one method of justification in the covenant relationship before the Fall and after the Fall involves God's crediting the believer's obedient faith for righteousness. Though Shepherd acknowledges that there is an additional factor in the post-Fall state, namely, the provision for the believer's forgiveness on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, he maintains that justification always is obtained by way of an active, obedient faith. It is by way of the obedience of faith that the believer finds, maintains, and ultimately enjoys acceptance and favor with God.[125]

The problem with this understanding of faith in relation to justification is that it commits what Ursinus in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism calls a "fallacy of composition."[126] Though it may be true that justifying faith is "not alone," it is not true that the works of faith belong to faith as an instrument of justification. The contrast between faith and works in respect to the believer's justification is absolute (Rom. 3:27; 4:6, 13; 9:11; 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5; Eph. 2:9). No human works, not even those "fruits of thankfulness" that God graciously rewards in the believer, play any role instrumental to the justification of believers. All of our works are unable to meet the standard of perfect righteousness that is revealed in the holy law of

Alone," *Reformation & Revival* 11/2 (Spring, 2002): 82; idem, "Faith and Faithfulness," in *A Faith That is Never Alone,* 53-72.

124 "Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective," p. 76. Shepherd even ascribes this "method of justification" to Christ himself whose "living, active, and obedient faith" took him all the way to the cross (*The Call of Grace,* p. 19). For a careful critique of Shepherd's formulations, see Wesley White, "Saying 'Justification by Faith Alone' Isn't Enough," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 239-65.

125 "Thirty-Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works," Theses 20-25, http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/normanshepherd/the34theses.htm. Cf. Rich Lusk, "Future Justification: Some Theological and Exegetical Proposals," in *A Faith That is Never Alone,* pp. 309-56.

126 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans reprint, 1954), p. 337. Unlike Shepherd, whose chapter, "Faith and Faithfulness" (in *A Faith That is Never Alone*) trades upon this "fallacy of composition," Ursinus treats the relation of faith and works in a wonderfully clear manner. For example, Ursinus notes that "good works, although they are necessarily connected with faith, are nevertheless not necessary for the apprehension of the merits of Christ" (p. 337).

God. Such works cannot be the whole or the part of our righteousness before God. They merit nothing so far as our righteousness before God is concerned. The persistent and studied ambiguity of FV authors like Norman Shepherd compromises this truth in the most fundamental manner. By redefining faith in its instrumental role for justification to include the non-meritorious works that true faith produces, human works are made to be constitutive of the way believers are justified.

5. The Role of Baptism as an Instrument of Justification

One of the recurring themes in the writings of FV authors is an emphasis upon the efficacy of the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of baptism, in the communication of the grace of Christ to His people. Some authors even use the language of "baptismal regeneration" to underscore the constitutive significance of baptism, not only as a sign and seal of the covenant promise in Christ, but as the instrument that actually effects saving union with Christ and all His benefits.[127] All those who are baptized, head-for-head, are not merely to be regarded as recipients of the gospel promise in an "objective" sense; they actually possess immediately, on account of their baptism, all that the sacrament visibly declares and confirms. The consequence of this unqualified and exaggerated view of baptismal efficacy for the doctrine of justification is not difficult to ascertain. Because baptized believers and their children are savingly united to Christ and therefore in possession of the grace that the sacrament attests, the grace of justification may also be viewed as a grace conferred by the sacrament itself. In the writings of FV authors, it is sometimes asserted that all those who are embraced by the administration of the covenant should be regarded as already possessing the fullness of salvation in Christ.[128]

The FV emphasis upon the efficacy of baptism is difficult to distinguish from the traditional Roman Catholic view. Like the Roman Catholic doctrine, it distorts the relation between the Word and sacraments as "means

127 See, e.g., Douglas Wilson, *"Reformed" is Not Enough: Rediscovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 2002), pp. 103-4; Richard Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals," http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/some_proposals_about_the_means_of_grace.htm; idem, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," pp.

128 E.g. John Barach, "Covenant and Election," *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* pp. 15-44; Rich Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies," in *The Federal Vision,* pp. 71-126; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Federal Vision,* pp. 47-70; and Douglas Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology,* pp. 233-44.

of grace." In the biblical and Reformed view, the Holy Spirit uses principally the preaching of the Word and promise of the gospel to produce faith and thereby savingly join believers with Christ. The sacraments are appointed as a means whereby the Spirit confirms and strengthens faith. However, ordinarily neither the Word nor the sacraments work effectively as "means of grace" apart from the response of faith that they produce and confirm. Without the response of faith, which the Holy Spirit authors through the use of these means, we may not say that every recipient of the gospel promise or sacramental sign and seal of that promise is in possession of the grace of Christ. In the confessional and biblical understanding of justification, faith is the sole instrument whereby the grace of free justification is received. Though the sacraments are not to be disparaged or diminished in their importance as a means of grace, we may not ascribe to baptism a kind of instrumental efficacy apart from the proper use of the sacrament in the way of faith. The inevitable fruit of the FV emphasis upon the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism is the advocacy of a quasi-Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism as an instrument of justification. However, the biblical and confessional doctrine of justification ascribes such instrumentality to faith alone. Baptism does not confer the grace of justification apart from faith in the gospel promised, which is produced by the Spirit through the Word.

V. Summary and Conclusion

Throughout our report on the distinctive emphases of the FV movement, we have been conscious of our obligation to focus primarily on its reformulation of the doctrine of justification. For this reason, we attempted, even in our summary of the distinctive themes of the FV, to bear in mind the way these themes relate to our understanding of the believer's justification before God. To conclude our report, we wish to identify those features of the FV that have special significance to its understanding of the doctrine of justification. We will then offer a few comments on the importance of the doctrine of justification, and the seriousness of the FV reformulations of it.

1. FV Distinctives and the Doctrine of Justification

In our summary of a number of distinctive themes in the FV movement, we identified several that are of particular significance for the doctrine of justification. In our judgment, the following FV themes have implications that are inconsistent with the Scriptural and confessional view of justification:

a. The FV insistence upon the close connection, even coincidence, between election and covenant, which leads to the unqualified claim that all members of the covenant community enjoy the gospel blessing of justification in Christ.

b. The FV claim that all members of the church are savingly united to Christ, even though some do not persevere in the way of faith and obedience and lose the grace of justification through apostasy.

c. The FV emphasis that the obligations of believers in the covenant of grace parallel the obligations of Adam in his fellowship with God before the fall, thereby undermining the sheer graciousness of the believer's justification and salvation in Christ.

d. The FV denial of the meritorious character of Christ's work as Mediator, who fulfills all the obligations of the law on behalf of His people and secures their inheritance of eternal life.

e. The FV tendency to reduce justification to the forgiveness of sins, which is based upon the imputation of Christ's passive obedience alone.

f. The FV emphasis upon a "living" or "obedient" faith in the definition of its role as the instrument for receiving the grace of justification in Christ.

g. The FV teaching that the sacrament of baptism effectively incorporates all of its recipients into Christ, and puts them in possession of all the benefits of His saving work, including justification.

h. The FV insistence that all covenant children be admitted to the Lord's Supper without having professed the kind of faith that is able to discern the body of Christ, remember His sacrifice upon the cross, and proclaim His death until He comes again.

i. The FV attempt to resolve the problem of assurance by an appeal to the "objectivity" of church membership and the sacrament of baptism, while insisting that some believers may lose their salvation because of a non-persevering faith.

2. The FV Distortion of the Doctrine of Justification

In the judgment of our Committee, the seriousness of the errors of the FV movement is most apparent in relation to the doctrine of justification. Though it is never satisfactory for office-bearers in Reformed churches to formulate their views in a confusing manner, or in a way that hardly seems consistent with the Confession's summary of Scriptural teaching, confusion and inconsistency on the doctrine of justification by those who hold to the Reformed Confessions is inexcusable. It is the opinion of our Committee that, on the doctrine of justification, the FV movement has not only contributed to confusion in the churches but also failed to guard the gospel of free justification on the basis of Christ's work alone from serious error. We agree with those Presbyterian and Reformed churches that have issued similar reports, and that have called FV proponents to repentance, urging them to proclaim and promote the biblical truths of the Reformation. Only in this way will the churches be built up in the most holy faith, once for all entrusted to the saints, and God be glorified in the salvation of His people.

The doctrine of justification is more than simply one biblical teaching among many. Justification is, as Calvin termed it, the "main hinge of the Christian religion." It is "the article of the standing and falling of the church" (Luther: *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Though the grace of free justification does not encompass the whole of the message of the gospel, it does lie at its core. Unless sinners are restored to favor and acceptance with God upon the basis of the works and merits of Christ alone, they will ever remain liable to condemnation and death. Guilty, disobedient sinners have no hope for restored communion with the living God apart from the perfect work of Christ as Mediator on their behalf. The glory of Christ's work on behalf of His people is that He has "fully satisfied for all their sins." Every obligation "under the law" has been met for believers by the obedience, satisfaction, and righteousness of Christ. The gospel promise of free justification in Christ is, indeed, what Calvin termed the "main hinge" of the Christian religion. Consequently, when the Heidelberg Catechism raises the question, "What profit is there now that you believe all this?" (that is, the Christian faith as it is summarized in the words of the Apostles Creed), the answer is: "I am righteous before God in Christ, and an heir of eternal life."[129] For Reformed believers and churches, no truth is more precious or worthy of more ardent defense. In the words of John Calvin, "For this is the key which openeth whatsoever is requisite to our salvation; this is the means to decide all controversies; this is the foundation of all true religion; to be short, this is that setteth open the

129 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23.

heavens unto us."[130]

In our survey of the revisions to the doctrine of justification that are advocated by writers of the FV, we have identified several serious errors that imperil this gospel of free acceptance in Christ. The justification of believers is diminished to refer only to the forgiveness of sins. Rather than a rich and fulsome pronouncement of the believer's positive righteousness before God, justification is reduced to the pronouncement that the believer is no longer regarded to be guilty. Because justification means only the forgiveness of sins, it does not include the glorious pronouncement that *all the requirements of obedience to the law have been met in Christ and are the believer's through gracious imputation.* The denial of the imputation of Christ's entire obedience for justification, which is an inevitable consequence of this reductionist view of justification, has a most undesirable, yet unsurprising, consequence: believers must maintain and secure their justification before God in the way of the obedience of faith or by means of a living, obedient faith. The good works that faith produces by the ministry of the Holy Spirit are inserted into faith as the instrument of justification. Therefore, by denying the imputation of Christ's active obedience, believers are merely restored to the position Adam, the original representative head of the human race, possessed before the Fall into sin. In order to maintain and secure their justification before God, believers find themselves under the same obligation that existed in the original covenant relationship between God and man before the Fall. The irony of the FV denial of Christ's fulfillment of all the requirements of the law on behalf of His people, is that it turns the gospel into a renewed and restored form of the original covenant between the Triune God and His people. To use the language of the Reformed tradition, the covenant of grace becomes a "covenant of works," and the gospel is transformed into a new "law."

By the standard of biblical and confessional teaching, this reformulation of the doctrine of justification by FV writers stands condemned. Contrary to the biblical teaching, which ascribes everything necessary to justification to the works and merits of Christ, the unwillingness of some FV writers to affirm the imputation of Christ's entire obedience for justification leaves believers "under the law" so far as their justification before God is concerned. Rather than a radical contrast between justification by grace alone through faith alone, apart from works of any kind, a distinction is drawn between "meritorious" works, which play no role in justification, and "non-meritorious" works, which do play a role in justification. To the degree

130 *Sermon on Melchizedek & Abraham* (Willow Street, PA: Old Paths Publications, 2000), p. 95.

that Christ's works and merits in their entirety are excluded from the basis for the believer's justification, to that degree the works of faith are included within faith as an instrument for justification. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that this reformulation of the doctrine of justification diminishes the work of Christ and enlarges the role played by the works of believers (cf. Gal. 2:21b, "For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.").[131] Furthermore, the assurance of favor and acceptance with God, which the confessional teaching undergirds, is undermined in the formulations of FV proponents. Rather than resting entirely in the perfect righteousness of Christ, believers are encouraged to think that their covenantal faithfulness plays some role "in order to" their justification before God. As a result, the testimony of the gospel is compromised and the confident assurance of believers in God's justifying verdict is undermined. The church must proclaim clearly that justification is "by grace alone through faith alone," for only then will she truly give glory "to God alone."

VI. Recommendations

A. That Synod London grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Patrick Edouard (chairman), Rev. Brian Vos (secretary, who will present our report), and to Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, as well as any other members of the Committee present during the discussion of this report.

B. That Synod London affirm the following teachings of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, and encourage all office-bearers to repudiate FV teachings where they are not in harmony with them:

    1. "Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which … he decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through His Word and Spirit. In other words, he decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of his Son, to glorify them." (Canons

131 Cf. J. Gresham Machen, *Machen's Notes on Galatians* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 161: "This verse is the key verse of the Epistle to the Galatians; it expresses the central thought of the Epistle. The Judaizers attempted to supplement the saving work of Christ by the merit of their own obedience to the law. 'That,' says Paul, 'is impossible; Christ will do everything or nothing; earn your salvation if your obedience to the law is perfect, or else trust wholly to Christ's completed work; you cannot do both; you cannot combine merit and grace; if justification even in slightest measure is through human merit, then Christ died in vain."

of Dort, 1:7)

2. "This election is not of many kinds; it is one and the same election for all who were to be saved in the Old and New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which he chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which he prepared in advance for us to walk in." (Canons of Dort, 1:8)

3. Some members of the church or covenant community "are not of the Church, though externally in it" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

4. Those who are truly of the church may be known by the "marks of Christians; namely, by faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof." (Belgic Confession, Article 29)

5. Adam was obligated to obey the holy law of God and the "commandment of life" in order to live in fellowship with God and enjoy His favor eternally. (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3).

6. All human beings have fallen in Adam, are subject to condemnation and death, and are wholly incapable of finding favor with God on the basis of obedience to the law of God. (Belgic Confession, Article 14; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24)

7. The work of Christ as Mediator of the covenant grace fully accords with God's truth and justice, satisfies all the demands of God's holy law, and thereby properly "merits" the believer's righteousness and eternal life. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 5-7, 15, 23-24; Belgic Confession, Article 22; Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors, 2:3)

8. The entire obedience of Christ "under the law," both active and passive, constitutes the righteousness that is granted and imputed to believers for their justification. (Belgic Confession, Article 22;

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23)

9. Faith is the sole instrument of the believer's justification, so that believers may be said to be justified "even before [they] do good works." (Belgic Confession, Article 24)

10. The good works of believers, though necessary fruits of thankfulness, contribute nothing to their justification before God, since they proceed from true faith, are themselves the fruits of the renewing work of Christ's Spirit, are imperfect and corrupted by sin, and are performed out of gratitude for God's grace in Christ. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 3, 24, 32, 33; Belgic Confession, Article 24)

11. The justification of true believers is a definitive and irrevocable blessing of Christ's saving work, and therefore cannot be increased by the good works that proceed from true faith or be lost through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:9; Rejection of Errors 1:2, 2:8, 5:7; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 20, 21)

12. The sacrament of baptism does not effect the believer's union with Christ and justification, but is a confirmation of the gospel promise to those who respond to the sacrament in the way of faith. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25, 27)

13. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a means to strengthen and nourish the believer in Christ, when it is received by the "mouth of faith," and therefore the children of believing parents are obligated to attest the presence of such faith before receiving the sacrament. (Belgic Confession, Article 35; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 28-30)

14. The assurance of salvation is an ordinary fruit of true faith, which looks primarily to the gospel promise and the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the basis for confidence before God. Though good works may confirm the genuineness of faith, they are not the primary basis for such assurance of salvation. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 7, 23, 32; Belgic Confession, Article 22-23; Canons of Dort, 5:8-13)

15. According to God's electing purpose and grace, true believers may be confident that God will preserve them in the way of salvation and keep them from losing their salvation through apostasy. (Canons of Dort, 1:12, 5:8-10)

C. That Synod London reaffirm the reminder of Synod Schererville: "That synod remind and encourage individuals that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our Confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) and the Form of Subscription for addressing theological error." (Acts of Synod 2007, Art. 67.4)

D. That Synod London: 1) distribute this report to all the consistories of the URCNA, commending the report to them for study; 2) post this report on the denominational website; and 3) instruct the Stated Clerk to mail copies of this report to those denominations with whom the URCNA enjoys ecumenical relations.

E. That Synod London consider publishing this report, separate from the Acts of Synod, for the sake of greater accessibility to the churches.

Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJC) Synod London 2010

Synod Schererville 2007 adopted the following recommendation:

> (1) to instruct the stated clerk to apply immediately, on behalf of the URCNA, for affiliate membership in the Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJC); and (2) to appoint the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois, to send two observers to each of the next three PRJC meetings, at URCNA expense, and request Faith URC to report their observations to the next synod meeting. (Article 42, Acts of Synod Schererville 2007)

Faith URC (Beecher, Illinois) sent two men to each of the past three annual meetings of the PRJC. Two ministers (including URC minister and Army Chaplain, Rev. Andrew Spriensma) and one elder were involved in visiting these meetings. We report our observations of these meetings below.

Organization & Function of PRJC

The PRJC is a well-organized and active endorsing body. As chaplain service in the U.S. Military requires an ecclesiastical endorsement from "a qualified Religious organization," the PRJC provides the necessary endorsements for qualified men from member denominations.

The Commission is governed by representatives or "commissioners" from its four member denominations: the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). It is also the endorsing body for two associate member (non-voting) denominations: the Korean-American Presbyterian Church and URCNA. Membership in the PRJC is limited to NAPARC denominations.

The Commission meets together at least once per year (usually in Atlanta, Georgia in February), and communicates by other means throughout the year. The Commission oversees the work of the full-time executive director, (ret) Chaplain (Brigadier General) Douglas E. Lee, who is assisted by an administrative assistant and one to two part-time associate directors.

The executive director actively attends military and endorser meetings, visits the chaplains annually (assisted by the associate directors), conducts training for the chaplains, oversees a quarterly newsletter with reports from the chaplains, serves as a liaison in a variety of ways, and among other duties, intervenes when issues arise between a superior officer and one of the

PRJC chaplains.

The PCA is quite influential and helpful to the PRJC. It has more commissioners on the Commission because of the size of its membership. Its Mission to North America staff does the accounting work for the PRJC. The executive director of the PRJC is always a member of the PCA. But while the PCA has a prominent role in the PRJC, it is clear that the Commission is governed jointly by member denominations whose commissioners work well together and serve to influence positively one another.

The total number of military chaplains currently endorsed by the PRJC is 178 (this includes: 19 KAPC, 4 KPCA, 18 OPC, 132 PCA, 4 RPCNA, and 1 URCNA). The PRJC also endorses 70 persons for civilian chaplaincies (including 10 OPC and 60 PCA).

Strength & Devotion of PRJC

During our visits to the PRJC meetings, we were highly impressed by the devotion and dedication of the commissioners and PRJC staff. The PRJC is a tightly knit group of men with great enthusiasm for the military chaplain ministry. Many (if not all) of them are retired chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces. They carry with them a wealth of experience and knowledge, as well as a deep-seated love for the Lord and for the men and women of the Armed Forces, especially concerning the Presbyterian and Reformed chaplains they oversee. It has been a great source of encouragement to observe their love for each other, their chaplains, and the chaplain ministry.

Their deep concern for the chaplains is demonstrated at each meeting when the director and associate directors report on their visits to the chaplains and their families. They attempt to visit each chaplain once per year in order to encourage them and assist them in their callings. Also, at each meeting, during the supper hour, a "report from the field" is brought by one or more of the active military chaplains. (Rev. Andrew Spriensma was invited to present a report in 2009.)

The PRJC is dedicated to both guiding and protecting their chaplains, enabling the chaplains to be faithful to the Reformed faith while working in a challenging pluralistic atmosphere. Chaplain Andrew Spriensma has found the PRJC to be a tremendous source of encouragement and wisdom and has relied upon them for guidance and assistance multiple times in his first tour in the Regular Army.

URCNA Membership in PRJC

In February of 2008, at their first meeting following our Synod 2007, the PRJC took up the request of our Stated Clerk for affiliate membership.

The Commission voted "to assume endorsing responsibility" for the URCNA, granting our federation (what would later be termed) "associate membership."

At this same meeting, the PRJC voted to approve the other request of the URCNA (Synod Schererville 2007) that the *Three Forms of Unity* be added as an alternative to the Westminster Standards for the URCNA endorsed chaplains in the PRJC policy statements.

As an associate member of the PRJC, our URCNA chaplains enjoy the same rights and privileges as those from full member denominations; however, the URCNA is not entitled to voting privileges. Associate members are permitted and encouraged to send observers to the annual meetings, but they are not obligated to attend.

Given the fact that only one URCNA chaplain is currently endorsed by the PRJC, it does not seem likely that the URCNA can justify a commitment to the responsibilities of full membership at this time. However, while maintaining associate member status, we think it would be wise to send occasional observers to the annual PRJC meetings in order to remain involved. The PRJC's executive director recommended that, if able, the URCNA might send one observer to each annual meeting.

Concerns of PRJC

One issue of concern for the PRJC is the matter of funding. The executive director sees many more needs beyond what current funding will supply. The Commission has discussed how churches and individuals might be better informed of the PRJC's work and encouraged to contribute financially. The PRJC executive director has requested advice as to how promotional literature might be distributed to churches or individual members within each denomination. It would be helpful if Synod 2010 determined what avenues may be made available for the PRJC's distribution of literature among the URCNA.

An area of far greater concern is the anticipated changes to our Armed Forces current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy (DADT), which currently forbids homosexuals to serve *openly* in the Armed Forces. The current administration is seeking to eliminate this policy. Such a decision would place chaplains and Christian Commanders in a dangerous position, in which they could be unjustly charged with discrimination if they refused to accommodate any homosexual soldier's perceived needs.

In February 2010, the PRJC issued a policy protecting their chaplains by forbidding them from performing any marriage or union ceremonies for homosexuals, performing any homosexual relationship counseling, or pro-

viding any programmatic encouragement to homosexual behavior. They also have submitted petitions to the leaders of our Armed Forces, and they have asked the member denominations to do likewise at their General Assemblies or Synods. Since we are only an associate member in the PRJC, the petition was not specifically addressed to the URCNA; however, it has been suggested that the URCNA receive it as a recommendation. We have appended the petition from the PRJC and the sample letter for petitioning leaders of the Armed Forces. These documents are worth considering as they detail the detrimental consequences for the future of U.S. military chaplaincy should the current DADT policy be removed.

Dues of PRJC

The PRJC is funded in part through dues. Dues are required of full member and associate member denominations in the amount of $500.00 per endorsed chaplain. The military chaplains themselves are also required to pay dues calculated as a percentage of their base pay. For active duty military chaplains dues range from $348 to $996 per year.

Recommendations

1. That Synod 2010 determine what means may be made available for the PRJC to contact individual churches with newsletters and promotional material, and to request the Stated Clerk to communicate this decision to the PRJC.
2. That Synod 2010, in response to the request of the PRJC, instruct the Stated Clerk to petition the United States Armed Forces officials on behalf of the URCNA, urging them to maintain the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.
3. That Synod 2010 appoint a consistory to send one observer every two years to the annual meeting of the PRJC, at URCNA expense, and to request the consistory to submit reports on the PRJC to future synod meetings.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Todd Joling
Consistory of Faith URC
Beecher, Illinois

Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJCCMP) Petition to respective General Assemblies or Synod of our member denominations Regarding "Don't Ask – Don't Tell"

Recommendation:

We, the members of the Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJCCMP), petition the respective General Assemblies or Synod of our member denominations to humbly petition The Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the service Chiefs and the President of the United States in his capacity as Commander in Chief, with copies to GEN Carter Ham, Commander, U. S. Army Forces Europe and Pentagon General Counsel Jeh Johnson, to maintain the existing policy of "Don't Ask - Don't Tell", hereafter "DADT," and faithfully to resist its removal, for the protection and meaningful continuance of the free exercise of religion within the Armed Forces of the United States.

Grounds:

1. Whereas, believing that the Word of God requires ministers, and other church officers, to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and that it is a grave dereliction of duty to proclaim "Peace, peace" when there is no (actual) peace, or to refuse to confront those who "call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light, or light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20); and...

2. Whereas, believing that it is the duty of the civil magistrate, "as nursing fathers, to protect the church of our Common Lord... in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred function, without violence or danger...and as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in His church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof;" and...

3. Whereas, believing (in light of over a century of our collective military experience) that any removal, or diminishing of, the well established U.S. military policy, and high moral purpose, of excluding open homosexuals from military service will, most certainly, put all chaplains who

believe the Bible to be God's Holy Word in its entirety gravely at risk of unconstitutional pressure, and eventual persecution, for upholding the Scriptural truth that homosexual thinking and behavior is sinful, should be so named, and ought to be corporately resisted; and...

4. Whereas, believing that any governmental decision to permit acceptance and inclusion of homosexuals serving openly in our military services, will most grievously, "interfere in matters of faith", particularly the exercise of Christian ministry on the part of our PRJCCMP endorsed chaplains; and...

5. Whereas, it is apparent from the action of the 2009 PCA and OPC General Assemblies that a number of teaching and ruling elders do not consider such a situation to constitute a circumstance extraordinary enough to warrant General Assembly action. (This in part may be because of the failure to understand the difference between a "free civilian society" and a "hierarchical military society.") To the contrary the PRJCCMP believes that silence by the church on this issue endangers the evangelical chaplaincy in the Armed Services, particularly the continuance of a faithful gospel ministry by almost two hundred PRJCCMP endorsed pastors (chaplains).

6. Whereas, it is our belief that this is an extraordinary case is demonstrated by the following if DADT is repealed:

    a. Unit chaplains will be expected by homosexual couples who come to them for counsel to strengthen their relationship with each other, which no faithful chaplain can do, except to counsel that they need to repent of their sin of homosexuality, which position also will lead to allegations of discrimination.

    b. A serious dissonance between scriptural truth and immoral law supporting sinful behavior will be generated which will jeopardize unit cohesion so critical in combat by a legally protected behavior that will trump the vital blessing of good order and discipline in a military unit as well as religious freedom.

    c. Another commensurate dissonance will be produced when a chaplain, as a matter of his required ecclesiastical duty is obligated to preach and counsel against the dangers of protected immoral be-

havior. By way of contrast, fornication and adultery, while both are great evils, neither are a politically protected behavior.

d. If DADT is repealed, chaplains who frequently hold command sponsored marriage retreats to strengthen marriages will be required to include homosexual couples.

e. Some chaplains will be required to facilitate sensitivity training classes to foster acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle.

f. Chaplains will be expected to perform marriages, or some kind of union ceremonies, for homosexuals, and if a chaplain claims exemption from complying on the basis of the free exercise of religion, organized homosexual advocacy will trump that constitutional protection with the accusation of equal rights discrimination likely following.

g. If DADT is repealed, chaplains will be asked to baptize, administer communion, and provide other spiritual services to homosexuals (who may profess to be Christians) which are reserved by Scripture for repentant and obedient believers. Again equal civil rights discrimination and not the free exercise of religion will be the complaint.

h. Chaplains will be expected to support excising all anti-homosexual passages from any Bibles permitted in military chapels until a "homosexual friendly bible" is printed, which will likely become the required version for chapel worship and for distribution to military personnel. Current gifts of Bibles for service member distribution by civilian organizations would be ended as well.

i. Chaplains conducting worship will be expected to avoid any mention of biblical passages prohibiting homosexuality in their sermons and other instruction. If they mention such, they will most certainly be reprimanded on the basis of permitting "hate speech" and/or precluding equal civil rights.

6. In summation, on the basis of already observed pressures against PRJC-CMP endorsed chaplains, we believe that the proposed elimination of the DADT policy will become catastrophic in the emerging unbiblical

measures which it will bring to bear against all chaplains. Chaplains eventually will be required to refrain from any identification of any aspect of homosexuality as sinful; and...

7. Therefore, we believe, in light of the above noted issues, that it is our biblical duty to recognize the extraordinary danger descending upon the visible church from this "extraordinary case", by humbly and urgently petitioning (with biblical grounds) the involved "civil magistrates" to refrain from repealing the current DADT policy.
(Note: Quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from Chapters XXIII and XXXI of the Westminster Confession of Faith)

Respectfully submitted,

Major General Bentley B. Rayburn, USAF (Ret.)
Chairman: Presbyterian and Reformed Join Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel

SAMPLE LETTER TO MILITARY/CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES

(Letterhead Stationary)

DATE:

TO: General or Honorable XXXXX

FROM: The (Name of Denomination)

SUBJECT: Potential removal of the Military "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) Policy

1. Concern: The (member denomination) is gravely concerned over the potential removal of the current DADT policy that has essentially in principle, though not specifically named as such, governed the service of homosexual individuals in our military for much of its history. The removal of this current ban may go so far as to force the resignation of our currently serving chaplains from the military as well as the service of military members from this denomination.

2. Consequences: The removal of the ban sets up the very real potential of the following ramifications of repealing DADT:

    - Chaplains will be open to the charge of discrimination or command reprimand if they preach or teach in accordance with the passages in the Bible which directly speak of the sin of homosexual practice.

    - Bibles in military chapels and on military bases will be under the threat of excision of all passages which speak very directly to the sin of homosexual practice. Whether it will be under the guise of "hate speech" or speech contrary to the policy of the Department of Defense, the effort will be made soon after the removal of the ban.

    - Marriage retreats conducted by chaplains intended to strengthen traditional marriage will have to include homosexual couples which may violate chaplains' faith tenets and negatively impact the voluntary participation of married heterosexual couples.

    - Homosexual couples will seek union ceremonies or marriages,

which are in violation of the beliefs and ordination vows of a large percentage of military chaplains, not just those from this denomination. Refusal will invite the charge of discrimination and command reprimand.

- The "free exercise" and free speech rights of chaplains and military members may be abrogated as Equal Opportunity policies, "hate speech" laws, or other legalities trump the First Amendment.

3. Appeal: For the above and many other reasons affecting chaplains and military members in the ranks we humbly appeal to you to <u>not</u> repeal DADT. We plead this for the good of the nation, for the good of the chaplains who serve the nation on behalf of their church, for the good of the military members from this church who serve in our armed services, and for the protection of the constitutional principle of the free exercise of religion.

Sincerely,

Clerk, (Member Denomination)

Encl: General Assembly Resolution passed on June XX , 2010

Report to Synod from the Board of the URCNA Corporation (Canada)

The Board

The Board of Directors of the Canadian Corporation consists of the following members: Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema (Chairman), Mr. Stan Antonides (Vice-Chairman), Rev. Joel Dykstra (Secretary), Rev. Richard Stienstra, Mr. Gary De Groot. The Board continues to work together well. However, having served since the beginning of the Corporation, Mr. Gary De Groot has indicated a desire to be relieved of his duties as Director. To that end, the Board of the Canadian Corporation recommends that Synod appoint a replacement for Mr. De Groot, (see Recommendations, below).

Finances

Since the meeting of Synod Schererville, the Board of the URCNA Corp. (Canada) has sought to serve the churches faithfully in a number of ways. The most basic and routine work of the Corporation involves the receiving and disseminating of funds for the work of our federation. Our accountant, Pam Hessels, does a wonderful job. Not only does Mrs. Hessels serve the churches as a volunteer, as a Chartered Accountant she makes certain that our finances are handled in a manner consistent with the demands of the Canada Custom and Revenue Agency (CCRA). We wish to thank Mrs. Hessels publicly for her work on our behalf.

We would also remind the churches that the decisions made by Synod are common commitments we must all share. Giving to the financial needs of the federation has improved over the last year. However, there remains room for improvement. We recommend that the churches, especially the larger churches, make these matters budget items. In this way money can be sent in a timely manner.

The financial statements of the Canadian Corporation are included with this report (see attachment 1). On the method of reporting to the Synod, we would ask that the Synod allow the Canadian Corporation to report in a manner consistent with our accounting methods. At the last Synod the reporting method was standardized, bringing the reporting method of the Canadian Corporation in line with the reporting method of the American Corporation. As a result, the Canadian Corporation now keeps two sets of books: one for the CCRA and another for the Federation. Since this is unnecessary duplication, we request that this requirement be lifted.

Concerning the level of support needed by the Corporation to fulfill Synod's requests, there is no need for an increase – provided the Canadian

dollar remains at its current level relative to the American dollar. However, in the event that Synod London were to appoint additional study committees, it must be remembered that the cost of each committee is typically $1.00 per family. Thus, we currently ask that the churches provide funding to the Corporation at the rate of $10.00 per family. Each additional study committee raises that amount by a dollar.

Please note that the Hymnal Fund has $14, 383.87 in its account. The churches are reminded that it is from this fund that the new Hymnal must eventually be produced and published. The costs of such an undertaking are considerably higher than $14, 383.87. Therefore, if and when the Hymnal Committee finishes its work, we will not be able to fund the cost of publishing its work. The churches are encouraged to make this a matter of consideration when they set their collection schedule or their budget. Again, the larger congregations should expect to bear a larger portion of the obligation for this work.

Joint Venture Agreement

The Board

The Board of the Directors for the JVA consists of the following members: Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema (Chairman), Mr. Lynn Brouwer (Vice-Chairman), Rev. Joel Dykstra (Secretary), Mr. Stan Antonides (Treasurer), Mr. Bob Huisjen. The Board of the JVA is working together to make finances available to our American churches from our Canadian churches in a manner consistent with the regulations of the CCRA.

Recent History

At Synod Schererville decisions were made respecting the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) that were to be implemented by the two Corporations of the URCNA. The pertinent recommendations, taken from the convening Consistory report, were essentially the following[1]:

1. That Synod Schererville appoint members of the Board of Directors of the two Corporations to execute the work of the Corporations.
2. That Synod Schererville place the Boards of Directors under the authority of the Consistory appointed to convene the next synod.
3. That the convening Consistory of the next Synod be directed to co-ordinate and facilitate the implementation of a Joint Venture Corporation between two Corporations no later than December 31st, 2007.
4. That the convening consistory of the next Synod appoint the Board of Directors for the Joint Venture Corporation.

These recommendations were approved by the Synod.

Synod then made the following additional decisions:[2]

1 Acts of Synod Schererville 2007, p. 39-41.

2 Acts of Synod Schererville 2007, p. 50. It is worth noting that while Synod approved the decision to appoint three Boards and to form three Corporations (an American, Canadian, and International) only the American and International Boards were appointed by Synod. Though this did not correspond with the earlier decision of Synod to approve the convening Consistory's recommendations (Art 74), it did reflect the condition of the respective Boards at that time, i.e. while the Canadian Board was functioning effectively, the American Board had effectively ceased to function soon after its incorporation.

1. Synod appointed a group of men to the United States Board of Directors.
2. Rev. Wybren Oord was appointed chairman of the United States Board of Directors.
3. Bethany URC of Wyoming, Michigan was appointed as the Board of the URCNA (International).

A number of challenges plagued the implementations of these decisions. Unfortunately, Synod Schererville had not received all the information necessary to make appropriate decisions on this matter. Though information had been forwarded in a timely manner to the convening Consistory and the Stated Clerk, this information was not reflected in the package sent out to the churches. In order to address this lack of information, the convening Consistory decided that the correct material would be presented to the committee dealing with this matter. However, the Director charged with making the corrected material available was suddenly unable to attend Synod and therefore could not make it available to the appropriate committee. As a result of this, the Canadian Corporation has taken steps to address this communication failure. Consequently all Directors of the Canadian Board now receive all communications to and from the Corporation. Therefore, if one Director is unable to attend the Synod, another will be able to take his place and ensure that all the information needed is available to the Synod.

However, implementing some of the decisions of Synod was still problematic. The appointment of the American Board did much to advance the plans for the JVA (the JVA had been awaiting implementation before Synod 2007). The JVA was not implemented, however, because there was no American Board of Directors to sign it. Since the appointment of members to the Boards of these Corporations is the responsibility of a Synod, it was necessary to wait until Synod Schererville before the American Board could be activated. Only after the American Board had been activated could the JVA be implemented (as it was according to Synod Schererville directive).

An additional problem with Synod Schererville's decision concerns the appointment of the Bethany URC of Wyoming, Michigan as the Board for the Joint Venture Corporation. The Joint Venture Agreement (adopted by Synod Schererville) required that the Board of the JVA be made up of representatives from the two Corporations (two American Board members and three Canadian Board members[3]). The latter took precedence in part because of its status before the law and in part because this newly formed Board was a

3 Since the JVA is effectively a sub-committee of the Canadian Corporation there must be a preponderance of Canadians on the JVA Board in order to satisfy the CCRA.

joint venture between the two Corporations. As such, both Boards needed to be represented on the JVA. For these reasons it was decided to adopt Synod's second decision, namely that the Board of Directors for the JVA would be set up in accordance with the JVA and not in accordance with the convening Consistory's report.

It was also noted that the decision to place the Corporations under the authority of the next convening Consistory contradicts the Articles of Incorporation. The Corporations were self-consciously made accountable to the Synods of our churches. While a convening Consistory can ensure that the work assigned to the Corporations is fulfilled in a manner consistent with a Synod's decisions, it may not itself direct the work of the Corporations. For the record, the Corporations have made themselves accountable to the convening Consistory of Synod London over the past three years.

Implementation of the JVA

The work of the JVA Board began in earnest once the matters surrounding the JVA were straightened out and all parties were clear as to their responsibilities. Unfortunately, a number of bumps along the way and the confusion following the previous Synod significantly delayed the practical implementation of the JVA. At the time of this report, the Board of the JVA has meet twice. The first real application we have undertaken in the JVA concerns the Stated Clerk's stipend and costs. We pursued this application since both our Corporations were already providing funding for the Stated Clerk. What is more, should the next Stated Clerk of the Federation be an American, the Board of the JVA will have to be responsible for his financial remuneration.

The next task before the Board of the JVA involves expanding the application of the JVA to more activities within our churches. It must be kept in mind that the JVA only functions to provide Canadian financial support to American churches (American churches may send money directly to Canadian churches, but Canadian churches may not send money directly to American churches). In order for Canadian churches to do this according to Canadian law, the Board of the JVA will need to establish a budget. In order to limit the number of items on such a budget, and to ensure that financial support within our federation remains consistent with the goals and principles of the URCNA, the Board of the JVA has adopted the following criterion for inclusion on the budget:

> Causes to be supported by the JVA will be limited to churches in the URCNA. Any request for support will have to come from and through a con-

gregation within the URCNA.

This decision was made in order to simplify the activities of the JVA and to keep it within the stated purpose.

This does not mean, however, that only established churches can be supported via the JVA. Church plants, missionaries, and even youth programs are possible beneficiaries of the JVA. However, in order to receive support, they must be associated with a URCNA church. A URCNA church must receive and disseminate JVA funds through its own budget. Should Synod approve this criterion for support, the Board of the JVA will address all requests for support accordingly. As causes from our American churches are approved, information about such causes will be sent to our Canadian churches for consideration.

Recommendations:

The Board of the Canadian Corporation respectfully recommends that Synod take the following action: that Synod

1. Approve the work of the Canadian Board
2. Approve the harmonizing of the reporting format with the accounting method.
3. Approve the appointment of Mr. Cliffe Hodgkinson as Director, replacing Mr. Gary De Groot
4. Approve the criterion for inclusion on the JVA Budget.

On behalf of the Board of Directors

Rev. Joel Dykstra
Secretary

Report from the US Board of Directors of the URCNA to Synod 2010

Brothers,

The US Board of Directors had their initial meeting on June 25, 2009 at Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, Michigan. At that meeting, Interim chairman Lynn Brouwer of Faith URC, Holland, MI., was confirmed as chairman of the US Board per the appointment made by the convening church of Synod 2010, Cornerstone URC of London, ON.

Henry Gysen of Trinity URC of Calendonia,MI., was elected vice-chair, Glenn Hop of Cornerstone URC of Hudsonville, MI., was elected secretary, and Bob Huisjen of Bethany URC of Wyoming, MI., was elected treasurer. John Velthouse of Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI., is also a member of the board.

MMAS to ratify the signature of Rev. Wybren Oord on page 7 of the URCNA (US)-INTERNATIONAL JOINT MINISTRY AGREEMENT dated December 31, 2007, was passed.

Corporation legal paperwork was submitted on 8-21-09 to the appropriate government officials to currently register the URCNA-US as a NONPROFIT CORPORATION by the US Board of Directors treasurer Bob Huisjen.

MMAS that terms of service on the board coincide with meetings of Synod and recommend **appointment (or re-appointment not to exceed three consecutive terms) of two members to the board at 2010 Synod and three members at the following Synod** and to follow this sequence at subsequent Synods. Motion Passed.

On February 3, 2010, the initial meeting of the International Board of Directors was held with the Canadian Board and the US Board of Directors. Bob Huisjen and Lynn Brouwer represented the US Board and are the US Board members present on the International Board of Directors of the URCNA.

The US Board is presently working with the International Board to develop a Federative Joint Venture Agreement (JVA), a mechanism whereby Canadian churches are able to financially support the work of the URCNA in the

United States, including foreign missions, in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA).

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn A. Brouwer
Chairman of the US Board of Directors of the URCNA
February 22, 2010

Please note:

1) **The US Board asks Synod 2010 to re-appoint two members, the chairman and the secretary, of the five member US Board of Directors at Synod 2010.**
2) **The US Board asks Synod 2010 to direct the US Treasurer to be a functionary of the US Corporation, not of his local church.**

Remarks by Ecumenical Delegates and Observers

Following are remarks by ecumenical delegates and observers who provided copies of their remarks for inclusion in the Acts of Synod.

Rev. W. den Hollander of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Art. 25)

Esteemed brothers in the Lord, delegates at this General Synod of the URCNA

When I bring to you formal greetings in the Lord, it is in deep gratitude that I do so for the fact that by our unity in the true faith we share in His work of atonement and in His resurrection from the dead through which He obtained His Holy Spirit for us that we may live in newness of life with our Triune God. He is our common Saviour, our Risen Lord, and Exalted King! He is the Head of His Catholic Church and it is in His church-gathering work that we have the privilege of serving Him. He gave us the means of grace and the precious promise that His Holy Spirit would lead us in all the truth. Our common bond of faith, love, and unity in the truth, therefore, incites us to seek you, greet you, and appeal to you that we may continue to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace! Yes, we pray with our only High Priest, that we may continue to grow together in the Lord, in the truth, and in the manifestation of the unity of the Triune God as He has revealed Himself in truth in His Word!

It is a real privilege and honour for me, personally, to be here and represent our Canadian Reformed Churches. When I express the prayer and desire that we may continue to grow together, I do this gratefully observing that we *have* grown together in the Lord a lot since the mid-1990's. Among the highlights in my life definitely have been the 12 years I served our churches in the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity from 1992-2004. I was blessed richly as I attended your Alliance Meetings at first and later on your Synods in Lynwood, St. Catherines, Hudsonville, and Escondido. I attended meetings of Classis Ontario, while closer to home I've seen the bonds grow and deepen with your ministers in the GTA. Most special, however, were the occasion at which I was privileged to fill the pulpit of one of your URCes! Looking back over this process, therefore, I am very encouraged by the grace of God and the power of His Holy Spirit as we increasingly see Christ's prayer come to fulfilment and reality as He has been bringing our churches

together more and more closely towards true church unity!

At the same time, brothers, I realize and am aware that much has changed in the course of those years. Even in the way of an increase in numbers, I have seen your federation grow from some 30 congregations at first to more than 100 today! You have become spread out geographically and the balance between congregations in Canada and the United States has changed as well. At the beginning of this development our Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity worked closely and intensely together with your CERCU brothers and the results were very encouraging: we moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2, laying the basis for the next move with the establishment of *Statements of Agreement*, which were *received* by your General Synod and ours in 2001. I believe that we owe it to each other that we do not only observe and *receive* these *Statements of Agreement* but also *uphold* and *honour* them as part of our unity in the truth. Yes, for those churches that joined in the course of the years it should be an incentive to assess the situation at their time of merger, taking ownership of the (brief) history of the federation of churches they desire to join. They may be expected to take note and interact and work with these *Statements*. The onus is on all other churches as well, though, to remember what was stated and to be committed to taking this course of action!

During this time of growth and development, you have dealt with various issues and matters that came your way, which indicated that there were ongoing dynamics of unification going on among you. As Canadian Reformed Churches we have observed these developments and dynamics and we rejoice with you in the continued unity you enjoyed in spite of difficulties and challenges that arose, in spite even of diversity of practices and of theological perspectives among you. Wherever applicable and appropriate we became part of the discussion, yes even subject to scrutiny and/or suspicion ourselves! Yet, we saw it as the normal and natural process of churches living together in a federation of churches that deal with all matters according to the same standards: God's Word and the Reformed Confessions. The history of the church of Christ in general, and the history of the churches of the Reformation particularly, show us that there will always be questions, concerns, and critical issues that the churches need to deal with. As the leaders of the 1st Secession expressed it, "Unity in necessities, freedom in what's not of necessity, and love in all!" It's one of the blessings and purposes of a federation of churches to deal with them. Hence, if and when there are matters that give rise to discussions and even disagreements, these should not *be*

or *become* obstacles in the way to ecclesiastical unity! On the contrary, as we have witnessed over the past year, it should be encouraging when we deal with those questions in the proper Scriptural and spiritual way. It testifies to the fact that we are one, not only in word, or not just in name as reformed churches with the same confessional standards, but also in deed! This is how we may and should live and work together in a federation of united reformed churches!

Dear brothers, your churches are precious to us and the aspiration and anticipation of church unity in one federation of united reformed churches is high among our ecclesiastical priorities and pursuits. Of course, we are realistic enough to note, as your representative at General Synod Burlington put it, that "we are at something of a delicate time with regard to the unity process. We are at the point where we see many practical difficulties, where there is fatigue, frustration, and sometimes disillusionment." Therefore, indeed, with tenderness, patience, wisdom, and with firm resolve, fortitude and commitment we must walk on in obedience to our Saviour, walk on *together* that is! We are not of those who shrink back but of those who believe and are saved! Therefore I would like to urge you to move ahead without hesitation or reluctance! I would plead with you to take the letter of appeal seriously, which GS Burlington 2010 wrote to you. I do not now need to repeat the sentiments and concerns expressed in that formal letter. Yet, I do want to ask you urgently and sincerely: heed our appeal for continuity!

As one of the two Coordinators in the Committee for Church Unity, I also wish to affirm and appeal that you accept the requests that are contained in General Synod's letter pertaining to the four sub-committees. Some made progress, relatively speaking, while others became frustrated due to the lack of it, considering how much they had to do in coming together "on the same page:" living together under one Church Order, singing together from the same Song Book, and training together our future ministers in their theological education. May you indeed come to the resolution to re-appoint the Joint Church Order Committee to finalize its work! May you also go back to the close cooperation between the two Song Book committees as it was enjoyed before the 2007 General Synod, so that we may as yet achieve what we expressed in our *Statements of Agreement* and "produce a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan psalter…, while including hymns that also meet the standards of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions." And as far as the theological education of our future ministers is concerned, I would like to re-iterate our *Agreement* in 2001, as our GS

Burlington did as well, that we should retain at least one federational theological school; thus preserving what has been such a tremendous blessing to our churches. It's, as our GS letter expresses, a principle that our churches hold dear! Accepting a federational seminary may not be a matter of Scriptural *command*, as you have observed, yet it certainly is a *principle* rooted and grounded in its essence and existence in God's Word (2 Tim. 2:2), the Confessions (HC LD 38) and the Church Order of Dort (our article 19). With such underpinnings, we should certainly treat it as demanding the highest possible priority and the strongest spiritual preference!

Beloved brothers, as Coordinator in the Committee for Church Unity and representative of the Canadian Reformed Churches, I wish to assure you of our continued commitment to the process toward full ecclesiastical and federational unity. I also want to offer our services and make them available to your churches and classes. We wish to further the process of acquaintance and serve the progress in acceptance, in whatever way we can, be that by attending your meetings and assemblies in the United States or Canada, by organizing conferences and theological debates, or by answering questions in one setting or another. At the same time I appeal to you that we *keep* our focus and vision on the calling from the Lord and on the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in spirit and truth. Allow me to quote once more what we expressed in our *Statements of Agreement*, namely, "Churches of various backgrounds but one confession have the duty to pursue the highest forms of ecclesiastical fellowship possible in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in the federation of churches."

May you receive the blessing and commitment from the Lord to continue in this spirit and resolve! May our heavenly God and Father bless your deliberations and decisions, for the well-being of His churches and for the greater glory of His Name! Thank you!

Rev. Vern Pollema of the Reformed Churches in the United States (Art. 43)

Mr. Chairman, Delegates, Distinguished Guests, etc.,

On behalf of Rev. Maynard Koerner and myself, I want to thank you for the wonderful accommodations you have provided as well as for your time and this opportunity to address the body. In view of your traffic signal, I shall attempt to abide by what one pundit has labeled the "Three Bs:" Brother Be Brief. However, with regard to that traffic light, I have one question: Is it photo-enforced resulting in a court appearance and a hefty fine?

As mentioned, my name is Vernon Pollema. I now live in Bakersfield, CA along with my wife and four children, all of whom are married with families of their own. All of us attend and are members of the Grace RCUS in Bakersfield. I am experiencing the blessings of the covenant! I have recently joined the rank of "Retired Ministers" and now have the title, "Pastor Emeritus." I am discovering that that means I am now available for pulpit supply, stated supply, visitation ministry, short term missionary activity, adjunct seminary professor, promotional work for the denomination and fraternal delegate with lots of time to read and digest a 500 page plus Provisional Agenda. I am frequently asked, "How's that retirement working out for you?" My reply: "I'm working at it."

But now to the matter at hand: I am delighted to be here and to bring you fraternal greetings from the RCUS. We are brothers about which I will say more at the conclusion of my remarks.

First of all, I want to commend the Committee On Federal Vision and Justification for its excellent report, subject always, of course, to correction and improvement. It is a report that should serve your congregations well. We are called to be "watchmen upon the walls of Zion" (cf. Isa. 62:6; Jer. 6:17). That means we must be constantly alert and ready to defend the flock against Satan's attempts to infiltrate and destroy the church through error and false doctrine. We must remember the apostle Paul's farewell warning to the Ephesian elders, a warning much too often over-looked: *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among your own selves* (cf. I Tim. 1:3,7,19,20; 6:3-5) *men will rise up, speaking perverse* [i.e., twisted] *things*

to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, . . ." (Acts 20:28-31). Watchfulness requires of us a careful exposition and application of the Scriptures and our confessions to expose error and false doctrine. Whether that is called pastoral advice or a position paper, we do not believe it is extra-confessional. Therefore we urge you to adopt the report as an "application of confessional teaching to a contemporary controversy" (p. 436). We are, at the same time, most thankful that you are adding your voice to the defense of such a crucial doctrine of the Reformed faith.

There is just one question I would raise with regard to this report. It is somewhat personal but has also been a subject of debate within the RCUS. Does a biblical, orthodox, Reformed view of justification and adherence to the TFU require belief in a covenant of works?

We also want to encourage you in regard to the report on the Level of Doctrinal Commitment, to adopt Position #2, Membership Access upon Full Assent, and reject Position #1, Membership Access with Stipulations. Covenant Theology is considered the hallmark of the Reformed faith. Many use Covenant Theology and Reformed Theology interchangeably. We would caution you not to diminish or slight covenant theology for the purpose of accommodating those who are either ignorant or antagonistic toward this vital understanding of the Reformed faith. We are both surprised and troubled by the historical references used as precedent in Position #1 that would place infant baptism, the sign and seal of the covenant, among the "non-fundamentals of the faith and points of doctrine that do not affect the foundation of salvation" (p. 406-407). We also question, in this report, whether "tolerance" and "patience" can be used as synonyms (p. 406-407, 413-414). We support confessional subscription (belief) for communicant membership which we believe is also implied (and so understood by the majority in your federation) in your form for Public Profession of Faith, question #1: "Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments, and in the articles of the Christian faith and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession (Form 2 states the necessity of believing 'the confessions of this church')" (p. 427)?

Next, let me relate some of the business at our recent Synod meeting at Shafter, CA that may be of interest to you. There were three Special Committee Reports. The first was the report of the Special Committee to Study Implementing a System of Church Visitation. After a rather lengthy debate on

the committee's first recommendation requesting that each Classis set aside time during their respective Spring meetings to discuss any perceived impediments to such inter-congregational visitations, the report went down to defeat. For the majority, the constitutional provision directing the Executive Committee of each Classis to visit congregations where trouble was brewing, was sufficient. Second was the Special Committee Report on Changes to the Modern Version of the Heidelberg Catechism, most of which consisted in updating antiquated language. A few of the more hotly debated changes: 1. Keeping the phrase "troubled life" (closest to the original German for some) in #26 in place of "valley of tears." The latter won out. 2. Using the NKJV form of Exodus 20 and separate the address, *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"* from the first commandment, *"You shall have no other gods before Me."* (It was discovered that the NKJV is not uniform in said separation.) This change was defeated by one vote! 3. Two other changes that were adopted: change "of this power" to "of those divine gifts" in #9; change the word "impenitent" to "unrepentant" in #81 and #87. The third Special Committee to report was the Committee on Synodical Procedures, the purpose of which was to come with recommendations for more judicious use of Synod's time. Whether the recommended changes that were adopted succeed, will be determined at next year's Synod meeting.

As part of the Christian Education Committee Report, the Sub-Committee to Confer with Dordt College brought a disturbing report with regard to some very problematic teachings of three professors. This generated a considerable amount of questions and comments after Dr. Carl Zylstra, President of Dordt College, addressed the Synod. Questions were raised with regard to academic freedom coming into conflict with the confessions, perceptions of Dordt's tolerance of evolution, Intelligent Design, homosexuality, unbiblical views of justification and the two-kingdom view. After a long and hard debate on the question of suspending Dordt from the list of approved colleges and the guidelines for giving, the body voted by a large majority to suspend Dordt from the list and that a letter of pastoral concern be sent by the Executive Committee of Synod to Dordt, to include a request for a response from the Board of Trustees to be made to next year's Synod.

The Synod voted to erect two new Special Committees to report to next year's Synod: 1. Promoting a Biblical Sexual Morality which will set biblical morality over against the abominations of homosexuality, adultery, and man-centered views of sexuality, to be used to teach biblical morality to our

own people and to our culture. 2. To exegete Matt. 3:16, Mk. 1:10, Lu. 3:22, Jn. 1:32 and clarify the wording of Belgic Confession Article 9 concerning the phrase "the Holy Spirit appeared in the shape of a dove." The issue: Is the picturing of a dove a graven image of the Holy Spirit?

Finally, we note your disappointment at the seeming impasse in your efforts to reach organic union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rather than view this as a failure, we encourage you to refocus upon the fraternal relationship and its meaning. We use the terms quite freely, i.e., of being brothers and sisters in the Lord, of being sister churches and denominations. While not as close as marriage, surely being brothers and sisters is a good and close relationship. I am reminded of a modern hymn that became popular some years ago; a hymn that, for obvious reasons, will not make its way into our hymnbooks or Psalters, but a hymn that expresses a precious sentiment nonetheless. I close with its words:

You'll note that we say brother and sister round here;
That's because we're a family and these folks are so dear.
When one has a heartache, we all share the pain,
And rejoice in each victory in this family so dear.
I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God,
Washed in the fountain, cleansed by the blood,
Joint heirs with Jesus, as we travel this sod,
I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.

Rev. John Hilbelink of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Art. 50)

NIV Psalm 133

1 song of ascents. Of David.

How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!

2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.

3 It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Mr. Chairman, Fathers and brothers in the United Reformed Churches in North America and those present from other churches, it is a joy to come to you with Jack J. Peterson as fraternal delegates from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This little Psalm we just read, Psalm 133, provides a good foundation for why we engage in fraternal relations. It give us a sense-filled description of "how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity." It leads us to the source of that unity in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And by God's grace this is the unity in which we delight along with you.

Two rich illustrations engage our senses. And, for that reason, Psalm 133, though short, should not be the object of speed reading. What is it like when "brothers live in unity"? "It is like precious oil poured on the head." Now stop, for a moment. Do you feel the fragrant oil coming down on your head? Do you see how the Psalm has drawn you in? But it continues, "Down on the beard" - maybe for someone else, but not for me. But let's go on. "Down on the beard of Aaron." Aaron! Suddenly there's someone standing in my place – the High Priest bearing the names of God's people on the shoulders of his robes and on the breastplate. So Aaron was anointed according to

Exodus 29 that he might present sacrifices for the atonement of the people. Through him they would have fellowship with God.

How much more precious, then, is the royal priesthood of our Savior! Having been baptized by the Holy Spirit, he humbled himself and became "obedient to death, even death on a cross," so that we may "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by *his* blood." Yes, the "good and pleasant" fellowship of believers is through the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our Savior and Lord. On him our sins were laid. By him our sins were paid. And he is now is on the right hand of the Father bearing our names, the names of those given to him by the Father. So we can sing,

> "My name from the palms of his hands
> Eternity will not erase;
> Impressed on his heart it remains,
> In marks of indelible grace.
> Yes, I to the end shall endure,
> As sure as the earnest is given;
> More happy, but not more secure,
> The glorified spirits in heav'n.

Then there's the second illustration, the dew of Mt. Hermon "falling on Mt. Zion." Notice again the dew is something coming downward. Good and pleasant fellowship is a gift of God's grace – it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit poured out on Pentecost as promised by our Savior. Like dew, the Holy Spirit comes to the nations with refreshing, cleansing, nourishing grace.

My children worked for several summers picking strawberries from 6:30 in the morning until about 11. They were real troopers. They never griped, except for one thing - the dew. It was so wet. But, they stopped griping about the dew on the first day there was no dew. They came home with red stains all over their clothes – there was no dew to wash their fingers and hands as they worked. The cleansing dew made their work pleasant – a gift from the heavens.

With the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, the gospel ministry of reconciliation with God in Christ goes to the nations. The dew of the Holy Spirit turns hearts to repent and believe in Christ. The dew of reconciling grace turns lost sinners to Christ, and toward one another. The dew of reconciling grace changes hearts prone to be selfish, crabby, restless, over-anxious, spite-

ful, mean-spirited, self-willed, arrogant, loose-canons. The fruit of the Spirit, like the dew falling on Mt. Zion, refreshes God's people with a fellowship of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

Therefore, we rejoice in our relationship with the United Reformed Churches in North America, in the "good and pleasant" fellowship we share with you in Christ. We rejoice and stand with you as you seek a fellowship with those who believe that salvation comes by grace through faith from the triune God, not of our works.

Our histories meet at an interesting intersection. 1997 was an important year in your history. You were organized as a church, having come out of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Leaving a church whose fellowship in the gospel brought great blessings in the past is not easy. That same year, the OPC General Assembly was wrestling with our relationship with the CRCNA. It was a heart-rending decision. It was the CRC that first extended a hand of fellowship to the newly organized Orthodox Presbyterian Church on June 11, 1936. Shortly before, ministers such as J Gresham Machen, and John DeWaard (my father's and grandfather's pastor), who upheld the gospel of Christ against liberalism in the church, were suspended and deposed by the Presbyterian Church in the USA. The CRC's motion at that time was a blessing to the OPC. And we have learned much from them and have been blessed in our relationship with them over the years. But, the CRC, having changed her church order and practice, now meant severing those ties. And, we did so at that assembly.

But, at the same assembly in 1997, the Rev. Jerome Julien, came as an observer from the newly organized United Reformed Churches in North America. The assembly moved to come into a "corresponding relationship" with you.

With the former ties to the CRC severed by both of our churches, our new relationship with you, the URCNA, brought a sense that we were continuing a relationship. Since then we have rejoiced in that relationship, and moved to extend to the URCNA a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
We received with joy the word that the churches of the URCNA in response to the action passed on to them by the 2007 Synod Schererville voted to approved entering phase 2 of Eccelesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in accordance with our invitation to you.

We thank our Lord for your active work in interchurch relations.

- for your work with us in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC).
- for faithfully sending fraternal delegates to both our General Assembly and our presbyteries.
- for the opportunity to visit with your fraternal delegates at our General Assembly. In recent years our Committee has taken time when available to meet with the fraternal delegates present. However, the most recent Assembly set aside the Friday evening session for this purpose. We were able to have a good discussion with delegates from the BPC and the RCUS as well as your delegates, the Rev. Casey Freswick and the Rev. Jacques Roets.
- for your reports in your agenda on the NAPARC Foreign Mission Consultation indicating your interest in the work of other churches.

Our most recent General Assembly was held several weeks ago at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL, from 7:00 pm, Wednesday, July 7 and ending the evening of July 13, 2010. As you now know, the assembly elected the Rev. Alan Pontier as our Moderator (yes! A cousin of your chairman for this synod) and served the assembly very well. A new Stated Clerk, the Rev. George Cottenden, began his service on the retirement of the Rev. Donald J. Duff, who served our General Assembly faithfully for nearly 20 years. We would also note that the Rev. Jack J. Peterson, here at this Synod with me, has stepped down from his position as the first Administrator of our Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. Affectionately known as "Texas Jack," he has become the face of the OPC in many reformed and presbyterian churches around the world. We are pleased that the Rev. Jack Sawyer will serve as our new Administrator.

The statistical report as of the end of 2009 showed a total OPC membership at 29,421 with 21,123 communicant and 7,815 bapized children; 271 churches and 50 unorganized mission works. The OPC consists of 16 presbyteries (classes), with one new presbytery approved at this assembly to be formed out of a portion of central Pennsylvania.
The Assembly took the final vote approving a new Directory for Public Worship concluding decades of work involving the labors many who at various times worked on this mandate.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church supports the ministry of Foreign Missions, Home Missions, and Christian Education through our own program

that we call "Worldwide Outreach." By way of Worldwide Outreach a budget is approved by the GA in which giving is divided up among the three committee ministries. While allowing for designated giving, each committee receives a portion (set by the General Assembly each year) of the missions giving from the churches to support the missionaries on the fields and the programs under each committee's oversight.

Our Committee on Foreign Missions reports nine foreign mission fields on five continents, with 17 families, including two single men, a medical doctor and a deacon. Some of those sent by the committee are members of the RCUS, the PCA and the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. The OPC is willing to consider sponsoring those from other churches provided they are qualified and there is sufficient support available. If you desire to send a missionary we would be delighted to have him to work with us in the declaration of Christ to the lost, needy world.

Our Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension reports 51 church planting fields and 10 Regional Home Missionaries

The Committee on Christian Education continues to provide oversight for the Summer and Year-long Internship programs, and sponsors Conferences for Presbytery Candidates and Credentials Chairmen, and held the second Timothy Conference for young men who might be interested in the gospel ministry.

June 11, 2011 will mark the 75th anniversary of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We will be celebrating our anniversary in connection with our 78th General Assembly at Sandy Cove, MD, beginning the evening of Wednesday, June 8, 2011 and ending Tuesday, June 14, 2011.

We are grateful to the Lord for the blessings he has shown to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. But know also that includes gratitude for the Lord's help through times of trial and wrestling with issues that the Devil would use to tear the church apart.

We express our appreciation for your hospitality at this Synod, and for the opportunity to speak to you in this meeting and to visit with you individually.

We are thankful for our fellowship with you in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

And we pray for you and with you, the United Reformed Churches in North America, that you remain faithful to the calling you have received, to the ministry of the glorious gospel of our crucified and risen Christ to the glory of God, and to the "good and pleasant fellowship when brothers live together in unity."

For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore. (Psalm 133:3b)

Rev. Ben Westerveld of the Église Réformée du Québec (Art. 63)

Esteemed fathers and brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Please receive the warm Christian greetings of your brothers and sisters in the *Église réformée du Québec*, the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ). We praise our heavenly Father for our fellowship in the one holy catholic and apostolic faith committed once and for all to the saints (Jude 3).

For the first time, we address your synod in person. Some of you may recall having met the pastors Jean-Guy DeBlois and Paulin Bédard at the Alliance meetings held before the formation of the URCNA. Since February 1998, our respective inter-church relations committees have held sporadic joint meetings. More thorough discussions took place in the context of the NAPARC meeting in Pittsburgh (2003), Montreal (2006) and Grand Rapids (2009), following the eight points of discussion listed in your Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, Phase One. While we could not send fraternal observers to your previous synods, we did write greetings to synods Escondido (2001), Calgary (2004) and Schererville (2007). We are thankful that this year we can address you in person, as well as enjoy your Christian fellowship.

However, I must apologize for the presence of an ERQ delegate with a curiously Dutch sounding name. Born and raised in a Christian Reformed and now United Reformed family in Dunnville, Ontario, the Lord called me to serve his people in the province of Quebec. It is now my joy to worship the Lord our God in *la belle langue*, the language of Calvin and, according to the brothers and sisters of the ERQ, the language of heaven.

Introduction to the ERQ

Since this is the first time that we address your assembly in person, it may be helpful to provide a brief sketch of the ERQ.

Historically, the French-speaking people of the province of Quebec, Canada have been devoted Roman Catholics. However, following the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the vast majority of Quebecers rejected the Roman Catholic Church and its domination of the political, economical and educational institutions. The Lord used this time of upheaval to revive the evangelical witness in the province. Many Quebecers converted and joined evangeli-

cal assemblies -- Brethren, Baptist, Pentecostal and Reformed. Despite this revival, today less than one percent of French-speaking Quebecers identify themselves as evangelical.

During the late 1970s, individual churches of Reformed confession and practice sought to work cooperatively as a French-speaking mission to Quebec. The churches involved included the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC), and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). A vision was formed to establish a federation of French-speaking Reformed churches to serve the province of Quebec, while maintaining ecclesiastical and mission ties to the English-speaking Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. This vision became reality in November 1988 when nine churches and mission works joined together to form the *Église réformee du Québec (ERQ)*. The newly formed church subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, and adopted its own church order.

With respect to ecclesiastical relations, the PCC refused to recognize the formation of the ERQ for theological and ecclesiastical reasons. The CRC mission support ended by prior arrangement in 1997. The ERQ synod declined an invitation to enter into fraternal relations with the CRC, concerned in particular about its decision to ordain woman pastors and elders.

The PCA has continued to support the ERQ, particularly through the mission work of PCA pastors. Official ecclesiastical fellowship was formed by the decisions of the PCA General Assembly 2008 and the ERQ synod of March 2010.

Since the late 1990s, a strong relationship has been formed with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The ERQ synod voted in 1997 to receive the CanRC into ecclesiastical fellowship, and Synod Smithers 2007 responded in kind. We are particularly encouraged by the active mission interest that local CanRC congregations have demonstrated, both through financial support, educational material and prayers.

Since 2001, the ERQ also enjoys mission support via the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The General Assembly of the OPC recently voted to receive the ERQ into ecclesiastical fellowship. Our synod should reply favorably to their invitation.

We might also note that since 2003 the ERQ is an active member of NAPARC, and we hold membership in the World Reformed Fellowship.

With respect to the United Reformed Churches in North America, the ERQ synod has mandated our inter-church committee to explore the possibility of establishing full sister church relations. To a certain extent, this relationship would be the logical course to take, following our respective decisions to separate from the CRC. Furthermore, several of your local congregations support Farel, the Reformed theological seminary in Montreal which seeks to train men for the ministry in the ERQ.

With respect to the work of the Lord within the ERQ, we can note several developments which include both struggles and joys. Having begun with nine churches and mission posts, the ERQ is presently composed of five congregations, with a combined membership of nearly 300 communicant and baptised members. Several church closures have taken place due to insufficient numbers or internal divisions. Discussions are presently taking place about one small congregation whose future is uncertain.

The four remaining churches of the ERQ are doing well, by God's grace. The two urban center congregations of Montreal and Quebec City are experiencing numerical growth, due in part to new converts, membership transfers and births. We are particularly encouraged by the public profession of faith of our covenant youth. For many members, these youth represent the second generation of the Reformed witness in the province of Quebec which had been revived during the late 1970s. As this second generation of believers begin to marry, we rejoice to see the third generation be born and received into the Church through covenant baptism.

Other encouraging developments in the ERQ these past three years include the formation and ordination of three elders (bringing the total to nine) and eight deacons for life time service, the reception of one seminary student to give an edifying word, the bi-monthly publication of a small Reformed review *Lumière sur mon sentier* (A light on my path), a museum exhibit in 2008-09 about the presence of Huguenot believers in colony of New France thanks to the support of several NAPARC congregations, and a possible mission work in Montreal reaching out to the Muslim and Mandarin communities.

A Word of Encouragement

Please permit us to express a word of encouragement concerning the growing relationship between the URCNA and the CanRC. We give thanks to our one Lord for this coming together of churches of like faith and practice.

It may be helpful for you to realize that your French-speaking brothers of the ERQ are often perplexed by the assortment of Reformed acronyms: URC, RCUS, FRC, HRC, and CanRC (occasionally mistaken for CRC!). While they are beginning to appreciate the theological and historical differences, your brothers in the ERQ still shrug their shoulders and ask, "Why should such differences keep these Reformed Churches separate?" The small Reformed work of the Lord in the province of Quebec requires us to bear and to forebear with one another as we seek to preserve the unity of our one faith. We would encourage the same forbearance, kindnesses and certainly humility in your dialogue, cooperation and eventual union with the CanRC.

Prayer

Brothers, we would end our address with an appeal for your intercessory prayers on behalf of the Lord's work in the ERQ, even as we pray for your churches. In 2008, the ERQ celebrated its 20th anniversary. At that time, we wrote this note to sister churches in North America.

"We began with a dream to preach the full council of God and to plant Reformed churches throughout the province. Twenty years later, we realise that we are fewer in number – only five small congregations. Nonetheless, we want to celebrate the Lord's faithfulness and to thank him for preserving a Reformed confessional witness in the province of Québec. We also desire to cast a vision for the future, persevering in the work of making disciples of all nations, including the people of Quebec."

We covet your prayers as we continue to fulfil this divine mission.

With Christian greetings,

The Rev. Ben Westerveld
For the Inter-church Committee of the ERQ
Rev. Ben Westerveld of the Église Réformée du Québec (Art. 63)
Clarification to the URC Synod London 2010

The Ordination of Deacons in the ERQ

We would like to address one particular question that has been raised about the ERQ, namely to permit the ordination of female deacons. Specifically our church order reads, "The congregation can call to the office of deacon *all members* who show evidence of their competence according to the Biblical criteria mentioned in Acts 6: 3; Rom. 16:1,2; 1 Tim. 3:8-13." (ODE 2.4.3, emphasis added.) While CERCU recommended receiving the ERQ into Phrase Two ecclesiastical fellowship, your advisory committee #8 voted against this recommendation primarily because of "the ERQ's current practice of allowing women to serve in the office of deacon."

With all due respect to the work of the advisory committee, and also recognizing the authority of this body to deliberate its own recommendations, we would like to explain the context of this current practice, as well as suggest an alternative action by your body.

While the current doctrine and practice of a federation must be taken into serious consideration when entering into ecclesiastical fellowship, the theological direction of that federation must also be weighed. The ERQ is *not* moving towards the ordination of women to all ecclesiastical offices, as you experienced in the CRC, but rather *away from* this unbiblical practice. Allow me highlight a few items from the recent ERQ history which demonstrates this point:

a) During the formative years of the ERQ in the 1980s, considerable discussion focused on the role of women in the church. The synod made a clear decision not to permit women into the office of elder and pastor.

b) Despite being indebted to the CRC for many years of sacrificial mission work in the province of Quebec, the ERQ synod cut ties with its "mother" because of her decision to permit the ordination of women to all offices.

c) During inter-church discussions with the CanRC in the late 1990s, changes were made to our church order in order to clarify that the deacons do *not* exercise spiritual authority or oversight within the ERQ, as is the typical practice of Presbyterian churches. For instance, the deacons will never sit in on a council meeting with the elders.

d) Presently the ERQ has a total of eight deacons, of which only one is a woman.

e) In the past three years, two councils have made the decision *not* to permit the ordination of woman deacons in their local congregation.

Given this developing direction within the ERQ, you might ask the question: "When will the ERQ synod re-examine its current practice of permitting woman deacons?" We are unsure. For several brothers amongst us, the biblical prohibition of woman deacons is not so cut and dry. (For example, how to interpret the reference to "woman/wives" in 1 Timothy 3.11, or the reference to the deaconess Phoebus in Romans 16.1.) Furthermore, the very existence of the ERQ is fragile. Divisive discussions could easily break apart our small federation, and consequently hurt the Reformed witness to the French-speaking people of Québec.

If your synod adopts the recommendation of the advisory committee and not enter into Phase Two ecclesiastical fellowship, you should ask yourselves the question, "How will the brothers in the ERQ react to this decision?" Some of our men may *interpret* your action as, "Become like the URCNA, and then we will accept you", although that is *not* your intention. They may want to stop inter-church dialogue. Other men of ERQ may welcome your decision as an impetus to re-examine the question of deaconess. However, if the debate is premature, it may divide ERQ.

Please allow us to make a humble recommendation to your synod. Receive the ERQ into Phase II ecclesiastical fellowship, and then instruct your committee CERCU, as it fulfills its mandated to assist the ERQ "in the maintenance, defence, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline" (Guidelines for Ecumencity and Church Unity, Phase Two, point "a") to give particular attention to the question of allowing women to serve in the office of deacon. We believe that in the context of a full sister church relation, your brothers in the ERQ will be more willing to listen, and you will gain your brother (Matthew 18.15).

Brothers, whether you decide to receive the ERQ into Phase II or to remain in Phase I, we rejoice that together we participate in this "phase" of redemptive history of making disciples for our Lord Jesus Christ from all nations. Our particular mission is to the French-speaking people of the province of Quebec, even as you work with the different nations and languages present in your cities and neighbourhoods. May every corner of North America be blessed to hear the gospel of grace articulated in our Reformed confessions.

Rev. Kabonga Kalala Malebongo of the United Reformed Church in Congo (Art. 84)

Esteemed delegates brothers,

The United Reformed Church in Congo, URCC, has conveyed its warmest heartfelt greetings to the delegates at this URCNA Synod 2010 and to all brothers and sisters, members of your church denomination. We pray for our Lord's guidance to you throughout your stay at your broader Assembly in London, Ontario, Canada.

As the name indicates it, the United Reformed Church in Congo belongs to the great family of the Presbyterian – Reformed Churches, but in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Middle Africa.

We are United by Word of God and the Spirit of Christ, not only in the D.R. Congo where we go beyond the tribes and language limits, but also United by love and truth of Christ with the faithful church of Christ in the whole world, as RCUS, GKV, GKSA, and now you URCNA.

We remain faithful to the Word of God, Reformed Confessions, and Presbyterian – Synodical church government. We want to stick to the XVIth century reformed church principles. It's at this point of doctrine and church government that brought a separation between the Eglise Reformee confessante au Congo, ERCC, and our new denomination the United Reformed Church in Congo, URCC. This happened at our general special synod of 2008 according to the decision of the ordinary session of 2007.

The URCC has about 150 local churches,n 23 ordained pastors, and many elders that lead the local churches in different areas in our country. The Congo measures 2,340,000 km^2, with a population of +/- 65 millions. We want to reach many other parts of the DR Congo because we are in five provinces out of eleven that compose the Republic.

The denomination needs to learn more of how to be reformed in doctrine and church government in a country dominated by Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches, and with the Muslims that come in through trade and extraction of minerals. We need to train our ministers of the Word, have church buildings, train the children in Christian fashion, and develop church members to get out of poverty.

May our Triune God bless your session.

Rev. Abel Ntita, Secretary
Rev. Kabongo Kalala Malebongo, President of the Interim Committee

Rev. David S. Fraser of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (Art. 91)

Chairman of the Synod & Brothers in the Lord, I bring you greetings from the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) lately met in Edinburgh, May of this year and of which I was Moderator. I came to Canada last week for the first time. I was visiting with my wife our Canadian son-in-law's family in Alberta and Saskatoon. For good measure, we had a tour of the Rockies. We felt very small in view of the vast expanses of your prairies and towering mountains. We will feel quite confined in returning to our little country! I think I met more Frasers in Canada than in Scotland! I'm glad our clan has contributed something to the building of this great modern nation!

You may be puzzled to hear of two Free Churches of Scotland and I confess this is a heart-breaking story but I think I may find sympathetic ears of brothers here who, at much the same time, experienced the pain of separation from your brothers! We are a small, weak, faulty remnant of the once notable Free Church of Scotland but we have a strong conviction that we must obey our consciences and take a stand for truth and righteousness. We are now a church of some 35 ministers and congregations with a seminary in Inverness and a mission college in Zambia. We have one congregation in Canada and 4 or 5 in the USA. I was privileged to visit Atlanta 4 years ago.

The division in January 2000 arose from the defective handling of a scandal among us. A number of men could not allow this reproach to lie on the name of the Gospel and our Church's witness. They maintained a protest against these failures and were suspended at a Commission of our Assembly for refusing to comply. A deed of Declinature was signed and laid on the table as they withdrew and reconstituted as a faithful Commission of Assembly of the Free Church. Their protest was against the unconstitutional actions of the majority in suspending ministers from their office without due process, that is, without opportunity to defend themselves. By this, we say, they arrogated to themselves the prerogatives of Christ, the King and Head of the Church. This is in line with a noble succession of godly men since the Reformation in Scotland 450 years ago. The successors of John Know were imprisoned and banished when they protested usurpations of the King. In the next century, a noble band of Covenanters refused to surrender the crown rights of Christ. I have here for you, Mr Chairman, a copy of a recent publication by one of our men, Maurice Grant. It is a biography of James Renwick, a faithful young minister of the persecuted remnant, who was or-

dained by the Classis of Groningen on 10th May 1683. He subsequently returned to Scotland and ministered to those who met and were often shot in the hills of Scotland. He was executed in 1687 a few months before the nation rose in revolt against the tyrannical king. The principles for which he stood and died were vindicated by the nation and a free gospel ministry was restored. Again, in 1843, our Free Church fathers laid a Claim & Protest upon the table of the General Assembly in May, 1843, when the right of the people to call their own ministers had been denied in the civil courts. These men forsook all their material support to defend the liberty of the Gospel and the headship of Christ in His church.

For 10 years since 2000, efforts have been mounted in the civil courts, by the majority, to deprive our congregations of the properties we occupy as our patrimony from our faithful fathers. The High Court judge, Lady Paton, has declared that we have not departed from the constitution of the Free Church of Scotland, yet I was at the Scottish High Court 2 weeks ago, seeking to defend one of our congregations threatened with loss of their property. This was despite an undertaking we both made at the ICRC 2005 to drop legal action!

Brothers, we seek a resolution of this conflict and, since our acceptance as members of the ICRC, we have sought assistance of sister churches, such as the GKNV and CRKN, to achieve a peaceful settlement. We ask your prayers for resolution that no more dishonour accrue to the cause of the Gospel. Whatever the motives of our separated brothers, we are ready to forgive them for what we have suffered. We desire the unity of the faith as expressed in our Lord's High Priestly prayer – John 17:21-23. We can benefit greatly from co-operation in the Gospel. Let me mention three possibilities:

1. I mentioned Covenant College in Zambia, which I was privileged to found in 2001. This is a ministry to local churches in which we train pastors with a thorough grounding in the Reformed faith. We have the co-operation of Reformed churches in South Africa, England, Holland and North America. More staff are required.

2. I mentioned that we are a protesting church. Is there not a need to protest the wickedness of our public life in our Western Culture? Is it not time to raise our voices by all means and present a united witness to our authorities against their grave departures from righteousness and our Christian heritage? Remember, "All kings of the earth shall praise you,

O Lord, when they hear the words of your moth," Ps. 138:4,5.

3. I serve in a low-class area of the city of Glasgow. I visit hundreds of homes every year to warn every man as the Apostle enjoined. I now have former alcoholics, immigrants and broken people under the sound of the gospel. Can we all say that we are faithful as churches in our mandate to "preach the gospel to every creature" Mark 16:15? Remember, "All nations whom you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord."

4. Our Seminary in Inverness is training men, not only for our own church but for Sri Lanka, Italy and North America. Our resources are limited and a share in research could be a great mutual benefit.

5. Above all, let us join in a concert of prayer for the coming of the Kingdom. In days of God's power in Scotland in the 1840s, Robert Murray M'Cheyne of Dundee had 27 meetings for prayer weekly in his congregation! We have a mere 4 in Shettleston yet this is more than most. Brothers I greatly admire what I see of your order, your catechising, your Christian schooling but, above all, I believe, is our need to live in communion with God and to devote time together for prayer and intercession. Let us pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Is this not a forgotten means of grace in our time?

Brothers I close with this call, "Therefore, be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Rev. Douw Breed of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) (Art. 103)

Introduction

Chairman, we sent a letter to the soccer team in Holland, inviting them to come and stay in Potchefstroom, less than 200 meters away from our theological seminary. We told them that if they come and stay there, they will win the soccer world cup. They turned our invitation down. They did not win the cup. then we invited the team of Spain. They came. You know who won the world cup!

Brother Chairman, it is a privilege for me and Rev. Ristimati Hobyane to be invited to your Synod and to represent the Reformed Churches (GKSA) in the South Africa. We will briefly inform you about the current situation in our Churches.

150th Anniversary

2009 was a remarkable year for the GKSA.

- During April we celebrated our 150th anniversary, with the main festivities in Potchefstroom where a high percentage of our members (black and white) participated in the proceedings.

- Our Theological School was established 10 years after the founding of our churches, in 1869. This was also the beginning of the University, now known as the North West University with three campuses. The faculty of Theology as well as the University (previously known as the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, until 2004 when we were merged with the University of North West in Mafeking) developed and grew in a formidable way. Currently the students enrolled for a theological degree count more than 550, and the registered students at the University are more or less 50,000 (these include full time and distance learning students). Apart from the training of students for the ministry in Potchefstroom, there are other theological colleges, for example Mukhanyo, who focyus specifically on the needs of many indigenous churches in terms of training and caring.

Womens' position in the GKSA

As you know we were engaged for many years in the study of the position of women in the offices.

This study resulted in the publication of a book: *Male and Female in the Church*, with the subtitle: *Gender in the ordained ministries*.

The final report of the deputies of our Synod on this issue of women in office was tabled in June 2009. Contrary to what many believed, our synod decided that according to the Word of God only qualified men may serve in the offices of teaching and ruling.

New structure

Since last year (2009) our Synod is for the first time composed in a new restructured way where every local church is represented irrespective of race or color or language. It really was the introduction of a new dispensation, and comments from the different congregations were very positive.

The GKSA in South Africa and Africa

Let me say something about the GKSA in South Africa and in Africa. As you will know many people (black and white) left South Africa since 1994 with the forming of a new political dispensation. But don't be mistaken. There are many – millions – of us who decided to stay, to stay in the country which we love, a country where we lived for many, many generations. We know about the poverty of Africa, the crime, fraud, aids etc. But, brothers, we also know about the One in the midst of the seven candlesticks (Rev. 1:13). He is the One who can make a difference and Who is doing it. We experience now how our Lord is opening the hearts of people for His Word. It astonishes one to see the number of churches that are coming into existence nearly every day. These churches need pastors who can faithfully and relevantly proclaim God's Word. In the GKSA we are working hard to provide some of this need. You heard yesterday from Rev. Kabongo where he studied. You will find these pastors who studied at our seminary and colleges in many parts of South Africa and Africa. At one of our colleges called Mukhanyo we developed a program to equip Church leaders with in-service training in their own ministry context. This program extends the reach of the college far beyond Pretoria and Johannesburg. (I brought some pamphlets about this

program with me and put on the table outside the hall.)

Brother Chairman, we greet you with all our heart and hope and pray that our Lord and Heavenly Father will guide and strengthen and encourage you to continue on the path of the Reformed faith in obedience to God in fulfilling your call in the URCNA and also in your society.

We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Douw Breed
30 July 2010

Rev. Peter Kloosterman of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (Art. 110)

Brothers and Fathers,

Thank you for the privilege to speak to you this afternoon. I am delighted to extend greetings to you in the name of the Lord from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Allow me to briefly introduce to the RCNZ.

We are a church in a country of 4 million people. The RCNZ is made up of 18 churches and around 3,300 members. I am happy to report the Lord's blessing upon our denomination. Last time you will recall I offered an urgent plea for assistance with filling the pulpits. There was a dire need for ministers. Then there were 19 churches with 7 vacancies. Now there are 18 churches and 2 vacancies. There are several men also who are in various steps of training as they aspire to the ministry of the word. While the closing of one church is not a happy circumstance, the filling of the pulpits is certainly a blessing from the Lord.

I am glad to read the CECCA recommendation for you to enter into Ecumenical Fellowship or phase 2 of your relationship with us. We are in wholehearted agreement and have already expressed our desire to have as close a relationship with you as possible.

Allow me to express to you why we regard this as important endeavour. And I would dare say the first question that often springs to mind is what do we get out of this? What's the pay-off? To put crassly what do we get?

But brothers shouldn't we be asking what do we have to give? One of the blessings of this assembly and these opportunities of address is for us to officially offer you some of our insight and input. I have been sent here not to get something from you but to give you our greetings and to show you our love for you.

I offer this input as an older sister. Not a bigger sister just older. We have noticed, albeit at a long distance, that there is a struggle in the Lord's household. Many issues that are hard to deal with and can be hurtful to deal with. Your response to Federal vision; the level of confessional subscription for membership; your ecumenical relations. We will continue to pray for the Lord's wisdom as you deal with these today and the effects of these decisions

in the years to come.

When I was a pastor in the URC I was asked to write an article in anticipation of an upcoming meeting. I used the analogy of a child learning to walk. Well, brothers, it seems that you have continued to grow and have now reached some of the growing pains associated with the teen years. I know that this is something that can be painful and hard to hear. But I want to encourage you to take some time for some self reflection and investigation. You will see this in your teens they want to have an identity and they want to have their independence. Freedom from rules and yet some security that can be found in regular rules for life.

While we are separated by many miles and much water, we share in the same calling with you to make known the gospel of Jesus Christ to God's people and the world. In this we would like to encourage you in your labour with some advice from your older sister. There are some things that you are going though that you wonder where you will end up. Fear of precedence, concern about influence, curiosity about identity. Trying to figure out who you are.

We can share these insights, not because we have solved your problems but because we have seen the Lord's work in preserving and sustaining us through our own trials and blessings. Several points bear mention. I am the chairman of the Overseas Missions Board and noted your desire according to the pre-advice committee #6 to have a coordinator of missions. I think this is a good recommendation and have been involved in such an endeavour in New Zealand. I hope the Lord will bless your direction in this and that your mission works at home and abroad can be strengthened.

It is our mission work that leads me to the next point and that is to encourage you in your relationship with your sister and our sister. We have been actively working together with the Can RC in Papua New Guinea. Brothers, we have differences with the Can RC. We do things differently than they do. Yet when we are committed to giving ourselves to the Lord's service, you will learn that you can work with those differences and often times through them. It makes each other stronger. That's the promise that God gives you: where your commitment is to the Lord, He will allow you with your differences to be bound together and to live together in a bond of peace.

Regarding Federal Vision, please recognize that this is a local discussion. It's among your friends and family and doesn't affect the whole world, though

it may seem like it at times. And about the confessional level for members, please go carefully.

We would like to encourage you to respond favourably to the recommendation of the Committee of pre-advice and move with us into a closer bond of fellowship. Let me close with this encouragement, be carefully where you look for identity and security. Their our intimately related. It's what the HC calls comfort – and that can only come in belong in body and soul to the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God bless you in your continued deliberations here and your life in the churches.

Thank you.

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